

# Untold Italy Episode 284: From Dream to Reality - A Solo Adventure in the Heart of Italy

Do you feel a strong connection to Italy but perhaps haven't traveled there yet or recently? Hear how one woman traveling solo, began a much longed-for Italian journey of discovery and realised an incredible dream on this very special 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, buongiorno friends. Here we are zipping through the year and time seems to be just flying by. It's easy to get caught up in the day to day isn't it and before you know it, the year is over and another cycle begins

Over the years, I've become more intentional about planning to fulfil dreams and it's really wild but generally once I've planted the seed of an idea it comes to fruition - maybe not in the exact way I expected it to but nonetheless a wonderful way. That might sound a bit woo woo but I stand by the notion that if you put your plans out to the universe, magic will happen

And while I have many examples of this of my own, today's guest shares a story that is all about serendipity, fate, being in the right place at the right time and involves a magical experience in the heart of Italy that I actually prefer to the events in Eat, Pray Love

This is the story of the Italian adventures of Untold Italy podcast listener and tours client Rebel who followed her heart, and her dreams, and traveled to Italy solo. Mixing and matching travel styles, Rebel found a way to discover the Italy she always dreamed of and build connections across oceans.

I get a bit emotional towards the end of this episode (in a good way) because I am so proud our little company played a small part in this ongoing adventure. So, andiamo, let's hear all about it.

Katy Clarke:

Benvenuta. Rebel, welcome onto the Untold Italy podcast.

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

Rebel Nelson:

Thank you for having me. I'm so happy to be here tonight.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, Rebel, it's fantastic. I can't believe you're here, actually, and that I met you just a little while ago in Italy. Even though we live in the same city, it's kind of random that we had to meet in Rome. We're going to hear all about your recent trip to Italy in a minute, but before we dive in, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what connects you to Italy?

Rebel Nelson:

So I am a mum of three boys, so single parent, loving my boys, but they're older now, so now I get to have a little bit more of some free time and some my time, so get to pick up and dust off the travel books and go. My number one dream is to go to Italy. And so I was lucky to kick that off last year, which we can talk more about later. My obsession, Italy - I think coming from Melbourne and living growing up in sort of the time that I did. So sort of like around the 80s/90s, all of the neighborhood around me were very European. So a lot of my neighbors were all Italian, if not from different European countries, but predominantly Italian. And so I think I was just surrounded by it from such a young age.

Rebel Nelson:

And seeing family, that's the real true family life. Of the smells that would come out of the homes and the kitchens and just seeing the interaction, I was just like, oh my God, I was just drawn to it. It was just, it was so different to my own culture. And just for whatever reason, like I said, just drawn to it and used to always say, I want to have them adopt me. I want to have that Italian nonna that is cooking pasta sauce and bottling sauce or making salamis and things like that. So different to my upbringing. I think that's where it started.

Rebel Nelson:

And then from there it was this sort of obsession that said - when I can and when I'm old enough to travel, that will be my destination of choice.

Katy Clarke:

Okay, and when was the first time that you went to Italy?

Rebel Nelson:

Last year. So it took me a long time to get there. I'd traveled before, but with the family and different, you know, work trips or different holidays that weren't my dream trip. And I'd always known that when I do eventually get there, it was a trip that I wanted to do on my own. So it was getting to that stage of life where the children had grown up, they're a little bit more self-sufficient. I've got, again, some more time to actually sort of plan and be able to do it on my own without that sort of guilty feeling of leaving the responsibilities at home. So it was kind of like, this is my time. I'm at this stage where I can actually go and start an adventure and just really be able to relax and enjoy it and actually do it the way that I wanted to plan it, versus just that quick, you know, holiday.

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Rebel Nelson:

And it's so far to go, obviously, being in Melbourne, so, you know, planning a trip to go to the other side of the world, I needed to have that time and plan it out that way. So, yeah, so last year, 2024 was my first trip.

Katy Clarke:

I love that you have owned this new season of your life for yourself and that you're going to do things your own way. I really feel like so many more people should do that. And I think you've got such a great story because people might be a bit nervous to take the bull by the horns. But how did you go about planning that first trip? What did you think that you wanted to do and how did you approach it?

Rebel Nelson:

So I decided I'm going to, like, start from the top down.

Katy Clarke:

Okay.

Rebel Nelson:

So it was, I'm going to start in northern Italy and work my way down, knowing that I didn't want to do that holiday where you were just hitting the major sort of traditional touristy spots in just one trip where you're like, one day here, one day here, one day here. It was, I'm going to do this slowly over the however long it's going to take me from here to the next, however many years, but really plan to immerse myself in being able to go a mixture between the key tourist spots that you see in, you know, movies and you see in magazines and that sort of thing, but also off the beaten track. So being able to go and spend some time in some places where I can just explore. So I started planning. It was a lot of planning. So a lot of, like, reading. My friends, my family, they all knew I had this obsession.

Rebel Nelson:

So, you know, I had the Lonely Planet book given to me, however many years ago and sort of like, okay, I'm going to read up. But when I really got sort of serious about it, when I knew that it was getting closer to a time of when that sort of dream could actually be a reality, was when I started to do a little bit more of sort of serious research. And that's when I was sort of looking at things online. And that's when I went down this rabbit hole of like, remember one night looking at sort of podcasts and then going, oh, travel podcasts. Okay, maybe there's something in that, that I was very new to podcasts at that time, but going, oh, there's travel podcasts, maybe I can find something there. And then sort of going down that rabbit hole.

Rebel Nelson:

And that's when I found Untold Italy. So that's when I came across your podcast and went, oh, my God, this is amazing. This is so aligned with the type of style of travel that I wanted to do, where it was off the beaten track. It was a mixture of some really sort of, I suppose, some

towns that I knew of. So like the sort of the Venice and the Florence and sort of towns where I'm like, I'm definitely not going to miss them. But then you start to learn about all of these other towns that I'm like, oh, I didn't know that that was such - and then when I say towns, they're actually quite big cities. But at the time, I didn't know a lot about them. So it was like listening through the different episodes and going, oh, this sounds really interesting. I want to go and visit this town. Or just the tips along the way. So I started to then look at planning sort of this trip. And so I had five weeks. I knew I had five weeks to spend from a time perspective.

Rebel Nelson:

And that's when I went, okay, I'm going to look at Northern Italy. Five weeks. I based myself from.. like, Australia to Milan was my flight, so it was in and out of Milan. So I knew I could loop around sort of the northern starting and leaving from Milan. And so that's when I started to use maps and podcasts and map out where all the different spots that I wanted to visit and how I was going to get there. So predominantly, I did all my travel by train. So from city to city, everything was train taking again, tips on how to catch and navigate the train system, how to get from A to B. So it was putting all of that into practice.

Katy Clarke:

So good. And on that trip, you actually joined us in Piedmont - beautiful region - on tour. What made you decide to join a group tour? What made you do that? Because you sound like a pretty independent traveler.

Rebel Nelson:

So I won't lie, I was a little bit hesitant at the start because I wanted to do this trip as a solo traveler. And the idea of being in a tour group was kind of in my mind at the time, was like, that's actually... I'm not going to be able to get the freedom that I want to be able to have. To be able to go off and go down a street and have time to have a look at something and not be sort of structured so much, so then I was like, oh, I don't know. But once I started looking into the tours and then seeing that there was just beautiful sort of ideas of going to these parts of Italy that I would never have found if it wasn't for the tour, so knowing that I'd get really off the beaten track, which I was like, tick, that's exactly the places that I want to visit. But then also finding out that how small the tour groups were, it was like, it wasn't overwhelming of knowing that I didn't have 20 or 25 other people or on a big bus where you're literally, you know, sort of like, oh, I've got to catch the bus back at this time, or I've got to find my tour group and which pole are they holding up and which flag was I supposed to follow sort of thing.

Rebel Nelson:

And it takes away from the moment, if that makes sense. So it was like, okay, I think this is actually going to be quite - it's actually going to work. And so then I think when I started to inquire with the team and then finding out that, yes, I can have my own accommodation, so accommodation would be my room. So it was like, tick, I get to have some of that down. Downtime on my own, then I get that free time, plus the guided tours and getting to see

everything. It just was like, no, this is perfect. So, yeah, that sort of is what attracted me to it. And then Piedmont was just. You go out into this wonderland of countryside and it was just amazing. And again, I don't think I would have on my own. I would not have probably visited those particular spots. I was already in Turin when I was - that was already a place where that was sort of mapped out in my original planning. But that was just. It felt like a taste or the edge of this completely unknown part of Italy that is not. Not the part that I really knew a lot about. So then I felt like it wasn't over touristy. It was really authentic and it was exactly that. So that's what I loved about it.

Katy Clarke:

It's just music to my ears because I think maybe people don't know, you know, my history so well or the history of the tours, but, you know, like, I'm a really. I have been a really hardcore independent traveler and fiercely so. And so to pull a tour together, we really didn't want that to be a standard experience. So when you say that, Rebel, it just makes me feel so happy that, that you had that experience because that's exactly what we're aiming for. So you were traveling solo and you managed to pack in a lot. And so I need to tell our American listeners, because we do have a lot of them, is that yes, in Australia we get quite a lot of annual leave. I'm sorry to break that too, but it is something that we love to take full advantage of in Australia.

Katy Clarke:

It's a really big tradition to take a long trip like that. And, you know, obviously, Rebel made the most of it.

Rebel Nelson:

And I worked to that point. Like I mentioned earlier, I actually had long service leave by this time. So again, that and maybe it's an Australian thing, but I was fortunate enough to that I was eligible to access that long service leave. So as soon as that ticked over, I was like, right, so, yeah, very fortunate in this, in the sense of being able to have that as an option was, was definitely well. But again, you know, coming back, like we said recently, just came back from Italy again this year. I didn't have as much time this time. I still had just almost the two and a half, almost three weeks this time.

Rebel Nelson:

But yeah, definitely worth it. Definitely worked a long flight.

Katy Clarke:

It's terrible, cannot be denied, but it has to be done. So, Rebel, I really am really curious to know, like, with all this build up that you did about the trip, when you landed in Milan, did you stay in Milan the first nights?

Rebel Nelson:

I landed in Milan and I basically went straight to Lake Garda. So I knew that the time that I wanted to spend in Milan was going to be at the end of the trip. My flight got in very early in

the morning, so I took the train to Central, got onto another train and was straight back out to Garda. So the first couple of days were at Lake Garda. For me, that was sort of the kickoff. And then I started to sort of town hopping. And again, like I mentioned, I was using different podcasts again.

Rebel Nelson:

I know when I went up to, for example, like Bolzano, I'd already had that accommodation booked in because again, I had listened to a podcast and it was like, oh, I want to stay at this particular winery, which I would never have probably found if it wasn't again, for the podcast, a lot of my other accommodation that I was sort of finding was like using sites like booking.com and sort of just trying to just read reviews of what other people had said. But then, when I started finding and reading the sort of show notes and things like that, where you'd have the links to sort of say, whoever was presenting this is the link to either their business or their accommodation, it was like I started to collect it. So. Sounds a bit nerdy, but I had my spreadsheet. Okay, right, right, right. So I was able to then sort of plan it out that way, so it definitely, it was really, it made it really easy to feel confident, to be able to go and navigate town to town,

Rebel Nelson:

feeling like I've already. I'm listening to people, but it feels like I've already had that advice being given to me, even though I'm a listener of the podcast, felt quite familiar and I felt confident in following the advice and then experiencing the ease of that once I landed and I hadn't been to Italy before, so it was all brand new. But it didn't feel super overwhelming. I mean, there were times where naturally, there were times where I was like, oh, hang on, am I going to be able to book this ticket? Am I pressing the right buttons? And I've got to make sure I'm holding onto my bag and I've got to remember all these things that I have to remember. And you have these little moments of like, panic, but not overwhelming at all.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, and Francesca's from the winery near Bolzano. She's so enthusiastic about her regions. Such a gorgeous woman. Like, I loved her so much. She's just so enthusiastic and passionate and you gotta love that. But I really want to know, like, because actually, I don't know if you know this, but, like, Garda was the first place I ever went to in Italy as well. So how did you feel when you arrived? Which town did you arrive in and what was your first feeling?

Rebel Nelson:

I did that sort of pinching moment of like, oh, my God, I'm here. And then I just wanted to sort of like contact family back at home and go, oh, my God, look where I am. Like, I need to video call you and show you. Like, look at this, I'm actually here. Yeah, it was one of those sort of like, sort of teary moments of like, I'm here and I'm, you know, what do I do next? And, you know, that moment of like dropping my bags and then walking out and going, how far do I actually walk? Or how - finding sort of finding my feet was. Was quite interesting. But once I sort of went, no, no, I've got this, I'm planned, I've got it all planned out. And it was like, just relax, take it all in.

Rebel Nelson:

And it was just almost like, I'm not going to say I've come home, but it was a very sort of familiar moment and then going, you know what, I can do this. I think what I would have done differently was that because I only spent sort of the first two days at Garda that I didn't get a chance to go to all of the small towns in between. So it was kind of that trade-off between - I'm wanting to visit a spot, but then also I had that many other sort of towns and cities that I wanted to get to and factor in the travel time in between. It was okay, I'm here, I spend two nights here and then off I go again sort of. But once I got that routine happening, it was quite easy to sort of navigate. And honestly, I've the whole time I felt the accommodation and where we were, it was so easy to. I didn't ever find a time where even with check-in and check-out where they weren't happy to hold my bags and my bags were safe. So, like even if I knew I was checking in before official check-in time, they'd hold my bags for me, so then I could go out and look around or vice versa if I had to check out.

Rebel Nelson:

And I wasn't catching a train until later that day, they would hold the bags for me as well. So I found that everywhere everybody was just so like, yep, we'll hold that for you. So that again made it easy and again remembering to know that that is an option, ask your accommodation, will you hold on to my bags? And like I said, I never had a problem. So I'm assuming that at least nine out of ten will say yes. And then a couple of times where, for example, when I was in Verona, I had my bags with me and I actually put them in one of the baggage storage facilities at the train station and it was all secure, really safe. And so there was that option as well. So something to help navigate around. Because you don't want to carry all your bags with you all the time.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, not over those cobblestones. So the bags were safe. And how about you? Did you feel safe during your travels?

Rebel Nelson:

I felt super safe the whole time. I predominantly I didn't travel late into the evening, so I always was sort of planning on, if I knew that the travel time was an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, whatever the travel time was that I would be arriving in sort of daylight. I tried to avoid being just in the night, just again, I'm on my own. But once I was settled, I really did not feel afraid of walking down streets and navigating between... even going out in the evening. Like, it was always using common sense. It was stick to sort of main streets in the night, sort of lit streets. My accommodation was always. It was all secured accommodation.

Rebel Nelson:

I felt really safe. I know when I was in Florence, I stayed on the sort of the opposite side of the river, which was sort of going away sort of from the main city center. And even again, coming back to my accommodation, I never once felt like I was afraid of walking the streets. And so. And you hear. You hear a lot. I think when, before you go, you hear a lot of people



saying about scammers and pick-pocketers and things like this, and it's like, no, it's just common sense. And like, when you have an awareness and you start to go, okay, I know how to navigate this.

Rebel Nelson:

But on a whole, I felt really safe the whole time. I got lost a couple of times, found my way back. It's all good. But, yeah, super, super safe the whole time.

Katy Clarke:

Getting lost is part of the adventure in Italy. I think everyone needs to have a getting lost story and a Carabinieri, or police, all strictly about.

Rebel Nelson:

I actually had to attend the police station because I did the rookie mistake of - I had my luggage. So I had my bag that I was traveling with, which was like a sort of oversized duffel bag, sort of backpack, which had sort of my main travel bag so I didn't quite have a suitcase and my sort of everyday crossover bag. So every time I was on the trains, it was like my backpack, my bag. But one day I had a shopping bag and it was out of my routine and I did the mistake of leaving the train and my shopping bag was left on the train. So it was one of those moments where it was like, oh, no, left my shopping on the train and door shut, train left. But to try to communicate with the train staff to say, look, I've left this bag on the train.

Rebel Nelson:

The process was you needed to report it at the police station. So it was quite like, you have to leave the train station. I had to find the police station. They were lovely. And I made a report, never got the bag back. But it was just one of those unfortunate things where it was my fault. I left it there.

Katy Clarke:

You had some amazing interactions with locals, and most recently, when you joined us on our tour in Italy, in Umbria. Beautiful Umbria. And so I wanted to ask you a bit about that experience in particular, and then we'll maybe we'll move on to some other ones. But it's a really amazing story. So maybe let everyone know what made you decide to join our Umbria tour and then the story that goes on from there.

Rebel Nelson:

So I was having a conversation when I was on tour, the first tour with Liv, beautiful tour guide, and we were having a conversation one evening about enjoying Italy for. And when am I coming back? I hadn't even left, we were still on tour. And I was in that conversation, I had mentioned that my next trip, as I'm moving down sort of the. The country, is that I've bucket list. Had always wanted to do the Flower Festival in Umbria and wanted to visit it, see the flower carpets being made in action and sort of talking through it, going, oh, my God, it's one of those dream things that I've always wanted to attend. And I didn't know the full story behind it, but what I did know was that the women would start at sort of sunset. They'd start



work on these most amazing, beautiful flower carpets and work all through the night and then in the morning, these flower carpets were completed and it was a big festival.

Rebel Nelson:

Again, not really understanding the full depth of what that festival was and what it stood for, but all I was really interested in was, I'm a flower person, I love flowers. I want to see these beautiful art pieces that have been made and that they've worked on. So, big conversation and that's when Liv turned around and said to me, we're actually doing the tour of Umbria next year and we're actually visiting the festival as part of the tour. And I was like, oh, my God, sign me up. So I hadn't even finished the tour and we were on the sort of conversing back and forth going, is there any spots left? Yes, there's a spot left. Oh, my God, it's mine. Make sure I'm on that tour for next year.

Rebel Nelson:

So I got home from my trip last year and I said to my family, oh, my God, I'm going back. And they're like, oh, yeah, yeah, I'm like, I'm serious, I am going back. 2025, I'm doing Umbria and I'm attending the Flower Festival. So it was that bucket list of, oh, my God, actually, this is. This is going to come true. I'm actually going to come and I'm going to see the Flower Festival. So, yeah, so it was super, super exciting because as you can tell by my voice, I was so super excited and then it was. I had something to look forward to. So it was, I'm really going to do this. So I was super, super excited.

Katy Clarke:

And then so you joined the tour and we were talking about this before and it was just such a serendipitous moment and I was, I had goosebumps when you were telling me about that. You know, part of the tour is to actually go and see the carpets and the people making the carpets in the night before in Spello, this beautiful town where they have this festival and then you return the next day to see the complete carpets. And so that was the plan and so obviously you were pretty excited about that anyway. But then what happened?

Rebel Nelson:

So the. It was two days or. Yeah, two days before where we were in, in the tour, in the time of the tour and we were visiting a Medieval town - again most days were - you just see the most amazing towns and things. So it was like in my mind it was, okay, we've still got two more days until I get to that ultimate what I'm looking forward to, but in the meantime I'm enjoying these most amazing other places that were just as, as magical. And it was the moment where we had finished attending a candle making tour and we had some free time and so it was walking the streets and having a look and I came across a jewelry store where the jewellery was just amazing. And so I sort of went in and started speaking to the actual owner of the store.

Rebel Nelson:

And she was - her English was amazing. So it was really easy for us to converse because my Italian is very, very super basic. So we started chatting and I was asking her about her jewelry

and she was explaining it to me and I was like, oh my God, it's amazing, I love it. Then it sparked the conversation of, oh, where are you from and why come to this particular part of Italy? And so that's when I sort of went, oh, I'm actually on tour. And we've come here as part of the tour and I've just been able to see candle making. It's so amazing. But the thing that I'm looking forward to the most is the Flower Festival and we're heading there on the weekend.

Rebel Nelson:

And she turned around and said to me, oh, we have a team that does the Flower Festival. And again, I was like, oh, a team. Like, do you actually participate? Do you make the carpet? And she was like, yeah, yeah. I was like, oh my God. And jokingly and again, sometimes I think that's some. You don't know whether that translates or not. I did the sort of, oh my God, you have to take me, you have to let me join your team.

Rebel Nelson:

And part of that was a sort of sarcastic, joking way of going, I just would love to be involved, but not actually ever expecting for her to turn around and say "yeah, join my team". And I was like, "you're joking". She's like, "no, join my team". So I was like, oh my God, wait here. Ran back to our meeting point and Giulia, who was our tour guide, then I said, I need you to come back. I need you to help me translate, just so that I haven't missed anything in translation. We were talking about the flower festival.

Rebel Nelson:

She has a team. She says, I can join it. So long story short, they had a conversation in Italian together just so that it was the local language and they all understood. And she was like, serious, she was like, yes, you're welcome to join the team. Here are all my details. And this is when that moment of going, is this real? Am I, Is this actually happening? And so that's when I was right timing in the right spot where we had this conversation. And I said to Giulia, she's like, she actually said to me, how did you make this happen? And I'm like, you guys made this happen. And she's like, no, no, but you put it out then.

Rebel Nelson:

So we were kind of laughing with the whole, like this was just being in the right spot at the right time, meeting the right people. And then that's when we started to organize this actual opportunity and being really grateful for knowing that, you know, I'd signed up for being a part of the tour and knowing that this is not really part of the tour, if that makes sense. So it was kind of like going, okay, well, I'm asking for you to allow me to stay there the whole night. I wasn't going back to my accommodation. It wasn't easy to get back to my accommodation. So, you know, for listeners to understand, it was not as easy as you could just get a taxi back in the middle of the night. If I decided, oh, I don't want to be here anymore. It wasn't as if you were a 15 or 20-minute taxi ride.

Rebel Nelson:

Our accommodation was in a very different sort of location and accessibility to sort of transport like that was... needed to be considered. So logistics aside and all of, all of that

aside, it was like, no, we can actually do this. And you know, we looked again to it and it was a lot of on your side as well there was a lot of organization and. But making that happen for me, like I. This is when you're, when you're in a tour like this. And even when I experienced it in Piedmont as well - the tours are designed, yes, with an itinerary in play, but the amount of times that my tour guides have gone above and beyond to make moments for each of.

Rebel Nelson:

- you know, I wasn't the only one, obviously the only one on the tour. There were other people that were either going to be involved or impacted as well. So it was like they actually went out and made those moments happen. And so I was fortunate enough to then be able to be left in the town of Spello and actually join the team, work through the night with the team, create this most amazing, beautiful flower carpet and get to see the end result of the whole town. So I got to see sort of a behind-the-scenes version and the final show version as well.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, Rebel, I'm tearing up here and that's Australian for I've got tears in my eyes. Yeah, amazing. You know, if I had a thought that this would happen from one of our tours, you know, I would have gone harder. But like, I'm so happy that you had that experience and I just know how special it was for you and that you were really embraced as part of that team too, weren't you?

Rebel Nelson:

I was truly adopted into the family of that team. They were so welcoming, really cared about my well-being as well. So they were constantly checking in with, are you, you know, is everything okay? Do you need anything? And I was like, no, no, I'm all good. And yeah, like, just being able to be really a part of the whole process and then being able to walk around and be involved in my, sort of the team leader of our team was also a part of the voting process. So we got to walk around the whole town and look at each other teams, I suppose, masterpieces and be able to. She was casting her vote, so I was tagging along and, and in being involved in. And then stopping and having these conversations with all of her contacts as well. And then it was like, oh, and this is, you know, this is Rebel and she's from Australia and you're just meeting these most amazing people along the journey and everybody is just there welcoming you, open arms and you just, oh, my God, this is amazing.

Rebel Nelson:

So, yes, super, super amazing. The whole festival, it's just, it's as beautiful as what you see in pictures. If you see it in pictures or if you see it on, I don't know, TV or things like that. It's that and more when you're there.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, this is the moments that you're really looking for in Italy. And we were talking before about how in our society and in Western cultures around the world more to say English English-speaking cultures, we are rushing around, we are so hyper-focused on productivity and getting things done. And I am as guilty of that as the next person. But when you go to

Italy and you have an experience where you, I mean, you've had the hyper-elevated experience of this, of people dedicated to a craft and an outcome that is just purely for satisfaction and not for any monetary gain or anything like that, it's just a salve for the soul. Like every time I go to Italy, I have a little moment like that and it makes me really appreciate that human beings are generally just so lovely and kind and committed and I really wish that for everyone. Maybe Rebel, you can describe the sense of community around building that carpet because that really how you described that to me before was just really beautiful.

Rebel Nelson:

So the team itself, the participants or some of the team members in the team had come from all different backgrounds. So for example, one of the gentlemen on the team, he was a schoolteacher and he was also an artist on the side. And so it was one of his, I suppose, dreams, but was one of. He had decided that he would want to be involved and as an artist wanted to be involved in this sort of carpet process. And so he had, this was his first time as well, joining the team. I say joining the team like as if I'm an artist, but I know I was very lucky. But he was his first time and I was just like, wow, the way you were all interacting, I thought this team was a really well-established team, that they must come together yearly to do, to participate. But it was this real group of very like-minded people and very creative people that come together.

Rebel Nelson:

And I think that's what draws them together, is that they've got this common passion that brings them together. And then working on these carpets, which the conditions are quite tough because you're on these cobblestone streets that are, they're not flat, they're on a sort of angle and they're, they're rocky and it's hard on your knees and you're on your knees and you're placing individual flower petals layer upon layer to create the most sort of laid effect of detail in these carpets. And it's such a slow process. So hours are going by and you're creating what is like a sort of photo of a, you know, like a human face, for example, and the depth of the layers of having to place these flower petals to create this art piece. It's not easy. Like, it's not just like we're throwing down petals and then hoping for the best. Like, there was such grace and creativity and talent to be able to bring those masterpieces together.

Rebel Nelson:

And seeing how they all work together, everybody was like supporting each other. Everybody was working in different sections and then everybody had a role to play, but they were also - there was laughter, there was people, you know, there was food, there was songs, there was just... It was just a real sort of movie moment of going, pinch me. Is this real? But it was just a beautiful community of people just coming together and in just enjoying the moment. And it went all night. So we. We started at like 9:30 in the evening and our carpet wasn't completed until 6am the next morning. And that's working consistently through the night. So there was no sort of. No sort of downtime in that. It's like you're just constantly sort of working through, but amazing.

Katy Clarke:

I can imagine the adrenaline would have been really flowing through the veins at that point. You wouldn't have felt tired.

Rebel Nelson:

No. And that's the thing. I did not feel tired. And I, you know, inspired too, because when you walk around, there's people of all ages. There was teams where it was teams of like, children and young children and they're putting together their designs. There were elderly women that were picking flowers and petals of flowers and you just like going - everybody from this really broad spectrum of ages and backgrounds and it was just this whole community of excitement. And just when you're in the town, like the energy of the town is just.

Rebel Nelson:

It's just. Even the. The night sky, and it sounds crazy, but the. The blue of the night sky. Like my photos that I was taking didn't need any sort of filters or change - like, they almost just looked like. Like I was a professional photographer. And it was - it's the town. It's the magic of the town. The countryside of Italy. Like, it is truly untouched. It's just beautiful.

Katy Clarke:

Rebel, I think you've done the best job of describing the region because it's really hard to describe it as, you know, our whole team has got a very special affinity with Umbria and I think it's very hard to get across that feeling because it doesn't have maybe those, wow, Instagrammable moments (apart from the flower festival, maybe) that some of the other regions have. But my goodness, does it get under your skin, that place?

Rebel Nelson:

It's definitely untold of like, I think that when I first started to plan these ideas of trips to Italy, what I would hear a lot about, you know, Tuscany and the Tuscan countryside and that's what I would hear a lot of. I'd be like, of course I want to, you know, if I ever get to Italy, I want to see Tuscany because it looks amazing. I've seen it in movies, I've seen it in magazines and that sort of thing. And then to get to Umbria and to see its beauty, I almost enjoy the fact that it isn't so popular, if that makes sense, because it. There's so much untouched beauty there that is not overcrowded by a lot of tourists. So if you really want to get that sort of authentic sort of feeling, like sort of that more sort of natural sort of untouched, that is what I got from there. And there was some. There were amazing moments like, I mean, yes, the flower festival was what drew me to Umbria, but even look, we had a night with the pizza making and sitting, eating pizza and just listening to stories and conversation and it was like I actually had a really teary moment of going...

Rebel Nelson:

I actually felt like I belonged to an actual family or friends of like I'm experiencing just an everyday everyone's over to have share a drink and have some pizza and tell a story. And it was like it didn't need a draw card, it didn't need a "oh, we're here to see this statue" or

“this gallery”. It was like this is the authentic experience and of what it's like just to be stopping and enjoying life in the countryside and being able to just share that with what makes you feel like family. You do feel like family because, like you said, the hospitality of the people that you meet. You're not on tour and you're just part of the tour group. You're this guest that becomes family.

Rebel Nelson:

So it's everybody. I feel like I've met you before, but you've meeting them for the first time.

Katy Clarke:

It's a very special place that, that little place that we go to for the pizza making. And I know a lot of love goes into that experience and a lot of care and attention and. Yeah, and I'm very proud that we can offer that to people. So just speaking about the group though, so I mean like we mentioned earlier, you know, when you're traveling solo as well and you're in a group sometimes there's mix of like solo travelers and couples etc. How was the group dynamics on the tour.

Rebel Nelson:

The group was. We all said it, we felt that you're traveling with like-minded people. So everybody that was on, especially the Umbria tour were people that - it drew them. So they had a. We had a common interest. We all wanted to see parts of Umbria. And even though some of our sort of bucket list sites, like for me it was the flower festival, for another couple, it was more the churches and more the sort of religious side of it.

Rebel Nelson:

But we were all drawn together. We all shared that common interest. So being in this sort of small, intimate group, we just clicked. So it was a really beautiful click. Even though I was on my own, being able to sit and have these conversations and we're from different parts of the world, but we've got this common, I suppose, interest that links us together. So the conversation flows really easily. You know, you're laughing, you're sort of the ice broke really quickly. From sort of meeting everyone on day one to we were just best friends by sort of day two sort of thing, it really worked.

Rebel Nelson:

And I think that by having the mixture of planned activities and free time - really balancing the fact that you were able to break away when, when and if you wanted to break away and go off and investigate or look at some things on your own, or if you wanted to do it as a couple, but then everybody would come back and we'd all, you know, share our experiences over lunch or over dinner. And so that, that worked really well. Like my group, we also laughed that between the group we all had quite a differences in our dietary requirements. It was really funny. Giulia did an amazing job because we were like, there was myself that's gluten free, so I'm celiac gluten free. And then there was another person on the group that didn't have lactose and then somebody else didn't have something else. And so we all had these dietary requirements and it was never a problem.



Rebel Nelson:

We were always accommodated to. And it was amazing. Like it didn't. It felt to me like it was never an effort. Probably behind the scenes there was a lot of organization, but as, you know, as the sort of, I suppose, guest it just felt like it all just worked. But it was a running joke with our group to go, oh, we've arrived and here's all our dietary requirements. We got to the end of the tour and we were sort of at that joking stage of we need an Umbria Part 2. Because this is like we've scraped the surface and we've experienced, but this again - it's endless that you can experience so much more. So we were always, we were sort of like, okay, this time next year we're going to do part two - sort of thing.

Rebel Nelson:

Yeah, we really gelled and it was, it was so lovely being able to meet people. The majority of my group were from the U.S. so we're from different backgrounds with different stories. But the stories that were shared, it was, yeah, it was amazing. You know, we were staying in touch and chatting back and forth on our group chats and things like that, where it's like, oh, I miss being in Umbria. Very lovely. And there was like, like, you know, there was another couple that had also done tours as well. So again, sharing sort of stories about our previous experiences and whether or not they were on tour with Untold Italy or whether they'd been going on to other sorts of towns and, and things that was just sharing, you know, you must visit here next time you come or we know we did this.

Rebel Nelson:

So if you're ever thinking of going to, you know, Sicily, oh, you have to do this and you have to see this. So you're just like, oh my God. Yes.

Katy Clarke:

So you mentioned the food and I really want to impress about - in Italy, if you're gluten free and you're actually celiac. Right, Rebel? So this is not an option for you. You must eat gluten-free. And I think when we first started chatting a few years ago, you know, I, really, really wanted to make sure that it was going to be the right fit because I, you know, I don't take those health issues lightly at all. And so what's been your experience eating gluten-free in Italy?

Rebel Nelson:

Italy takes it so seriously, like, it's one of those countries where you, I think from - I believe there is a, even a government scheme where if you're a celiac that you actually are able to have hold a particular card and you're able to use that card to buy products and, and things. So the products that are available, so whether that be pastas and breads and biscuits and things like you can actually go to supermarkets and, and even the pharmacies and to be able to buy those products. So they do take it seriously and nearly all the restaurants that I've been to either accommodate or are very serious with - we offer sort of the separate kitchens or separate fryers and things like that. So it's, it's very well known and I've always found like there are, there have always been options presented to me. So very easy to travel from a



gluten-free perspective and not having to sort of having to explain what gluten-free meant. Like I could say gluten-free and straight away it was understood.

Rebel Nelson:

So it was like, yes, we know what you mean when you say gluten-free. I know when I've traveled in Asia, for example, where I've gone gluten-free, no flour. And they're like. And the translation wasn't understood. But in Italy, saying either gluten-free or straight away, it was very known. So there was always options available. I found it really easy and I think even the first time, maybe I'm taking a little bit for granted because there's some - I know there's a lot of organization behind the scenes, but the produce is amazing.

Rebel Nelson:

So like when we're in these small towns and restaurants and you're having very local dishes, a lot of it is so fresh. Yes, there's the heaviness of a pasta where you're having a gluten-free option from a pasta. But if you're having vegetables and or meat dishes and a lot of them are naturally gluten free as well. So there was always really sort of a variety of options that were presented to you. Not a problem at all from a gluten-free perspective.

Katy Clarke:

I know when I was there with you on that first night and you, I think you had something made with chickpeas. I don't know, it looked so delicious. I had dish envy for sure.

Rebel Nelson:

I had a couple of those moments when we were sort of like comparing plates and like, oh, I've got the gluten-free option. It looks good. Yeah, definitely. I never missed out on anything, even in the activities. So both tours we had cooking classes and both cooking classes completely accommodated the gluten-free. I think my first one, we were making gnocchi and like a dessert and it was all gluten-free. And then the pizza making and having the pizza base made in gluten-free flour. So it was again that whole experience of not missing out on an activity just because of the requirements. Like it was all considered. So really grateful for the fact that that was accommodated to and planned for.

Katy Clarke:

I just want everyone to feel like they can relax and enjoy everything that's going on around them. That's really what we're trying to do. And of course, if that means to cater for different dietary requirements, then that's really the least that we can do. Okay, now I just want to - you've just been so generous with your time. I just wanted to ask you one more. Was there any other experience on either of those tours that has been really special to you that you wanted to share with everyone?

Rebel Nelson:

I would definitely love to share. It would be my first tour. And this is where, again, the extra mile that you don't as a participant, I never expected from the tour itself. But the example that I'd love to share is when I originally booked the tour, one of the draw cards was originally

going to be we were going to do a truffle experience and truffle hunting with the dogs. And I'm a bit of a dog lover, so I was like, oh God, this is going to be cool because I love dogs and I want to do this piece. And when it came time for the tour, the season - so unfortunately, from this the weather and the season before meant that the truffle season wasn't quite.

Rebel Nelson:

Was impacted from the weather. So something out of everybody's control. So the tour was adjusted and we had other great activities in. In place of that. And so totally not expecting. I mean, like I said, everything was magical.

Rebel Nelson:

But this one, again, having a conversation going, oh, you know, would have been great to see the dogs and the experience. And we had gone this particular day to a winery. And out of surprise it was. Liv said to me, I've got a surprise for you. I've organized a surprise for you. Unexpected, off the cuff. And I was like, well, okay, so we turn up to this winery and Liv had organized the owners of the dogs that do the truffle hunting to bring their dogs to this winery to introduce the dogs to us so that we could still experience and hear the story about how they raise the puppies and how the dogs are trained to go out and hunt for these truffles.

Rebel Nelson:

I was just like, oh my God. - again, a tearful moment of like, oh my God, this is so beautiful. Totally never expected it. I'm on the ground patting the dogs and hearing the story and having that moment where it was too. So we're already at a winery, which we're hearing about this most beautiful young couple that have started their business and telling us their story. And then we've got a completely different community person coming into their winery to tell us about their dogs. And I just felt so special because it was just like, it was really organized because it was something that I had mentioned and it was like making those moments come true.

Rebel Nelson:

You take that away with you because it's like, I think that even when I've done sort of smaller tours elsewhere, you don't get that personalized service. You have an itinerary. You follow the itinerary. Day one, we're doing this. Or, you know, you literally just follow the itinerary and the guide that you've sort of signed up for. Both of my experiences joining the two tours is completely opposite to that. Yes, there's an itinerary. Yes, we're following sort of what the itinerary is laid out to do, but it's all of those moments in between that you're talking to the staff or you've made a comment, and then you go to bed at night, or you go off and go to a restaurant and they're in the background crazily working away to make those dreams come true. And that's what you don't get with talking to people that do other types of tours or those big tours. You don't get that.

Rebel Nelson:

Whereas with your tours and the tours that I've experienced, it's that personal touch that creates the memories.

Katy Clarke:  
Oh, Rebel.

Rebel Nelson:

It is the truth - like it is. It's so authentic. It is a true experience of Italy, its culture, its people, its hospitality. You're welcomed by everybody. Every person that we met, every business that we went into, like you. You hear a story and you. It's just a magical place.

Rebel Nelson:

You know, I'm already planning the next one. It's like, I need to go back.

Katy Clarke:

We're gonna have to find you another truffle hunt. I think we're gonna have to make sure that that happens. People sometimes ask me what I do now. I think I can tell them I help people's dreams come true. So you made me very emotional.

Rebel Nelson:

No, no, no. And it is so true. It's. I, on my own as a solo traveler, would never be able to experience or even arrange half of what I've experienced on the tours or even visit some of the small, off-the-beaten-track properties and towns. And some of those properties are not even open to, I suppose, the general public. So I know that when we did visit some venues, that it's not something that is typically something that you could just book on, get my guide or something like that. They're not that type of experience, so they're very intimate. If I was to do that on my own, I don't think I would have ever seen that side of Italy.

Rebel Nelson:

I've seen some amazing other sites of Italy where I was able to navigate by myself with the help of what I've learned from, you know, my research. But that authenticity of being able to experience that because of the connections that you're able to establish with those different relationships means that we as customers can get that experience. I think that is what is quite unique about having these types of tours.

Katy Clarke:

I haven't paid you for saying all of this. I feel like I should. But seriously, I'm very emotional about that, what you've just said and really proud of my team and I really appreciate you taking the time to chat about this on the record. I'm just so glad and so happy that you have had the experience that you were looking for because, you know, I feel in this world the way that it is at the moment, you know, there's like a lot of noise, a lot of chaos and if we can all just take a moment and chase the dreams like you've done and hopefully the stars align and we can find like minded people and have, you know, beautiful sharing, convivial times together, then, you know, all that chaos melts away and we know that, you know, everything's going to be okay and we're going to have a bright future ahead. So, Rebel Grazie Mille! Thank you so much for everything. I am so delighted that you've been able to uncover the Italy that I

know that we both dream of.

Rebel Nelson:

And again, I so appreciate all the hard work that goes on to allow me to experience that. So I would tell anyone and everyone about, you know, this is the, if you, if you want to get the true experience, this is a way to achieve that.

Katy Clarke:

Thank you. Thank you, Rebel. Grazie, Mille.

Rebel Nelson:

You're welcome.

Katy Clarke:

You know listeners, I only heard the full story of Rebel joining the Infiorata team when this episode was recorded. How incredible that a chance meeting in a tiny town could create this wonderful outcome. Silvia and her team welcomed Rebel with open arms into their community and she has the memories, t-shirt and many photos to prove it!

Rebel will never forget this genuine act of kindness towards her, a stranger, or the bonds formed that wonderful evening under the star-studded Umbrian sky. And I won't either. I strongly believe the world needs more stories like this and as a reminder that whether we're in Australia, Italy, the United States, Canada or any of the many countries where people listen to this podcast around the world, that human connection is a precious gift

Now we can't promise adventures like Rebel had to all our tour guests - although you never know - I can promise, however, that we will do everything we can to help you realise your Italian dreams - whatever they may be.

So if you think this kind of travel experience is for you, we would love to have you join us on one of our tours. You can find out more at [untolditalytours.com](https://untolditalytours.com) or in the episode show notes at [untolditaly.com/284](https://untolditaly.com/284) for episode 284.

And if you have a personal Italian story or adventure like Rebel's that you would like to share with our listeners, please reach out to me at [ciao@untolditaly.com](mailto:ciao@untolditaly.com).

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did, then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. That way we can reach more Italy-loving travelers just like you.

On next week's episode, we're wandering through another beautiful part of Italy to discover its hidden secrets.

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

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](https://untolditaly.com) for show notes and all episodes*