Untold Italy Episode 210: Travel Smart to Italy - Your Guide to New Regulations and Important Dates

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 210.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy

Ciao, buongiorno everyone. I'm Katy with a quick update about some upcoming changes in procedures and travel trends in Italy that I think it's worth everyone knowing about if you're planning travel in 2024 and 2025. Now, lots of rumors fly around about pretty much everything these days, and we do our very best to keep a lid on things Italy travel related until they are 100% confirmed because it is Italy after all, and things have a habit of changing last minute.

Katy

That being the case, in some cases, I do think it's worth knowing about some upcoming trends and happenings well in advance so that you can adjust your plans accordingly. A good example of that recently was the 2023 Ryder Cup, which is a golf event that bought many thousands of visitors to Rome and Italy during the already peak tourist visitor time of September and October. This pushed prices up to eye-watering levels in the major tourist zones like Rome, Florence, Venice, Tuscany, and the Amalfi Coast. Like I said, fore-warned is forarmed. Let's get started, and I'm going to tell you about a few things that you do need to know about if you're traveling in the next year or two.

Katy

The first thing that I wanted to mention is happening in beautiful Venice, one of my favorite cities in the world, and that is the Venice Tourist Tax. Now, no one wants to hear the word tax, but in this case, I think you do need to know, otherwise the tax could become a fine, and

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we don't want that to happen. So this tax or access pass is something that will impact all travelers visiting Venice on certain dates in 2024 and probably beyond.

Katy

They're doing a trial at the moment, and it's probably going to continue. And that's the tourist tax that's aimed at day trippers. Basically, the The city has been put on notice by UNESCO that its World Heritage Status is under threat from over-tourism, and so Venice needed to take action. Now, notwithstanding, Venetians have been protesting about the over It's been a interesting situation for well over a decade as more and more citizens leave the city, and it's becoming less of a lived-in city and more of a tourist attraction, which is... That's not what we want when we're visiting a city. We want it to feel alive and the way it is for its citizens. Anyway, the tax is an attempt to collect some revenue from day trippers that visit the city to contribute towards the maintenance of what is a very, very fragile city. Imagine the municipal costs of a city built on water. It really makes my mind boggle, actually. So overnight, visitors already pay a per night city tax that's collected by accommodation providers like hotels and Airbnb operators. But this particular new tax is specifically aimed at day trips. What is this tourist tax and how does it affect you?

Katy

Well, starting in April 2024, if you are visiting Venice on certain days, you will need to pay five Euros per person for an access pass if you are visiting for the day. Or, and this is really important, you need to apply for an exemption if you are staying overnight in a hotel or other type of accommodation. Now, this part is so important because it's actually clear as mud on a lot of the communications that are coming out about this new tax. So what I want everyone to know is if you're visiting on these days, you do need to take action. So regardless of whether you're visiting for the day or you're staying overnight, because if you don't, you do risk fines of up to €300 per person. And that's a vacation mood killer, if I ever heard one. So as I said, this starts in April 2024. And the dates that have been published when this is taking effect are from April the 25th to the 30th and then May the first to the fifth. So that's a good 10 days really coming up very quickly that you need to take action. So I've written a complete article with all the dates that are so far published for 2024.

Katy

And we'll pop that into the show notes before. It's on our site, untolditaly.com/210. And we'll keep it updated as more information becomes available because like I said, it is Italian bureaucracy and things have a habit of changing. Now, like I said, this tax is aimed at day

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trippers and there are exemptions. And you are eligible for an exemption if you're staying in Venice overnight, which you'll need to provide your accommodation details and show proof of the reservation if asked. This applies to the Metropolitan city of Venice, which includes Mestre on the mainland. A lot of people stay in Mestre because it's a little bit cheaper than staying in the old city of Venice itself, and they get the train in. So the good news is that if you're staying in Mestre, you do not need to pay the five euros per person per day new tax if you're visiting for the day. However, if you are staying in Treviso, which is another beautiful city that's north of Venice, a lot of people like to stay there and catch the train, you will need to organize to pay the access pass tax. The other people who are exempt, kids under 14, and those with a disability, also qualify for an exemption, as well as Venetian citizens.

Katy

It's a complicated process. No one's happy. While the intentions of these tax are probably well-founded, there are many, many problems with this initiative and its implementation, and I'm not going to go into them here. My goal is to make sure you don't get hit with a €300 per person fine. But if you're interested in the politics and the goings on around this particular tax, my friend Monica Ceserato, who, if you're a podcast listener, you heard on last week's podcast episode, she gives a fine analysis on her podcast, Venice Talks, which you can go ahead and listen to if you'd like an insight into the frustrations of Italian bureaucracy. But if you have any plans for Venice, please make sure to read our article, which links directly to the city's official website to pay the tax and/or apply for the exemption. There's quite a lot of out-of-date information and dodgy websites circling around about this particular tax, so please be careful. The fee is just €5 per person, and it only applies on certain dates for now. We'll keep you posted on Untold Italy as things change, and they probably will, it being Italy. But for now, that's the best information we have.

Katy

So head on over to untolditaly.com and look for Venice Tax, and you will go straight to the article. Another new tax that is scheduled to be introduced in 2025 is the new ETIAS or EU Visa Waiver Program. The acronym is ETS, E-T-I-A-S, and it is a visa waiver program that applies to visitors to Europe, mainly, and including Italy. Now, there was a lot of hype around this, that it would be implemented in 2024, but the program's been delayed until mid-2025. Well, that's what they're saying. And it's well after the Paris Olympics with no official date announced. Now, usually, I don't talk about things that haven't been officially launched, but there is so much confusion around this that I thought I'd clear some of it up. So currently there's no visa or visa waiver required to enter Italy for citizens of many countries, including

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our main follower base in America, Australians, Canadians and British-Irish as well. So it is quite a big change, and it's an extra step in getting ready for your trip. But it's actually not a big deal, and I'll explain why. First of all, what is ETIAS? ETIAS Travel Authorisation is an entry requirement for visa-exempt nationals traveling to 30 European countries, including Italy.

Katy

It's linked to your passport, and it's valid for up to three years or until the passport expires, whichever comes first. If you were to get a new passport, you would need to get a new ETIAS Travel Authorisation. Now, Now, once you've got a valid ETIAS travel authorization, you can enter the territory of the 30 European countries as often as you want for short-term stays, normally for up to 90 days in any 180-day period, which is exactly as it is now, but you don't have to apply for it online. However, it does not guarantee entry into those countries. When you arrive in Italy or one of these European countries, a border guard will ask to see your passport and other documents and verify that you meet those entry conditions. So it's just really another bureaucratic step and probably a way to collect some money. We know everyone loves doing that. So when it's implemented, how will you apply for the ETIAS? Well, there will be an online application form on the official ETIAS website or their mobile app. And you'll need to complete some questions and provide info like your passport details and address.

Katy

And most people will need to pay a fee of seven euros per person. There are some exemptions. Now, before anyone gets anxious about the questions and application process, it will be very similar to the ESTA program, the United States (which I have just completed for an upcoming trip mysel)f and the Electronic Travel Authority to enter Australia. It's a long, overdue process, and for most people, it should be very quick and straightforward and completed a few weeks before your trip starts. The EU says most applications will be processed within minutes, though some may take to 14 days. And you get an email with your ETIAS travel authorization, which you'll need to show when entering the EU. Now, that's all I'm going to say about that today, because at this stage it's over 12 months away from implementation and things could change. But you just need to be aware if you're traveling in 2025 and keep an eye on reputable sources. And I really want to stress that you need to focus on the sources that you trust and you know are true. So make Sure, you visit the official EU website to keep yourself updated. And that is a bit of a tongue twister.

Katy

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It's traveleurope.europa.eu/etias, E-T-I-A-S. But I'm going to put it in the show notes because that is an absolute mouthful. But again, there are some really unscrupulous people trying to cash in on uncertainty around this process and scam unsuspecting travelers. So just go to our show notes and we have the official site there that takes you to the actual website that is giving all the up-to-date information.

Katy

OK. Paris Olympics, I mentioned that earlier, and this is also likely impacting visitor numbers, supply and demand in Italy, as people plan European adventures around the Olympics events in late July and August. And while we're working with our trip planning clients, we're noticing accommodation availability shrink by the day around those dates in July and August. If you plan to travel, then please do not delay. Actually, we're seeing very limited availability in May and June, too. It seems like everyone wants to go to Europe and Italy. You know what that means? Fewer places to stay and the prices go up. I've mentioned this to our podcast listeners many, many times, and I can't stress it enough. I have one hotel I stay at in Florence that in March, it was €300 a night, and then in October, it turned up to a thousand euros a night. So that's what's called surge pricing, and it's in full force at the moment.

Katy

Now, in 2025, which seems like a long time away, but it's not really, there is a very big event happening throughout the year in Rome, and that is the Vatican Jubilee, also known as the Year of Hope, and it in fact starts in December 2024. This is a very special year for the Catholic Church and practicing Catholics. A Jubilee or Holy Year is a year of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, and many, many millions of pilgrims are expected to visit Rome to take part in some of the celebrations that happen surrounding this special year. That includes opening of the Holy doors of St Peter's, another major Basilica in Rome. You can only imagine what that means for the city. Typically, these events have happened once in 25 years, although popes can call for extraordinary Jubilees like the one held in 2015. But what it does mean for visitors is even more increased pressure on accommodation options and tourist infrastructure like taxis and restaurants.

Katy

So given the increase in visitors since 2022, there's a legitimate concern about how to manage this influx of pilgrims, and it goes all the way to the top. And the Pope Francis himself, who has urged the Italian and Rome governments to take urgent action to address this. One thing is for sure, if you plan to visit Rome in 2025, you'll need to get organized very quickly to make

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sure you are well-prepared for this extraordinary year-long event. What I would be doing is looking around at accommodation options now and selecting the ones that you really like and get ready to book 12 to nine months in advance to make sure you lock in the accommodation that you really want. That's probably the main thing. And then look at the tours and activities that you want to do. We will also keep an eye on any closures at the Vatican because if people are planning to go to the Vatican museums or visit St Peter's, there may be some changes there. But again, we'll keep you updated on Untold Italy, because that's what we like to do. The last thing I wanted to mention falls into the rumors, and we're not quite sure what's happening category, but I think it's worth mentioning because we know that Airbnb and short-term rentals are popular choices for travelers.

Katy

But apart from increasing fees and charges and lack of flexibility around cancelation on many properties that we're seeing, it seems that Italian cities are watching closely initiatives taken in Florence and around the world to limit properties available for short-term rental, and they're monitoring all these initiatives very closely. So last June, Florence placed a ban on new short-term private rentals in the city's historic center. And that was in response to a growing housing crisis and a desire to move residents back into the city center.

Katy

Now, there are currently around 8,000 properties available for rent on a short-term basis in Florence. However, the city has also put incentives in place to motivate landlords to rent out these properties on a longer-term basis. It looks like the number of properties available is shrinking. There are lots of rumors and rumblings coming from Italy's central government about short-term rentals, too. A recent crackdown on tax evasion by landlords looks like it may be the tip of the iceberg in terms of new legislation aimed at short-term rental owners. They are looking at standards in terms of compliance and general housing affordability, among other things.

Katy

What this means for travelers is that it means there may be fewer short-term rentals available. And in the most serious cases, if some very fundamental steps are taken, like in places like New York City, supply can dry up and existing bookings can be canceled. So just make sure you're keeping an eye on this trend. And if you're planning to book a short-term rental or a series of short-term rentals in Italy over the next few years, just be really clear on what you're booking, the cancelation clauses and all of that, because we don't want you to be

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out of pocket. Travel is always always very, that's not the cheapest thing that you can do in the world. So make sure that you protect your vacation dollars and keep an eye on all of these things. As I said, that's a quick update. I hope you found these practical tips for visiting Italy in 2024 and 2025 helpful. We have hundreds of resources to assist you to plan your trip to Italy on our website and podcast, including the best areas to stay in Rome, Florence, and Venice, and beyond, and itinerary ideas and travel guides.

Katy

We particularly like to focus on the lesser-known areas of Italy. That's why we're called Untold Italy. If you're keen to explore off the beaten track, then you can find a lot of resources on our website for you, too.

Katy

Lastly, you can also, if you're looking for a little bit of extra assistance, we do have online trip planning services available with a beautiful, dedicated team of Italy trip planners that you can book at a time that suits you. And we'll put a link to those into the show notes, as well as all the official sites that I mentioned and upcoming dates.

Katy

We'd like to thank you all for your support of Untold Italy over many many, many episodes and your enthusiastic messages and reviews. It does mean the world to us that so many people from countries around the world tune in each and every week to listen to the show. If you enjoy it, it would be incredible if you took a few moments to write a quick review or give us a rating on your favorite podcast app. Grazie mille. Thanks in advance. We appreciate you so much and can't wait to make more episodes for you.

Katy

That's all for today. On next week's episode, we're back in Roma chatting to my friend Nesim. But until then, it's ciao for now.

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