

Untold Italy Episode 234: Savor Italy - Important Tips for Mindful Travel

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 234.

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 Clarke:

Buongiorno everyone, thanks, grazie for joining us for another virtual trip to beautiful Italia, it's great to have you here as always for what I believe is a really important episode on the differences we can make to our own travels to make a positive impact on the places we visit and level up our own travel experiences at the same time.

Lately, the news has been full of stories about over-tourism in some of Europe's most favorite destinations including many in Italy. And also the local challenges that go hand in hand with that over-tourism - limited housing for locals, squeezing out artisans from historic center of cities, eateries catering solely to visitors and I could go on and on.

Our guest today, my friend author of the Glam Italia travel guides Corinna Cooke, and I felt like it was time to address this issue head-on. And I say that because it's been a very deliberate strategy of mine to talk about slow travel approaches without directly mentioning it as a philosophy because I truly believe in showing, rather than telling.

But today I wanted to flip the switch and be very upfront about how the choices we make as travelers really do have an impact and we can make changes by voting with our travel dollars. So let's dive right in.

Katy Clarke:

Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Corinna Cooke:

Thank you, Katy. It's wonderful to be back.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, it is always a pleasure to have you join us and you're fresh off the plane from Italy. Can you tell us some of the highlights of this trip?

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Corinna Cooke:

Yes. Well, it's all different now that I have a home there. So, you know, that's pretty exciting for me. Just being at my home is really, really exciting. And then packing it up to leave, I'm just like, oh gosh. I can barely breathe. So, yeah, it was it was great. I did all kinds of really interesting things and went to some new places.

Corinna Cooke:

I actually, at the end of my June tours, I always like to go to the beach for a week because beach vacations are my favorite thing. And this time I went to the beach in Le Marche, my first time, and it was so beyond fantastic. I mean, I always have quite high expectations, but this was like 1000 times more than I thought it was gonna be. And it was, oh, I don't know. I'm still really, really excited about it. It was fantastic and fun and ridiculously affordable. No tour buses. So there's very low tourism or very low international tourism, I guess, is you get, like, a lot of, Europeans may be going through there, but it just felt really special and untouched.

Corinna Cooke:

And, it was so great. So great. And then now I'm home, and I'm you know, got this, new kinda jet lag that I've started getting the last couple of years where coming back, I wake up at, like, 3:30 in the morning or whatever, and I'm wide awake.

Katy Clarke:

You're always smiling and we love all your adventures and I'm sure we'll get into a few of those later, but let's start with a quick recap introduction. I've given everyone the 30-second summary, but can you remind our listeners and especially the new ones about who you are and what you do?

Corinna Cooke:

Yes. My name's Corinna Cooke and I write a best-selling book series called the Glam Italia How to Travel Italy books. And they approach travel slightly differently in that they are all about showing you places that you don't know inside of the big famous cities. So whether you're in Rome or in Florence or Venice or wherever you are, there's so many fantastic things to do that, most tourists don't know about. So you don't need to be in crowds all the time. You can be off seeing equally spellbinding things and having all these incredible experiences with not a whole lot of people around you. So that's that's kinda what I do. I also lead small group tours for women called the Glam Italia tours, and that's about it.

Katy Clarke:

She's a very busy lady and very inspiring. And we often ask Corinna to join us to chat about practical planning trips, to make the most of your time in Italy or her favorite places. But today we're gonna switch tack a little and talk about something that we're both passionate about, and that's how we can travel and truly enjoy ourselves and not be part of an ever-growing problem of overtourism and all the associated problems that entails. So some

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people call that sustainable travel or responsible travel. And I think, you know, that's probably a nice label to put on it, but I wanted to put a touch point in it before we could start this chat is that over the weekend, the past weekend, that's just gone past thousands of people in Spain, protested in Barcelona against over-tourism. And what they did was they actually soaked tourists with water pistols and they like drenched them. And really they were not made to feel welcome. And I think, you know, I don't think that was a great experience for anyone there.

Katy Clarke:

And it really does come back to this problem of these popular cities in Europe, that are becoming more and more inundated with tourists. And, you know, it's impacting the lifestyle and the lives of the people there. So, you know what the good news is because, you know, that was a pretty crazy story, I thought, that according to a recent survey by the accommodation site booking.com, 76 percent of travelers said they want to travel more sustainably in the future. But the problem that they were having is that 51% of travelers believe there aren't enough sustainable travel options. So, hopefully, during this chat, we can reveal some of those options to you because there are a lot of simple ways that we can take. And I know Corinna's got some excellent ideas to enhance and not compromise your travels at all, but actually make them the best travels you've ever had. So I know you, Corinna have a lot of thoughts on this, so I'll let you get started.

Corinna Cooke:

I will say that, you know, for years people used to try and talk to me about sustainable travel And I felt like it was those religious door knockers, you know, like, trying to say something. Like, as soon as something would bring it up, I would, like, do anything I could to get out of that room. I didn't wanna have somebody talking at me about stuff. And then I actually watched a YouTube thing. This is years ago by accident, but this guy was a travel specialist. He was very interesting. And then I realized that sustainable travel was exactly what I was doing. I just didn't wanna call it that. They need somebody to make it, like, a sexy name for it, not Yeah. Sustainable travel because it sounds so off-putting. But, really, what it is is traveling in a way that you don't damage the place that you're in. And I think that, you know, it's it's actually really easy to do. It's how I have always traveled without realizing that's what I was doing. And I think for the end user, that being the traveler, your experience is so much better for it. You know, it's so well worthwhile doing, and it's very, very small, small, small adjustments.

Corinna Cooke:

I found with my tour groups over the years when I'll say to them, oh, you know what? We should maybe do this this way and explain it to them. They straightaway get it. And like, oh god. No. I don't wanna be a problem. I wanna be one of the good guys. So it's all, like, really easy stuff, but it kind of starts off with why do we travel and we travel internationally so that we can experience something different than what we have at home. So the first thing we need to do is value what it is that we're coming to see. The second thing when it comes to Italy is I think we really need to stop and think about when we dream about going to Italy,

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what is it that we are dreaming about? Are we dreaming about being squashed inside of crowds with, like, those headset things in your ears and trying to remember what color flag the person's waving today and make sure you're following them. Or are we actually really dreaming about rolling hills in Tuscany and vineyards and olive groves and beautiful old buildings and wandering little streets full of history. And I think it's about aligning our actual travels more with those dreams that we have. So we see that Italy, and it's really easy to do even inside the big crowded cities. So we can have that experience inside of Florence and Rome and Venice. No problem at all.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And I think really what's happened in recent years, especially, is that we're actually told what we want. Very dramatically. Like you just have to spend, you know, like half an hour scrolling on Instagram and you're basically rolled into what your dreams are. But I think we need to take back some agency around what it is that we actually enjoy and not be told what's, what it is to enjoy because things becoming more and more homogenized in this world. And I think you, if you do a quick Google of anything, you're going to come up with a list of things to do in Rome. And the first 10 websites in every, every list are going to have exactly the same thing. So you automatically your brain it's, is just keeps telling you, well, this is what I should be doing. But I think we all have agency and we can all take a big step back and say, what is it that I enjoy? For me - I love food and history, and they're probably my 2 main motivations for travel, but some people might love being in nature or exploring.

Katy Clarke:

I don't know. I know we had some guests, that went to Piedmont and they loved dark magic and that was their passion.

Corinna Cooke:

Wow. How cool.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Corinna Cooke:

I think it does get difficult for someone who's coming for the first time and they think, well, what am I supposed to see? And it's really easy to just go, well, I'm gonna go on this tour, this mass you know, big bus tour, or I'm gonna go on this cruise, and it's gonna take me around Italy. And I have these day trips in and out. And I think those are the most toxic ways to travel. You know, their position is, oh, don't you worry. We're gonna show you what you want to see. We're gonna show you the things you need to see. And they've got this prefabricated list of places that you're going to see inside of each city that have exactly nothing to do with your personal interests. It's just like push all these people in and you'll find that all the tour, you know, big tour companies send everybody into these same handful of locations within a city.

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Corinna Cooke:

And so the travelers end user experience is that they are just surrounded by crowds and it's hot and it's sweaty and they're tired and the only food places available nearby where they are are overpriced tourist joints. And so they come away from it with a lesser experience. They've paid a lot of money for their trip and they come away with a lesser experience and they've kind of been part of the problem because that is just not sustainable. So I think that, you know, some of the big things are making a move more towards small group tourism where kind of like what you and I do where it's more specific to certain people's interests. Also, maybe looking a little bit more broadly at some of these cities and seeing what else there is to offer. Now, obviously, if you're going to Rome, it would be madness to not go to the Colosseum. I still go to the Colosseum virtually every day that I'm in Rome. I'll go walking past it and go see it and do all this stuff because I still can't believe that it's there and I get to look at it. But there's so many other things to do as well. So it's just a little bit of exploring, a little bit, seeking out a little bit more knowledge, maybe.

Katy Clarke:

I mean, if you're really interested in ancient Rome, we, and we have quite a few podcast episodes on the secret things to do in Rome, but I recently went to Palazzo Massimo, which is a treasure trove of ancient Roman art, which is...

Corinna Cooke:

And were there like 10 other people there?

Katy Clarke:

Correct. In the middle of June. It was crazy. And I loved every second of it. They like, you're sort of thinking, is this real life? Because they've actually kept a lot of these, treasures in this museum because they want to keep them safe. Right. And then they've got too many treasures. So you wander over the road to the Baths of Diocletian. They just got them all hanging out. They just thought, 'ah, we don't really know what to do with these, so we're just gonna put them in the garden'.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. I mean, like those places absolutely blow my mind. And anytime I take any of my tour travelers there, or I'll often have people reach out to me on social media or, like, in my Rome book, I talk about these places. And people will say to me, oh my God, this was the greatest thing. Like I'm getting my heart pounding just talking about it, but you get so excited because you're seeing some of the greatest stuff in Rome, and you're the only person there. Like, so there's just so many options of things to do. And the thing is, when you're doing things like that. When you're going to Palazzo Massimo and the Baths of Diocletian or the Baths of Caracalla or Palazzo Altemps. I mean, I can make a huge list of places in Rome to go to where there's barely anybody there. They're astounding places to see.

Corinna Cooke:

And the act of going there is what's called sustainable travel. You know, you've not been

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weighing down these over-touristed places. You're going to somewhere less-traveled within this big city. You know, that's oftentimes just across the street from the most crowded places, and your dollars are going into your travel dollars are going into supporting those places and keeping them running. And, you know, it's it's the tiniest action, but it's so sustainable. You know, it's it's the epitome of sustainable travel and everybody wins because you're getting this most amazing experience. Like have you been to Palazzo Altemps?

Katy Clarke:

Yes, I went there as well.

Corinna Cooke:

Oh, like that's another one of my favorites. And so for for you listeners, it's at the top end of Piazza Navona, which is perhaps the prettiest piazza in all of Rome, and it gets very busy. You cross the street and there's you see the big sign for Palazzo Altemps. And so you leave the crowds, cross the street, and there's I mean, half the time that I go there, there's almost nobody there. And just staggering, absolutely brain-bending, endless ancient Roman statues and inside this building that is just devastatingly beautiful. And so you're getting this full round, rich, robust Roman experience. You're really getting to see ancient Rome just as you can at at Baths of Diocletian and at, Palazzo Massimo. But I feel like you get time to, like, stop and look at these statues and things from every different angle and to just breathe them in and enjoy them and move through at a leisurely pace rather than having to be hustled through because there's another 1,000 people coming behind you.

Katy Clarke:

And it really is. I mean, the Colosseum has got apparently up to 30,000 visitors a day and only 3,000, only 3,000 can be in there at one time.

Corinna Cooke:

At a time.

Katy Clarke:

It's really busy. And look, you know, it's one thing you definitely have to experience at once in your lifetime. And I think walking out on that arena and pretending that you're a gladiator is one of those top moments in life. But, you know, there's so much to do. And the Colosseum itself is one of the world's most iconic monuments, of course. And unfortunately, it's so iconic that it's almost like the Ministry of Culture in Italy doesn't really know what to do with it because I mean, for me, I get a little bit worried when I go there because I'm thinking, wow, this is so precious. This is such an amazing testament to human ingenuity that it actually survived for, you know, 2000 years, even though it's been ransacked and trashed, and it's been the home for, you know, they've, they've made it into a farm and all sorts of things. But I mean, are we really respecting and I, and like, this is not an answer for anyone here.

Katy Clarke:

I think the Italian government really needs to have a look at some of these amazing cultural

treasures that they have and how they really manage them going forward because they need to do a better job in my opinion of advertising what else is available, because I don't think they do the best job of that, to be honest with you. And I think they rest on pretty is the saying is, and really promote the obvious stuff when they could be doing a better job of letting people know about the amazing Palazzo Massimo and all the different Roman baths and all of those things.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. I think also the tour companies and the cruise ship companies, like, they're taking the easy way out. They just send them on in, like, busload after busload after busload.

Katy Clarke:

Mhmm,

Corinna Cooke:

And they don't care. They've already got your money, so they don't care what your experience is. So if you're standing there amongst thousands of people, they don't care. You know, it'd be better if they were offering people all these different things and saying to them, hey, you could do this or you can do these things. And like, just explaining to people some of the different things that are available.

Corinna Cooke:

I mean, I'll get off the Colosseum in one second. But I was horrified in June. I was there with, some friends who were working on another project. And we're walking around the back of the Colosseum, and I was watching all these cruise ship groups. It was from Norwegian Cruises. And I was watching them, like, they're all flying along. First of all, there was group 23 because I was watching the paddle with 23 on it. And I was horrified that all these people were so intently following number 23 and making sure that they were not losing sight at number 23, that none of them looked over to their right and paid one second's attention to this 2000-year-old building that is one of the great wonders of the world. And then I so I was saying to my friends, I'm like, look at these idiots on group 23. What how how can you possibly walk past this and not look at it? Like, it's the beginning of the day. They haven't been in there yet or anything. How can you possibly do that? And then my friend Melissa's like, well, look at group 16, and they're going the opposite way. Same thing. And they're so intently watching that paddle because if they get separated from their group, you know, that's gonna be a disaster for them, that they're missing the fact that, hey, wait up a moment. Look at what you're going past. And I found that just so, so sad.

Katy Clarke:

I think that. come down to agency as well. Like you, we have our own, we can make our own decisions about the experiences that we want to have. And, you know, I think it's easy to go for a package in, in many different senses, you know, to get that whole package and say, yes, that's what I want. But if you if you'd have to take a little time, it maybe is a little bit more confronting. So what are some of the choices that we can make?

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Corinna Cooke:

That brings it around to, like, the next point I wanted to bring up. And if you've heard me here on the podcast before, you will have heard me say this before, but I think it is the most crucial thing when you're planning a overseas trip, when you're planning on coming to Italy. Because obviously you've saved up. Like, very few people just, like, write a check and be like, oh, yeah. I've got, like, a few 1,000 spare. I'm just gonna jump on this. Most people have done some saving up and they've done some sacrificing to get to come on these trips. But I think the most important thing is right at the get-go, when you make that decision that you want to come to Italy, sit down and start writing a list of the experiences you want to have. Because I guarantee you, you're not going to write down on your list, I want to be stuck in a crowd and, like, desperately trying to follow paddle number 23 and not get lost.

Corinna Cooke:

So let's look at what those things are, and it might be that you want to see some historic sites in Rome. And maybe you want to see some interesting old art, and maybe you want to go to a winery and maybe you want to have the experience of dining alfresco somewhere beautiful, sitting in some lovely piazza. And like you start making a list of these these things. And then once you've got your list kind of nice and fat and round with all these things that you'd be interested in doing, we can now cater a trip that is based on your interests, not based on what some tour company is telling you, oh, these are the 5 things you need to see in this city. And I think that changes everything right there and then. You know, you always hear people say, oh my god. I don't wanna go inside another church. Well, that just tells you right there that they were on the wrong trip if it's taking them in and out of endless churches and they're not interested in churches, you know, maybe go see 1 or like I always especially in Florence, I try and get people inside churches because that's where the great art is.

Corinna Cooke:

But, you know, you really need to be more of an advocate for yourself to actually go and see and do things that you are interested in. I often see, for example, at the Uffizi in Florence, I won't go there unless it's, like, January, February just because it's so overcrowded. But it's not overcrowded with art lovers who are bouncing out of their minds going, oh my god. Look at what I'm seeing. Look at I can't believe I'm actually seeing this in real life. That's not who's there. It's people who are on their cruise ship day trip into Rome or they're into Florence on their bus trip into Florence or whatever, whatever this thing that they're on, on there is you have to go to the Uffizi. So they don't have any interest in art, but it's, you know, number 3 on the list.

Corinna Cooke:

And then after that they're gonna be going to the next thing. And so they're just kind of filing past and taking up space, bringing this background to sustainability, that's completely not sustainable. It means it puts too much pressure on these locations, too many people coming in, too much weight on those floors. Whereas if it was only the people that were really interested in the art that were going there, you would have vastly fewer people. And then the

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people who are not interested in art can actually be spending these hours of their Italian vacation doing something that's of interest to them. And I think that that's so important.

Katy Clarke:

I think as well, you know, everyone's sort of on, I remember when I first started these podcasts, we talked less about places and places to go and list-ticking around places to go. And then we started talking about experiences, but what I've really noticed lately is that people are doing list ticking of experiences. So they're wanting to do a cooking class in Italy and it's like, well, that's great. And do you really love cooking? Or because if you don't, why, why are you feeling like you have to do a cooking class? Because it's not the most, budget thing that you can do. I mean, I like cooking. I love it and it's fun. And I like to learn different things, but that's for me because, I'm really interested in food where the produce has come from, but if you're not interested in it, I think don't add that to your list because it's just not, you know, or maybe you will get inspired. I mean, this is like an open conversation. Maybe you will. But I think for me, it's about learning different techniques and, and things and understanding, well, if I'm going to go to Rome, I want to learn how to make the Roman pastas, which Nesim's talked about a lot on his show. And I don't really want to do that when I'm in Venice, because that's not what they're known for right? So, yeah.

Katy Clarke:

So I think just be really curious, like curiosity is the real driver here. If, if we can all be a little bit more curious, then we will find the doors open and we'll find the experiences that we're truly looking for.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. For example, if you enjoy cars, jump on a train up to Modena, go, go up and see Ferrari and Lamborghini and Pagani and like go have that experience because that's gonna fill you up and you're gonna be so thrilled that you've been in seeing this cool thing that means something to you. Like, don't let your trip be filled up with things that don't mean something to you because then again, we get to the situation where we've got 2 larger crowds all weighing down a small area. And then what happens when you have those crowds? Those crowds, while they're waiting hours to get inside somewhere or waiting in line to get inside somewhere, they're not participating in the local economy. You know, you're not in the shops, you're not buying gelato, you're not doing these other things. You're just standing there. And that's very non-sustainable as well.

Corinna Cooke:

I have this whole thing with sustainable travel where I believe that every dollar you spend either has a positive or a negative impact on the place that you're in. So I'm not talking about the country as a whole. I'm talking about this little town that you're standing in right here right now. So if you make the decision that every dollar I spend is gonna have a positive impact, then it changes how you spend those dollars. You're not gonna be wanting to spend money to stand there in line for an hour for something that you're not really interested in. You're more likely to spend those dollars on something that does interest you. One of the

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examples I love to give is with gelato. Yeah. Because it costs, what, \$2 for a gelato. It costs the same if you go to an artisanal place where it's made on-site and it's fresh made, or if you go to an industrial place where it's, you know, chemically made ice cream and, we I think you've had you've had episodes about gelato. Right?

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. We can we can educate you on that.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. So we know the difference between the 2. So the difference when with the sustainability equation and making those \$2 or €2 count is that if you go and you buy that chemical, you know, mass manufactured ice cream product, then those €2 that you're spending aren't landing on the ground in this town that you're in. We'll use Florence for an example. They're not landing in Florence. They're just going off to some chemical factory. Whereas if you go to an artisanal gelato shop and they are everywhere, like and Italians won't eat the manufactured stuff, they eat the real stuff, then that €2 that you're spending for your gelato is actually impacting real people's lives because a real person came in and was making that gelato this morning. They're making it with ingredients.

Corinna Cooke:

So like a strawberry gelato, for example, from an artisanal place, it's actually made with strawberries that a farmer grew. So, like, of your €2, part of that is going to a farmer. Part of it's going to another farmer that the milk has come from. Part of it is is going to the guy that did the churning and, like, did the making of the product. It's only €2, but it's made a difference. And it's just little things like that when you get that awareness that you can make all the difference in the world. And you might say, well, €2 is neither here nor there. Well, factor that out by 10,000 people going into one little gelato shop over the course of the year. And yeah, it's made a huge difference.

Katy Clarke:

Corinna, have you read Atomic Habits by James Clear?

Corinna Cooke:

He's, Oh my God. You know, what's crazy? Like I do masterclass and last night I just started his masterclass.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, okay. Yeah, because it's a really interesting book and what it's saying is like little, little changes and just consistently little by little, if you change your habits, then it's going to eventuate into a big change. So I feel like that's a really important message here is that we can all do, like, small things. You know? We're not gonna hit the mark 100% of the time. No one's perfect. But if we can make some small changes, like you say to buy the artisanal gelato, which by the way is delicious and way more delicious than then the bright blue pofo, which is a Smurf flavor. I just always laugh when I see it. I'm like, oh, that can't taste good.

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Corinna Cooke:

And every every food choice you make in Italy because, again, you didn't fly across the world to come to Italy to eat something that's come out of an industrial-sized can. You know? You came over here to eat real Italian food. So making that teeny tiny choice that you're going to eat where the Italians eat, because they don't eat in the tourist joints, again, you've just changed the equation. So normally, the tourist joints are gonna cost a little bit more, but let's just say it's €14 for a bowl of pasta. If you have made that decision that you're only gonna eat where the Italians eat and you go into the little local trattoria and you have your pasta there, guess what? You've just changed the world again because now, like, there was somebody that made that pasta by hand this morning. There was somebody that made that sauce. There's, you know, owners and they're they're, like tend to be owner operated rather than being part of a chain. There's so many humans that have come in contact with the making of that bowl of pasta that is now sitting steaming in front of you. Your end user experience is a thousand times better because you're getting the real deal. And it's the real deal Italian waiters that are serving you. And it's a real deal crazy Italian stuff going on all around you. So your whole experience is fantastic. And it's so much bigger than if you'd stopped at that tourist joint and there's, like, pictures on the menu and ketchup on the table.

Katy Clarke

Or god forbid - McDonald's. Look, sometimes it's true. Even, even the most dedicated of us of Italian food lovers do after a few weeks in Italy find that they need to try something different, but you really just need to change regions. And if you want to find out more about that, we've got so many podcast episodes on about the different regions and their different food culture and the dishes that they like to eat. And most recently got one on Puglia, which is mind-blowing. It's like if you're vegan, if you're vegetarian, Puglia is a place to be. Anyway. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

Corinna food. Absolutely. What else have you got?

Corinna Cooke:

Also, I think making conscious decisions about where you're shopping. And this is one that, again, people don't think about until you tell them. And once you tell them, they're like, oh, okay. I get it. And that is you don't wanna be spending your money in the made-in-China kiosks, like with buying junk stuff that's made in China. You didn't come all the way to Italy to buy some piece of junk made somewhere else to take home as a souvenir. You want to shop at Italian places, ideally shopping with artisans because part of what is alluring to us with coming there is all these specialty things that they make, that they've been making for centuries, that they're brilliant at, that actually involve a human doing stuff versus a machine, you know, in a factory or sweatshop across the world. So again, it's a little thing and I'll say that to my tour people, if they want to go and buy something at a kiosk, I'll be like, you know, no, that's made in China.

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Corinna Cooke:

Let's go here into this little shop instead, and you got stuff that's all locally made. Again, everyone's straight away, like, oh, yeah. I wanna do that. And they're happy because the thing that they're taking home you know, maybe it's, a lot of my people like buying those wooden, cutting boards that are made from local olive wood. And it's tangible and it's real. And I was in Italy, and this is from Italian olive wood. And look at this thing I got versus, oh, look at this t-shirt I bought that's made in China and it's gonna shrink when I throw it in the marsh. You know? So little things like that, just making these little decisions about where you put your money is extraordinarily sustainable and everybody wins. The town that you're in wins and you win.

Katy Clarke:

Exactly. You know, every time you get at that chopping board, which is probably every day, I feel like I said, and you, you know, cut a piece of cheese or you chopping up some vegetables. I mean, that's, they're looking at it instead of like a, you know, a plastic key ring that's gonna break after, you know.

Corinna Cooke:

Exactly. Or even buying, you know, a hand-painted ceramic cup that you have your coffee in every day. Every day, it's going to take you back to that moment wherever you were in Italy, where you bought that cup. And I can be like, I'm laughing because that's what I do. Every day in America, my coffee is in a hand-painted ceramic cup that I actually bought in Sicily a million years ago. But every day, it gives me that little, oh, like, I think about where I was when I got it and how fantastic it was. And again, it's the same like, that would have been the same €5 or €10 that I could have otherwise spent on some stupid junk, but that €5 or €10, whatever it cost me back then, went right down there, right into that local economy. And again, that is one of the most sustainable things that you can do and everybody wins.

Katy Clarke:

Exactly. So I think the Italians do a really, really good job of making it easy to eat well and sustainably and with local seasonal ingredients. So the thing about Italy is that if you're getting say artichokes in autumn, you have to really think to yourself, hmmm - because artichokes are a spring vegetable. So you can quickly tell, you know, where you are getting that seasonal produce. So that's great. Also with the artisan goods, they've got such a great tradition of that. And everywhere you go, there's some, either some linens or some ceramics or something, leather, paper goods, so many beautiful artisan wares that you can acquire when you're in Italy. One thing that they don't do very well, and it actually drives me absolutely crazy is the amount of plastic water bottles that they have.

Katy Clarke:

And there is absolutely no need for it in most places. And so what, what do you think about that Corinna?

Corinna Cooke:

So that's actually, it was on my list of things to talk about, and it's something that I do with my tour groups as well. And that is you have to be conscious of the amount of trash that you are creating. And single-use plastics, like plastic water bottles, they're the top of the crime list. So when you're somewhere like Rome, it's brilliant because they have the Nasone everywhere, and you can just stick your empty bottle under that, fill it up with icy cold aqueduct water, and it's fantastic. It's not always that duplicatable. You know, if you're walking around Venice and you need more water, that's a little bit more tricky. But it's just something to be really aware of. And I really get quite emphatic about walking around eating.

Corinna Cooke:

So here in America, it's very much just a way of life. You'll see people walking down the street, eating a hamburger or eating whatever and not thinking about it. Whereas over there, if I use the example of Venice, for example, when you're walking and eating or you're eating outside of an establishment, you now have food trash. You have bits of food that has fallen on the ground. When you are done eating whatever food is left, you're, like, throwing it into a trash can that is hopefully not overflowing. But those food scraps, that food mess actually draws rats. And so you're, you're creating trash that the city has to now pay for getting removed and, and you're also bringing in rats. And this we're in like a port town that has a street food culture and we'll go on a street food walking tour like Naples or Palermo or Genoa.

Corinna Cooke:

Oh my god - I could just die in Genoa. I love their street food. I just did one, last year in Catania. We did a street food walking tour that was just nuts. It was so great. So the port towns are really big on street food. Everywhere else, make sure that you're sitting down to eat. Like, you're going into an eatery. It's not expensive and sit down to eats so you're not creating that excess stress.

Corinna Cooke:

And another thing too is people will leave all their soap products and that's another actually environmentally really difficult equation. So I would say to people, travel with travel-size body wash and travel-size soaps and take it back with you. And whatever you got left, don't leave it there because again, they now have to pay to clean up your mess and that's really non-sustainable.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. I mean, one of the things that I just makes me a little bit, very sad and a little bit angry actually on our travel planning community is people will actually advise people to buy big bottles in Italy and then just throw it away. And I just... I really.. just don't.

Corinna Cooke:

It drives me crazy. And Italians, most of Italy, they work really hard on recycling and on trying to take care of the environment. And so when you're doing those things, it's really making you

the ugly tourist. You know, it's just a big part of the problem. Another one that gets me is people, doing the (I call all vacation rentals Airbnb's), but doing the Airbnb thing, they will say, oh, I left food in the fridge and the cleaning lady can have it. It's like "come on". You left food in the fridge because you're too lazy to take it down to the trash. And no, the cleaning lady does not want your open bottle of milk.

Corinna Cooke:

She doesn't want your food scraps. What are you talking about? So that one drives me crazy too. But just being responsible and aware of the amount of trash that you are creating is huge. But the single-use plastics with the water bottles is a bit of a nightmare. And I don't really know the answer to that in most places because especially like this, this summer, it was boiling hot. Like, the last few summers have been really, really hot over there, so you are consuming a ton of water. And if you're not somewhere where you can fill up with quality water for, you know, free, like the Nasone in Rome, it can be a bit of a problem.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. That's true. But I think as well, the Italians don't have a strong drinking water culture. I mean, even at restaurants, so it's really more bottled water. And I find that, you know, they could they could step up a bit too. I think there's a lot of things we can all do, not just as tourists, but as, you know, and maybe as a tourist that we demand that they offer that and then they need to change a little bit and that would make a difference too. But, I find that a bit frustrating about Italy, to be honest. You know, we here in Australia, you can order tap water, mineral water or sparkling, and it all comes out of a tap.

Katy Clarke:

It's a big vat. It's not actually a bottle. I mean, which is, you know, it's a little step again, but it's not the end result. I guess the, you know, would the ultimate will be that we didn't, use any packaging at all. But, I mean, that's probably not realistic.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. It gets frustrating.

Katy Clarke:

What else did you have for us, Corinna?

Corinna Cooke:

Oh, let me see what's on my list here. Choosing less touristy locations. And this one is one that, when I see people talk about it in social media groups, I kinda get like, ouch - that's bit mean. But so when you're going for the first time, of course, you want to hit Venice and Florence and Rome and maybe the Amalfi Coast. And these are places that you've heard about all the time, and all of them are fantastic. Like, Rome's my favorite city in the world. I wouldn't miss Rome for anything.

Corinna Cooke:

But there are so many other places as well that, you know, for example, if you're wanting a beachy vacation, which plenty of people talk to me, they wanna have that experience when they're in Italy, they want to go to a beach club, they want to be on the water. Italy's all coast. It's magnificent. And they want a piece of that experience. And they immediately think Cinque Terre or Amalfi coast. And I'm always like, oh, you know what? Let's go a little bit in either direction. There's so many incredible places to go that aren't those 2 locations. They are great, don't get me wrong, but they get so overtouristed, it becomes impossible. It stops being a fun experience. It's not sustainable being there because these little places can't withstand this volume of, tourism. But for the end user experience, it's not always that great and they tend to get quite expensive. But there's so many other places that are close by that you can go like buzzing down to the Cilento or there's so many places on the Tuscan coast where beaches are gorgeous. Turquoise water, very low mass tourism going to them. So that means the price comes down drastically. You're getting that more, I hate using the word authentic, but you're getting that more Italian experience that you've been craving rather than just being surrounded by a billion cruise ship people. And I think that it everybody wins.

Corinna Cooke:

Like, over the last few years, I've been to Abruzzo for a beach vacation, this time going to La Marche. And I was telling you before we started recording, this trip to La Marche was phenomenal. I mean, it was it it was just everything. Everything you could possibly dream of for, beach time in Italy. And it was so affordable and it was so sustainable too because every dollar I spent was hitting the ground there and was actually going into the local communities of where I was. So I feel like everybody won by me being there. Especially me!

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. I was just about to say that.

Corinna Cooke:

Win, win, win, win! But, you know, I've been a couple of years ago, I was down in Abruzzo on the coast. I love going to Puglia. In Puglia, there's famous beaches, but there's also tons you can go to that are not overly famous, and they're equally fantastic. And your end-user experience is extraordinary and you come away from it going, 'oh my gosh, this is my life - look at what I'm doing'. Versus being wall to wall, shoulder to shoulder with, mass tourism.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. I think it's, it's a really interesting discussion. I know when I talk with Holly in Capri that, she really struggles with, you know, the whole need to, I mean, she loves sharing the island. That's now her now, her home, but it's also a little bit scary. I mean, even just a few weeks ago, there was a big water pipe burst and they ran out of water and they stopped all the ferries going to Capri. They did not have any water. They were allowed 20 liters of water per family. It's not a lot of water. You can't, I mean, that's drinking water, that's not to wash yourself.

Katy Clarke:

And that was for a few days. So I think, yeah, just being aware of, some different options can make a huge difference.

Corinna Cooke:

It can often seem like, well, they're they're telling me to go far away in a country that I don't know. But the thing is that wherever these big famous places are, right next door to them is somewhere equally fabulous that doesn't have that tourist load. You know, the the Cinque Terre is another great example, and we've talked about, Liguria a lot. Just up the way, like, \$2 on the train, you have a whole new world that is equally beautiful and equally, you know, stunning and atmospheric as the 5 villages are, but there's hardly anybody there. And so you're not overloading the place. Your dollars are actually making a big difference. And, again, everybody wins, and your end-user experience is incredible.

Katy Clarke:

And it's a not-so-secret objective of this podcast to help people find the untold parts of Italy that they want to go and find. And so that's why a lot of the times I like to talk about, you know, the places like Rome and Venice and Florence and give people ideas of what to do there, just like you do in your books, Corinna, but also like to shine a light on these places and, you know, somehow bring to light these different wonderful experiences that you can have that are just on your doorstep and just very, very close by and worth the effort.

Corinna Cooke:

Yeah. And I think too that I mean, we both do the small tour model, small group tour model. But I think too, people are realizing that there are these other options out there. Now, obviously the whole world can't come on your and my tours because not, we can't take that many people.

Katy Clarke:

We'd love you to.

Corinna Cooke:

But there is supply and demand. So the big tour companies are all about making that money, right, big time. And they're very good at following supply and demand. So if the demand is there for more small group experiences, they will provide them. So I think for people listening, you know, maybe my tour is well, I am only doing a handful of tours, so I can't really take that many people. But just looking for small group opportunities of things that are of interest to you, that's the answer right there. It's so it's totally sustainable. And then you're you find that all the guides that you're working with are local guides, and they've worked hard to get their guide licenses. And those dollars that you are paying them are actually going right down into their local community. It's paying their rent, and it's paying their food and their electricity bills and everything. So you're you're doing this incredibly sustainable thing. You know, looking around the small group travel options or, you know, a lot more people now I think are quite happy to plan out their own thing or to do their own thing with a little bit of

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help with the planning. And just having that awareness that you can go to some different towns and just see some different things.

Katy Clarke:

Well, Corinna, I, I really appreciate all your insight. I know you're really passionate about exploring Italy in just a really conscious and aware way, and it's truly always inspiring to have you on the show to chat about different places, experiences, and overall a different philosophy than maybe we're seeing in the general media. And what I really appreciate as well is that, you know, from my perspective, awareness and action is key, and I really think we need to all make - keep making small changes. And then if we all do it, we'll make a bigger change. None of us are perfect. I'm I am guilty of buying plastic water bottles. I hate myself for it. Like, you know, the shame, the shame, when I'm in Italy, but unless we're presented with all the options or they're easy to find, it's hard to be truly sustainable. So I really appreciate you coming on the show today to really explain all the different ways that we can make a little bit of a difference and therefore a big difference. So how would you like to wrap this up, Corinna? What's the message that you would love to give our listeners?

Corinna Cooke:

The big one is to make sure every dollar you're spending is hitting the ground in the town that you're in, and then just have that awareness. Because none of us are perfect. None of us are gonna get it right 100% of the time. But if you're getting it right some of the time - you've just made you just changed the whole world.

Katy Clarke:

Just like that.

Corinna Cooke:

Just like that.

Katy Clarke:

So, Corinna, can you remind our listeners how they can connect with you and follow along with your Italian adventures, including your new home in Italy? So spill the beans.

Corinna Cooke:

Oh, yes. So the best way is to go on my website, which is corinnacooke.com. I have a link there to join my newsletter. I have a massive newsletter that comes out about once a month, sometimes twice a month, and that fills you in on all kinds of different stories. And I tell you about places that I go and places that I've discovered that you might wanna add to your travel itinerary or swap something out for. It also has links to my social media accounts, and I will be telling a lot more stories about having a home in Tuscany and all the fun and fabulous things that happen with it. I'm just giddy about it all at the moment, so.

Katy Clarke:

I'm so thrilled for you. Must be so wonderful to finally have a place in Italy that you can call

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your own. Just absolutely delighted.

Corinna Cooke:

Yes. I love it.

Katy Clarke:

Grazie Corinna, thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy and let's chat very soon. I love chatting with you.

Corinna Cooke:

Likewise. Thank you so much and bye everybody.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao Ciao.

Katy Clarke:

It's fair to say that the hordes of people we've seen swarming monuments and cities aren't what most of us imagine when we're planning our dream trips anywhere in the world. Those scenes remind me that we always have choices when we travel and we can choose what might be the obvious and best-advertised choices, or, if we dig a little deeper we might uncover something a little more magical.

I don't know about you but when I'm traveling I want to be contributing to and learning from the places I visit, not having an negative impact on them. And I've found by making a few small changes, not only can we enhance our own travel experiences but also have a positive impact on the economies and lives of the locals where we visit

And I also believe that companies offering services in those places will respond in kind. So If more people reject the puffy gelato in favour of delicious artisanal scoops, more smaller gelaterie will be encouraged to open. At a more macro level, I hope that encourages the Italian tourist board to switch its budget from the obvious attractions and do a much better job of marketing lesser-known destinations and find creative ways to encourage visitors to go explore beyond the obvious.

Here at Untold Italy, we'll continue to showcase lesser-known regions and give you insights into the ways you can visit the popular sights in a way that is considerate and respectful of local customs but also gives you a wonderful experience too. You'll see that across all our platforms - this podcast, our website, social media, on our tours and of course with our trip-planning clients. After all, this is the magical, heart-stopping Italy we love and we want you to have that feeling too.

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If you'd like more information on the tips we've shared today, a downloadable transcript and the links to Corinna's website and more, head on over to the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/234.

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Next episode we're visiting one of the world's most iconic monuments to get the low down on how to make the most of your visit.

But until then it's ... ciao for now.