

Untold Italy Episode 294: Journey Across Northern Italy

- Lakes, vineyards and truffle country

Picture this - vast shimmering lakes, romantic villas, rolling hills covered with vines and fairytale castles complete with moats and drawbridges. This is northern Italy - the place where I first fell in love with Italy and where I've left my heart again and again.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy Clarke:

Buongiorno friends and welcome to a very special episode of Untold Italy, where we take a trip to northern Italy, where my Italian experiences first began and the regions that have played a transformative role, not just in terms of how I travel but also my life. Because my first experience of Italy was on the shores of Lake Garda and it started a lifetime of adventure and eventually our podcast.

This life-changing first experience of Italy was the inspiration for our brand new tour traveling from Venice in the east to Torino in the west. Along the way, we visit lakes and hidden towns and, of course, meet and make connections with locals who have loved this land for generations.

Joining me today is Untold Italy's chief experience officer, Olivia, who has her own special relationship with northern Italy, now strengthened by family ties. Together, we're going to walk you through our itinerary and how we created this tour including the highlights and special experiences you can expect.

So andiamo, let's go to northern Italy.

Katy Clarke:

Buongiorno Liv. Come stai?

Olivia Windsor:

Ciao Katy, molto bene - tu?

Katy Clarke:

Oh, Bene!. So, Liv, how are things going for you and whereabouts are you right now?

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

Olivia Windsor:

Things are very good, Katy. We are in beautiful Piedmont at the moment. We've been here for at least a month with my husband's family, and, yeah, just having a beautiful time. It's a beautiful time of year, the end of September. Fall weather is certainly a pop upon us. Crisp temperatures. You know, there's soon to be the harvest season, so it's a very nice time of year to be here.

Katy Clarke:

Sounds divine. Gorgeous. So now, before we dive into talking about how we designed our new tour of Northern Italy, which does include beautiful Piedmont, obviously - a lot of people know you on the podcast, and that's thanks to the wine episodes that you do with Andrea. But today you're joining us in your capacity as our Chief Experience Officer at Untold Italy Tours. So, how about you tell everyone a little bit about what you do and how you came to be working with me and Untold Italy?

Olivia Windsor:

Thanks, Katy. Yeah, I think I've got an absolute dream job because I get to bring to life some of our amazing tours around Italy and all the regions. So how amazing is that? I've also been a tour host before, so we've been running the tours for three years - we're now in our fourth year of running. And, yeah, when we started running Untold Italy tours, we had two tours in Puglia and Sicily, and our very first tour in Puglia, I was also the host. And then for the last few years, I've also been hosting the tours, designing the tours with Katy, which has been a lot of fun. I had a baby at the start of this year, so I've stepped back at the moment from hosting and concentrating on bringing together some amazing itineraries for our guests with our team of very experienced and wonderful tour hosts. So, yes, I've got a really dream job, I think

Katy Clarke:

We're so lucky to have you. Of course, Liv is. She's very modest, but she has lots of skills. And if you've been on tour with Liv, you know just how kind and thoughtful she is and really enthusiastic about sharing beautiful parts of Italy. Not just the scenery, but also the culture and getting really into local ways of living, meeting local people so that they can share their perspectives. And this is what is brilliant about having bilingual hosts. So Liv and all of our hosts are actually bilingual, so they can speak fluent Italian. And if you have any questions for the local people that you meet along the way, then they're there to really translate and connect you with them.

Katy Clarke:

And it's a beautiful thing to watch, actually. And it's probably one of the inspiring - the things that really inspired me to create the tours like that with Liv. So now, just talking about creating a tour, we have got a new one, don't we, Liv? And so we are heading off into Northern Italy next year and this is a really special tour. So, Liv, why don't you let everyone know why we decided to create this tour.

Olivia Windsor:

So excited about this tour. I can't tell you. So we decided to create the Northern Italy tour because, well, for one, the Italian, Italian lakes are seriously bucket list worthy. And so we didn't have a tour including the lakes. But the thing about the lakes is that they can be quite busy and touristy, so we obviously wanted to do it in our 'Untold' way. That still feels really personal and local. So we're able to offer that lake experience, capturing Lake Como, Lake Garda, Lake Maggiore, but in a really, yeah, Untold kind of more off-the-beaten-track way.

Olivia Windsor:

And we're also seeing that a lot of our guests want longer experiences. So a lot of our tours are for around a week and this tour is for 12 days. So we're really capturing, we're having a. Capturing a range of different regions and yeah, for a longer amount of time. So we're able to fly into Venice, travel along the Wine Road into Verona, around the lakes, and then, of course, come into gorgeous Piedmont. So with 12 days, we're able to really have a nice tour along Northern Italy.

Katy Clarke:

Amazing. I'm so excited about this and I'll tell you why... Because this region is very special to me and it holds a very special place in my heart. Because actually, if you've been listening for a while, you probably know that the first place that I set foot in Italy was actually up in the north, in Lake... near Lake Garda, in the little town of Malcesine. And I love this region and I have a very special affinity with it. So on that trip, I also went to Verona and this is where my mind started to be blown completely because I couldn't believe that anywhere so beautiful existed. And really the actual vibe of the place, it's a very elegant town, it's very refined. There's beautiful piazzas and there's a castle up on the hill with the river Adige running below.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, it's Verona. I hadn't, didn't know anything about it. And let's remember folks, this was back in the 1990s, before the Internet, so there was no Instagram or anything looking up pictures. I just heard of Fair Verona via our friend William Shakespeare. So I really didn't have any idea of what to expect when I got there. So it was very beautiful. And then on that trip, I also went to Venice and Sirmione, which is included in this tour. So it's a very special region to me.

Katy Clarke:

And then maybe, oh, would have been. I'd say, 15 or maybe longer. Oh, many years after that, I went to a wonderful press trip with the Italian Tourist Board out of London, when I was living in London, and we went into the region of Lombardy. And I think that this was the trip that really inspired everything that I do with Untold Italy today. Because having since that first trip, I traveled everywhere around Italy, all the major places. And, you know, I really loved my experiences in Italy. But it wasn't until that trip that I really started seeing the countryside and these smaller towns and cities that really I love so much to this day. And they are the Untold ones, I say.

Katy Clarke:

So this is. This trip, this other trip, which was probably my 20th trip or something like that, really inspired me. And what is really delightful about this tour is we've managed to incorporate a few of the places that I visited on that trip into this tour because I just fell in love with them, and I really just wanted to share them with all of you. So, how about you Liv? What makes this trip special to you?

Olivia Windsor:

A few reasons, and I think, as well, touching on the part you were saying about the refined elegance of northern Italy. It is really beautiful and elegant, and I think so different to what many of us would think of as quintessential Italian when you think of Italy, because it's probably southern Italy you're thinking of. So I find, you know, I'm really excited about this trip because it's probably not what you first imagine of Italy, and that's a pleasant surprise as well, because it's totally different to what you're thinking of. And then, of course, I have to mention Piedmont. I lived in Piedmont for some years. It's where my husband and his family are from. So I'm very connected to this part of Italy, especially. So it's such a thrill and a joy to be able to bring travelers to this beautiful region that's definitely, you know, lesser known than some of the other places in Italy, like Tuscany.

Olivia Windsor:

So for me, that's a real joy.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I guess people do know Venice and they know Milan and Lake Como, but once you start asking and digging a little bit deeper, they may have heard of Lake Garda, but, yeah, we're taking people way, way, way outside even those areas. So we're going right into untold territory here. And that's the exciting thing for me, too. All right, so maybe I think we're being a bit of a tease here Liv, like, we haven't actually. We can actually explain the flow of the trip and how it's going to work in. In a lot of detail.

Katy Clarke:

So, how about you give everyone an overview of how this trip's going?

Olivia Windsor:

Excellent. So we meet in Venice and we don't actually spend time and the tour in Venice. So you can fly into Venice, maybe have a couple of days in beautiful Venice, and then we're going to pick you up, whisk you away into the countryside. And as we head towards our first home base, we'll be in Verona, which Katy was talking about before. Beautiful fair, Verona. So we'll have a lovely lunch there and time to look around and admire the Arena. It's not the Colosseum, but it is, you know, similar shape to the Colosseum. And then, yeah, we continue on into Lombardy in the countryside, right on the shores of Lake Garda and we settle into our first home base for five nights, which is a beautiful hotel that Katy went to many some years ago that's run by these lovely sisters and it's just, yeah, an absolutely gorgeous place to stay.

Olivia Windsor:

So we'll be based there for the start of our trip and each day we go out on different excursions to explore the surrounding area. But actually, we'll be meeting the local people because that's what all of our trips are about. It's not just a tick list of different places to see. It's going and meeting the locals and hearing their stories and their connection to the land. Because that's what I think really stays with you after a trip to Italy, or especially a trip with Untold Italy. While we're there, we'll be going to Sirmione, of course. We'll be doing some amazing boat tours, aperitivo in hand, of course.

Olivia Windsor:

We go and visit a local farm where they make cheese and we do some cheese tasting. Lombardy is famous for their cheeses. We're talking soft cow's milk cheeses normally up here. Absolutely delicious. We'll also be checking out Bergamo and Brescia. So they're two, I would say, off the beaten path, towns that aren't normally on the tour radar. We'll be visiting some castles. So there's a wonderful castle that Katy loved that we had to include on this tour for their story, which I won't spoil.

Olivia Windsor:

Katy might want to talk about that later. But that we'll be visiting wineries, of course. We've got such amazing wine just in this first part of the trip alone because it's Franciacorta territory. So if you like sparkling wine, you may know Prosecco and you can have your fill in Venice. But we'll actually be drinking Franciacorta, which is kind of like, you know, they brand it as Italy's answer to champagne. So very delicious in a nutshell. And then after our time around Lake Garda, we'll go up and we'll be based our next base is on Lake Maggiore. We will, you know, take a trip into Lake Como for a day, where we'll be hopping onto some Venetian-style boats and cruising around as if we were with George Clooney, we'll go and visit a beautiful villa and yeah, just I think really appreciating the lakes on the water is the way to do it.

Olivia Windsor:

And it's just such stunning views and relaxed vibes. And of course, these will all be private boat tours too. We'll have relax time as well when we're in Lake Maggiore. So that will be, you know, a nice time to reset because this is a longer tour. And then we go into beautiful Piedmont after we've had our time around the lakes. And as we go into Piedmont, we are sticking to the countryside roads and we're going into the famous UNESCO heritage Langhe region, which I was there on the weekend and it is absolutely stunning. There's vines as far as the eye can see, the rolling hills, little villages, so much charm, it's just gorgeous. So we'll be there for the end of the trip and again trying some of Italy's best wine.

Olivia Windsor:

So that's where Barolo wine is made. Of course, Barbaresco as well. We'll be meeting the locals. So we've got an amazing local woman who runs our cooking class for us in her family home, you might have heard me mention on previous episodes, or if you've been on tour,

about her pet pig that sometimes runs through the kitchen. So that's always fun. And of course, we'll be meeting a local truffle hunter and learning about his trade and seeing him interact with his dog. It's such an important part of Piemontese culture. So yes, we'll be, you know, visiting a lot of the bucket list worthy places - Lake Garda, Lake Como, Lake Maggiore.

Olivia Windsor:

But actually, it'll be about meeting the locals and hearing the stories that will really bring those places to life.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Thanks, Liv. I think one of the major things that I wanted to bring up today was that this was probably something that we haven't maybe done the best job of, actually. But Carolyn, one of our very special repeat guests, mentioned this to me, that she really enjoys this part of our tours - is that we do go to some of the major places that people want to see. So we're not simply going off the beaten track fully, but when we go to places that are, you know, very popular, like Lake Como, we're going to do it in a slightly different way, in the way that you're going to still have that wow experience, but it's not going to be like a mass tourism experience, shall we say? So we do a lot of work when we're designing our tours around timing and just choosing really carefully the experiences and the perspectives that we want you to have. Because, you know, these places are very, very popular for a reason, and they are incredible. Like, I have to say, like Sirmione, which is like this tiny little town in Lake Garda.

Katy Clarke:

It is straight out of a fairy tale. It is so cute. There are swans going under the drawbridge. There is a drawbridge. You know, there's a moat. I don't know if you really wanted to be a princess in a castle. You can actually fulfill those dreams.

Katy Clarke:

But we do this, and it's a very popular town, but we do it in such a way that you can really enjoy it and appreciate it for the reasons why it became popular. And that's what I think makes our tours very special, actually. And so each of our tours has that approach, but we're talking about the Northern Italy Tour today. And that's why I wanted to bring up little Sirmione, which is. Is a super cute little town, and just on the shores of Lake Garda, which you should definitely go check out if you come with us or if you don't. I'm highly recommended. Okay. Now, we are also traveling from east to west.

Katy Clarke:

And what I think is really lovely about this approach is that you're seeing a completely different culture from A to B. And it's really difficult sometimes to explain to people why everything changes so much. So even from province to province, you are seeing a different culture, a different way of life, and still, though, the same passion for the local environment. And so it was in Lombardy where I did an olive oil tasting, and the lady who led it was so funny, and it makes me laugh to this day because she was like, we make the best olive oil in

Italy. It has got the best polyphenols or whatever those chemicals, good chemicals are. They are, you know, extra heightened in our olive oil that you can't get it anywhere else.

Katy Clarke:

And it's so funny because, you know, everyone has this pitch that they say, but I love this, they're so passionate about what they do. And you can see the differences in terrain, which are quite significant, and also the culture. What do you think about that travel from east to west?

Olivia Windsor:

I agree, because you're starting in the Veneto region, where there's Venice and I mean, you're literally on the water. And that's. The food culture as well is completely different. A lot of seafood there. The small cicchetti, the small bites, there's the Prosecco wine. And then you're traveling into Lombardy, where, besides just the terrain being completely different, you're on the lake. So, yeah, there's still water, but completely different. The food is completely different as well, and a lot heavier.

Olivia Windsor:

We're talking about a lot of butter here as well, a lot of cheeses. The wine again is different. So we've got the Francoscorta wine. And then when you finally end up in Piedmont, it's different again. Definitely. I mean, my husband would not like - he's from Torino, who would not like to be confused with the Milanese, because even though they're only an hour apart on the train, completely different culture, completely different food, completely different landscapes. So I think a good way to think about it too is just, you know, by the difference in the food culture across these three places that are - so on the map they're so close together, but completely different way of eating, a different way of living as well.

Olivia Windsor:

From Venice to Turin, it's a completely different lifestyle. I should have mentioned before that we end this trip in the city - Turin. And so you'll see a huge difference in what looks on the map to be quite a small distance, I guess.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely. Because Turin is obviously quite close to France. So you get quite a French influence in Turin, whereas over in Venice it's, you know, heavily influenced by their incredible republic that where they basically controlled the Mediterranean. So the contrasts, just in which is a short distance for some of us who come from these big countries, like we do, it's quite astounding, actually. So I find it really exciting.

Olivia Windsor:

Absolutely. I love it. I love the. Yeah, the difference in culture in such a kind of small part of part of the country. Amazing.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, beautiful. So the other thing that we wanted to touch on here is the lakes. So I have a particular passion for the Italian lakes, as I mentioned before, because this was the first place in Italy that I really set eyes on and like, mentioned. There was no Instagram or anything like that. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I just arrived there and I was on a coach tour. I thought I was in heaven.

Katy Clarke:

I didn't know what was going on. So, I mean, this - we don't have huge lakes in Australia, so. And we do not have huge mountains. So I got the whole package. There was the mountains, the lakes, and, you know, these cute little cobblestone villages. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Katy Clarke:

I thought this place was like something out of a fairy tale book. Anyway, so since then, I've really gone on to explore a lot of the lakes up in the north there. And I really find them so beautiful and so different and unique. And of course, on this trip, we start in Lake Garda, which a lot of people have heard of, but we also take a little detour into another lake, which is called Lake Iseo. Now, this is pretty nice. It's... if people who have been there, it's one of those if, you know, you know, places, people who have been there will just go, oh, Lake Iseo.

Katy Clarke:

It's a place where the locals go and it's completely charming, beautiful nature, and we can't wait to show our guests that area. And of course, we do stop at Lake Como, as Liv mentioned. And Lake Como, also a very special place to me, actually, because I've spent quite a bit of time there. But, you know, it's maybe not what you expect. Like, okay, as an Australian, sometimes when I go overseas, I'm really expecting a lot of broad open spaces and a lot of nature with not a lot of buildup of, you know, towns or dwellings or things like that. Because in, you know, sometimes in Australia, if you want to go on a road trip, you can be going for a long time before you see a house or something like that. So Como was.

Katy Clarke:

It's stunning. Like, it's absolutely gorgeous. But it is quite built up, especially down the Como end and around Bellagio in the central lake area. So it's got a different vibe completely to Lake Garda, in fact, and also completely different to Iseo. And then of course, we also spend time at Lake Maggiore, which goes up into Switzerland, actually. So we don't go into Switzerland, unfortunately, it's a little bit too far. But where we stay around in Lake Maggiore is this beautiful town, close by called Stresa and off Stresa is this island which is called Isola Bella.

Katy Clarke:

And it's stunning. Okay. Like you've got this villa, you know, gorgeous gardens. And if you're a garden lover, this is really the area. So they're beautifully manicured and they're very refined. So that's Maggiore. Gorgeous. You're going to have a very different experience.

Katy Clarke:

It's different lakes. So I think it's really wonderful to see the contrast not just in the landscapes of the hills and the mountains, but also in the lakes because. Yes, again, very unique.

Olivia Windsor:

Beautiful. Can't wait.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And so what experiences do you think people will enjoy doing? I mentioned a couple Liv, like the. They can go over to see the Borromean Islands on Lake Maggiore, but what other specific lake experiences will they have?

Olivia Windsor:

So on Lake Garda, we've got a beautiful sunset boat ride which will be very relaxing. And we start in Sirmione, so the fairy tale town that Katy was talking about before. And we sail around the lake with the aperitivo in hand. So we start that boat tour from Sirmione and then we end up in Desenzano, which is another beautiful lakeside town. And it's at sunset, so we'll have a gorgeous view as the sun's setting over the lake and all these little fairy tale towns around us. So that's a really special one. Instead, when we're in Lake Como, we do a daytime boat trip, but we'll be in a different kind of boat, like a Venetian-style.

Olivia Windsor:

Like if you think of George Clooney and his boat, that's kind of what it looks like. Check out the website page because you can see a great photo of Katy and some of our team in the boat that I'm talking about. And it's a very glamorous kind of experience, I guess, as we're jetting around Lake Como and we pull in at one of the famous villas and we have a little tour there and then we get back in our boat and we head off to Bellagio and we have a nice lunch. So that's kind of a really, kind of like a movie star experience, I guess we could say. So, yes. There's some of the experiences you can look forward to on the lakes.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, well, I wish I was going. Every time I talk about this, I'm like, ah, oh, I need to go back. Oh, dear. Anyway, Liv. I think a lot of people think traveling in a tour might not be... they kind of don't I think it's their cup of tea and it's really Interesting because both live and I, I would say, and most of our team too, I would say, are very highly independent travelers and have traveled around the world mostly independently, except more recently, I've seen the light. But it has to be a certain type of tour that I want to go on because the reason to join a tour like this is because, well, first of all, you get everything done for you, we look after you. This is a big passion of ours, isn't it? We do get this feedback often is that we do really look after everyone in a very considered way.

Katy Clarke:

And we love to make sure that people are having the best time when they're in Italy. From the selection of a wine, down to the dishes that they might like based on their preferences or their dietary requirements. Like we, we have a lot of attention to detail, but when we are on tour, we are able to access experiences that you cannot have. Yeah, if you're traveling independently or you can, but you are going to be paying significantly more. So I know, Liv, you did a quote for someone who wanted a private version of one of our tours and it ended up being a 70 to 80% higher price because it's a private experience. So they are very exclusive experiences. So when you come on these boats with us in a group context, we can have a, you know, a better value experience, shall we say. So first of all, there's a cost element.

Katy Clarke:

And the second part of it is also that we can't access these things, generally, as independent travelers. And that's because a lot of these people not in the interest to open up to like one or two people, but it is in their interest - well, they do enjoy bringing groups through to experience their boats or their farm or what have you. So this is the reason to join a tour. You want to have the access to these beautiful experiences, you want to be looked after and you want to also meet some like-minded people. And I think it's really amazing. I love seeing all the little text messages that come out for 20 people. We have a WhatsApp group that we get people to collaborate on while they're on tour and everyone's sharing their photos and stories and it is so lovely, so beautiful relationships form.

Katy Clarke:

And I think that's probably the thing that I love the most, actually, that people have these experiences of their time in Italy and they have formed a bond and connection with people that they may never have met.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, I agree, I agree. I think as well, something that really strikes me in all of the reviews that we get too is that when you come on tour with us, you are able to feel like a pseudo Italian rather than just a tourist, so to speak, because you really do get access to people, places, stories that you just can't have when you travel in Italy by yourself. Unless you speak fluent Italian, unless you've got lots of local friends here, it's kind of impossible to have that experience otherwise.

Katy Clarke:

And that's, I guess, how these tours evolved, is that I was able to travel with Liv and with my husband, who speaks Italian, and a whole world opened up towards me and I was like, wow, I missed out on all of this stuff and I just really wanted more of it and I wanted to have people experience that too. Okay, now I just wanted a little bit of an insight in some of these smaller towns that we're going to visit in some off-the-beaten-path areas. So, one, I just want to bring up one. And this is another place that's very special to me, and it's called Brescia. Now, Brescia is a small city in Lombardy and you may not have heard of it, except unfortunately, it was a very central area where Covid first emerged, which was very sad. And if you go back

into the archives of this podcast, you can hear me talking and getting quite emotional about the experience that I had in Brescia and how sad I was for the people there during 2020 when things were particularly bad. But anyway, we're going back, we're going there on this tour and it is an absolutely wonderful town. And the reason it is so wonderful from my perspective is that it's like a little potted history of Italy in the one spot.

Katy Clarke:

So it has Roman ruins, it has Etruscan ruins, it has medieval churches, it has Renaissance palaces, and you can just walk around this beautiful city and just have like a little Italian history experience in half a day. And not only that, but the food is amazing and they're very friendly people, because they don't see many visitors, so they're quite surprised. I remember going into a little alimentari, like a grocer and we were trying to buy some cheese, of course. Of course, we were trying to buy some cheese and that was, oh, where are you from? And what are you doing here? And they loved it. And it's such a, like - when you have that curiosity and that mutual curiosity, I find it so refreshing, especially these days when people can be a little bit cynical. But like, you have this, like, oh, where, why are you, what are you doing here? What, what brought you here? And I just think it's, it's absolutely lovely.

Katy Clarke:

But, yeah, how about you, Liv? Why do you think people fall in love with this type of place?

Olivia Windsor:

I think as well because it's we, it's what we would say is authentic, I guess. And that can mean a lot of different things in a lot of different contexts. But it's having an experience like what you describe, where it's not swarmed with tourists, there's still people going about their day to day daily life. They're going to the alimentari, they're going to the local baker, they're going to the local butcher, and they're just getting on with their day-to-day life. And it's an opportunity when we visit these places to actually see how Italians live in small, in small towns. And that's not to say that in Milan it's any less authentic. It's a different kind of authentic up there. But on our tours, I think we like to bring you to these small towns because they're places that you normally wouldn't visit by yourself.

Olivia Windsor:

Whether that's because it's hard to reach them transport-wise or because maybe you need to know Italian or simply you might not have heard of them before, they might not be on your radar. So it's, yeah, real joy to bring people to these smaller towns in the countryside.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, yeah. I do love Brescia. I went to a food festival there Liv. I might have mentioned this before. Do you tell this story quite a lot? It was a slow food festival and it was another one of these, I guess it was a lights on moment about how different things could be if you approached it in a different way. And basically whole of Brescia was out and you would go from each of these historic sites and have a glass of wine, have a local dish, and everyone was

kind of like leaning up against a fountain or some sort of, you know, Roman column. This is. And sadly, that festival doesn't happen anymore.

Katy Clarke:

But it was really wonderful and I, I really hope everyone who's joining the tour will actually enjoy their time in Brescia, because I certainly did. Okay, now let's just quickly skip over to Piedmont. And we do talk about Piedmont quite a lot on the podcast, basically because Olivia is often there like she is now, and it is such a beautiful place. And I think it's really coming onto the map that we've noticed a lot of people, a lot posted in Piedmont lately. But if you could pick like maybe two or three things that you think are super special about Piedmont Liv, what would you say that makes it different from the other Italian regions? And why we wanted to include this in this tour.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, I've touched on this before, but I think especially with Piedmont, it's the fact that it's so unexpected. So it's not immediately what you would think of when you picture Italy. And I really love that because it's such a pleasant surprise. So, yes, it is becoming a little bit more on the map, but it still feels quite Untold. They're not the hordes of tourists that you might get in other places like Venice or Florence. So you can really soak in the local culture, I feel, because of this. And you actually can really still see the local culture.

Olivia Windsor:

It's not, you know, the same shop again and again and again down the main streets. So that's the part that I really love, because it feels like you can still live in the steps of the actual Piemontese people while you're here. And I know when we've taken groups in the past appearedmont on our Piedmont tours, they absolutely love that element about being in Piedmont, because it feels. It feels really real, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. I'll give you an example. The other day my husband Andrea and I went to see an art exhibition in Piedmont with work from Botticelli. And you know, if that had have been in Florence or Venice or Rome, it would have been absolutely packed. There are about four other people there and you know, we're seeing this art exhibit right next to the Royal Palace in the middle of town.

Olivia Windsor:

So I just, I love that. I think that's an experience that, yeah, you. It feels very real. And then obviously Piedmont, the landscape in the countryside is absolutely stunning. It's not UNESCO heritage for no reason. So, you know, vineyards as far as the eye can see, castles as well. This was a royal region, of course, with the family, the Savoy family, who were kings living here. So there's lots of castles that they've left in their wake.

Olivia Windsor:

And undoubtedly, the food and wine, and the culture of food and wine, is so important here. So that's another reason that we had to include Piedmont on this tour.

Katy Clarke:

It's a really incredible journey from start to finish. Veneto, Lombardy, Piedmont. Lakes, mountains, food, wine. You know, there are a lot of elements to a tour and when we're building a tour, we're not just thinking about logistics. And I think this is really, really important to get across. We are thinking about how you're going to connect with this part of Italy when you go there. So for us it's about building up some and I think sometimes travel can be a little bit transactional. We're going to go here, there - we've got to get the logistics in order. But for us on our tours, this is a really important aspect. What we're trying to create is that you have an emotional response to the area that you're visiting and the experiences that you have. And Liv, can you maybe expand on that a little bit, too? Because you've actually seen this many times in real life, in fact. And so it's a very special experience for us to have to know that we're experiencing, achieving this goal.

Olivia Windsor:

I agree. You know, just to give you a little insight into previous tours that we've run around the country, I've had guests in tears, happy tears, of course. I've had guests absolutely embracing locals with big hugs as if they're long-lost sisters or long-lost relatives. So there are some huge emotional reactions that I guess can have, as well as just feeling simply, you know, moved by the different stories. So I think what's important about our tours is that it's the human side of travel. So it's not, as I, you know, we keep saying, it's not just ticking off a list of places. So even when we go to and visit a winery, it's not just that we're going and we're tasting a Barolo wine and, oh, that's very nice, isn't it? But it's actually who you meet behind the wine because we sit down with the winemaker and get to know his story about his family and what they were doing in the land for generations and his, you know, different challenges and highs and lows of his day-to-day life. When we're eating pasta, we're not just having a delicious bowl of pasta, but we're learning the story behind it and why they eat pasta with this sauce at this moment, at this time, and the stories behind all of that.

Olivia Windsor:

So that also, you know, allows our guests, I think, to really understand the places that we visit in a more holistic way. And of course, the truffle hunt as well. That's always a really emotional experience, I think, because it's so unique to see how the truffle hunter interacts with his, you know, trusty dog and talks to the dog in their dialect, not even in Italian, but their dialect of where they're from and then lots of dialects within a region. So that's so special to witness too, because you're seeing a really hyp. Hyperlocal moment of culture that you just, I think, can't see if you're not with us or with friends in Italy that are Italian. So all of these experiences, I think, really do allow for a huge range of emotions to sweep you up into. I know when we've been at different festivals and events in Italy, it really can bring you to tears. I have been like that myself.

Olivia Windsor:

And because you just get swept up in the emotions of everyone around you and feel the community spirit and the pride and joy in these long traditions that they have. So, yeah, it is quite emotional in a very good way.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And I think if someone is feeling overwhelmed with life and their busy lives in our - it's really our English-speaking countries that, where we have, I think, this particular challenge. If you're feeling overwhelmed by that, this is the ultimate escape. And I feel so very lucky and I'm so grateful that I have this job and I get to work with people like Olivia and our tour hosts. And if you've met Manuela, Giulia and Sylvia and Henna and Sarah, you will know that they all share this really beautiful spirit and passion of... for Italy and Italian culture in the way that Liv's just described. And it is an emotional experience and it just reminds you how life actually can be if we choose it to be.

Katy Clarke:

And I think for me, having that, that regular reminder is something that really keeps me grounded and appreciative of not only what I have here, but also what I can experience. And I always try and take a little bit back of that lifestyle when I come home. Just piano, piano, slower, slower. And appreciate those little things. Okay, so before we wrap up Liv, maybe you can share who you think this trip is best suited for because, you know, I think some people may not be sure. Is this trip for you in terms of who's going to be on the tour? And of course, we keep the groups very small to 12 people or less. And it's a beautiful convivial group and maybe you can share some of the people that have really enjoyed trips in the past.

Olivia Windsor:

So certainly we get a lot of couples on our trips, but we also get solo travelers, we get sisters. In fact, we're welcoming one of our return guests back next year and she's bringing her sister along for the ride this time. And we even get mums and daughters or parents with their daughters, normally. So, you know, it's suited for a lot of different people. I think this trip in particular would be great for a first-time traveler, but also a return traveler to someone who wants to dig deeper. Maybe you've been to the main cities, and you want to go and explore the countryside or some of these more off-the-beaten-path places, or maybe it's your first trip and you're looking for a really immersive experience across the north of Italy. So I think this trip could suit a lot of different personalities. And, you know, if you like good food, if you like wine, if you want to feel like a real Italian, but, you know, be led along the way with care and expert guidance by a lovely tour host then this is the trip for you?

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think what really unites the guests that come on our tour is that they're a little bit curious. You know, if you're a curious person and you've got an open mind about how things could be a little bit different and you want to understand a little bit more about a different culture, then these are the type of people that come along. Usually, they've got a very strong appreciation of food, not always wine, because we have had people on the tours that don't drink wine, and that's 100% fine. But I think when they experience the wineries, it's not just about wine. It's actually about nature and understanding seasons and how when they're in the winemaking process, it relates back to the land and a whole lot of

other cultural implications that you may not expect. So if you're not a wine drinker, you won't feel left out, in fact.

Olivia Windsor:

No, not at all. In fact, one of our return guests, who's been on about, oh, five or six tours with us, he is not a wine drinker at all, and he really enjoys our visits to the wineries because, as you say, it's about the people behind them, the stories behind them, and often they have a very interesting philosophy on life that this guest in particular always really enjoys hearing.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, amazing. Okay, thank you, Liv.

Olivia Windsor:

Thank you.

Katy Clarke:

I love talking about tours you. We can talk about tours a lot. Liv and I - we are very good talkers and very good talkers about tours. So... but this one is very special because it is something that we've wanted to create for a while, and it touches some places that are very, very important to both of us. And we know that we can show people a different side of this part of Italy that they may not have expected in a very beautiful, locally enhanced way. And so we're really thrilled to be bringing it to everyone. So, Liv, before we wrap up completely, maybe you want to let everyone know when the tour dates are next year.

Olivia Windsor:

Yes, Katy, we sure do want to let everyone know when we're running this tour for 2026. So we're going to be visiting in September. So the dates are September 21st to October 2nd. I think this is the perfect time of year to be in this region. It's, you know, beautiful temperatures while we're on the lakes, and then we're getting right into fall season by the time we get to peak Piedmont, which means truffles, it means great wine, means harvest season, Porcini mushrooms. So, yes, it's a really nice time of year to be in this part of Italy.

Katy Clarke:

And we already have some bookings for this tour, don't we, from our wonderful repeat guests? So, yeah, don't - if you're thinking about it and you think like you might be interested, do reach out to info@untolditalytours.com and if you'd like some more information, we can definitely send you the full itinerary and all the details of the hotels and places that we're going to be staying at. We'd love to do that for you. Oh. So I hope everyone's enjoyed this peek into our tour and the way we design it and the philosophy that we put behind the tours. And if you are inspired to join us, we'd love to have you along and share this really special part of untold Italy with you.

Olivia Windsor:

Can't wait to take everyone there. Thanks, Katy.

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Katy Clarke:
Thanks, Liv.

Olivia Windsor:
Ciao, Ciao.

Katy Clarke:
Everyone, when I said that I had no idea what to expect when I arrived in Italy, it kind of took me by surprise and sent me back in a time machine. I remembered those days on Lake Garda and just how in awe I was of the beauty, culture and history all around me that I had no way of anticipating. Simply because we had no internet.

It's very sad in a way that now we think we know what to expect when we visit places, down to where to eat, and even how to get a photo we've seen on Instagram. We've almost lost the ability to go into a place unseen and let it surprise and delight us, but with our tours, we hope to reignite that spirit of adventure and feeling of wonder. Olivia and I both feel strongly connected to northern Italy for different reasons. For both of us, the landscapes and culture pulled us in, but in the end, it was the people we met along the way that cemented our passion for the north of Italy.

So if today's episode sparked your curiosity about exploring beyond the usual tourist trail, and discovering the food, wine, history, and stories that make Northern Italy so enchanting, why not check out the show notes at untolditaly.com/294? There, you'll find all the details about the tour, places we mentioned, and ways you can connect with us to learn more or join us on this unforgettable adventure.

Before I go - We absolutely love hearing your feedback and reviews—it's what keeps Untold Italy growing and helps more people find us. If you enjoyed the episode, please consider leaving us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. And if you'd like to go deeper, our Untold Italy premium app has ad-free episodes plus curated travel guides to inspire your next Italian adventure.

Next week, we're exploring more of our wonderful Untold Italy, and I can't wait to share it with you. But for now, it's "ciao for now!"