

Untold Italy Episode 259: Winter in Italy - A Trip Report

Imagine tucking into a steaming bowl of carbonara in a cozy Roman trattoria, admiring the pristine snow-capped peaks of the dolomites or gliding along a misty Venetian canal with no summer crowds in sight. Winter in Italy is a different kind of magic, and in this episode, we're taking you to Rome, the Dolomites, and Venice to uncover why this season might just be the best time to visit Italy. Pack your coat and your sense of adventure, and let's dive in.

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, everyone. Katy here with an update on our recent winter trip to Italy, which was a lot of fun and offered up lovely surprises and experiences that I'd never had before. Traveling with my family, which we did on this trip, is one of my favorite things to do in the world, but not least because children offer up a very different perspective and opportunities to try new things, which we did. Now before I take you through what we did and learned on the trip, I wanted to do a big shout-out to all of you who have booked in with our trip planning consultants to help you plan your Italian adventures. Already this year, we have helped well over 30 groups plan their trips, and it's always exciting to hear what interests you and which special corners of Italy that you're looking to explore. I know many of you are podcast listeners, and we can't wait to hear how it all went and see some photos. And if you wanted to do that, you can tag us with #untolditaly on our Instagram if you're happy to share them publicly.

Katy Clarke:

Now our spring tours to regional Italy are almost full now. There's just a handful of rooms left if you would like to join us, including the very last spot for this year that's heading to Puglia in late May. Unfortunately, all the other spots for Puglia in 2025 are taken. We're gonna try and add some extra dates for 2026, but at this stage, they will be limited to around the same as this year, if you're interested in a trip to Puglia, We do have some more availability on our autumn or fall trips to other regions like Piedmont and Sicily, and, of course, we'd love to have you along to share meals and stories, enjoy amazing scenery, experiences, and local wine, and discover the endless delights of our untold regional Italy. You can head on over to our tours website at untolditalytours.com for all the destinations and details.

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Katy Clarke:

Okay. So onto the trip report, and I thought I'd start off by looking at really what made us plan a winter trip. And so one of the main things was that we do have some exciting events coming up with our team, which I'll be able to share with you in the coming weeks. And one is a huge project, which is really exciting and the culmination of, I guess, my career over the years when I moved from technology sector to travel. So something that I've been working on with my team in Italy, and I'm very, very excited about it. And I also needed to get my team together. You know, it's great to see everyone face to face because, as you can imagine, running a business from Australia that's all about Italy, sometimes we do need to touch base in person, so it was so lovely to see all of those smiling faces in Rome when I got there. Another big reason, why we decided to take a winter trip to Italy was that I've never been to Italy in winter, and I was really curious to see what it was all about. I have been in late February and late November, but I've never been in January. And so I wanted to have a look at the Christmas decorations and just see what the vibe's like in the midwinter, and I was really pleasantly surprised. The other reason is that, for most of, you know, and you can tell by my accent, that snow is a novelty for us here in Australia.

Katy Clarke:

We do have snow fields. However, it's not quite the same. We don't really have those soaring mountains and alpine lakes that you have in North America and also obviously in Europe. So it's super exciting for us to see a winter wonderland that's all laid out before us. I also wanted to check out the Christmas scene. And if you've listened to our Christmas episode a few episodes ago, you'll know that in Italy, Christmas kind of goes on until the 6th January. So it was really exciting to go and check it out because I wanted to see exactly what the vibe was, and I can't wait to tell you all about that. The other one that I wanted to do was check out what Rome was happening in Rome and what was going on during the Jubilee year, and so I could report back to you, and so we'll go through a bit about that as well.

Katy Clarke:

And the other reason was we used to live in London, which is why I did a lot of travel in Italy prior to moving back to Australia, and it's obviously a lot closer to get there from London. So we had a lot of friends and family over there that we wanted to touch base with, and that was just really lovely. But it was also really great to do that because it provided an interesting contrast to what we found in Italy. And so we did go to London first. And what is interesting about the UK, and I've lived there a third of my adult life and, you know, have lots of fond memories from there. But one that is not so fond is the gray, gray skies that sort of seem to blanket you for 6 months. And so it was pretty I don't wanna say gloomy, but it was quite gray when we were in London. And so when we arrived in Rome on New Year's Day and there was bright blue skies, it was really lovely to get back into the Italian spirit.

Katy Clarke:

So, yeah, yeah, that's what we did. We arrived on New Year's Day, and it was really buzzing and busy in the center. So I always like when I arrive somewhere to get out and go for a big long walk. And in Rome, that's obviously super fun, and we stayed this time... I always like to

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stay when I'm with the family in central Rome because they like to go and explore and just, you know, go walking everywhere. So we stayed right near Campo de' Fiori, which is where I like to stay and quite fun because it's, like, very vibrant. There's lots of restaurants, and you can easily walk to all the main attractions. So I always tell people that's where they should stay, especially on their first trip, and, I like to practice what I say.

Katy Clarke:

So that's what we did, and it was beautiful. So it was much warmer than London, and, yeah, we have bright blue skies for most of the trip. So that was really fun. And I think we had one rainy day and then we just ducked into a museum for that day. So it was really nice. So we first went to Piazza Navona because Piazza Navona is where they have the Christmas market. So I really wanted to go check that out. That was New Year's Day and that is a public holiday in Italy.

Katy Clarke:

So just bear that in mind, but it was really busy and there was a lot of, stalls there, particularly those celebrating Befana, who is the good witch that comes and leaves candy or coal for the children in Italy. She's kind of like an extra Santa kind of figure. So they're very lucky over there. And, my children were saying, does Befana come to us? And I said, I don't think so because I feel like you've been very spoiled already. Anyway, but Piazza Navona was looking amazing. It has had a bit of a glow up because, obviously, we're in the Jubilee year. So if you had visited last year in around June, you would have found the fountains kind of boarded up and under restoration.

Katy Clarke:

So it was lovely 6 months later to see everything looking so beautiful and so vibrant. And, you know, there's a little carousel in the piazza, and people are wandering around enjoying the scene. And it's it's a really lovely spot, but it was really busy. And I would say it was mainly European travelers and Italians, and we didn't really hear many English-speaking voices. So I think the Italians were taking the holiday and making best use of it to really go out and explore their city and enjoy it looking so beautiful. That was Piazza Navona, and it was great. You can go there. You can get some mulled wine and walk around and just admire the scene.

Katy Clarke:

And, obviously, just walking around the center is really beautiful, especially at this time of year. So the last time that I went was just before Christmas was in late November, and I had noticed that there were a lot of festive decorations, but I think most of them hadn't been up at that time. So I think by the December 8th, they're usually up and everything's looking great. So I hadn't seen everything in its full glory, and, you know, they really know how to do beautiful Christmas decorations in Italy. And there's lots of lights and just beautiful decorations and window displays, and it just has a really lovely atmosphere about it. And, of course, you know, if you're wandering around and you, you know, wanna pop into a cafe and grab a hot chocolate or a coffee, and it's just it's got a cozy vibe. So, you know, it wasn't so cold, I would say. Like, I'm from Melbourne in Australia, and it's very similar for those of you

who are listening in from Melbourne.

Katy Clarke:

I think the weather is quite similar to Melbourne in winter, which is fairly mild. It's about 15 to 16 degrees during the day, which in Celsius. So for those of you who are in North America, that is it's about 60. So I think it's very mild. It's very doable. I still wore my coat because I like wearing a coat. It's fun. And, it was just was just really lovely to just walk around and, build up an appetite because, obviously, it's always good to eat when you're in Rome.

Katy Clarke:

So I had a few meetings, and while I did that, my husband took the kids and they rented some bikes at Villa Borghese and rode those around. And if you're traveling as a family, this is a great way just to get them up and moving and doing something that's fun. It's a beautiful garden right near Piazza del Popolo, and, you know, it's not a museum. And my son really loves museums. My daughter's not the biggest fan. So it's always good, I think, to mix up activities when you're traveling with kids, and this was, a good way for them to do that. So they rented the bikes at Villa Borghese, and then they also went along to check out what was happening at the Trevi Fountain because they've implemented a new kind of queuing system. So if people wanna get close to the fountain, they need to queue up and line up.

Katy Clarke:

And it didn't seem too busy when they went, but I feel like in summer, it's gonna be quite busy. So just be prepared that there are a few little changes happening around the city to do some crowd management. But I think having seen a bit of overcrowding at the fountain, it's probably not such a bad idea. But as always, if you want the best views and you wanna see the fountain in all its glory and have your little moment with it and throw your coin in, the best time to go is really early in the morning. By really early, I mean 6 o'clock, if you're one of those people that gets up, and it's just absolutely beautiful. Then and you have it largely to yourself. Hopefully, there won't be too many influencers there hogging the vistas. Anyway, enough said about that.

Katy Clarke:

One of the other things I got my kids to do, which they were fully invested in, was the Roman pasta challenge. And when we were there, which was about, I think it was about 5 or 6 days, they did have the opportunity to try all the Roman pastas and tell me which one they liked the best. So they tried, Al a Gricia, Cacio e pepe, Carbonara, and Amatriciana. And so each of my kids had a different favorite, and I think it really does depend on the restaurant that you go to. But, you know, do some research, and it's a fun thing to do because these pastas are based on the same base, which is the Cacio pepe, and then they add a few little extras to make it a little bit more interesting. So if you wanna learn more about those pastas, we have a couple of episodes on them actually that, we'll put a link to in the show notes. Those episodes I did with my friend Nesim who runs full belly tours there in Rome, and he was on the podcast last week as well, talking about food allergies. And Nesim and I and the family caught up and we went to a neighborhood that I hadn't been to before, which is the

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Garbatella neighborhood, which is super cute.

Katy Clarke:

It's a little village-type atmosphere and it's very different to other parts of Rome. So it was built sort of as a little escape from the city, and the houses there are very different, and it's got a very different vibe to what you find, say, in Trastevere or in the center or, you know, even in Ostiencina where we go sometimes or to Testaccio. So this is for those of you that wanna get off the beaten path and go see a real Roman neighborhood. Trastevere is amazing, vibrant place, but it's also, you know, becoming a bit more touristified, I would say. So if you really wanna see a neighborhood where Romans live, Garbatella is a really great place to do that, and, of course, you will find some lovely restaurants there too. And we had an amazing lunch with Nesim and his wife, and it was just super nice to catch up with them. Usually, when I go to Rome, it's in the shoulder or the peak season, and it can be quite difficult to catch up properly. So that was really nice.

Katy Clarke:

The other thing that we did there was we ducked into a few museums that I've never been to before. So one of them was a Roman museum that overlooks Piazza Navona, and this was, like, super interesting because it was about the history of Rome and some of the more, celebrated Romans that have been in power over the years. But one thing that's really lovely if you go there is if you go up to the very, very top of the floor, it's got a beautiful view over Piazza Navona, and it's something that I've never seen before, and it was really lovely. It gives you the full vista of that part of the city. Of course, Piazza Navona used to be where they held the chariot races, so you can really see how impressive that would have been in its heyday. So that was really fun to do as well. And then we also dropped into Palazzo Altemps, which is a really lovely museum full of ancient Roman artifacts, and it's just mind-blowing to see these amazing sculptures, artwork, frescoes that have survived for 100 and 100 of years. And they're in a beautiful setting in the Palazzo, and that one is very close to Piazza Navona.

Katy Clarke:

So if you ever think you wanna get away from crowds or you just wanna have a quiet moment, it's a really beautiful museum just to duck into for, you know, an hour or so because it's not very big as well. So I find that's very good for children because there's only, I guess, so much art maybe some kids can take, so or museum type activities. So it's that's a really nice one to go into. I'm gonna talk about the Jubilee in a minute because that's where a lot of the crowds were coming from, while we were there. But the last thing that I wanted to mention was the Catacombs Tour, which we did on a whim. And I was looking for something to do, and I'd always wanted to suss out the catacombs tour, but I'm a little bit of a scaredy cat because I don't really like dark scary places with bones. But we did go and check this one out, and this one was with Walks of Italy. And, you know, it was really fantastic.

Katy Clarke:

And the guide, Antonella, was just incredible. So this one starts as a little walking tour in Trastevere, and it takes you to a bone crypt that's, down by the river. And you go in there,

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and it says by special arrangement with the nuns there. And I don't believe you can go there if you are not with the tour. Anyway, so you go and see the bone crypt, and you learn about why things were preserved the way they were down there, and that was super interesting. And then they jump you on a bus, and you go on a little bus ride down to the Via Appia, which is the old Roman road leading out of the city. And so you learn about the Roman road, and you hear about stories about the, really, the early days of Christianity in the city. So I thought it was a really nice thing to do when we've got all the Jubilee celebrations going on as well, because if you're interested in early Christianity and the history of that, this is an amazing thing to see because the catacombs that they take you to, they're obviously very, very old and they date back to pagan times.

Katy Clarke:

So you see the pagan catacombs and some incredible relics and things that they've discovered over time, but then it was also one of the very early Christian churches. So this church that they take you to San Sebastiano is a very important church because it was the favorite of one of the recent popes, Pope John Paul the second and also Mother Theresa. So it's a very important church. And the reason for that is because it has supposedly I'm not not going into any speculation, but it does have what they say is the footsteps of Jesus, the imprint of it, and that's displayed in that church as well. It's a very interesting church and very interesting stories that are around it, and the guide was fantastic, and I thought it was a really nice contrast to see, you know, the churches and how they dealt with the catacombs in that story. So I would really recommend going on that. If you've got any interest in history, especially around the ancient Roman and early Christian history. It's it's super interesting.

Katy Clarke:

And, of course, you do go on the Via Appia, which is the famous Roman road. Okay. So one of the other reasons, as I mentioned, that we went in winter was, in this time, was I really wanted to check out what was happening with the Jubilee in the first days of this event, at the start of 2025. So, obviously, it started on the 24th December last year, and what that means is, for the Jubilee, some of the most important aspects of it is the holy doors are open in Saint Peter's and three other major basilicas in Rome. So I wanted to check out what it was all about, and, you know, I'm not a practicing Catholic, and so I have a different perspective than if you were a practicing Catholic. And so I'm just putting that upfront. But I did wanna check out the museums and Saint Peter's. So we booked a tour with LivTours, which was fantastic as always, really professional, really well done.

Katy Clarke:

I did leave that one till the last minute, and I did not get the earlier time that I wanted. So we entered at 8:30 AM, which is still early in the morning, and it was really busy. And I was pretty shocked, actually, because I have been very lucky to go in at the earlier sessions most recently. So it's like you're wandering the halls there and the galleries by yourself, and it's a different experience. So the guide was amazing. She navigated us through everything and took us to some cool parts of the museum that I had never seen before, including some very special Egyptian collections. So, you know, if you have a specific interest, it's really

worthwhile, getting a guide who can help you tap into those as well, because it's a huge collection and there is no way you can possibly see even a tiny fraction of it, you know, on one visit. It's just impossible.

Katy Clarke:

So I would recommend that if you're bothered by crowds and you want a more peaceful experience, do book the earlier sessions, which are available, either directly through the Vatican Museum sites or via some of the people that we like to recommend, which include Walks of Italy and LivTours because they give you, like, a slightly different experience. So I've done many, many tours of the Vatican Museums, and they're all great. I find the official tour is probably leaning a little bit towards maybe more religious aspects and a little bit more dry, whereas the other companies kind of are focused on entertaining and sharing stories. And it's purely personal preference, but do have a look at the tours because I do think it's worth it if visiting the Vatican Museums is a priority for you. The really exclusive Keymaster's tours are now open for bookings for 2025, and this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to walk with the Keymaster to open the galleries, including the Sistine Chapel, and enjoy that experience with just a handful of people. It does come with a price tag to match. However, it's very exclusive. If that's something that interests you, I would not hesitate to go for it, but it does definitely come with a price tag. To reiterate, if you wanna go and have a peaceful experience, you'll need to get in there before 8 at 8:30, and, you can do that with all of the options that I mentioned.

Katy Clarke:

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Katy Clarke:

So we got through the museums, and we saw some things that we'd never seen before, which was really lovely. And what we did do, which I thought was really lovely, was we took a family photo in front of the map in the gallery of maps where my husband's family's from. So that was super nice. And we'll be showing that to his mum when we go visit her soon. So that was really lovely. And then one thing that's really good about this tour, and we can't guarantee that it's gonna continue for the rest of the year because it does change, but on this occasion, we were able to walk directly from the Sistine Chapel through to Saint Peter's and avoid the busy security line that's outside Saint Peter's. Yes. It was incredibly busy. Saint Peter's because, obviously, the pilgrims are going to see Saint Peter's. It is very, very busy because, obviously, it is the home of the Catholic church, and it is the home of the Jubilee.

Katy Clarke:

So it was really interesting. I didn't know what to expect. So, usually, you walk through the

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main doors of the basilica, but now you walk through the holy door. So you can see the pilgrims going in, and they're holding the crosses, and it's really emotional for them, and it's it's very special thing to see. I think anyone who has a faith like that and has made the effort to do this pilgrimage, I'm sure that it's a super emotional time for them, and it was really lovely to see people, you know, doing that as a group and obviously enjoying that experience together. You know, when you're inside Saint Peter's, again, super busy, and they do manage the crowd very well. One thing that was really nice was we saw the preset pay or the nativity scene that's set up in basilica each year. So that was really lovely to see.

Katy Clarke:

I hadn't seen that before. Also, we saw how they manage the clergy as they're moving around the church. So there was a lot of security and the priests would walk through and then everyone would go back to their own business. So it was really interesting to see how that was managed, But everyone was super polite and kind. It was just very, very crowded. So just to be aware, I don't think that's gonna be less crowded, as the year goes on. We did see a lot of European people there, so there wasn't a lot of English being spoken. So that's another thing because that time between Christmas and New Year is a time when Europeans do go and visit other parts of Europe.

Katy Clarke:

So I think if I had realized that I may have chosen a different time to visit, but that's okay because we did experience the same thing in London. It was crazy busy, actually. Like, I had never seen it like that before, actually. And, yeah, it was mainly Europeans out and about. So one thing to note, if you're not into sharing your experience with a big, big, big, big crowds, then maybe the time between Christmas and New Year is not the best time to visit, but it was still lovely. So it's swings and roundabouts. So that was Rome. And, you know, we had an amazing time in Rome, and I've been talking for a while now.

Katy Clarke:

And I realized that there were we saw so many things that I had never done before, at least 3 or 4 things. And, you know, I think I'm on my even since Covid, I'm like on my 10th or 11th visit since Covid. So, you know, there's so much to see in Rome and experience. And so please make sure you spend a good few days there because it is really one of the most amazing capitals of the world. Now when that part of our trip was over, that was this is the next exciting bit, and we were heading up to the Dolomites. And so it's so easy from Rome to get to the Dolomites. It's super easy. You just jump on the train at Roma Termini, and you sit on the train for 5 hours in comfort.

Katy Clarke:

And after 5 hours, you're arriving in a completely different scene in Bolzano, which is one of the major towns or cities in Northern Italy. Traveling by train in Italy is so relaxing. There's no security lines. The seats are comfortable. There's free Wi-Fi. You can just relax, get a coffee, and just wait for 5 hours until you get to Bolzano. And once we got there, it was a very easy little walk from the train station to where we were staying, which was right on the main

piazza. And we arrived for the very last day of the Christmas market, which is absolutely gorgeous, and you can stand around in the little huts and try the local wine, which is absolutely wonderful, and local foods, and I think we had some pretzels and yeah it was super nice.

Katy Clarke:

And they also sell a lot of lovely homemade goods. Like, I bought myself some really cute felt slippers for home, and they're really lightweight, so that was a good gift. So I'm learning my lesson not to buy heavy things when I'm on my travels. And we also bought lots of lovely Christmas decorations, and there was so many cute little things to buy at the market and just enjoy the atmosphere with huge Christmas tree lights. Yep. Just a lovely, friendly, relaxed vibe. It was a really good example of what the Dolomites is all about because there, everything is extremely well done, and if you're interested in sustainability and preserving local culture in a really considered way, you really have to go up there to see how things are done.

Katy Clarke:

They are really good at it. They don't really compromise on, I have to say, like, anything truly modern. Like, they've modernized everything, and everything runs very efficiently, but you still get that sense of what their culture is like and what they've been doing there for 100 and 100 of years. And so I think one of the best ways to describe that is that, you know, even the local teenagers don't have a problem wearing their national dress, which is, you know, the for most teenagers, it would be seen to be very unfashionable and, I should say, not something that they would do. And I just think it's absolutely lovely that they're also proud of their heritage, and it's it's really, really lovely. But at the same time, it's also very modern. So and that was good. So it wasn't busy at all up there, and that's probably because, as I mentioned, that European winter break had just finished.

Katy Clarke:

So we arrived on the 6th which is the last - it's a public holiday, I think, in Italy, and it's the last day of the winter holiday, so it wasn't busy at all. In the city, they had some ice skating rings. You know, everything was lit up. It was really pretty. And we also took the cable car up the mountain, and we had an aperitivo up there, including sparkling apple juice made from the local apples, which was so so delicious. And this is another amazing thing about the Dolomites is that they don't really encourage global things. Like, you know, my kids was they wanted to have I mean, they did wanna have a Coke, and I said, well, I was I think I was at that point, you know, saying, okay, we're all thirsty.

Katy Clarke:

Let's just all relent on one occasion because I don't normally let them drink that. But the lady said, oh no, oh no. We don't serve that, but we do have sparkling apple juice. And so off they went and they had tried the apple juice, and they preferred it to Coke anyway. So I was like, uh-huh. We did, from Bolzano, take we rented a car, and we took a drive to Murano. And that was on special request from my son who wanted to go back to the thermal baths there.

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Katy Clarke:

So in Murano, they have a big public thermal baths, and it's got about 20 swimming pools there with different levels of heat, and it's got an indoor-outdoor section. So you go into the different pools and try them out to find the one that you like, but you can also go through the big main pool out into, the outside area. And it's super lovely in winter because all the steam's coming off the water, and you can see the mountains in the distance, and it's really, really quite lovely. So we spent half a day there and enjoying that and then wandering around Murano a little bit, so that was really nice. And then the next day, we headed off, and we were heading east, sort of Northeast to San Candido, which is just near the Austrian border. And it's on the other side of the Dolomites. And we did take a stop in Vipiteno, which is a super cute town. And, we started really getting into the Dolomites lifestyle and trying out all this strudel and baked goods that they have there because the Austrian influence is very, very strong up in that part of.

Katy Clarke:

My kids are very, very obsessed with Italian hot chocolate. So we were on a mission to find the best hot chocolate because, this is the type of hot chocolate that you can stand to spoon up in. So if you're someone that likes a bit of, sweet treats, this is a place for you. We stayed in San Candido which is a really super cute little town. And that was on the recommendation of Tyla, who's one of our trip consultants and Tyla, recommended SunCanto because it was a great place for the young or kids or people new to skiing to learn how to ski, and she was absolutely 100% right. It was amazing. And the kids, did their skiing lessons, which were amazingly well organised and fun, and they, you know, built their confidence up.

Katy Clarke:

I think as I mentioned, in Australia, we don't really have a lot of opportunities to go skiing, so this was a really fun thing for them to do, and they loved it. The interesting thing about San Candido is it's the home of tennis. Number 1, Jannik Sinner, who's just won the Australian open here in Melbourne. And so it was nice to go around the town and everyone was saying, oh, Australia, Jannik Sinner. And we're like, yeah. And they really love him up there. And, yeah, there's posters of him everywhere.

Katy Clarke:

And it was it was nice. And, you know, these towns, they're so clean. They're so well kept, and they're so proud of their natural heritage. It's an absolute pleasure to spend time there and to the point where, just to go back on their views on sustainability, is that you can't really buy a bottle of water. It's really quite hard. Like, I did try my I had, you know, kids say, oh, I'm so thirsty, and I went to find some water. You know, it was I had to walk 15 minutes to go find some, actually, so that was it was really interesting, I thought, and we stayed in a really lovely apartment with the views of the Tre Cime peaks from our apartment. I was just, oh, stunning.

Katy Clarke:

Anyway, I would recommend that. And we spent a few days there and enjoying that snowy lifestyle. And I was really happy that I bought the right gear because it could have been a little bit miserable. It did get to minus 5 at one point, which, my Australian bloodstream is not really used to. Anyway, once we'd done our skiing there, we headed and drove through the eastern part of the Dolomites to Lake Misurina, where we played in the snow and just enjoyed this beautiful winter scene. It's not probably one of the best-known parts of the Dolomites, but it was super lovely, just gorgeous. Absolutely stunning. Then we kept driving on to Cortina D'Ampezzo, which is getting ready for the Olympics next year.

Katy Clarke:

So if you're interested in what it was like to drive in that environment, I have to say once again, these people know what they're doing. It's very, very well maintained, easy to drive. We didn't feel, you know, like it was, scary at all. Like, it was really very, very modern. All of the roads had been ploughed and what have you, even after a big round of snow, and so you just felt very, very safe driving around there. And the roads are very well maintained, so it's really good to see what's happening and how they're updating things, for the Olympics, and I think it's gonna be very exciting. So this time next year, you can tune in to the Winter Olympics and see a lot of the places that I've mentioned because they will be ready and waiting and operational for the Olympic the Winter Olympics.

Katy Clarke:

So the very last stop on our trip was we're flying out of Venice, which is a great airport, by the way, if you're flying, it's a nice small airport, runs smoothly, easy, especially if you're going on to other parts of Europe or there are direct flights from Dubai if you're coming from Australia. And also there are some direct flights from North America, like a few different airports actually flying into Venice. And it's a really nice little airport. I usually say to people, you should stay on the lagoon, but we didn't really have much time. So on this occasion, we stayed out in, Mestre, closer to the airport, and that worked out really well, actually. So we then drove into Piazzale Roma, where you can park in the car parks there, you just need to do a little bit of research on them and understand that, you know, there's not a lot of space in those car spaces, so they do sometimes take your car keys and, you know, do a more like a valet service. I wouldn't leave luggage in the car there, but we dropped our luggage off at the hotel. And then we just I mean, it sounds crazy, but we just went into Venice for dinner, and we rode on the Vaporetto number 1 down the Grand Canal.

Katy Clarke:

And it wasn't busy because it was winter and we just sat out the back and enjoyed the view as we went down the Grand Canal. And then we got to Piazza San Marco walked around, you know, not so many people there, and then wandered back and stopped at a few Bacari or bars for some cicchetti and really enjoyed that experience. So, you know, we didn't have very long, just a few hours in Venice, but it was super lovely. And just getting down those side canals in the back and seeing the mist come over the canals, it's just, I don't know, a high in Venice, just really, really beautiful. And as we were walking through the back streets, we

found they have a huge ice skating rink, and I was so surprised. It wasn't open that day, which is good because I wouldn't have got my kids back to the hotel. But, yeah, it was a really surprising thing to find in Venice. It was huge ice skating rink, actually.

Katy Clarke:

So I feel like maybe Venice in winter is on the cards because if we did do that, and I'm just speculating, we could spend some time in Venice and then go up to the mountains, which, really, they're just so spectacular, and it's just such an easy trip, actually. I was surprised. I was thinking it would be harder with the snow and all of that, but it wasn't. It was really easy. So that was our trip to Italy in winter, and I guess, you know, maybe people are wondering, would I do it again, and what did I learn? And so, absolutely, I'd do it again. And I think I'd do some tweaks to it because while we did kind of run our time perfectly for the ski fields as most of the kids were back in school and the runs were quite quiet. And that was important for us because, you know, the kids had never done skiing before - I can imagine that the weekends would be very, very busy because, people would come up for skiing during the weekend.

Katy Clarke:

But, yeah, it wasn't busy at all, and, you know, I guess I do know that we're lucky because it is the school summer break here in Australia, which does run from December to late January, so we had some flexibility around the timing. But if you did have that flexibility, I'd probably you know, it would also be cheaper to go after that winter break is finished. In the cities, the time between Christmas and New Year is really, really busy with Europeans on city breaks. And, while I did really enjoy the atmosphere, I think if it was your first visit. It might be maybe a little bit overwhelming. Like I mentioned, actually, London was way busier than Rome. It was a bit shocking. But, yeah, I just the atmosphere is great, though, so, it's really up to you. If you like that kind of thing, then go for it, but if not, just to be aware that it is busy.

Katy Clarke:

Another thing that I would do is probably get a little bit more organized with restaurant bookings in the cities because a lot of the places that I like to go to were closed, especially in Venice. They do like to take a winter break so they can recharge for the season because the season does go for 8 or 9 months. Rome is amazing in winter. And, you know, as I mentioned, instead of those gray skies that you get further north in Europe, this was really beautiful blue skies, crisp days, perfect for wandering and eating pasta, and so that was really great. And the last thing I wanted to mention was that I managed to pack for this trip like a pro with only a medium case, and that included winter and snow gear. And it worked out really, really well, and I wouldn't go any larger just simply to manage the size of the suitcases in the car rental and also on the trains as usual. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

It just was fantastic, and I think we only did one wash throughout the whole trip, so it was good. So in summary, winter trips to Italy are fun and a great way to see the country through

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a different lens. And I think if you don't like traveling in the heat and you prefer city breaks to coastal adventures, it's a great time to go. Also, if you're like me and you haven't had much of a winter wonderland experience close to home, it's an absolutely magical experience. The mountains covered in snow are just simply breathtaking. Now I've put all the places I've mentioned in the episode show notes on our website at untolditaly.com/259, and you'll also find links to our trip planning services and tours if you're interested.

Katy Clarke:

Grazie Mille. Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for tuning in. This episode went a little bit longer than I thought, but I do hope you enjoyed today's show. And if you did, we would love it if you shared your appreciation by sharing an episode with your family and friends, and thank you to all of you who have already done this. It is so appreciated. That's all for today. Next week, we're joining my friend, Nesim, again to continue our discussion about what to eat and prepare for if you have food allergies and you're interested in visiting Italy, but until then, it's ciao for now!