

Untold Italy Episode 296: Sicily in Spring - An Italy Travel Dream For the Ages

There's a moment in Sicily, usually somewhere between the waft of sea breezes on Palermo's Lungomare and the sight of ancient temples rising in the distance, when you realise that this island isn't like anywhere else and it's in springtime that Sicily is at its most magical. And now we're going to find out why.

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, amici. Ciao friends. Here we are, closing in on the end of October, and hasn't the year just flown by? We're about to wrap up our final tour of the year with Untold Italy Tours, and it's been such a wonderful time for the team, meeting our guests and reconnecting with quite a few others too, that have been on trips with us before. A big shout-out to everyone who has traveled with Untold Italy over the past few weeks and before that, too.

Katy Clarke:

I've been seeing so many beautiful smiling faces and such lovely feedback. I'm only a little bit jealous, just a little bit, and wish I could be there for every tour, but unfortunately, as life has it, I cannot be. But as those of you who know and have traveled with us before they do know that our incredible team of hosts, a shout out to Giulia, Manuela, Henna, Sarah, Sylvia, and of course Olivia, are important and actually critical glue that makes our tours so very special. They are all bilingual, Italian and English speakers. They have a passion for Italian life and showing hospitality that knows no bounds. Our Google reviews are simply bursting with love for our team and I could not be prouder. So you may know me as the voice of our company, but I hope it's clear that this is a team effort and I am so, so very grateful to be surrounded by such talented, kind and clever women who make the vision of these tours come to life and share the Italy that we love with you. I'm going to read out the latest review from one of our guests, Lynn, who visited Puglia with us.

"Wow. What an amazing six days in Puglia. Our tour host, Sylvia, was exceptional. Local experiences, food, wine and accommodation. And our small group of fellow travelers, all first-rate. We couldn't have asked for more. Leave the planning to the professionals and you won't be disappointed. We can't thank you enough. Till next time."

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

Katy Clarke:

Oh Lynn, we hope to see you again. Thank you so much for that lovely review. It's such a pleasure to host our guests who are all curious, friendly and open to new experiences, whether that be meeting baby goats or making your own mozzarella. And we cannot wait to show you our Untold Italy in 2026. So joining me for today is another one of our tour hosts, the lovely Henna, who you may have heard on an earlier episode. Henna and I can't stop talking about Sicily, so I've asked her back to talk about my favorite season on the island, which is spring.

Katy Clarke:

Benvenuta Henna. Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Henna Garrison:

Thanks Katy. It's always nice to be here. Very excited to be chatting about Sicily today.

Katy Clarke:

Oh yes, it's always lovely to chat with you, Henna. And we got so many great comments from our last podcast about Sicilian sweets and I guess there's a lot of sweet teeth out there, but Sicily always draws a crowd for all good reasons. And so today I wanted to chat about how the island changes with the seasons and, in particular, how it bursts into life in springtime. But before we kick things off, can you remind our listeners a bit about yourself and how you come to have such a strong connection to Sicily?

Henna Garrison:

Oh, absolutely. And this is such an amazing topic. So I came to Italy in 2014 to study food, culture and communication at the University of Gastronomic Sciences up in Piemonte, which is the north of Italy. And then I slowly made my way down south. I lived in Bologna for a little, and I actually took a solo weekend trip from Bologna to Sicily in March, I think it must have been 2016. And I fell in love with the island on the first day of spring, essentially seeing everything come back to life. And on that weekend, I decided to move to Sicily. It took me about six months to organize everything, but since 2017, I had been living in Sicily between first in a really rural area called Valledolmo, which is a mountain town of about 3,000 people, and then I moved to the coast in Cefalu.

Henna Garrison:

I'm actually in Sicily at the moment, on vacation right now with my dad, but I've moved up north to Liguria as of last year. So, really happy to be back and happy to talk about Sicily in the seasons.

Katy Clarke:

Of course, Henna is one of our amazing Untold Italy Tour hosts. And if you're coming on tour with us, she can tell you all about all the different parts of Italy that she loves. And you speak fluent Italian, too, don't you, Henna?

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Henna Garrison:

Absolutely. I mean, fluent's a strong word, you know, Everyone always is like, wow, you speak Italian. You speak so well. And I'm like, yeah, but you notice my accent, don't you? And they're like, yeah, you're American. So I hold on to that part of me.

Katy Clarke:

Yes, exactly. But, I mean, I think it is hard, someone who's learning it and struggling very hard with the verbs at the moment, it's all those tenses that's the struggle. Anyway, I'll get there one day. But I do admire all of you that fluently speak, speak different languages. It's amazing. Now, Henna, there's something about Sicily, and I think that if you've been there and you felt that connection, then you really do know that it is something. But how would. How can you describe it? What's the spirit of Sicily?

Henna Garrison:

It's such a good question. The first word that comes to mind is generous. Like, it is a generous island, but it's also challenging and stubborn and complicated. But, you know, I always say there's a little bit of magic in Sicily. It's a place, it's a continent, it's a whole island, it's a whole continent, and it contains so much complexity, so much diversity, and I think that's the beauty of it. And at its core, at its very core, the people, the food, the geography, its identity, there's this spirit of generosity that just pervades the island.

Katy Clarke:

I didn't know what you were going to say when I prepped you with this question, but because, you know, when we were talking about untold Italy and building out what we wanted our brand to be about, it was really about generosity. So when you said that, I was like, huh, maybe that's it. Maybe that's it. That's what makes me so connected to Sicily and how I felt that same way. Because like you, my first experience of Sicily was in springtime. So I have a special connection with that. And we had some family living in Messina and we were able to, you know, spend Easter with them, which kind of blew my mind, you know, because it was such a unique and special community-driven experience that I had never experienced before in my life. And I don't know that I ever will again.

Katy Clarke:

But yeah, it did resonate with me very strongly. So I love it. Generosity. Fantastic. So going back to that first experience in spring, what's the first thing that comes to mind when you think about Sicily in springtime?

Henna Garrison:

I mean, it's just a reawakening. Like, it's a, it's a real reawakening, I think of the colors. I mean, I lived a long time in the center of Sicily, so in a very rural, agricultural-driven area. We were surrounded by wheat fields and you get these, these pops of color. So you have the young wheat that's this just vibrant, bright green. That's gorgeous. And then all of the fields are bordered by wildflowers, so you have like purples and reds and yellows, and it's, it's impossible to capture. You really feel this like, brightness in spring in Sicily.

Henna Garrison:

And I think too, whether you're in the mountains or you're on the coast, there's a general, like, coming back to life. Spring starts early, first of all. You can have gorgeous days in the winter that really feel like spring. But people withdraw a little bit. You, you know, you have the holidays, you have family time, you spend more time indoors. And so in spring, you start to see everyone coming out and really embracing, you know, the landscape, the sunshine, each other. Maybe folks have, you know, spent more time with family, so friends are now coming back, getting out together. And it's so tied to, you know, tied to the land and the agricultural.

Henna Garrison:

So you have that same, you know, getting out in your fields, doing the pruning, doing all of the work that you need to be done that's maybe been neglected over the winter, that sort of thing.

Katy Clarke:

And it's also the time for celebrations, isn't it? So for us, seeing Easter and the lead up to Easter or Pasqua was, yeah, like nothing that I've ever experienced before. So in Messina, which is probably like some other towns, they haul the floats, these wooden floats through the town and they are very heavy. They only walk maybe a few meters. It's like you know, maybe 10 or 20 guys, really strong guys holding these floats or wooden structures and they sort of stagger, I would say, but I mean, everyone's sort of cheering them on and wanting them to, to keep moving. It's. It's really amazing.

Henna Garrison:

Yeah, it's a beautiful sense of community. March 19th is San Giuseppe. So typically, the start of official spring is the 20th or 21st. And here in Sicily, San Giuseppe throughout Italy is Father's Day. But here in Sicily, it's particularly celebrated and it's beautiful because it's one of the first processions where, like you said, Katy, the folks get together and there are big processions, big parades, celebrations of San Giuseppe. And it's really coming to get, like it's sort of the start of that, that Easter season, a big coming together. And then you, of course, move into Easter, depending on where that falls for the year, you can see a lot of things setting up the carnival, all of that, you know, all of that. So it is.

Henna Garrison:

There's a lot of celebration in spring in Sicily.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And of course, you know, celebrating the countryside all around you, springing into life. I remember as well those wildflowers, and in particular, I remember being in Agrigento, which is the Valley of the Temples and around that area. It was just amazing. I think it was just like completely mind-blowing. I had never seen this juxtaposition between nature and history and

the culture all in one easy, not easy package, because it's not easy to digest. It's quite, you know, it's quite... not over... I wouldn't say overwhelming.

Katy Clarke:

I would say more, just it's so grand and so beautiful and so old, you know, so we had a. Haven't got that in our countries. We haven't got those old structures. But. Have you spent much time in Agrigento?

Henna Garrison:

I mean, I've been. Yeah, I've been a handful of times. The Valley of the Temples and you know, you mentioned spring, but they have an almond blossom festival every year in the spring. And that time of year at the Valley of the Temples is gorgeous because you have a lot of the almond trees that are in bloom. You have this fragrance in the air of that scent and then if you've ever been down to Kolymetra, it's part of the Valley of the Temples, but it's an old citrus garden orchard. And there you have...

Henna Garrison:

They have saved a lot of... A lot of different varieties of citrus. So when you go and everything's still in bloom in the spring, it's just. It is overwhelming because you get the sense you. You look up and you see the. The Greek temples and it is grand. It's beautiful. It's a journey of the senses, I would say.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely. And this is slightly a bit ignorant of me, but when I first went to Sicily, I, you know, I knew there were Greek temples, but I didn't quite understand. And then you go and do a little bit of research, and you start thinking, wow, this is incredible because this island has so many layers of history, and it, you know, reaches way back before the Romans, and obviously when the Greeks arrived and they built these temples, which they're still standing. They're over 2,000 years old, and they're huge, and they're still standing in this. It's not a valley even, is it? It's actually a ridge on top of it. But it's quite amazing to see that whole..

Henna Garrison:

Complex. Yeah,

Katy Clarke:

I guess it was a city.

Katy Clarke:

And then we stayed in this little town. And talking about the citrus, I had this amazing salad, which, as people know, I'm a little bit obsessed with salads in Italy, but it was. I think it was orange and capers and was delicious.

Henna Garrison:

A lot of times they do the. Yeah, the fennel, like, fennel and orange - raw fennel, orange. Sometimes some red onion in there. It's so fresh and so good. Obviously, all the foods in the spring are just like. I think a lot of the artichokes, because that's one of my favorite dishes.

Henna Garrison:

And you start getting them in the winter. And then it's funny because when the first artichokes come out, you know, you look at the prices and you're like, oh, okay, okay. By spring, they're just trying to unload any artichoke they can, so you can buy 20 of them for, like, €2. It's unbelievable. And my favorite time of year, because I could eat artichokes forever.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, how do they cook them in Sicily?

Henna Garrison:

Oh, gosh, Katy. Well, there is, like, anyway, so there's a town that is sort of maybe an hour from Palermo called Cerda, and it's the official town of the artichoke. And if you go there they have the festival of the artichoke. And in the town square, there's probably like a 30-foot-tall iron statue of an artichoke. And all of the restaurants there, they do artichoke menus. So it's a set menu.

Henna Garrison:

You go, and I remember the first time I went with my dad, he was visiting and we just got the set menu. They had 10 different antipasti, so 10 different little dishes. There were fried artichokes. There were artichokes and sweet and sour. There were like whole artichokes that are grilled. They had artichoke sort of flan or like little quiche-type things. Then we had artichoke pasta for our first dish. And then of course, you needed to have some grilled meat afterwards.

Henna Garrison:

So that was great. One of my favorite artichoke dishes that a lot of folks don't know is that they do an artichoke caponata. So I think I'm American and a lot of us think of. I mean, most people think of caponata as being exclusively with eggplant or as you all say, aubergine. But the artichoke caponata is something hard to find, but absolutely delicious because you get that sweet and sour flavor and fresh artichokes. So good.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, my gosh, I think that's amazing. I want to go to this artichoke festival. But you know, when you were talking, I was think, wow, this is so interesting because this big artichoke, I'm fascinated with this 30-foot artichoke. Do you know why? Because in Australia, we have this tradition of big things. Like, we have, like, they're kind of like tourist attractions. Like, we have a big banana and a big pineapple. And there is a point to this, I promise. But the people,

James and Amanda, who came on our very first tour in Sicily, they had an avocado farm and James's father had built the big avocado.

Katy Clarke:

So I'm wondering, and I'm hoping that they have seen the big artichoke.

Henna Garrison:

Wow.

Katy Clarke:

I think it would be amazing. I think. I think James and Amanda, if you're listening, you need to go back and see the big artichoke for sure.

Henna Garrison:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

So Agrigento is kind of in the center. And, you know, it's an interesting place because it's actually a little bit tricky to get to, isn't it? So in the past, we haven't included it on our tours because you kind of have to - you have to do a little bit of planning to get in and out.

Henna Garrison:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

But we have included it now in our Highlights Tour because it is an absolute highlight. It is so special and it's so unique. And I've forgotten why the Greeks built it there. It was probably very strategic. It's quite close to the shoreline there. But yeah, it's a very important sort of anchor point. But on this tour, we go all over Sicily in our new Italy Sicily Highlights tour. And we start in Palermo and work our way down to Catania.

Katy Clarke:

And you see lots of different parts of Sicily. And it's hard to explain to people because it's not a very big island, is it? But it's so diverse everywhere that you go.

Henna Garrison:

It is. I mean, you look like you look at the map and it depends, you know, it's not a tiny island, it's not one of, you know, it's not like Capri or something, but it's, you know, it is big enough, but it's still not connected, you know, as we know, still not connected to the mainland. So it is an island truly apart. And then the thing that always amazes me is the geographical differences. I mean, you have a little bit of everything. You do have mountains, there is a place you get snow, you have the valleys, which are just, you know, a lot of the inlands are all rolling hills, agricultural land. And then the coastal towns really vary. And on top of that, you have the distinct feel of every different area.

Henna Garrison:

Because going from Palermo and getting to see, you know, the Arab Norman influence in Palermo and then crossing the island and going down to Noto or Modica, Ragusa, you have all the baroque style. When you're in the little fishing towns, like over in Marsala, you get much more of that Arab Byzantine feel. So it's really. I lived there nine years and I still am surprised by different places, new places, different towns, new feelings. It's truly diverse.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's one of those places that you could spend a lifetime exploring. And I always find it interesting when someone says to us, sometimes when we have our trip planning clients, they say "oh, we're going to... we want to go to Sicily for three days." And I'm like, yeah, a very minimum really is, is seven days. And for us, you know, we started doing eastern and western Sicily because it's really an assault on the senses in a really amazing way because you're getting the sight, the sounds, the smells, and it's very different to the mainland. So it's a fantastic juxtaposition to Florence as an example, because it's really. Florence is so refined and elegant.

Henna Garrison:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

And then Sicily, not saying they're not elegant because some of the people that they have very snappy dressing styles, but it's. It's a different energy there and I find it exciting.

Henna Garrison:

It's amazing that you can, you know, you can have such different feels in. All in the same region, all in the same island. And definitely Sicily has its elegance, but there's something more honest about it. Like it's. It comes from the heart. There's not a lot of facade here. You know, like, I think of Florence as a very dressed-up city, or Tuscany in general is a dressed-up region. It's like manicured, it's curated, it's polished.

Henna Garrison:

And Sicily just wears its heart on its sleeve. Like it. It shows you. It's going to show you also some things that are challenging. I mean, there are parts that are a lot of buildings that have been abandoned. There's sometimes, you know, you do see signs of environmental decay and you see humanity in Sicily. You see the trash as well as the beauty. And I think the juxtaposition is important when as someone who is traveling and who wants to see untold Italy, because you get that in Sicily

Katy Clarke:

And to combine it all, it's the people that are providing that honesty as well. So, you know, they have. Have such big hearts and such big stories to tell. On the first trip that we did in Caltagirone, which is a small town that's very famous for its ceramics, and this young woman,

I'll never forget her. I'll never, ever forget this young woman. She had an amazing command of English and she was roped to help translate to tell the story of her family's business.

Katy Clarke:

And she had us mesmerized. She was just so articulate. She. She was very concerned about the youth of her island, and she wanted to really promote the fact that the young people had so many ideas about how to protect their culture and how to live in a modern world, but still protect their island. And I think Sicily is such a great example of evolution and change because they've welcomed so many different cultures and had so many different people come into their island and so much change over many, many centuries, but they've still evolved and managed to keep a very strong sense of identity. It's quite inspiring, actually.

Henna Garrison:

Absolutely. Yeah, it is. And what you say, Katy, about the younger generation, I mean, the people that you meet and that are invested in staying in Sicily and creating and building new communities and new opportunities, it's a really wonderful generation because Sicily does have a big problem with folks still leaving, looking for work elsewhere. But when you're able to find the committed generation, the younger generation that is staying, they can open up new doors and really help share this island from a perspective that's, you know, hopeful and inspiring. Which is important. Which is really important.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely. And some of those people we're lucky to find when we're on our tours and in a hospitality context because they do tend to gravitate to some of these professions. So winemaking, producing amazing goods. A big shout out to the pistachio producers of Bronte, because, I mean, pistachio is having a moment right now in terms of a flavor. But I've been there for a very long time and I'm here to tell you, you want to get your pistachio goods from Sicily because they're amazing. But also like restaurants and hotels that are very environmentally focused and very family focused. It's very inspiring, actually. And the other one that I really like is the artisans.

Katy Clarke:

So we, on our time in Ragusa, we visit some people that do some incredible painting of the traditional carts and yeah. And I think some of the ways that they've modernized some of the traditional crafts. And you can go shopping in Noto. And this is another shout out to Vicky, who I know who shopped up a storm in Noto. But you can just find so many interesting, unique gifts or presents for yourself if you want to treat yourself.

Henna Garrison:

I have a soft spot for ceramics and Sicily is just a gorgeous ceramic place. Everything from the tiles to the Moors heads to just the figures that they do.

Katy Clarke:

And it's.

Henna Garrison:

It is nice to see there is a lot of tradition when it comes to artisan work. And then you have folks that are willing to break the mold. So there's a ceramicist that I've visited frequently up in the Madonie Mountains and his family for, I think three or four generations, made tiles for, you know for building bricks and tiles for the home. And they also moved into making... this gentleman, he does a lot of Sicily's restoration work for the old palazzo that need the hand-painted tile floors. So he knows how to match the designs and everything. And this is something that he worked on with his father and now he's taken the company into more of an artistic realm. So he does a lot of gorgeous. I mean, he makes these stools that are impossible to describe.

Henna Garrison:

They're sort of like comma-shaped or he does these sinks that are hand-painted. And so from a tradition of really like a building tradition in his family, he's taking it into the artistic realm. And I. I love that as well. I love seeing that and hearing those stories.

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. I love the Moro heads, but I really want what a modern one. Like, I've got my eye on this one that's just this pair that's plain white, and it's more of like a patina on it. It's just. It's really nice. It's more. It's kind of modernized.

Henna Garrison:

Yes. There's a woman in Palermo who does gorgeous modern renditions of the Moor's head. And I. I also. She does a lot that have. That are like this. Like you said, white, and then they have, like, the fruit or prickly pears kind of coming out of them. They're really fun.

Henna Garrison:

They're like. They take the tradition and they make it almost accessible or fun or easy. I love it.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And there's such a great story behind that tradition as well, which we won't spoil for everyone, because it is something that you need to hear from a Sicilian, I would say.

Henna Garrison:

Yes, you do.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. It's just something that's so integral to their culture, this particular story, that you need to hear it in a way that's, you know, from the heart, really. Not that I wouldn't say it from the heart, but I'm going to miss out a bit, and I'm not going to be as passionate, and I don't have the great accent, so. But in other places has a. Like a really strong. So this is a story that has a strong resonance, but probably the one place in Sicily that has the most pull and the most

magnetism of the island, and it really develops its soul around this natural wonder is Mount Aetna, isn't it?

Henna Garrison:

Oh, absolutely, yes. I mean, Aetna just. It's almost like another planet again. You have, like a microcosm or a small. You know, just a. Just a little picture of Sicily entirely in Mount Etna, because the north and the south sides have completely different landscapes. You have a people that has endured, you know, volcanic eruptions over centuries and who have strong faith in where they live and that mountain hovering above them. So it's a really.

Henna Garrison:

It's a really powerful place. And I think the people there have learned to adapt, and their sense of. Yeah, I think I would say faith, like, their sense of faith and security in living in such an untamable, under an untamable geographic thing is unbelievable.

Katy Clarke:

And in springtime, you have, again, you have these wildflowers and everything's very fertile around there. So, again, it's just beautiful to see that volcano smoldering in the distance. It does make you feel like you're in a. You're in a very different place than the mainland of Italy. And I think that what makes it very special, actually. And I find it very exciting. And for anyone who's worried, I mean, Henna, you lived in Sicily for how many years? Like, seven or eight years?

Henna Garrison:

Yeah, eight years.

Katy Clarke:

Eight, yeah. Were you ever worried by the volcano?

Henna Garrison:

No, no. The only worries are sometimes about, like, flights getting delayed, but that's a solvable problem. I've done some beautiful hikes on Etna and with geologists as well. One of our guides, he studies Etna and he follows the eruptions, and he showed us videos of being up there at night and watching the lava flow down the craters, and it's unbelievable. There's a lot of attention paid to Etna, what she's doing, the movements. And then there's lovely stories around how the villages. In the past, when there have been huge eruptions, you can find little sanctuaries, like on the north side. I think it must have been in the 19th - the early 1900s, one of the big lava flows. There's a marker where the lava stopped before reaching the town, and there was a Madonna that was already there, and the people prayed to the Madonna, and the lava stopped at that moment and didn't go any further into the town. So there is a huge. Yeah, there's a huge, you know, a huge faith behind Etna's movements as well. It's beautiful to see. It's not a thing for concern. It's really something of wonder. It's a place of wonder.

Katy Clarke:

I know. I find it very moving, actually. Now, before we head off, I was wondering, you did share this artichoke meal with us, which I'm still in the back of my mind thinking, how can I get to this artichoke festival? But is there any other meals that you especially remember? I know you've broken a lot of bread with people over the years in Sicily, but can you think of a springtime occasion other than the artichoke festival that you really enjoyed?

Henna Garrison:

There's so much. One thing that's wonderful, like ricotta all year in Sicily, is a religion. I mean, ricotta in Sicily is unlike any other ricotta I've had. And the beautiful thing is tasting the changes in the flavor, because it depends so much on what the animals, which in Sicily are mostly sheep - what they're eating. And so the spring ricotta, I really, really feel is like, it's. It's just light. It's fresh.

Henna Garrison:

It's like a cloud. And if you're able to taste it while it's still warm, it's just lovely. That's one thing I love. The other thing, I think you have a lot of, like, barbecues. So we were talking about Etna. There are some wonderful butchers on Etna and some wonderful reaching over into the Nebrodi Mountains. It's a place that has a huge culture of raising a specific type of breeds of pork for consumption.

Henna Garrison:

And they're just - they do great sausages, they do great prosciutto salamis. And these are all like, springtime - you think of getting out and barbecuing, grilling with friends. So there's really, really great, great meat we had. And then, I don't know. I'm just searching. I'm geographically in my mind, traveling through all the places that Untold visits, because each area has its own signature dish.

Henna Garrison:

And the other, you know, the other thing that's coming to mind is - I know you visit Trapani and the salt flats near there, you get really good couscous over there, fresh fish. In the spring, you can have the sea urchin. Ricci di mare is a specialty that not everyone likes, but it's an interesting flavor profile, and it's something that there is a season for it. So I suggest the spring is a good time for that. But, yeah, I could. I do spend days eating, so I could spend days talking about food in Sicily. All I can say is you won't be disappointed, and you can always find something that you'll like.

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. And, you know, when we're on tour and henna, you know, maybe you can describe this, but we do spend a lot of time making sure that you're trying the local delicacies. So, you know, maybe you wouldn't. If you were traveling on your own, maybe you wouldn't know what to look out for or what to order. But because you're with someone, if it's henna or might be one of our other wonderful hosts, they are primed and ready to get you to test out your taste

buds if you're wanting to. You don't have to. We never force anything on anyone, but it's a really great opportunity to try things that you may not - it might not even be on the menu.

Katy Clarke:

But. But we know about it.

Henna Garrison:

Yes. And if we, you know, and if we as tour hosts, forget or maybe don't make you try something. Believe me, the Sicilians will make sure you are trying what they want you to try. Anywhere you go, they have an opinion on what you should order. And I remember standing on Etna, standing outside a butcher shop, just because we were. I was. I was sharing with a group a picture that they had of the ricotta making. And the butcher came out and he had a little tagliere.

Henna Garrison:

A little cutting board of salami. And he's like, no, no, come on, you have to try this. This is our salami! Telling us everything. So, you know, you can't. You can't escape. Of course, you don't have to try anything. But the Sicilians will make sure you're trying the best of what they have to offer. And that's part of their generosity.

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. It's that heart and generosity. So you've spent a lot of time with people that have maybe Sicily for the first time or they're returning. Yeah, you can see it firsthand, how people experience the country. What sort of emotions do they have when they are spending time in or when they're about to leave? What have you noticed?

Henna Garrison:

Everybody feels so connected to Sicily, and everyone is able to find something that resonates with them. And I think that's really a beautiful part of Sicily. People go home knowing that they'll be back. People go home knowing that they maybe have tasted, seen, toured a lot, but that there's always something else to discover there. So there's this mix of just genuine connection, but also this curiosity, this feeling that this place will remain with you and that you won't ever be able to let go of it, that you'll have to come back for more in Sicily.

Katy Clarke:

Well, that certainly is what happened to me. Absolutely. And I would go back again and again, and my entire family would, too. We've have so many beautiful, deep memories of our time in Sicily. It's very special to us as a family. And I think it really informed a lot of what we're trying to do here at Untold Italy as well. Because again, like you said, that spirit of generosity and also just connectedness is what we're trying to achieve with all the different regions of Italy. But I do have a very special soft spot for Sicily.

Katy Clarke:

So, Henna, you know, you're no longer living there, so how do you feel?

Henna Garrison:

Don't pick it up, Katy. It's a tough transition. No, I just. I love it. I made a home here, and I feel at home here. And when I come back. I feel the same way.

Henna Garrison:

And I think that's a feeling that a lot of people get, even in a short amount of time. And, you know, you come back and a lot of things feel the same. You have the same sensation, but then you can always discover something new. And I think that's the great part of Sicily.

Katy Clarke:

Me too. I think I feel very excited and invigorated when I'm there. And also seems like you say, a land of possibilities, too. It's a beautiful place. Oh, Henna, thank you. Grazie mille for your unique perspective on this beloved island. And one day, maybe we'll go there together. Hope so.

Katy Clarke:

I'd love to see it through your eyes.

Henna Garrison:

I would love that. Absolutely. Well, thank you for having me, Katy. I will always willingly talk about Sicily or anywhere in Italy. And I'm so grateful to be part of the Untold team. I love showing... I love showing all of Italy to anyone who is. Wants to discover the Untold Italy. So thank you.

Katy Clarke:

You are welcome anytime. And as I started off this episode, there is so much love for our wonderful tour hosts, and obviously, Henna is one of them. And that's because they do share this passion for Italy. So if you're wanting to see Italy in a very special way, we're very lucky to have people like Henna on our team to show you. And it's, it's hard to describe, but we try and make sure you have feelings about all the, all the good ones about your time. Oh, Grazie. Henna, thank you so much.

Henna Garrison:

Grazie, Katy, Ciao.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao. Ah, Sicily. It's a bit of an assault on all the senses, but we wouldn't have it any other way. I love the springtime festivities, weather, food, and everyone is in a good mood as the winter days fade. I can't wait to see the reactions as people fall in love with the wildflowers at the temples of Agrigento and around Mount Etna. It's just beautiful. I also wanted to mention that there's a very striking tree known as the Judas Tree. And it's named that way because it bursts into bloom around Easter and it has the most vibrant purple blooms.

Katy Clarke:

You'll see this tree all over, but my favorite spot is in the gardens of Ragusa Ibla, where the Val di Noto spreads out below. Ragusa is one of the stops on our 12 day highlights of Sicily trip that takes you across the island from Palermo and the north to the Marsala Salt Pans, the Valley of the Temples, and then southeast to The Val di Noto, Ortigia and of course, everyone's favorite, Taormina. Along the way, we'll not only show you these incredible places, but you'll also meet the people who are the very heart and the very beating heart of this island. You'll soak up Sicily with all your senses. And the best bit, you don't need to worry about a thing. Our trips are almost fully inclusive except for a handful of meals, so that means all activities are included and there's nothing more to pay. Unless you maybe want a massage or you want to buy some souvenirs, you'll stay in hand-selected boutique accommodation, try the most delicious food and wine and experience Sicily in the most magical way. If you'd like to know more about this trip that we've poured our hearts and souls into, I've put some more details into our show notes at untolditaly.com/296 for episode number 296.

Katy Clarke:

And those show notes also include the places that Henna mentioned and that artichoke place, which I'm really thinking I could build a whole trip around. Don't even tempt me before I go. You know, we absolutely love hearing your feedback and reviews. It's what keeps Untold Italy growing and it helps more Italy-loving travelers just like you find us. If you enjoyed this episode, please think about leaving us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app.

Katy Clarke:

And I just wanted to say thank you because we had a gorgeous review from Finland recently. Finland, how exciting. Grazie Ramona. She took the time to write about Sicily and she said, I love your podcast. It is very helpful and inspiring. My best food experiences were in Favignana, where I ate the best arancini with salmon or best pizza in Palermo or the best pasticheria in Erice Maria Gramatico. And it's worth mentioning La Dolceria di Santa Caterina in Palermo with lots of love. So thank you again, Ramona. Really appreciate you taking the time to do that and we really love getting these messages. It's truly why we do what we do.

Katy Clarke:

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