

# Untold Italy Episode 285: VIP Experiences in Italy - Special Access to Iconic Sites

Ever dreamed of having the Sistine Chapel all to yourself? Or skipping the crowds in Venice to see the golden mosaics of San Marco lit up after dark? In this episode, we're joined by our friends at Walks of Italy to reveal what *really* happens on their VIP tours of Rome, Florence and Venice. From hidden doors to guides who know every story behind ancient stones, you'll hear how these experiences can turn your Italy trip from memorable... to unforgettable.

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:

If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place, dreaming of arriving in Italy, strolling into a gelateria and ordering your gelato with confidence. If you've been learning Italian with language apps but still can't string a sentence together, it might be time to try another approach. My friend Michelle from Intrepid Italian offers a practical way to learn travel-ready Italian. Thanks to her unique 8020 method, Michelle teaches you exactly what you need to know to connect with locals and have more authentic travel experiences. There's no getting bogged down in awkward phrases and unnecessary grammar. As an adult learner herself with Italian heritage, Michelle really knows how to bridge the gap between English and Italian. As Roma from London said, the learning methodology is great. I progressed much faster in the last four weeks than I ever did on my own or using other language apps. To find out more and claim your free Italian travel phrase guide, visit [untolditaly.com](https://untolditaly.com) Italian or visit the link in the show notes. As a bonus, you'll also get an exclusive \$20 coupon code to use on any of Michelle's online self-paced courses. So visit [untolditaly.com](https://untolditaly.com) forward/italian and accelerate your Italian language journey today.

Katy Clarke:

Buongiorno friends. Come stai? Hope you're ready for another Italian adventure. Andiamo! Today we're doing a grand tour of sorts and taking a look at the very special experiences you can now have in Italy's iconic cities - Rome, Florence and Venice.

I'm joined by my friend Denyse Pantaleo from Walks of Italy - one of the longest running and popular tour companies operating in Italy - started in 2010, I believe. I remember my mum saying she enjoyed their tours on a trip way back when - so they've been entertaining and

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educating visitors to Italy for a very long time and know how to showcase the world famous sites of Italy through storytelling - rather than dry facts and figures.

They've recently added some VIP or very special experiences to their list of tours on offer and Denyse is going to share what to expect if you choose these over a standard tour of the Vatican Museums, Colosseum, Florence Duomo and St Mark's in Venice.

If you're a history, art, or architecture lover or have a deep connection to the Catholic church, these are the five-star experiences worth splurging on - let's hear all about them.

Katy Clarke:

Bentornata Denyse, welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Ciao, Katy. Thank you for welcoming back here. Very happy to be here.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, it's always great to have you on this show. And you know, we've known each other a few years now. In fact, I believe it was you who taught my kids how to use the Roman Nasoni water fountains. And now they know how to squirt everyone.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Sorry about that.

Katy Clarke:

That's okay. It's always good when it's hot. But I'd love to introduce you to our audience. I think the best way to do that is for you to tell everyone all about yourself and walks tours to our listeners.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yes. So my name is Denyse. I was born and raised in the northeast of Italy, but about 20 years ago I moved to Rome. I fell in love with Rome and other things and I decided to stay in this city. The city really hugged me so tight that I couldn't leave. I started working with Walks about 10 years ago and then for Devour also four years ago. And currently I am the ground operation manager for Walks and Devour in Rome and Pompeii. Why I've been working for walks 10 years because I love the people that work for Walks and the way we care about crafting the experiences for our guests and visitors and we really care about having them the best experience they can.

Katy Clarke:

It's so true and they're very creative people and we're going to hear about that in a minute. But Walks has really come a long way, hasn't it? I think it's over 15 years old, I think.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yes.

Katy Clarke:

That's a lot of tours.

Denyse Pantaleo:

A lot of tours. A lot of people.

Katy Clarke:

That's a lot of people. Especially as it's in, you know, it's now all over Europe, but in some of the busiest cities in the world. And I imagine the team's learned a few things along the way and each and every season because, you know, dealing with hundreds of people actually every day going to these major sites, so. And I know that you're always tweaking the experience to make sure that they are special and because what I know about Walks is that you do understand these trips are very, very big and important for a lot of people and it's not something that people do every day. So you want to make sure that they're memorable for all the right reasons.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yes. You can dream about the Sistine Chapel for years and maybe you have one chance to see it. So we need to go above and beyond to make sure that one time experience in your life is just the perfect one with the perfect guide, because guides are big, big, big piece of the whole experience. Their storytelling, their knowledge, their stories, what makes the Sistine Chapel alive. And it changes every time with every guide you are with.

Katy Clarke:

I know. I've been on so many tours in the Vatican museums, and it is different every single time I learn something new. And I mean, this is a huge expanse of, like, art and history in the one spot. So, of course, there's so many stories to tell. But, you know, what I really appreciate going with Walks is that you can have a totally different experience based on the person's expertise and their interests as well. I think last time we went, this was a private experience that I know Walks are now offering too, with someone who had a really strong interest in Egyptian mythology. Well, my son was right into that.

Katy Clarke:

And we went into the Egyptian mythologies. I'd never been there before. How interesting. It was fantastic. So. But what we wanted to talk to you about today is you've got some new, newish VIP experiences, and this is about taking those iconic moments to another level. Is there a reason why you've created these? Is there...

Denyse Pantaleo:

I think that, as I was saying, if going to the Colosseum or going to St. Mark, going to the Duomo in Florence is definitely on your bucket list. I would make a parallel with food, which

is my passion, and I have to. You can dream of the perfect carbonara or you can dream about a carbonara, but carbonara can be a carbonara or it can be THE carbonara. So if I can make a parallel with the Vatican or visiting the Sistine Chapel or the Duomo in St. Mark can be your experience of visiting the Sistine Chapel or can be THE experience. So I don't want to say that that carbonara is not good, or it can be good and perfect and it will stay in your memories forever, or. Or it can be THE carbonara you will talk about with your friends back home forever, and you're going to make your friends, like, dreaming of it.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So it's just two levels of the experience and I have to compare it to a carbonara, of course. Sorry for the Sistine Chapel, sorry, Michelangelo, but the carbonara is a masterpiece, if you want. So the experiences we have, I don't like 'Exclusive', because it's cutting off a lot of things. They're special. That's what, in the end, these tours are and what will stay in the memories are really special memories. So it's easy to describe them, like, beat the crowds and this and that the reality is that when you are stepping inside the Vatican Museums early morning before it's open to the general public, and you walk through the museums with the Key Master and you see that is lighting on all the different rooms and you feel all this art around you, you soak in those energy that probably there's too spreaded with too many people during the day.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So honestly, when I'm traveling, for example, I decide, okay, there's one amount I save on the side for something special, something that I want to live a hundred percent. And this type of tours are that kind of thing. It's not, it's not Michelin restaurant compared to a trattoria, but something like that. It's that kind of experience that can be really taken to another level.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I agree. So I'm gonna confess now, I have not had the opportunity to experience any of these VIP experiences, but the Untold Italy team have and are very impressed actually. So I think one of the ones that we could probably talk about in a bit more detail is the Key Masters tour. So I have actually experienced the Alone in the Vatican Museums tour myself, which is an amazing tour. And I have and I'm going to put the photos up with these episode show notes of me walking through those galleries. And it is unbelievable. Like, because you are there with very few people in this, this one, it's.

Katy Clarke:

It's mind-blowing. Especially if, if you've maybe been before and you've walked there with hundreds of people and like I've done both experiences, both recently. It is a whole another opportunity. When you are there in those galleries with very few people, you can really take in what's going on around you. Like, it is stupendous, this art. It is unbelievable. It blows your mind. And I think in an hour or two or three that you have, when you're going through these galleries, it's very, you know, like, if you're surrounded by people and paying attention to everything around you like that, it's exciting.

Katy Clarke:

But it's also a totally different experience when you're there with a very small group. And what you're able to do then is explore what those galleries mean to you. One example that I'd love to give is that when we went down through the gallery of maps, the guide was helping us figure out 'where's your family from?' Because my husband's family is Italian. So that was like, oh, where's your family from? And so she was very kind and she got, she took a photo of us in front of the. The town or the area where my husband's mum is from. And it was so nice, you know, because that was something really special that you wouldn't be able to do on a normal day, I think.

Denyse Pantaleo:

I mean, it's not because guides are different or they don't want to. It's because it's just this stream of crowd and you just need to go. So you're allowed to do these little things that really make the tour different. You can appreciate the details of paintings. While on a regular tour, guides are doing above and beyond to give you all the context of this painter and colors and describe the painting as much as they can without a crowd and having more time, you can really appreciate the colors and details. It's about details.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely.

Denyse Pantaleo:

With time, you have details.

Katy Clarke:

It's like getting the best guanciale on your carbonara, right?

Denyse Pantaleo:

Exactly, exactly. Like, it's the way that the guanciale is cooked with more time and more curated that makes a difference. In the end, the carbonara in the regulatory trattoria is good, but can be much better.

Katy Clarke:

I agree. You need time to. To cure that guanciale properly, which is the same thing as going through taking your time in the Vatican museums. Another memory that I have of the Alone in the Vatican Museums tour is like actually looking out of the window that the Pope looks out of and watching the sun come up over the rooftops of the city. And - for me, it's very emotional because I really now, these days have a very strong connection to Rome. And I. I love that view of the.

Katy Clarke:

Of the sun coming up. And also the other thing that I love, in autumn and winter, when there's. Is it the starlings or the swallows? And they come out, the murmuration, and there's these big, huge birds that come in waves over the city. And it's almost like a movie. It's

beautiful. But, you know, when I was talking to Olivia and Mary on the Untold Italy team about their experience on the Key Masters tour- it's the actual opening of each gallery and the sort of dropping of the breath, you know, just unbelievable.

Katy Clarke:

Just having that experience of seeing the lights go on and all of those precious, precious artworks illuminated.

Denyse Pantaleo:

It's incredible. I've experienced it myself. The Key Master tour was just after Covid, so I have pictures with masks. It's unbelievable. You are inside the Sistine Chapel with no one, and they just turn on the light. You are in the middle of the Sistine Chapel, and boom. You have this blue of the Michelangelo paintings.

Denyse Pantaleo:

You just goosebumps everywhere. It's incredible. And you can stay there. You can appreciate the paintings without having anyone is pushing you or too many people. And also in the Alone Vatican tour, guys are allowed to explain in the Sistine Chapel why, in regular tours, they can't. So you are. You are there and the guide is really pointing everything you need to notice. You need to keep with yourself forever.

Denyse Pantaleo:

And, yeah, you were talking about the timing of the day when these special tours are. And also in Florence and Venice. In Venice, is evening, it's after hour, and in Florence, is sunset. So I believe there are some timing of the day where everything looks more special. Sunset or sunrise - these places are much special. Yeah, yeah.

Katy Clarke:

It's golden hour, they call it. So Mary just went on up to Florence and did the Alone in the Duomo up there. And she said it was unbelievable because it's just so everyone knows for people on my team have really got a passion for Italy. And so either it's through food and wine or it's through history and culture. Mary has a very strong background and lots of studies in history. And she's a bit like me. She geeks out on all of that stuff.

Katy Clarke:

And she said to me, before, we just got so close to everything, and I just felt so connected to the city of Florence. All I could see was the city laid out before me, and it was unbelievable. She said it was - you know, I loved looking at the artwork on the dome, and I just felt like I was part of it, that I could almost sense the work that had gone into it. All of the thousands of people that had created this artwork to make it so magical. And, yeah, she couldn't talk about it enough. And I was like, wait, I need to do that one next time I'm in Florence. I haven't climbed the dome for a very long time, so.

Denyse Pantaleo:

And also this one in Florence and the Key master in Rome, they have a key master. So you get to know that there's actually a human being that is a key master and is in charge of opening and closing. So it's even knowing that there are some jobs that you don't even think about it.

Katy Clarke:

And the rituals and like, I've seen actual - and we will post these on our show notes as well. The actual keys for the key masters to the. The key holder. It looks like there's hundreds of keys on it. Like, I don't know how they know which is which. Like, obviously, it's probably in an order.

Katy Clarke:

Like, that's how I would do it with my type A brain, but. But like it. So amazing to see that. Yeah, right. There's a job and that's someone's responsible for this very important ritual that goes on every day, but that very few people get to see.

Denyse Pantaleo:

I like this thing you're mentioning about rituals. These are places, they're so special places, so full of art. And all this art is the energy of the artists. They're behind that and the willings of Popes and noble families. So there are so much layers of energy, of creativity and willings of having these places magical and beautiful and the aesthetic. The rituals are important because you point out the importance of this place, of being there. It's not just a church, it's not just a museum. It's something that has been created because someone believed in it.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So rituals are important. You highlight the importance of this place and do we need today in 2025, a key master? It looks so old school that you have actually someone that is opening doors with a key. Yes, you need it because this place is special

Katy Clarke:

And not only for the art, but also the history and who's walked there before. I mean, you know, remember, sometimes we think, oh, we need to go see the Sistine Chapel. But remember who made it and how he did it and the passion and time and the energy and just the dedication. I mean, I think he was in his 90s when he was still painting. He was very old Michelangelo, when he was painting that Sistine Chapel. And you can really get a sense of that when you're there and on your own, you're able to ask questions and just have that connection either to the Sistine Chapel or the Duomo in Brunelleschi's Dome in Florence. And what I think is important here is - this is not for everyone. Right.

Katy Clarke:

Because this is something. If you are obsessed by art or you have a very strong connection to the church or you are really into history, then you are really going to geek out on this stuff like me. But, you know, it's not for everyone, right? So if you think that going there is like something that's cool to do and you want to take some photos and say that you've seen it and



appreciate that you've seen it, that is amazing. And there is plenty of options to do that. But this type of experience is really for someone that is kind of obsessed with history or art or connecting with the past.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yeah, definitely. As I was saying before, you have someone really into food, you don't just stop yourself to, like, researching good trattoria and osteria. But you want to go the next level. And yes, it's going to be an investment because it's probably more expensive than a regular dinner in a trattoria or regular tour at the Vatican or the Colosseum. But you having THE experience also I was thinking about, I don't know if it's the same thing around the world, but when you get married here, you ask your friends or family to put some money for your honeymoon and help you getting the perfect honeymoon and contribute to pay the honeymoon. This is something I would gift a couple of friends, that are really into art or they, they want to have the best experience there. Don't just go at the Colosseum but go in the Arena. So I want that when you're going to be in Rome or Florence or Venice, you're going to think about me like I gifted you the experience, just making an example.

Denyse Pantaleo:

But it's like gifting a Michelin star restaurant because I want you, I love you as friends and I want you. I have the best experience.

Katy Clarke:

I'm really wondering why no one's gifted me those experiences, to be honest. Come on.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Do you want me to talk to your friends?

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I think we need to, we need to have a chat tonight. But it's so true. Like gifting experiences is something that I've been passionate about for a while now because we all have too much stuff.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yeah. You think about one stuff, you order it online and two hours later is in your house. But experiences is different.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And I think whether you're standing in the Sistine Chapel admiring that or you're standing out on the Palatine Hill walking in the steps of Julius Caesar. It's a totally different memory than, you know, perhaps you're getting that book that you ordered on Amazon because in the end of the day it's really 10 books you buy on Amazon. I mean I love reading but something like that is going to stay with you forever. The other one that Mary enjoyed recently, that she really loved was in Venice. She said this was incredible. So the latest VIP one is in Venice After Dark and you go into San Marco and turn the lights on, you're from that



region, Denyse. And that's a very special church, isn't it? That one?

Denyse Pantaleo:

It's super special. So as a kid raised in the Venice area at the primary school, they were taking us to Venice every year. That was the thing you go to Venice. Venice is very close to your school. You go to Venice every year. And when I started working for Walks and we start having this experience, I was like, why? I've been taken into the St Mark's many, many times, but I never got to experience this, because this is special, of course. So I know with the daylight what this golden dome looks like, but I mean, being there after hours in the dark, and then they turn on the light. Wow.

Denyse Pantaleo:

It's just unbelievable. As a kid, I would have dreamed to see this, and I couldn't experience this yet, but everyone that took this tour and this experience, they were just enthusiastic. It's incredible.

Katy Clarke:

It is supposed to be. I am so jealous. I just - I'm a big, massive fan of Venice and I love everything about the history and the culture of Venice. I'm obsessed with it, and I think it's the ultimate expression of the city. But you also have that sense of mystery and wonder, which I think is the city itself. And one thing that Mary said that you can do there is you go see the Pala d' Oro, which most people miss, which is that very special icon that you can go and see. And it's this huge, like, magical piece of art that is.

Katy Clarke:

It's not on the standard tour, so you can only go there if it's very special. So not only do you see the lighting up of the. The golden mosaics, but you also go into some special areas of the church, which is very, very unique. And yeah, if you're into Byzantine art, if you are particularly religious or you have got a really strong connection to the Catholic Church, then this is really a very, very special experience. And I have to say, as well, you know, Venice is very well known for being very busy. And most people will go straight to San Marco, go there, go to the Doge's palace, go to the Rialto Bridge, and that will be their experience.

Katy Clarke:

And in fact, the reason Venice is busy is because it gets a lot of day trippers. So when these people have left for the day and you have your magical experience in San Marco. I think I'm coveting that one big time, we'll put that on my wish list.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yes, definitely. Me too. This is something I want to do. And also because all these stores are early morning or late afternoon, you can really dedicate that special moment to that special time of the day and focus during the day to other things. So, you know, that must to see, must to visit place is scheduled sometimes in early morning or late afternoon. And you're okay with that. You're going to live it at its best. But the rest of the day, you're going to dedicate

yourself into completely different things.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So when all the other people are going to the Vatican, you are going to other places that are less crowded, and you're going to live all the best of everything, basically.

Katy Clarke:

Will you be having a long lunch with your excellent carbonara? For sure. And in Venice-Cicchetti, gotta have some Cicchetti, go have your gondola ride. But it's such a smart thing to do, in fact, is to actually organize your day, especially also when it's hot, to organize seeing these major sites in the evening and the afternoon. But it's not about logistics. These experience, they're very, very special. And I'm very jealous of everyone that's done.

Katy Clarke:

But I can only say from my experience at the. Alone at the Vatican, it is one of those things that I'll never forget, because having the contrast of my previous experience, which was, you know, not being able to appreciate what was happening around me, and then having those moments in the Sistine Chapel was just incredible.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yeah, that was exactly the goal of this, that experience. Maybe you're not going to remember all the details of the tour, but what you remember is the feeling you had. And this is what makes an experience versus a tour.

Katy Clarke:

Exactly. And I was saying to Denyse earlier that, you know, Italian wages are not what they are in some of our countries. So for everyone that's listening, so some of these experiences are really out of reach of, you know, your average Italian. So when I've had some of my team who are Italian go on these trips, I think they've been maybe a little bit skeptical, I would say, to experience them. And then they've been on them and they have just been wowed. And they get quite emotional, actually, because, you know, in Italy, you study very hard the art history and history, not like we do in our countries. So they're very, very aware of. Of that.

Katy Clarke:

And they may not have ever had the opportunity to go and see and experience their culture in this way. And Olivia, who's on our team as well, her husband Andrea, he's a big history nerd like me, and he just cannot stop raving about the Key Masters Tour. And he would do it again and again and again.

Denyse Pantaleo:

I told you, I've been taken from my school many, many, many times in St. Mark because we have to as kids raised in that area, you need to get to know what is special in your area. But I'm dreaming of that experience in a completely different way. And I've been because of work many times in the Vatican Museums, but also on my own. But when I went on a Key Master

tour, it was a completely different experience. Like I told myself, I've been in the tapestry gallery, I don't want to say 100 times, a little less, but very close to. And it was a completely different experience.

Denyse Pantaleo:

I could stand in front of each piece of art and appreciate the details, which is something you can't do when even in November when it's less crowded.

Katy Clarke:

So I think it comes down to the rituals, the detail, and that is why it's a VIP experience, because that's kind of what you expect when you're having a VIP experience in any context, really. And I think the one thing that... story that really stands out to me is that I think with the Key Masters tour, when you get to the Sistine Chapel, someone gets to choose the key to go into the Sistine Chapel. And it might not be the one that you're expecting. You know, like, I have these visions of like a huge old key that's very mysterious and hundreds of years old. And, yeah, I don't know if it's that one. I'm not going to give anything away because that would spoil it for everyone. But, yeah, you get to choose. Amazing.

Denyse Pantaleo:

And this year, with a conclave, it's even more special here. It's where all the cardinals, they've been locked up inside the Sistine Chapel.

Katy Clarke:

So, yeah, you can imagine that what was happening in there. I mean, I was there just a few months before and it was really cool because, you know, I had the kids there and they hadn't been to the Vatican museums before, so they were like, like, oh, yeah, you know, they're only 11, so it's a lot to take in. But when the conclave happened and I was able to relate it back to what they'd seen, they were like, mind blown. We love this. Oh, we were there.

Katy Clarke:

But just on keys - I understand. The Duomo key in Florence is exactly what you imagine it. It's a big old key, but you.

Denyse Pantaleo:

You close up there, not opening but closing.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, but it's like you're the last people and then you turn the lights out and imagine to, like, to leave all that art to just to rest in quiet.

Denyse Pantaleo:

That's exactly what I'm thinking about, about museums. Like, I imagine that all this art and all these masterpieces are taking this moment of quiet during the night, and they are like resting in peace for these hours of the night. And that's exactly how I picture this, like in the morning

you wake up this art or you just say goodbye and good night in the night. And yeah, I think about the same about art when closing up the museums or you open it up.

Katy Clarke:

Your daughter's very young, so she hasn't got to this point. But the night at the museum, excellent movies and that's what I think of as well. And you just wonder like, is the art coming off the wall and you can just kind of peek your head in.

Denyse Pantaleo:

The ghost of Michelangelo or in the Roman form, there's Caesar Augustus. They're walking around in peace, with not all these tourists.

Katy Clarke:

Listen, I could walk the paths a million times and I'm sure I will learn more and more things, but. But if you are remotely interested in history or art or understanding more about these incredible cities that have been there for thousands of years, it's really worth the investment. I can't stress that enough because you're never going to - well, you might have another, you might have the opportunity to get. But I mean, we never know when we're going back to Rome or we're going back to Florence. And so if you have that passion, just scratch the itch and you know, make it that thing that you want to invest in, I think, because it doesn't have to be everything. Like some people love the Colosseum and ancient history and are not very interested in art. And I say good for you.

Katy Clarke:

Go, go discover the history of ancient Rome and then other people who love art can go crazy in the Vatican Museums. And I think that's really where travel's heading.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yeah, I'm very into archaeology, so if they could give me like the super special experience anywhere in Pompeii or anywhere in the world, that's my thing.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So also being in the arena at the Colosseum, it's something really special.

Katy Clarke:

I mean, a lot of people want to go do the underground, but I just, I think actually walking out on the arena is the. Is a special thing. Have you done that lately?

Denyse Pantaleo:

No, not really recently, but I've done it many, many times. And yeah, first of all, you get to see the Colosseum for that very special point of view, if you want to say the gladiator point of

view. It's sad, but it's really. You get to see the old Colosseum and you're going to appreciate this incredible building that is standing. That's what really impressed me more than thinking about all the gladiators thing. And. Yes. And also guides from that perspective have so many other stories to tell you about the Colosseum.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Colosseum is again another site where I got hundred different versions of stories depending on the guides. You can describe it and talk about the Colosseum from so many different angles that it's incredible. But it's not just a Colosseum. That's the thing. So we have all the rest of the archaeological area with the Palatine and the Roman Forum, and there are so much more other places, like hidden places, the house of Augustus, the house of Livia. We got frescoes inside, so you can walk inside the house and see the frescoes like you do in Pompeii.

Denyse Pantaleo:

It's another layer of interest there because we see Rome now just white because of the travertine. But Rome was full of colors. It was definitely a very - if you want to say that some guy's gonna kill me, because I'm saying that it's a tacky and colorful city. It wasn't white. So when you step inside a house and you see all these colors of the frescoes, you're leaving Rome.

Katy Clarke:

That's the Rome from thousands of years ago. I. I was shocked. I didn't know that, you know, like, I can't remember when I found that out, but I was like, oh, wow. You know, it was very colorful. Yeah. And I think you touched on a really good point there, Denyse, because the guides are what make this situation. And Denyse, you've been a guide yourself, so you know that this is a high-energy, high-impact job.

Katy Clarke:

And how at Walks do you find the people that can deliver those stories? Because there are thousands of guides in Rome. Right. And everyone has to pass the exam and everyone has to be accredited to deliver the content. But it's the way that the content's delivered that makes it really special.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Yeah. It's not just about the knowledge. If you're an official guide, the knowledge is there. Of course. It's the way it's delivered. It is the way you put together so many informations and dates and Popes and Emperors and everything into something that is very easy to remember, understand, enjoyable, full of fun facts. In the end, what you gonna bring with you forever are the fun facts. You want to know that that specific Pope died in that specific way that is weird. Or that specific Emperors had a passion for horses. Just saying.

Denyse Pantaleo:

So guides, they need to be storytellers. Otherwise, you can just go on AI and you ask your chat GPT to give you descriptions of the Coliseum. But the energy that the guides have to

deliver so many - also hard informations to put together their own books and they need to translate this into a tour with an extreme heat in summer, a very uncomfortable area like the archaeological area in Rome, full of steps and ruins and these and that. And I've seen, joining tour group of people, that despite 40 degrees and all the other things I mentioned, like not stopping, looking at the guide and being focused for three hours. And this is when I joined tour and I'm just checking guides, how they're going. I'm like, wow, these people are incredible. This is the type of guide we want on our tour and we invest a lot in interviewing and a lot of questions during the interview.

Denyse Pantaleo:

And we believe in people, that's one thing. We believe that tours are not just about having someone that takes you around, but we invest in people. And I have to say that our guides are very special.

Katy Clarke:

I agree. Yeah, you can always tell because I feel like from a customer point of view that it's more about entertainment rather than knowledge. I think you get all of that for sure, but it's packaged in a way that's engaging and not delivering facts or just repeating things over and over again. And like you said, the ability to think on their feet and condense like what is like literally thousands of years of information into a very short time space and deliver it in a way that people can find interesting - is an incredible skill in fact. And I do have to say *complimenti* to Walks because you do manage to find some very talented people and it does really make all the difference.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Thank you.

Katy Clarke:

And you know, we have worked with you guys for a very long time and the reason is because we have a lot of respect for you and your colleagues, because you've always been, you know, very generous and accommodating to the people that we've sent your way as well. So it's a pleasure to work with Walks and so exciting that people, people can now experience these VIP options when they go to the iconic cities in Italy. So Denyse, thank you for sharing those jaw-dropping experiences with us. If our listeners are interested in learning more about them and checking on availability, how can they get in touch with Walks of Italy?

Denyse Pantaleo:

They can check on our website Walks of Italy and Take Walks. All the special tours are listed in different cities under Rome, Venice and Florence. Yes.

Katy Clarke:

Okay. And we'll link to them and all your social media sites on our website too. And I'm going to put those photos up of the keys and the climbing up the dome and the views from the Duomo because it really is very special. And if you do want something that is going to remind

you of your trip, then check them out. It's something that I don't think anyone would really regret. And in fact, we have a lot of people thanking us for passing on this information. So. Grazie, Denyse, As I mentioned, while some of our team have joined Walks and been thrilled by these experiences, I am yet to do them.

Katy Clarke:

Except the Alone in the Vatican. One day I will. I really want to do the Alone in the Dome in Florence.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Thank you, Katy, for having me here.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, Grazie. Mile. Anytime. Anytime. Grazie Denyse.

Denyse Pantaleo:

Grazie. Grazie. Grazie.

Katy Clarke:

It's very interesting to me how these experiences are evolving and changing over the years. I remember my first times visiting these major sites in the 1990s and simply being in awe of what I was seeing right before my eyes that I'd read about in books or seen on TV.

And what happened was, I was inspired to learn more and more about those places and return again and again because you can see the best photos on instagram or videos on youtube, you can read about them or hear about them on a podcast like this but nothing beats standing in the places where history has been made and hearing the stories and tales of what makes these structures so important.

Connecting the architecture and art back to people and stories is what makes these sites come alive and that is why, even though I think I've been to the Vatican museums 5 or 6 times in the last 3 years alone - i'll go back again and again with a guide who can take me on a journey while I'm standing in situ and help me soak it all up.

So if you've got a passion for history or art or architecture (or you know someone who's heading to Italy who does), take a look at these new VIP experiences, as you might just find something there that will take your trip from memorable to unforgettable.

You'll find all the tour links to our show notes at [untolditaly.com/285](https://untolditaly.com/285)

That's all for today. Next week, once again, I'm indulging my inner history geek and we're heading to Tuscany to learn all about the Etruscans!

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*