

Untold Italy Episode 306: Italy Ancestry Research Tips and Travel Stories

Do you have Italian heritage? Does it go back generations or is it more recent? If you have been wondering about where and how your Italian family lived before they moved to America, Australia, Canada and all manner of places, and how to get started with family history research, we're sharing some tips and ideas with a listener who found her Italian family and changed the way that she travels in Italy.

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 a tutti. Welcome friends to another episode of Untold Italy. And I'm so excited about today's episode as you're going to meet a few fellow listener who, with some tenacious online and in country research skills, managed to uncover some of the family stories that were part of her family's immigration journey to the United States.

Katy Clarke:

I'm Katy, the founder of Untold Italy and we're a modern travel company that hosts intimate small group journeys across regional Italy. We also assist independent travelers with one-to-one trip planning services and our travel app is full of curated recommendations for the whole of Italy. Every week on this podcast, we talk with locals, fellow travelers, and experts so you can learn more about Italy and focus on the experiences that matter to you.

Katy Clarke:

In just a few moments, you will meet Pam Bernardo, one of our listeners who was keen to share her genealogy research project with you all. And I'm so glad she reached out. Pam has some very practical tips to get you started, but more than that, you'll hear the emotional journey she had walking in the footsteps of her forebears. So let's welcome her onto the show.

Katy Clarke:

Benvenuta Pam, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Pam Bernardo:

Grazie Katy.

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Katy Clarke:

Oh, it's so lovely to meet you, Pam. I love meeting fellow travelers to Italy and it seems like you have been so many times and so maybe can you tell everyone, all our listeners, something about yourself, where you're from and what keeps drawing you to Italy?

Pam Bernardo:

Sure, thank you for asking. I'm a second-generation Italian American on my father's side and I grew up knowing my grandparents. They were alive till I was about 18 so I knew them growing up. We lived next door to them until I was 12 so it was great. Sadly, I did not learn Italian, but I heard Italian a lot. I am a semi-retired public school administrator. I retired once but it didn't stick. So I come via Connecticut and Pennsylvania and I now live in rural Vermont and I do a lot of consulting with the schools here.

Pam Bernardo:

We have kicked up our travel game considerably, my husband and I and I really have a passion for travel and I have a little bit more flexibility to do it now. So we've been exploring the US, mostly the national parks here and the UK and Italy have been our passions lately.

Katy Clarke:

Fantastic. And you're in such a good spot there. You know, there's some nice little airline routes around in to Europe from there. Not too long flights. I know people might argue with me there, but when we do 24-hour flights, that's very long.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes. We can actually get a straight flight from Boston to Rome.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Amazing.

Pam Bernardo:

Oh, it's great. No changing or anything.

Katy Clarke:

Fantastic.

Pam Bernardo:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

So how many times do you think you will have been to Italy so far?

Pam Bernardo:

I've been to Italy eight times. I had the opportunity to take four of my nieces and nephews when they were teenagers at various times and it's great to travel with teenagers. So I took two girls, two of my nieces when they were 13 and 16 to the Amalfi coast and Rome and then I took my nephew and my niece who were 13 and 16 at the time and we explored Florence and we actually went to Ferrari because there's nothing better than seeing a 16-year-old around cars. So we have had some wonderful experiences then. My niece actually studied in Rome for a year and we went over and visited her as well. So it's been great.

Katy Clarke:

That was very kind of her to arrange that for you.

Pam Bernardo:

Exactly. There was no excuse then.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, wow. But I mean, I think there's something really interesting when you've got that heritage behind you and the curiosity that wants you to go and explore a little bit more into like where your family was from and why they left. I don't know if you know, but my husband's family left in the 1950s from Calabria. And I just think, wow, how brave were these people to go somewhere where they didn't know the language, they didn't know even what they were getting themselves into and, you know, just sort of throw caution to the wind and just go for it. I think it intrigues me and I don't have that background to go back and to look at. What was it there that made them leave or what's the story? And I know you've followed on that a lot. What was the motivation for you to go find out about your family?

Pam Bernardo:

I've heard stories growing up, but nothing specific. We knew my Nonna, my grandmother was from a very rural area in Marche. We knew the name of the town, but that was it. She had some relatives and it's interesting that you say, you know, why they left. She was 16 and she left. Her sister was here in the US and that's all we kind of know. And then my Nonno, we knew a bit more about him and knew that he did have relatives still in Italy. He was the only one of his siblings that left, which is another intriguing kind of thing.

Pam Bernardo:

Why did he leave and why didn't anyone else follow? And some things you can find out, and some things are lost in the family lore or in the family heritage. And so I had always heard of these little towns. My father would talk about it every now and then. When my grandparents were alive, they would get pictures or a letter or a phone call from my grandfather's side. And that was always a little intriguing when the picture was shared. But then, as you know, the elderly leave us, those stories are lost and the contact tends to be lost. And as I started traveling to Italy, and you said this earlier, I became a bit more intrigued that it's not just Florence, Venice and Rome. And that's what made me start to really think about "what does

this mean in who I am?" and when you realize it is a very large country. It is not something that you can just explore like a city.

Pam Bernardo:

And the diversity is interesting as well. Both my grandparents came from very different areas of the country. They both spoke dialect, and I don't know that they really could understand each other, which is always stories as well. But that's what really kind of began the focus of where in this very large country were these two tiny little places.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's so interesting, isn't it?

Katy Clarke:

Because, like, geographically, it's not large, but it's large in the fact that to go from one place to the next, even like 100 miles or 100 kilometers, you know, south or north, like, things can really change a lot. And it's, I guess, from, you know, you're from the States, I'm from Australia. Very big geographic countries. And maybe the culture doesn't change so much in those short amounts of distance. But, yeah, it's so intriguing, isn't it, to find those differences? Now, tell me, you did actually make it to your nonna's hometown, didn't you?

Pam Bernardo:

I did. She was from a very small town on the edge of the mountains in Marche. The town is called Piagge, and we were able to secure her baptismal certificate. I had contacted the diocese, and the diocese shared the church in that town. And the interesting thing about the, you know, it's all about the churches. And the baptismal certificate contained the names of her parents, who - which we knew, but it also contained the names of her grandparents, which none of us had any idea of, as well as her godmother, which none of us had any idea of. She was one day old when her father brought her to church to be baptized.

Katy Clarke:

One day old.

Pam Bernardo:

And again, the certificate was all in Latin, so it took a little bit of translating. But, yes, social media has been very helpful.

Katy Clarke:

Okay.

Pam Bernardo:

I would suggest people use it judiciously, but it has been very helpful. A volunteer from the church reached out, and that's how I was able to secure that document. We had always known where she came into, when she immigrated and her ship. And that information was accessible on the Ellis Island website, which is really interesting. That's how we KNEW she was 16. That's

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how we knew who sponsored her and the town that she came from. And so that kind of began the digging, if you will. Yeah.

Pam Bernardo:

And then we made sure that when we were there that the church would be open so that we could go into the church. There are not any relatives that we know of in that area at all. But the volunteer made sure that we could go into the church. Very tiny little town. There wasn't even the requisite coffee shop to get a coffee in the afternoon. I felt bad. The driver just wanted a cafe and, you know, a little snack. And it's a very, very tiny town.

Pam Bernardo:

The church seems fairly active on social media, but just going in, realizing that this was a place where this little tiny baby had been, and that little, tiny baby was my Nonna.

Katy Clarke:

That's absolutely incredible, isn't it? That would have been. Was it very emotional when you walked through there?

Pam Bernardo:

It was. I was expecting the small town. I was expecting a small church. They said it had been renovated numerous times because that area in Marche is near Ancona, which there was a large battle there in World War II. So the church had sustained some damage. So it has been renovated. It's Santa Lucia is the patron saint of that church. And there's the Santa Lucia statue with, you know, no eyes, because that was her martyrdom.

Pam Bernardo:

And it was very emotional. There's, of course, the requisite place where you light the candles and, you know, you feel a presence of, you know, neither of my parents are with us anymore, but in all of this, I just kept saying, oh, my father would be so proud of me. I'm going to start crying now. My father would be so proud of me. Or that we did this, and we're fortunate. We're very thankful that we can do something like this.

Pam Bernardo:

It was quite emotional, just walking around the perimeter of the church and then stopping at the altar and then lighting the candle.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

And I can imagine in a very rural part of Italy, because, again, my husband's family come from very rural part.

Katy Clarke:

You know, like, you think, wow, how did these people get that imagination and that drive to go over an ocean, probably on a boat the size they'd never seen before? I mean, how brave were they?

Pam Bernardo:

I think about that a lot. At 16, she was from this very compromised town. She never learned to read or write in either language. My eldest cousins taught her to sign her name.

Katy Clarke:

Was her name Lucia?

Pam Bernardo:

No, her middle name was Lucia. It was Prassede Rita Lucia.

Katy Clarke:

Ah, yeah. Lucia's. They seem to carry the name of the church, don't they? But I think it's also really amazing how you managed to find all the information out by Ellis Island. And obviously, you know, I've actually been there because I'm really fascinated with these stories of immigration. And they kept such brilliant records, which, like, actually, it's very. It can be very difficult to find out information around Italian heritage, unlike you know, my family's background is British, and, you know, there's a lot, actually, we can go back hundreds and hundreds of years. Whereas with Italians, you know, and everyone's got the same name there, too, it doesn't make it easy, you know.

Pam Bernardo:

Typically, there's, you know, one less consonant or something in the name.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. It is a bit of a challenge for people that want to do that genealogy research in Italian history. So, I mean, I said there's some of the best tips that you've just given that I've heard, actually, because I think it can be quite challenging.

Pam Bernardo:

We tried to do the same thing with my grandfather and realized that it was not the correct Simon Bernardo. And so we always thought he came into New York. And interestingly enough, when I started to do some research on dual citizenship by descent.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Pam Bernardo:

And the company that I had contacted does some preliminary research for you. And lo and behold, they were able to find out that Simone came into Boston.

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Pam Bernardo:

Not New York. Ah, what we assumed. And I wasn't making as much progress on the Ellis Island site with him as I did with her. I think it also depends, and you mentioned this earlier, depending on the town, there were a lot of digital records in San Felice, near Casserta in southern Italy. The records in Piaggi and Marche are not digital, so you would have to dig a lot more in some of that, which is why I started with the church, but his documents started in the town office. And that's another thing that I would suggest to people is that if you can contact the town office, that can be somewhat helpful as well.

Katy Clarke:

And they're called the comune, aren't they?

Pam Bernardo:

Yep.

Katy Clarke:

And there are hundreds of them throughout Italy.

Pam Bernardo:

Oh, yeah.

Katy Clarke:

Some may be more helpful than others, I would suggest.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes. As well as depending on where the communities are located. You know, in Campania, there are still rural communities, but when you're not too far out of Naples or Caserta or that area, while the town is small, it doesn't feel quite as remote.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, that's true. And there was a big American air base there near Caserta, too. So there's a lot of tradition of American people actually living in the area. So I'm sure that they've probably made more of an effort to preserve those records somehow. But how about the language? How did you go with that when you were? When you were there?

Pam Bernardo:

I do have to say, all the times that we've been to Italy, we are very patient. We try to be travelers rather than tourists and are very conscious of whether I have to use Google Translate or I just have to be patient, say it a different way. A lot of smiling greetings of people. The language proved difficult with meeting family, but it was not anything that was handcuffing, if you will. Certain areas, it's more difficult. When we went to Marche, we stayed in just north of there, in Rimini, which is a beautiful seaside town, and there was not a great deal of English spoken, but we were able to navigate the bus to San Marino and it was

fine. So we're fairly adventurous travelers, and I work closely with a travel designer. We use a lot of private drivers.

Pam Bernardo:

We typically don't rent a car. I prefer to use a private driver that often speaks English, and you can even request that. And that's been very helpful as well.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, those people are golden, actually, when you find the people that can help you navigate around, especially in those areas, and especially if you don't want to drive, because you have to drive basically to reach some of these places. I mean, you can take the bus, but I think you need to have a lot of time on your hands. And so, typically when most people are traveling, they don't have, you know, months and sit at the bus stop waiting for that one and only bus of the day to trundle on past.

Pam Bernardo:

The driver, actually, from Rimini - we went from Rimini to Urbino and did a half a day in Urbino, which was a beautiful college town. And then the driver took us through the mountains and the gorges to Piagge. And we wouldn't have had that experience on the bus necessarily.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely not. How lovely is Urbino? I was only there in June this year, and, oh, it's that place that people imagine in their minds of what Italy would be, you know, and there's like, really no tourists there because it's actually quite difficult to get to. And again, if you're short on time, then you're not going to make the effort to go maybe three hours out, you know, but it is definitely worth the detour, and I just love that place. Now, you also met your nonno's family down in Caserta and tell us about that experience, because that was a bit different, wasn't it?

Pam Bernardo:

It was, again, through social media, and we knew we had family there in a town called San Felice a Canello, and there's a couple, San Felice, I think, in Italy, so that one's important. Again, I had a lot of his information through the research that was done for us for the citizenship. And that particular document had an address, a street address, where he was born. And so by, you know, the grace of online maps, I could see a building. And so that became even more intriguing to me that this is interesting. I had a cousin that has done a fair amount of research, family research, going back, and she became Facebook friends, social media friends, if you will. And so I had a contact, I posted on the town's site asking for anyone that might have information about Simone and this particular address.

Pam Bernardo:

And lo and behold, a second cousin contacted me and this gentleman's father's mother (so if we can follow) - so this cousin, father Pasquale's mother, and my grandfather Simone, were

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brother and sister. So Carmela and Simon were brother and sister. They had a son. This son has two sons, and that's kind of where we landed. We then found out that they still live in the ancestral home of my grandfather, which was unbelievable. So we go to Italy every end of October, November, that made that decision as to where we were going to base ourselves.

Pam Bernardo:

So we based ourselves in Napoli, which is a wonderful town, I must say. It is chaotic, it's passionate, and it is wonderful. We were there for six days and it was just great, great. So again, I hired a driver the morning we went to the Royal palace in Caserta, and that afternoon we arranged for the driver to take us out to San Felice a Cancellò, and family greeted us at the door.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, wow. How was that? How did you feel when that happened? That would have been amazing.

Pam Bernardo:

It was amazing. There was the father, there was his wife. He is in his late 80s, his wife and he are in their late 80s, and his two sons and one of the sons' teenage daughter, who acted as our translator, bless her heart, and they even invited our driver in. So we spent a delightful afternoon, about two and a half/three hours with this family. We had the wonderful opportunity to call my aunt, my father's sister. So her father was Simone. So she's this gentleman's first cousin. I called her on the phone and we talked on the phone, and I don't think she got three words out and we were all crying and sobbing and trying to speak through this poor little girl, you know, - teenage girl interpreter. It was emotional, but it was, it was wonderful.

Pam Bernardo:

It was a wonderful experience. Wow.

Katy Clarke:

There is something about family that you can't really pinpoint. I've got twins, actually, and sometimes when they separate twins and then somehow they just know each other when they're together. And I don't know how that works, like genetically or anything like that, but it does seem like that if you've got some, you know, genetic connections, that it can draw those emotional bonds together.

Pam Bernardo:

You know, I look at the pictures and as soon as I saw, especially Pasquale, my cousin, we just look alike. There's strong genes there. But everyone says, "oh my gosh, your eyes are the same". And we're a very short family. Well, none of us are very tall and they're all short. The one son was a nice height. I have to say, Katy, I don't think we're in the door five minutes and the pasta was on the table. And so it is, it's about the food as well, of course.

Katy Clarke:

Especially in Napoli, because my mother-in-law is from that region and it is the good stuff down there, let me tell you. You would have been treated and I can imagine like it's very natural for them to be generous in that respect, but I think, I don't want to assume, but I imagine that you felt so much generosity, not just from the food, but also just their time and just how much they wanted to share. And the smiles.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes, thank you for that memory as well. The smiles and just the genuine hand holding and arms around each other and the kindness of these people that, you know, this gentleman left in 1912 as an 18-year-old eldest son of a family of, you know, six or seven. And here are these people that have taken us in from this random person in the United States that sends a message and says, by the way, I'll be, you know, in your hometown on such and such a day - can I come into your home and meet you? But it was not at all in any intrusive way. It was genuine and loving, which was wonderful.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, that's so lovely. Now I just want to circle back, Pam, because you said you'd been connecting these people on social media, but it was that Facebook specifically, because there's lots of different platforms these days.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes, it was Facebook specifically. And then we would do a private message and we subsequently shared email addresses so it would be more private and not posted in any way publicly.

Katy Clarke:

I bet you're on a WhatsApp group with them now, too, aren't they? They love WhatsApp.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes, they do love WhatsApp. That was one thing I did find out, both in the UK and in Italy to make sure I was up on how to use WhatsApp. They did suggest that. We have been emailing back and forth. We're hoping to do video chat on Christmas Eve with my family and my auntie in another state, so we'll. We'll be traveling there.

Pam Bernardo:

But they're anxious to actually meet her. They spoke with her on the phone through tears. They're excited to be able to video chat a little bit with my aunt. She's 90 and Pasquale is in his late 80s, so we want to be sure to make that connection.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, amazing. Like, that's one of the best things, isn't it, about technology, is that ability to connect people these days, I think I could probably leave off half of it that - well, more than half that we get. But that actual ability is so incredible because again, when they left, I

mean, they probably didn't know if they would ever speak or hear from these people again. They had no idea. And we just sometimes take it for granted that we can do this communication so effortlessly. I mean, I know even when I first started traveling, you'd have to get a phone card, and you'd have to enter in about 5,000 numbers before you got to the phone. And then you would have five minutes to talk. That cost you \$50 or something like that, and you couldn't even see the person. So, I mean, you know, that's like 30 years ago. It's not that long, really. And here we are beaming into each other's homes, are halfway around the world. Amazing.

Pam Bernardo:

Exactly. And even just making those contacts, you know, that some of the research would not have been as easy 25 years ago. Or, you know, when my father would have been interested in that or whatever. You're sending, you know, handwritten letters or something that take forever to get delivered, and you just didn't know exact anything. We wouldn't have known the exact address or necessarily the names of the people. And one of the comments that Pasquale had made, you know, to my husband in his limited English was, you know, why did you wait so long? I didn't know you existed, but now I do. And so now that's what's important, that that connection has been made.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, that's beautiful. And I love how you're staying in touch. That's so, so lovely. And has the way that you approach travel to Italy changed now that you've established those family connections?

Pam Bernardo:

I feel more connected to people.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Pam Bernardo:

As opposed to just connected to, oh, I know I'm from southern Italy, or I know my ancestors are from Marche or a tiny little town. I feel there's a people connection that is stronger than just a geographic connection, and that I think is important. And as I said earlier, we try to really be travelers, not tourists. So there's a sense of when you go to any country, that the culture is somewhat different. It's about their culture, not your culture. And that's what I think - seeing people has been quite important.

Pam Bernardo:

You know, growing up, we always had the bread with the, you know, taking up the sauce, the scarpetta. And when we were sitting at dinner and my husband was doing that, you know, with his fork, Pasquale immediately sent the bread down the table and... "scarpetta! Scarpetta". And soaked up the sauce. So just those cultural kinds of things have made me feel a bit more thoughtful. And as we were talking earlier, you know, what's next? We go annually,

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every year, in late October, sometime in November. But I'm not sure if the Dolomites were next on my list, whether I do it at that time of the year.

Pam Bernardo:

So maybe I need to think about more Southern Italy. We had a delightful opportunity to travel to Bari and Puglia a few years ago, and that has intrigued us as well. So I think it just gives you pause because now, can I really travel to Italy without going to see family every time? Now? I can't not do that. Can you imagine if they found out that I was in Italy and didn't come to see them? That would be terrible. Adds another dimension in that as well.

Katy Clarke:

It does. And actually, you know, I have to say, unfortunately, sometimes I have to actually, actually shut off my social media so they don't know I'm coming, because, you know, when I'm coming for work, I can't because they want to spend so much time with you, and it's beautiful, and they're so generous. But, yeah, it is a different, different way of seeing the country. And it's very special, actually. I think. Yeah. I love that you've had that experience. It's so wonderful.

Katy Clarke:

There's a lot of people that might be a little bit curious about how to even get started. They may have these long-held sort of like inklings in their head that they thought, oh, I might want to chase that up. Where would you suggest that people start doing that?

Pam Bernardo:

I think if you know the name of a town, that might be the place to start. As we've said earlier, there's the town offices. The churches are probably the place that would have the oldest records, depending on where you need to... where the person or family history would be. So you have a little kernel of something that you may be familiar with and you move off of that. But I do think you need to give yourself some grace because you could hit a roadblock. One could be language, and while all the online platforms are great for translating, they're not exactly what you may want. You do need to give yourself some grace and time. And I think that's probably the place I would start with the town offices in whatever piece of family lore.

Pam Bernardo:

Like I said, we didn't know exactly what it was, but whatever piece of family lore you might have and those stories and the other thing, and this is so cliché, but if you have people in your family that know the stories, then you need to find out the stories before the stories are lost.

Katy Clarke:

And it's so easy these days, actually, because you can just get your phone and record it and then by the magic of transcription services. And this is another - actually this is a good use of AI, is that you can actually just upload that audio and it'll transcribe it and then summarize it for you. I mean, and you know, as a, someone who's very passionate about learning and stuff,

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and you, as a former teacher, like we do, we do not advocate rampant use of AI. But yeah, I think there's definitely some uses there and we can speed things up a bit. But yeah, Italy always requires a bit of patience, doesn't it?

Pam Bernardo:

I think that's it. Yes. That's a great way. I, you know, use the map. Look at the map first. Plot out the town, see what it might be near. Is it near something that maybe is a larger town? So many of the churches have consolidated as well or have shared clerical documents. But churches will usually have at least a birth record and a marriage record.

Pam Bernardo:

The other thing is the names. Is there a maiden name of a woman that could help you? We knew both of the maiden names of the grandparents and so that can be helpful as well. Again, going through the church and you may have to go through, they're called something different, but you may have to go through the diocese, which will lead you to the church. So the patience, tackling one thing at a time and not necessarily, if you hit a roadblock, then move on to the next thing. If you knew they came over at the peak of immigration to the United States and you knew they came into New York, then start with the free services that Ellis Island offers. There are lots of companies that you can pay to do some subscription services for you. I've managed to find a lot of it without having to pay for a subscription, but that's not the case for everything. And I do think, you know, it's interesting you mentioned that your genealogy goes back quite far.

Pam Bernardo:

We started this whole process with my husband's genealogy, which his is from England, from Devon and Cornwall and his goes back many, many years. And we started this visiting the three churches in Devon and Cornwall, a few years ago, where his family was from. And his was easy. Mine - not quite as easy as you've heard.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's very different. And I think it's worth noting that the most popular research site is Ancestry.com and it is very much leaning towards those English-speaking migrations.

Katy Clarke:

So be careful about subscribing to those because I think that you're much better off going, as Pam said, to the local diocese and the local churches because that's where the records were held and you know, that's often only where they could read and write. So you know, the priests and the local church community there, they may have been the only person in the village who could read or write. So that's why it's really important to go down that path, I think.

Pam Bernardo:

Absolutely. And there may be more than one church. You know, the church part wasn't as easy for me on the one end, on the nonno end, but on Prassede that was the key. It just sort of

depends. Visiting the places as well can be somewhat challenging. As I said earlier, a private driver has been invaluable to us and you can pair it with a lot of different things. You know, we paired the northern Italy trip with, you know, Bologna and Rimini and Urbino and and then the southern Italy trip was really focused around towns there. And again it was a delightful afternoon visit and if it spurs something, that's fine.

Pam Bernardo:

And for some families, it might not, it could be very, very painful. But if you find out what you need to know and you know your own family and so you'll kind of gauge that how is best for your family?

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I think that's really important because to maybe not go in with expectations because you know, I think everyone would love to have that story where, that you did, where you were welcoming to their home. So, for example, my mother-in-law, her entire family moved from Campania to Australia so there is no one kind of left there really. All the aunts and uncles are here. So yeah, I don't know that they would have a similar reunion as an example. Whereas down in Calabria, where my husband's family's from, there's still a lot of people there and you definitely get that reunion there. So I think one day I had 20 coffees and I'm already buzzy, but this was a little bit woohoo. I think what's interesting to me is what's different about their lives, but also what's the same.

Katy Clarke:

Can you comment on that? Like, what are some of the things that you realized about people in different parts of the world from this experience?

Pam Bernardo:

I think, as I said earlier, that there are cultural differences down to the time they eat dinner in the evening, which is sometimes difficult when you travel. But I think that the language is always a challenge. But there are some universal kinds of things. A smile, a greeting, a handshake, a hug. Asking questions that are easy to answer. What did you do for a living? How did you meet your wife? Are they from the same town? We had a lovely - the one son did a lovely chart for us of all the siblings and it was typed out so it was easy to navigate, that they had pictures to share with us. Some of them - they didn't know who it was, but they still wanted to share these photographs that were, you know, 75 years old. But you can look at the photograph and say, aha, that's a relative, because they look like us.

Pam Bernardo:

So just sharing those things that don't require the challenge of a language. Whether, like I said, that it's a picture or a chart or a document. You know, Luigi did a beautiful job putting all of the siblings of my grandfather on a chart and where they moved to and what they did for a living. And so we didn't need to talk about it a lot; we just needed to share it.

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Katy Clarke:

That's so beautiful. I love it. It's a great story and I think, you know, thank you so much for generously sharing your... the way that you've gone about it because I think people are very curious about it and, and it's not as easy as if you've come from Britain for sure. And it doesn't have to involve like a huge investment in, you know, like a service that may or may not be able to come up with the goods. But yeah, I think what you've shared is - and your story, like, I love that, how it's sparked just more travel and more deeper investigation into Italy and I know. Yeah. So where are you going to next?

Katy Clarke:

That's what I want to know.

Pam Bernardo:

I think that Sicily is on our short list. It seems like that's going to take a bit of planning, but I do feel like Sicily may be on the short list.

Katy Clarke:

I think you're gonna love Sicily. Yeah, you can, you can get the ferry over from Naples, actually. I know that you're adventurous, so that might be an adventure that you want to take. You can also fly, but yeah, I like the fact that you'd like private drivers because that's what you're going to need when you get around Sicily, actually. Unless you join a group tour or something like that. But yeah, it's a beautiful place. And make sure you have at least two weeks there, I would say.

Pam Bernardo:

Oh, that's a good tip, Katy. Thank you. Yes, we don't shy away from trains, planes and automobiles, and we tend to do this adventurous travel on our own. We have done very little group tours, a few small day group tours, but typically it's planned with a travel designer who has some contacts in the country. And that's where it's worked out best for us.

Pam Bernardo:

And we do try to bookend our trip, if you will, with either Rome or some larger city, so we can check out that as well. But I appreciate the. The two weeks in Sicily sounds delightful right about now, where I live, there's about a foot and a half of snow on the ground, but I might just have to base myself out of Naples and see a little more family.

Katy Clarke:

Someone actually told me recently that it's an Australian style of travel to kind of mix and match different styles of travel. And I was like, really? What? But I think it's a really good point that you made because some people think, oh, I have to do like a group tour or I have to travel independently, but you can mix and match all of this stuff together and come up with an amazing plan that suits, you know, whatever you want to do. I think people - and we've had, you know, several, several of our clients who, you know, they build their confidence by doing various different types of travel and then, you know, they can go out and

explore on their own. And I just love that. I think that there's space for everything. And however way you want to explore and meet people and, you know, build some sort of passion or connection to Italy, I think whichever way you want to do it, just go forth I say.

Pam Bernardo:

Absolutely. And I do appreciate it, is the more you do a little bit on your own, build your confidence. And so getting on a train and going from Naples to Paestum, because I had to see those Greek temples, was just. I had to see them, and that was how I was going to do it. And then a private guide met us there to give us a private tour. So you combine a lot of different ways that you like to travel with what you can do within your budget and within the timeframe that you have. And if you can fit in a little family genealogy, because you've done some of your research, I think that's a bonus.

Katy Clarke:

You know what, Pam? I think you're living the dream, as we say here in Australia. And before I let you go, I just would like to.

Katy Clarke:

Why do you travel at the end of October and the start of November? Because I actually think this is a brilliant time to travel, but I'm just curious as to why you go at that time.

Pam Bernardo:

Since we have been more retired in the past, being school teachers, we had to travel in the summer, where it is the hottest in many places. And we found that traveling at the end of October, November this year, we did it closer to the end of November because of some other commitments. Less crowds, less people, and things are more available. Everything isn't quite closed down yet, and the weather does not bother me. And I must tell you, it rained almost every single day of this past vacation, but it was fine. We had our rain gear, we had our umbrellas, we dodged in and out of places, and it was fine. The weather doesn't handcuff my travel.

Katy Clarke:

I think in Italy, it just... it stops as well. Like, there'll be a big downpour and then it'll stop and you'll just keep going on with your day. And then my last question is, was your family home the Caserta Palace? Because. Because that would have been quite impressive.

Pam Bernardo:

No, but I must say my family was quite impressed that we toured the Caserta Palace that morning. Actually, the. The family home. Just quickly, when we first got there, it was important. And Pasquale showed me the original two rooms where my grandfather had lived, which was, you know, same kind of thing. You're walking in the steps. And then they have expanded the home over that ancestral home.

Katy Clarke:

That must have been really, really special.

Pam Bernardo:

It was.

Katy Clarke:

It's kind of mind-blowing to think, you know, that there's actual people that, you know, they had their own lives. I mean, it's not mind-blowing, but it... when you start, stop to think about it and just the passage of time and what's changed and how they've moved around the world, that's kind of mind-blowing to me. And that the fact that you can come back there and still feel at home, what a beautiful thing.

Pam Bernardo:

Yes. I never anticipated that they would still be in this same home of an address that appeared in a birth certificate from 1890 - whatever.

Katy Clarke:

Amazing. Amazing. Grazie Mille. Pam, thank you so much for sharing your story with everyone. And I know many people have so many strong ties back to Italy over many generations. It's been really beautiful hearing the story of your family and how you've been able to connect with them again. So Grazie Mille. Thank you.

Pam Bernardo:

You're welcome.

Katy Clarke:

Listeners. Pam's story really encapsulates how I feel about travel and how my own outlook has changed over the years. At first, I was so excited to see and do everything, but now I know that the difference between a lovely trip and a truly memorable one has everything to do with the people that you meet along the way, whether it's locals, long-lost family, fellow travelers, and reconnecting with your own friends and family. Well, that's how it is for me.

Katy Clarke:

The memories I have of interacting with people last long after the moments seeing a major monument have faded. One of my favorite recent memories is when Giulia, one of our hosts on our tours and also my very good friend, told me to stop our car immediately while we were driving up past Bologna and join her for a coffee. I was with my family and my parents and we just pulled over and had a quick espresso and about a million hugs before she had to get on with her day. It was really random and fun, but there we were in the middle of this cafe near her small town, chatting and laughing and catching up.

Katy Clarke:

That's the kind of thing Giulia will suggest. And if you've been on tour with her, you'll know this is how the warmth comes out in everything that she does. So much so that this simple coffee sticks in my memory many months later. Now, if you're wanting to get in touch with your Italian roots and perhaps have some more intimate experience while you're in Italy, Pam shared so many great tips and ideas for researching family history. And of course, that's all summarized in our episode show notes along with the Full transcript at untolditaly.com/306 for episode number 306. And if you don't have family of your own there and you want to travel in a more personal way, we, of course, have opportunities to join Giulia and our other hosts exploring the magic of regional Italy together. That's all for this week. Next week, we're getting an insider's look at Rome with one of our very popular team members, the marvellous Manu. But until then, it's ciao for now.