Untold Italy Episode 250: On Tour with Untold Italy - Our Hosts' Highlights Revealed

Curious about what happened on Untold Italy's 2024 tours? Join us as we chat with some of our amazing tour hosts to uncover surprise snowfalls in the Dolomites to intimate farm-to-table experiences in Sicily and all the highlights of a wonderful year of travel in Italy with Untold Italy Tours. On this our 250th episode of the Untold Italy podcast.

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:
Ciao friends, welcome and thank you for joining us on Untold Italy today as we celebrate 250 episodes of the podcast. And wow this milestone has quite snuck up on me.

What started out as a rough idea by my friend Josie has taken me on an incredible journey not only around Italy but also around the world as I connect with Italy-loving travelers both online and in person, some of whom have joined the Untold Italy team. Thanks to this podcast we've built something pretty special that I'm very proud of.

So to all of our listeners and especially the Og originals - grazie! Thank you so much for supporting the show. It really does mean the world to me and my team. I know many of you have been tuning in since the very beginning in 2020, and stuck with us through Covid and as we came out the other side and ventured back out onto our travels together. Wow, it's been a wonderful ride over the last 5 years. So if you've been here from the start, or are just joining us now or somewhere in between - welcome, it's great to have you here with us as we all dream of Italy.

For our 250th episode today, I wanted to spend some time reflecting on the year that was exploring the boot from top to toe with Untold Italy tours. Joining me today are a few of our wonderful tour hosts - Olivia, Giulia and Henna - with their thoughts on what was magical in 2024 and what they're looking forward to next year. Andiamo, let's get started.

Katy Clarke:
Benvenuti everyone. So great to have you all here. We do have a few missing as they are still on the road with guests, but I am absolutely thrilled you could contribute to this episode and give everyone a little insight on what happened on tour with Untold Italy in 2024. What a year it was, hey? So much fun. And what I'd like to do is go around and get you to introduce

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yourselves and let everyone know a little bit about you and which tours you led in 2024. So Liv, can we start with you?

Olivia Windsor:
Absolutely. Thanks for having me again, Katy. Hi, everyone. I'm Olivia, obviously, and I've got the pleasure of creating many of our itineraries for our Untold Italy tours with Katy. I've got a big interest in food and wine. You might've heard me on podcast with Katy in the past, with my partner, Andrea. We run Italian Wine Tales. So we're studying our sommelier course.

Olivia Windsor:
And in the meantime, I also host some of the tours. So in 2024, I hosted our Chianti in Spring and our Piedmont in Spring tours, as well as our first ever Dolomites tour this fall, and the Wine and Wellness retreat in Southern Tuscany, which was lots of fun.

Katy Clarke:
Thanks, Liv. Okay, Giulia. How did you go this year?

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, Katy, I absolutely loved leading the 2024 tours. Lots of fun on the road, lots of great people. By the way, Ciao a tutti everyone, I'm Giulia. I am a tour director, and, also I help the team to design some of the tours, especially the East Sicily one for that was for for 2024. I am from Emilia-Romagna, and this year, I have led 3 tours in Emilia-Romagna, also one private tour, and I also hosted the East Sicily and West Sicily. It was great because we have incredible guests as always, And what I especially loved this year was actually really seeing - especially the Sicily tour that, I helped design, actually having it happened and see it live for me was a very, very big pride.

Katy Clarke:
Amazing, Giulia. And, you actually do some work for some other companies. Wondering, can you share a little bit about what's different about the Untold Italy tours that you lead?

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, first of all, the size of the groups. So the experience with Untold Italy is so much more intimate, and I feel, as a tour director, I can really get to know the group. And the connection that is created, it's definitely more deeper, and I can see that, the guest really enjoy this part, being a small group. Second element, in my opinion, is absolutely the name already 'untold'. Let us understand that what we normally do is not something we find, with bigger companies. First of all, because, for example, the locals that we meet are small artisans, small shops off the beaten path. So this would be the 2 main elements that I would say really different and really make Untold Italy such a fantastic experience.

Katy Clarke:
That's amazing. Thank you, Giulia. Wonderful. Okay. Now, Henna, this was your first time working with us, and I'd like to love to introduce you to our audience. So go ahead. Thanks,

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Katy. Thanks for inviting me here, and thanks for inviting me onto the team.

Katy Clarke:
It's been a fantastic 1st year with Untold. I'm Henna. I come from the United States. I am from Massachusetts, a small island called Nantucket.

Henna Garrison:
So a lot of my life, I have been working in tourism. I come from a very touristic destination. And for the past 10 years, I've been, living in Italy. I spent 8 of those 10 years in Sicily. So my home right now is, let's say, a little bit between Sicily and Liguria. I got married this year. My husband is up here in Liguria.

Henna Garrison:
He's part of my heart, but some of my heart is also still in Sicily, so I keep an apartment in Cefalu, and we're working figuring out a game plan for the next years. I've worked at a cooking school in Sicily, managing a lovely rural place in Sicily, and then also as a tour host for other companies along with some freelance work in communications. But being with Untold this year, I was able to lead the Piedmont tour, and Liguria, and it was absolutely fantastic as an introduction. Both tours were this fall, so I feel fresh off the tour path and very excited about the way things are going.

Katy Clarke:
It was so great to have you on board. And, of course, you have this connection with Piemonte, don't you? Because you studied there.

Henna Garrison:
I came to Italy thinking... I came to do a master's in food, culture, and communication at the University of Gastronomic Sciences. It's about an hour outside of Turin in a town called Pollenzo. And I figured I'd be here for a year. I'd do my masters, see what life in Italy was like, maybe a little bit longer. And now, yes, it's been exactly 10 years as of a couple weeks ago.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, Auguri, congratulations. It has a way of doing that doesn't it Italy?

Henna Garrison:
It does.

Katy Clarke:
So what I thought I'd do now team. And, as I mentioned earlier, there are some people missing from this call as they're busy, busy with guests, in Umbria, but we know they're having a great time over there. We've seen some beautiful photos and videos coming through, but what I'd like to understand from all of you is maybe some of the highlights of the tours that you've led this year. So Liv, let's start with you.

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Olivia Windsor:
Yeah, absolutely. Well, first things first, it's always a pleasure when we get repeat clients and we were so lucky this fall, we had so many repeat guests who've been not only just on one Untold Italy tour, but some of them, this was their 4th tour with us, which is just amazing. And it's like, you know, having family get-togethers again. So that was a particular highlight. I'd have to say the Dolomites tour. You know, it was our very first tour in the Dolomites, and it was just stunning. The scenery in the Dolomites, It's like no other, you think it's beautiful on social media.

Olivia Windsor:
And then when you're actually, they really is even more beautiful. We had some surprise snow, so that was a really wow moment. And one of the things that really remains in my mind is we're up, you know, on the top of Alpe di Siusi and we're in this little mountain hut doing our cooking class and it's all cozy inside guests having a glass of wine as they're learning to make dumplings and the snow is falling outside and it was just a magical moment. I think that was something that everyone absolutely remembered. So that was very special. And then of course, another special moment on a lot of our tours is we do try and, you know, bring into them local festivals and in the Dolomites they have this really special festival in the fall and they bring the cows down from the mountains. And we got to go to this festival and they parade through the town and they dressed up in flower garlands. And I thought it was going to be just the cows initially, but then they bring out the goats, the baby goats, the baby calves and all the little kids handing out food and throwing flowers. And it was just such a moment of community spirit and everything I think that our tours are about, there was, you know, nature, the seasons, the locals, animals, food, wine. That was a really wow moment.

Katy Clarke:
Well, that sounds amazing. And that's really what we envisaged wasn't it when we, when we were pulling that tour together. And I know in fact that I'm actually going back there in a few weeks time but I won't see the baby goats, which you know how much I love the baby goats, But, yeah, definitely. I do remember that heart and I can't even imagine just how beautiful it was to see that. How about, the other new tour that we did this year in Southern Tuscany? What was your highlights from that tour?

Olivia Windsor:
That was a beautiful tour as well. And I think something that's so special on the wine and wellness tour is the locals that we've met and the connections that we get to have with local people that you just don't have, you know, if, if you're visiting as a kind of normal tourist, normally, I guess. So one of them we go and visit this old historic noble house from like the 14th century and Lorenza is her name. And so we, you know, arrived at her house and it's this grand palazzo that she inherited through her husband and the marriage, and we get toured around the house and, you know, everyone's just kind of in awe of where we are. And she was so personable and friendly. And then she had organized, well with us, but for our guests, it was a surprise, a surprise violin performance with this lovely young lady from the village. And it was, this is gonna sound a bit corny, but honestly, we actually almost all cried because it

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was so I think music has such a special way of really making you feel things obviously. And, you know, it was the scenery, the locals having this kind of music playing that was just amazing seeing it live.

Olivia Windsor:
And then, of course, we sat down to lunch in her house that she had prepared. So that was just such an amazing moment. And she's just one of many locals we met on that tour. We went to another farm and we got to hear this fascinating story about Sandra, who was the owner of the farm, who was doing our cooking class. She was originally from Switzerland and she moved over to Italy like 30 years ago. Not really speaking any Italian. She came from, not a farming background and they had to learn everything, you know, you think about how difficult that would have been.

Olivia Windsor:
Oh, and she has 4 young children, by the way. So everyone was just in awe of her, and they just have created this most amazing property, and now they're supporting all of these different local families through the farm. And that was a really special moment. We had a pizza cooking class there where - something our guests loved was that they got to do every single process of making the pizza from start to finish, which was just amazing - they were kind of in awe, like, you know, to see this whole process as well as of course, you know, meet the locals. So there was so many other characters that we met, but they were to the women, Italian women that really stand out in my mind.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. That's really interesting live because I know a lot of these pizza classes, you don't get to make the dough. That's what I found out recently. And I was shocked. I was like, well, the dough is the main part. The toppings are just the, you know, that's just to enhance the dough. What's going on? So, yeah, I thought that was really fascinating that, you know, people hadn't had a pizza class like that before, but obviously yes, meeting the locals is pretty special. What about the zipping around the country in the Fiat 500 so that looked pretty cool.

Olivia Windsor:
Don't even get me started yeah, so our last full day on that tour, you know, we end with a hurrah because we get picked up from this gorgeous Abbey by the way, and we all hop into the 500, you get to choose which color you like and you zip through the stunning Val D'Orcia countryside, which, I know probably a lot of our listeners might be more familiar with Chianti. So where Chianti is kind of more, rolling hills and kind of really, really windy, Val d'Orcia is a lot kind of more open plains. There's Cypress trees everywhere. In the Fall it's kind of all golden is they've harvested the wheat and it's just stunning countryside. There's the vineyards of course as well, the hilltop towns. So we really enjoyed our ride on the Fiat 500 and we ended up in Pienza, which is, you know, the town of Pecorino cheese. So that was just a delightful way to spend the afternoon rolling from one cheese shop to another.

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Katy Clarke:
I have to say my jaw dropped when I saw some of those sunset pictures you sent through, that were just incredible. Beautiful. Beautiful. Thanks, Liv. Okay, Giulia. How about you? What are some of the highlights of your time in Sicily and Emilia Romagna?

Giulia Tamarri:
You know what, Katy? Liv used the word that I would also definitely, use, which is the magic. Because, really, during our tours, we really touch all the 5 senses, and every day, we've got so many experiences. So let's think, for example, of the smell. Something that maybe you would not expect in the Emilia Romagna tour, for example, we use obviously our smell a lot, not only to smell the amazing Prosciutto di Parma, which is an absolute highlight. I always say that the Prosciutto di Parma smells better than Chanel number 5 to me at least, and most of our guests agree. But we also make something very cool, which is a perfume-making class, and we do that in Parma because Parma is also very well known for being the city of perfume because Marie Louise, the second wife of Napoleon, lived there. So with her, you know, we also experience something different that we, I don't think we do for other tours. Also, the smell, we use a lot because, as you know, in Emilia in the Emilia Romagna tour, we also talk about the traditional balsamic vinegar, and we find out very well how we make the black gold of Modena, which we do using different type of woods.

Giulia Tamarri:
So even, like, very touch feelings of touching the barrels, the pasta making class. And obviously the sight, the beautiful towns that we have and the city of Parma and the city of Bologna and the city of Moderna so much. Thinking about, the hearing, also, Liv mentioned about the music. This is also something that happens especially in the Sicily tours. So we had a surprise on one of the evenings. We had a traditional Sicilian band playing for us, Sicilian songs in dialect, so we even heard some dialect words. And, for example, in the East Sicily tour, that was probably my personal highlight, we had a concert, with 2 musicians that study about traditional songs from Sicily, but more from the Renaissance, so a little bit different than the normal traditional music. And we had that at our beautiful hotel overlooking the baroque town of Modica while having vino Cattarrato.

Giulia Tamarri:
I mean, amazing. Amazing musicians. Magic. That's the word, Katy. Magic.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Magic. Indeed. You have captured that brilliantly. And what I love in Emilia-Romagna is that contrast between the traditional, traditional, the consortium that we go visit there and also these young up and coming bells and we could be together maker who we're not going to share that because that's a top secret. It's so different, like the different approaches. And you know, what I do love about Francesco is he does have respect for the tradition, but he's also trying to innovate with the balsamic production and he's very inspiring.

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Katy Clarke:
And I do find that combination of innovation and tradition. So very exciting in Italy, it's one of the things that I think is very special about your country, Giulia. All right. Well, thank you so much. And now, Henna, how about you? What were your highlights of the tours you led this year?

Henna Garrison:
It's so hard to choose. I was actually thinking, Katy, because you asked us just to to kind of keep in mind some of our favorite parts of the tours, and both of them were spectacular. I mean, Piedmont and Liguria are regions that I thought or I think I know relatively well. I live in the, you know, I live in Liguria. I studied in Piedmont, I know Turin, and it was full of surprises. I think that is also, like Giulian Lev said, that's part of the magic is that it's really full of unexpected experiences, wonderful people, and then all of the senses. Giulia, when you were talking about the smells, we visited a basil farm in Liguria, and it was just I mean, it was unbelievable.

Henna Garrison:
You don't think about these kind of things when you're eating pasta. You can rationally know that, oh, peste comes from Liguria. Pasto is wonderful. Pasta con pesto. But then you go to the basil farm, and there are greenhouses with just, you know, square meters of basil plants, and you just poke your head in there, and it's another world. It takes you to another world. We had a lesson in making handmade pesto, and it was really fun because, a lot of people in our group were super surprised by the actual, you know, how to make pesto. First of all, done by hand, mortar and pestle.

Henna Garrison:
You would never use a food processor. We Americans are guilty of just taking the path of least resistance, so surely any pesto that we try to do homemade is in the food processor. But we did it the the the traditional way in mortar and pestle, and one of the things that stood out was folks couldn't stop saying, "oh my gosh., there's not there's barely any garlic in there. And, really, it's just a sliver or 2. And another thing, like, garlic, we we think of Italian, and we think of garlic. You don't need a lot. So I loved that whole day around pesto and around basil and felt like eating the fresh pesto from the mortar and pesto, like, hand done just on a slice of bread was probably one of the most beautiful moments on our Liguria tour.

Henna Garrison:
But then, also, I mean, Enrica from A Small Kitchen Genoa, she was with us for a lot of our activities, and, like Liv was saying, sort of like going out with a bang - on our last day, we had a cooking class with Enrica that was just fantastic. Beyond what we what we made ourselves, we were at a little winery in the town of Albenga, and we had been inside busy cooking with Enrica, and we peek our head outside and they're bringing the grapes in and they're crushing the grapes right in the driveway. So, of course, you know, moment of pause, we go outside, we check the wine, ask what they're doing, see what the process is, and it was lovely just running into something so, you know, without a plan, getting the opportunity to see that. And

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when we finally did sit down to lunch, we had been preparing for 3 hours with Enrica as our, you know, as our super maestra. And next to us, the family sits down, and the grandmother of the family just brings out this pot of pasta that was larger than, you know, my entire thigh. It was enormous. And the whole family, like, probably 4 generations, because it was the grandmother, her kids, the 3 generations, and then their children that were having lunch together while, you know, we had we sat down next to them with our prepared meal that we'd slaved away, and she whipped up something in 15 minutes to feed a family of 8.

Henna Garrison:
I mean, that was really, really special part of the Liguria tour for sure.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, wow. That's a big praising day for someone that's working at one of the most renowned schools in Italy. Unbelievable. Yeah. I think those serendipitous experiences can be the highlights. Actually, we do a lot of planning to make sure everything's really lovely, but sometimes it's just those special random moments that happen on tour that are really nice. I know down in Puglia, our driver, they always pull something out of his hat, whether it's pulling over for fresh peaches or dropping by his family's farm and letting the guests hug an olive tree. It's just it's one of those things that you can't really plan for.

Katy Clarke:
And it does say a lot about the people that we work with, the really special people. What about what do you think some of the guests really enjoyed the most? What would what do you think were some things that they sort of weren't expecting?

Henna Garrison:
I would say I would say both with Piedmont and with, Liguria, a lot of it was around the people. And whether it was Enrica in Liguria, who was our local guide, or Carlotta in Piedmont, I mean, they were just outstanding all-star people, not just in their knowledge, but just the warmth of their heart and what they wanted to share about their about their regions and about their hometowns. In Piedmont, we had a truffle hunt, and so this was a new experience for everyone, including myself, and we were all just blown away. I mean, we had this Tartufai, this truffle hunter. His name was Jean Piero and his dog, Camile. And Camile, I mean, from the moment we met her, she was just everybody's favorite. Not a person because she's a dog, but just a favorite character of the trip.

Henna Garrison:
And it was their relationship that was really so spectacular - the relationship between the truffle hunter and his dog. And she was one of, I think, 7 dogs he had in his home. To be able to hear this story, but also see them work together, he speaks in Piemontese to her. She really, like, looks for his affection when she's looking for truffles. It was such a beautiful thing, and it's almost as though, you know, their relationship, their love for each other was the epitome of also everyone's experience. So all of our guests are getting to see and encounter people who really love the places that they're in, where they work, what they do, and I think that's,

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you know, really the special part. Because we can say, oh, we're going to visit a cheese factory, but you don't know you're going to meet the 4th generation, cheese monger whose great-grandmother started it. Or we're going to a wine tasting, but you don't expect to have, like, a 22-year-old who's veering from his father's path of hazelnut growing and all of a sudden taking over winemaking.

Henna Garrison:
I hope I can speak for our guests, but they really, really enjoyed making connections with all the people on our tours.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. That's exactly what we hope for actually. And, you know, a lot of these things, become a surprise to us too, when some of these stories come out, don't they? And we're like, oh, that's amazing. And so I think, you know, the element of surprise is there just for you as the tour host and tour leaders to experience too. Giulia, what about you? What was the things that made your guests go wow?

Giulia Tamarri:
I always make a joke that, the the food in Emilia-Romagna, is life-changing. So during the tour, for example, we visit a super special dairy farmer to taste the Parmigiano Reggiano, from a special type of cow that is very rare. It's called Vaca Bianca Modenese. And when we are there, we also try their ricotta. And, Katy, everyone, I can tell you on every tour that ricotta is, like, when I see our guests' faces when they they have their first taste, it's like wooom! - you can see from their eyes where everything is like there is an aura coming out, life-changing ricotta, so, yeah absolutely I would say the food obviously, it's a major highlight well and in Sicily too, of course. Another thing that we do that is, I would say, life-changing, for example is when we try the special chocolate from, the city of Modica. You know, it's a very special type of chocolate.

Giulia Tamarri:
So we actually have the experience that we make, 2 bars together. So, you know, even something especially local that we do that we can't experience anywhere else in Italy. So we or as Henna just said, we go for the local. And most of the time is family-run small artisans.

Katy Clarke:
Amazing. Amazing. So Olivia, how about you? What about the guests? What, what made them especially excited on the trips that you led?

Olivia Windsor:
So as the girls mentioned, obviously all the locals, we met the food, of course, it's all amazing and wow, but to say something a little bit different, that was particularly evident on the Dolomites and the Wine and Wellness tour were the wellness moments on the trips, which is something that we're really trying to build into a lot of the tours is these moments of relaxation and rest and wellness. So for example, in the Dolomites, it's amazing because, you

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know, you go out for the day and you do your hike, when we go and visit a local producer in a winery, and then you come back to our gorgeous hotel and there's a beautiful spa. And there's an opportunity to use, you know, the sauna, which is really, really big up there - the sauna culture, all the different kinds of the Finnish sauna or the Swedish sauna. You can have a massage. And that was something that I guess really enjoyed. We also on the Dolomites tour went to the Termes, so the thermal Springs in Merano. So they're famous for their healing waters in Merano.

Olivia Windsor:
And that was a really special experience as well. And, you know, an opportunity, for the guests to just really relax and slow down and kind of reflect on all these incredible characters that they're meeting during the tour, take in all the food that they've had so far. So that was really enjoyable. And then the Wine and Wellness tour, we go to Bagno Vignoni, which is a spa town, again famous for their waters. And we have a day where you can choose either, you know, not everyone's a spa person, so if you don't want to go and relax at the healing waters in the pool or have a massage, you can do an e-bike tour, which is really fun and, you know, actually quite easy too because you don't have to, you can use the acceleration on the e-bike to get you through. You don't have to do too much pedaling if you don't want to. And you take in the beautiful scenery and it's again just kind of a moment to slow down. I think that's something that guests really like.

Olivia Windsor:
Of course, these tours are quite action-packed and full of amazing experiences, but it's always really nice for them to have a moment to rest and reflect and appreciate that they're on vacation too.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, absolutely. Look, if anyone is on the fence about these thermal baths, let me explain the level of relax that I have felt when I've experienced any of these thermal baths in Italy. And it's a different experience. It's not like you're going to a swimming pool.

Olivia Windsor:
No

Katy Clarke:
it's slightly not medicinal, but I mean, it can be if you want it to be like, as they, they do a lot of, medicinal treatments there too, but it's more, it is definitely a wellness experience and I'm looking forward to going back to Murano in a few weeks. Just, in fact, my son has demanded that we are going there. So off we go to swim in the, I think there's 20 pools. Not all of them are always open, but there's 20 swimming pools at different temperatures.

Katy Clarke:
I am one that likes the 37 degrees, whatever it is, body temperature. I love that pool. All right. Now Liv. Was there anything that the guests were surprised about or you were surprised

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about on the tours?

Olivia Windsor:
I guess I see it a lot with all of our tours, but it's always a nice surprise is from that first moment when we pick up our guests in a lot of the tours, it's Rome and Florence, they're big cities. They're amazing. Obviously of course you need to visit them. However, they're probably not the most relaxing of places, right? Lots happening, lots of tourists. And so it's always a really nice thing for me to see - and a bit of a surprise, I guess, is when we pick guests up from these cities, they just immediately relax as we, get into the countryside and they can really start their proper vacation. And they really appreciate with all of our tours that they're away from the hustle and bustle and kind of showing the regional side of Italy, the locals and kind of a slower pace of life. So that's something that's always really nice to see.

Olivia Windsor:
The other thing as well. And again, I guess it's kind of a surprise, but not a surprise, obviously everyone always loves the food and they are surprised by different flavor sensations, but more than the food and the sights that we see, it comes back to the locals that we meet too. And I think it's the people that they meet along the way that even days later and weeks later and you know, we have these WhatsApp groups, so you keep in touch and you might hear from people down the line - it's the people that we've met during the tour that they'll remember. Of course, you know, they'll say, oh, all the food was great, but it's what really sticks in people's minds is the local connections that we made on the tour.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Amazing. I love seeing those WhatsApp groups and the little messages "ooh, we cooked that dish that Giulia showed us". And it was really, it's really a nice way to keep those memories going because you know, it's a big investment going on these chips and you really want to make sure that you're having an experience that you can remember for a long time and maybe take some skills back that you were going to use in the future. Okay. Giulia, how about you? Anything that you thought the guests were surprised at that they weren't expecting?

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, thinking about, one of the best experiences I've done, for example, on my very last tour in West Sicily, one of the biggest highlights was actually going to this very remote farm, which, has olive oil, olive trees, sorry, and also wine, and actually having lunch at a big table in the middle of the countryside with the nonna, the mamma, and the winemaker and olive oil maker. That was fantastic. So, yeah, as Olivia said, of course, okay, the food, it shouldn't be taken for granted, but we kind of know that Italy is so well known for that. But the actual experience of going to a very remote farm and having such a simple, pass me the expression, lunch, but with the nonna and the family was fantastic. So, for example, also the passion that that this farmer had in explaining every type of olive they have because, you know, in Italy, we have more than 500 types of olives, and he was very proud showing us also his very ancient trees. He had a 300 years old olive tree, and we were all amazed. The name of the

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tree was Sophia, so we were like, oh, wow. You know, so we not only meet the local like, we even meet monumental trees.

Giulia Tamarri:
Like, these things really stuck into our minds, like, fantastic.

Katy Clarke:
Amazing. Who would have thought the tree would have a name like Sophia?

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah. Was also the daughter of the tree. I forgot the name, but they named also the daughter. So cute.

Katy Clarke:
No, I love those stories. It's so special. And I think what people need to understand is you can't organize this stuff, unfortunately, if you're traveling independently. So please, you know, like a lot of people do reach out to me and ask, but you can't because these people are running a farm, so they're doing their daily work and they're doing, and they may like to, welcome some people into their home, but it has to be worth their time. So they're not gonna do it for, you know, one-off visitors, okay? So it has to be organized well in advance and as part of a bigger activity. So even though our groups are very small, it's big enough for them to take the time out of their day to do that. So, yeah, unfortunately, if you are traveling independently, this is not something that's probably available to you.

Katy Clarke:
That's why we started these tours because we did want people to experience that for themselves. Okay. Henna, how about you? What were people surprised about?

Henna Garrison:
Well, I think Liguria is a fantastic tour in general, and I think the region itself is surprising. Most people, when they think about Liguria, they think of Cinque Terre, and that is where people congregate, Portofino, the let's say the east side of of Liguria. So all of our tour starts in Genoa, and we go west. And I think it's a big surprise to discover what is west, what is going towards France in Liguria because it's quite a hidden area. The infrastructure is not fantastic. There aren't a lot of trains. The highway is not always in good condition. But that being said, there were so many gems that we experienced when we were there.

Henna Garrison:
We went for an olive oil experience in a town of 300 people, and it took probably 30 minutes to wind our way up these roads and had the most lovely hosts. I mean, really, Katy, like you said, this isn't somewhere you'd pop into. It's not somewhere you would really find on a map. I mean, I told my husband about it about the name of the town, and he's he's from Liguria. He's from this part of Liguria. No clue. Like, no idea.

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Henna Garrison:
Yeah I've heard of it, but no idea what's going on there. So I think the Liguria tour is all of a wonderful surprise, and really a fantastic surprise. And it's a nice contrast with the Piedmont tour because I think our Piedmont tour is especially in the Fall, it's truffle season. So you have, like, the heavy hitters. We're in the land of Barolo, truffle season, and you think, you know, what's better than that? And the surprise in Piemonte, or in Piedmont, is that there's a lot of things. It's not just Barolo and Tartufo. Don't get me wrong. We loved eating and drinking our fair share of truffles and Barolo.

Henna Garrison:
But also discovering some of the lesser-known grapes or the lesser-known wines of the region was really a hit. We had a young winemaker who walked us through his portfolio, and we did have the Barolo, and it was fantastic, but also getting to try some of the white grapes that aren't as famous, the Arneis, sparkling wine that was made with a grape that's that no one has heard of. So these were the surprises. In a place that's so famous for a particular product or a particular wine, it's exciting to find things that are different and things that you hadn't imagined would be there. That, and I'd say, Vermouth was a big surprise for everybody, except for Buzz. She, one of our guests was a huge Vermouth fan, and so she knew a little secret way ahead of the rest of us. The rest of us were all, absolutely charmed, would never think of drinking vermouth, sort of, on its own.

Henna Garrison:
But Turin, being the birthplace and the capital, you have to try it. And then we were all hooked. So that was a fantastic surprise on the Piedmont tour.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, ditch the negroni for the vermouth. I really do have a big passion for Liguria and I think, wow, if people could just edge away from the Tincote and explore some more, they will not know what's hit them. It's a really amazing, charming area that I think is very underrated apart from, apart from obviously the hordes that into the Cinque Terre. It's very beautiful. Okay. Giulia, last one. Anything that the guests or you were really surprised about on the tour?

Giulia Tamarri:
So, for example, we also really enjoyed, seeing the artisans making ceramics in Sicily. That's absolutely amazing. So both for the East Sicily and the West Sicily, we actually go and visit little workshops where we can see these crafts that are still made by hand. So we have the experience of seeing these beautiful ceramics, how they are made. So that's another highlight in my opinion.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. I love the ceramics, and just meeting the families that have been making those things for generations has been you know, it's really quite incredible.

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Giulia Tamarri:
So, Katy, one of the things that the guests were very surprised, and this can only happen with small tours, is on one day, in West Sicily, we had very bad rain, which, you know, sometimes it can happen. But with Untold Italy, we are very flexible, to change the program last minute. So, for example, we went to this very tiny museum in the middle of nowhere in Sicily, and it was about immigration. And that was something our guests were absolutely flabbergasted with because we went to this little town. We had a proud ambassador of this community taking us to see very, uncommon things. For example, we went to see their, so that's like their meetup point, their community center, And it told us about the history of this town that was, unfortunately, badly hit by the 1968 earthquake in Sicily. And then it took us to the museum, and it told us all about this community of immigrants, and this was really, really powerful because, some of our guests had Sicilian origins, and they felt really connected. So I would say surprises like this as well.

Katy Clarke:
You did such an amazing job with that, and I know the guests were really touched, by that experience too. Okay. Now, Giulia, looking forward to 2025, what are you most looking forward to when you're on tour with the groups?

Giulia Tamarri:
It's very hard to just to name a few. Well, of course, I'm very proud to take, the Emilia-Romagna tour because, obviously, it's my region, and I can't wait, for our guests to actually also visit my town, which obviously for me has a special spot, which is called Spilamberto. And, also, actually, during the tour, Katy, you know, sometimes I call my dad, and it's another big highlight of the tour. You know? Even meeting, like, someone personal, someone from, like, an Italian family, you know? So I'm also looking forward to that. And, of course, in Sicily, the amazing beaches. For example, we also go to Henna's town, which is Cefalu with this beautiful church and the relaxing time there, having more olive trees, tasting the chocolate, tasting seafood. I mean, I can't stop.

Giulia Tamarri:
Too many things to look forward to.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. I think everyone does love meeting your dad, Giulia. He's got the winning smile. And, if people look closely on our YouTube channel, he's a bit of a star on the YouTube, actually.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeeees!

Katy Clarke:
Okay. Henna, how about you? What are you looking forward to next year?

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Henna Garrison:
Giulia said it quite well. It's really hard to choose. Everything is so fantastic, and I think Katy used the right word - there are always some surprises, and I think that's the lovely thing is that you can go in with an idea and even from my experience, I'm always just, I've been blown away by what what we find. It's always something above and beyond what you're expecting, which I think is great. I definitely am looking forward to eating more. Although I have to say, when I come home, I'm so happy to get back onto, like, you know, a little lighter food schedule.

Henna Garrison:
But, it is such a treat to try all these really typical local products and from producers who are really passionate about what they do. And I think meeting the people that come on the tours, this was something for me. - this was my 1st year with Untold, and understanding the group members and who they are, where they come from. We've just had such lovely, lovely, lovely guests. As Liv said, a lot of repeat customers. I had a couple in my Liguria tour who had traveled with Untold before, and it was so fun to hear about their experiences in other parts of Italy and to know that they were going right on to it another tour after ours. So everyone who joins the group has something to contribute. They all have great stories.

Henna Garrison:
Of course, they have their lives back home that they're usually willing to share about. So we had some really fun conversations in both groups about wedding planning because I had wedding planners in both groups. And just it was fantastic, everyone pitching in and sharing their stories. It's a really nice community, so I think I'm looking forward to meeting all of our guests next year as well.

Katy Clarke:
And Liv. Now Liv sadly won't be leading any tours next year, but she's got some exciting news, and, it is around the name of Sophia.

Olivia Windsor:
Indeed. Exactly. I'm pregnant and giving birth in February. So I'll be watching with excitement from the sidelines. So we're having a little girl with the name Sophia as well. Just like those olive trees. But, no, I'm really excited especially for we've got one new itinerary launching next year that's completely new actually because the Chianti tour is a little new as well.

Olivia Windsor:
But the Umbria tour, we are doing the Infiorate tour this June. Well, this June 2025. And I am so excited about that. It's the very first time I've led the Umbria tour in the summertime, and it's all centered around this very special flower festival in Spello that I went to a couple of years ago with my husband and it is phenomenal. They spend the whole night before as you know, a community. They get into little teams and they work from the time that sunsets, so, like, 9 PM all through the night until, like, 6 AM in the morning, building these kind of tapestries on the floor, carpets out of flower petals. And they're amazing.

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Olivia Windsor:
So this tour was born really kind of to center around this idea of this community festival. And it's a party atmosphere. There's, you know, beer in the street and porchetta, and it's all very Italian. So we'd go the night before and then the next morning we get up early, which everyone's more than happy to do because then you get to go and see the finished flower carpets first thing in the morning before the priest walks over them. And they're all kind of, you know, a little tampered with, later in the day, but that's such a special tour. So I'm really looking forward to seeing that come to life. And then as I mentioned, the Chianti tour for next year is a little different as well. So we're doing, instead of having our whole time just in Chianti, we are doing a few extra exciting things and having a few nights in Lucca, which is a beautiful town.

Olivia Windsor:
Every time I go there, we always say, oh, we could live in Lucca. It's so beautiful, medieval, everyone bikes around. It's just a really relaxed, lively kind of place. And so we'll be, yeah, having a few nights there too and doing a few special activities in that area. They're really famous as well, near San Gimignano for truffle hunting. So we're going to dip into there. Dip into maybe even the coast in Tuscany. So yeah, look out for some updates on those two tours because they're really ones to watch.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Amazing Liv. Wow, everyone don't worry - Liv is always going to be involved in the tours. So she's got such a passion for showing people this untold Italy that we've all grown to love and appreciate over many years. And she will be missed by the guests on the tour, but the stamp of Liv will always be there. Okay. All right.

Katy Clarke:
Well, to all of you and to the team that's on the road at the moment, I can't tell you how proud I am of all of you when Liv and I started creating these tours, we certainly had a vision for them and it's so really delightful to see them come to life in the way that we imagined. And that is really all thanks to our wonderful hosts and tour leaders who pull it all together. So it's a fun job, but it's also got its challenges leading people on the road, especially, you know, with weather and all things like that. But you really do make Untold Italy tours, what they are. And I can't wait to see what 2025 holds as we gather more Untold Italy gets into our fold and show them the magic of regional Italy. So thanks to all of you for coming on the podcast today and sharing your experiences over the last year or so. Really appreciate it. And as I said, I'm very, very proud of you.

Katy Clarke:
So thanks to you all.

Olivia Windsor:
Grazie Katy. Thank you.

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Giulia Tamarri:
Gracie, Katy.

Katy Clarke:
Thank you.

Katy Clarke:
Wow, what a year and what a team. They are all simply wonderfully talented women who brighten the lives of all that cross their paths. What a privilege it is to work with them as they bring into reality the Untold Italy vision.

Now a week long tour experience isn't for everyone but I know from the many repeat clients we have that they truly appreciate our small groups, all-inclusive pricing and attention to detail. Many of the special activities on our tours are not available to the general public so our guests really tap into something unique and exclusive when they join us. And we love to watch those smiles when they relax into our Untold Italy.

We have 18 tours planned for 2025 and of course, we'd love to have you join us to explore the magic of regional Italy whether it be elegant Piedmont, beautiful Sicily or an unexpected side of Tuscany.. Some tours are already fully booked so be sure to reach out if you're interested in joining us in 2025. Of course, we spend all our time away from the busy cities so you don't need to worry about crowds and all of the hubbub around the jubilee year.

I've put a link to the tours website untolditalytours.com and a new special offer for 2025 tours for those of you tuning in at the time of publication in November 2024.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did we would love it if you shared it with your Italy-loving friends and family. Grazie to those of you who have already done this - it is so appreciated.

That's all for our 250th episode. Thank you for joining us and I've got a big surprise for you next week. Something a bit different that involves one of the legends of travel, a guy that changed the way many Americans visit Europe. But until then it's Ciao for now.

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