

Untold Italy Episode 307: A Perfect Day in Rome with a Local

Want to experience Rome with a local? Join us as we take a virtual wander around the Eternal City with our friend Manuela as she answers the question - What is the perfect way to spend a day in Rome?

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:

I'm Katy, the founder of Untold Italy. We're a modern travel company that believes Italy is more than a checklist and deserves deep and thoughtful exploration. We host intimate small group journeys across regional Italy for people who want to take part in Italy, not just see it. For DIY travelers - we know the Italy you are searching for is not on page one of Google or in an AI chat. We help independent travelers like you map the Italy you are searching for with personalized trip planning services, and our Untold Italy travel app that is full of curated recommendations for the whole of Italy - from the top of the boot to the toe.

Katy Clarke:

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. In just a few moments, you'll meet Manuela, one of our charming and very popular tour hosts who lives in beautiful Roma - a city I could never tire of, even after dozens of visits. So, andiamo, let's welcome her onto the show.

Katy Clarke:

Benvenuta. Manuela, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Manuela:

Thank you so much, Katy. I'm really honored to be here with you.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, I'm excited. Excited and Buon Anno. Happy New Year.

Manuela:

Buon Anno, everyone.

Katy Clarke:

So it is so great to have you on our show, so the listeners can get to know you. Manu and I could do an introduction here myself, but I always think it's best that our listeners hear directly from you about who you are and what you do and what your passions are.

Manuela:

I am Manuela. Nice to meet you, everyone. I was born and raised in Rome, and even my family roots are in Sardinia, which is a huge island region that is part of Italy. So I feel that grow up between these two big different cultures shaped my personality. What I do. I'm technically an accompagnatrice turistica. That means that I lead people around when I'm in Rome. Basically, mainly I lead food tours and I teach how to cook the Roman dishes in a cooking class.

Manuela:

And from two years, I'm so lucky because I'm part of the Untold Italy family. So I travel very often around the regions, showing to my guests the difference between the regions, how to deepen their different cultures through the food and the wine, of course. The food was always for me and my family, like a Fil Rouge, because I remember, for example, the kitchen of my nonna. I love to watch her chopping the ingredients, helping her, kneading the pasta dough. And the best question in the morning for me was in front of my breakfast, "what do you want for lunch?" She used to go to the market, buy everything fresh, because when I would a child, they weren't in supermarket in the city, so there were all the little vendors. And also, I have this memory going around with my dad. I have this beautiful memory that I entered the Colosseum holding his hand. There weren't gates, there weren't tickets, there weren't tours. I was very lucky. It was a different world.

Manuela:

Traveling also shaped my personality because I had the chance to meet a lot of people, different cultures. And I think that all of that brought me to study history of art. That's my graduation and in the meantime, when I was studying in university, I started to work with kids. So I was a party... kids, entertainment. And also, I lead 100 kids around the different regions in Italy. Yes.

Manuela:

Plus teachers and mom. Not everybody, only with me. But yes, think that this helped me to keep the attention of many people.

Katy Clarke:

I've only got two kids and I can't keep their attention. So 100, I'm in awe.

Manuela:

Not too many. But like immediately of five days, you see, they look at you and they tell you, oh man, I remember what you explained to us the first day and it's like, oh my God, you really

hear me. I thought that you were like thinking about anything else except listen to me, but you did. So that was a big training. And I confess that in my 30s I didn't understand English, I didn't speak English. And so I decided to learn this language. I moved to Malta, which is a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. It's famous because there are a lot of English schools. And in six months, I can say that I started to understand, to speak a little bit was enough to come back in Rome and be gently pushed on a van with 15 people from the US.

Manuela:

And yes, I remember the first day I didn't understand anything because my best friends in Malta were Turkish. So I learned English with a Turkish accent. 'Vere are you going?' I remember this man that was talking to me and he was probably from New York. And I was like, yeah. And I repeat the face that he did. So like, okay, he's happy. And I was happy.

Manuela:

Oh, that was serious. And I was serious. But in a lot of years of leading tours from Rome to Pompeii and Positano helped me a lot. Then in the meantime, I start to work and teach in a cooking class how to make from scratch. And then I start to lead food tours. And this is what I do. I eat, I drink, I know things, I welcome people in Rome and I try to show them my city through my eyes.

Katy Clarke:

Amazing. We had like a one morning when we first met, didn't we? And we just hung out in Trastevere and just had a really nice chat. And I love seeing that through your eyes. And so that's why I asked you to come on the show and tell everyone a little bit about Rome and how you would spend your perfect day if you were being a tourist in your own city. But maybe can you tell me and everyone what it is that you really love about Rome? What's so special about your city that maybe, you know, everyone has a different interpretation of when they come to Rome and based on their experience. But if you've lived there and you've grown up there, how do you feel about the city?

Manuela:

I would say, first of all, of course, Rome is my hometown. And I think that everyone are attached to the place where they are born. As familiar as what you know, of course, I. I feel that I'm very proud to be born in a city like this. I feel that I have kind of responsibility to. In terms of respect and of the city - I always say that for me, Rome is a woman.

Manuela:

I have this feminine picture of the city. This young lady of 2779 years old that always changed her dress, her hairstyle, the color of her hair. She was built and destroyed and she had a lot of invasion in the history and she never gave up. She's like a big mama that protects you, but like a woman, she has different mood or behave. If it's sunny, she hugs you and she's full of love and she's bright and colorful. But if there's a cloudy day, she's grumpy and she's like, leave me alone, don't touch me. I'm an independent woman with my credit card and move away from here.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, I love this analogy. Keep going, keep going.

Manuela:

But also, I love Rome because for us, Rome is a lasagna, because it wasn't built in a day how the Morcheeba group used to sing many years ago. It's a. It's a lasagna because it's a physical layers of history that during the century built everything on top of heroines. But also is a cultural lasagna because in Rome, from ever population, from everywhere, all the Mediterranean coast, all the Europe, what now is Europe, they arrive in Rome with their religions, art, architecture, food, culture. And like lasagna was like a stratification of all this thing. So there is not one Roman culture. It's a mix and melting pot of many things. And as a very passionate person of history, I have to say that what I love in Rome is that she is huge.

Manuela:

So Roma is made by a lot of different neighborhoods that are like a lot of... a million villages. And every neighborhood has his own personality, his own style, different accents from the north of the city to the south, people dress in a different way. So if you are from here, you can see like, okay, she's dressed very posh clothes, so she's from the north of the city. And I am never worried about the city, because every day I discover and I rediscover the city and all this neighborhood make people feel that they are not from Rome. When I introduce myself, I don't say I'm from Rome. I say I'm from Monteverde.

Manuela:

And if you read Rome, that in Italian is Roma. If you read Roma backwards, you read amor. So Roma = Amor. So Rome is a big, huge woman full of love... that eats lasagna!

Katy Clarke:

Which is funny everyone? Because Manu is - she's a tiny woman, in fact. But I love this analogy. Oh, that's beautiful. I agree. My first experience of Rome was not optimal, I would have to say. And, you know, a lot of people have this kind of like, oh, like, oh, I came to see all the sights and everything, but something maybe was missing, and that definitely happened to me. And there's a few reasons for that.

Katy Clarke:

But now you can't keep me away. I love this city. Like, it's a place where you can just walk and walk for miles and miles and you'll find something new or old or ancient, and you just have to turn a corner and there'll be something that will amaze you. So tell me, if you have one day, just your ideal day in Rome, just to be a tourist, a perfect day, what would it look like Manu?

Manuela:

Imagine that we start from my home, okay? I don't live in the city center, just a little bit far away. But if I work in my office, which is the city center, and I want to walk from my home to

the city center, in about 30 minutes, I'm there. Suppose that you book an Airbnb close to my place. We start to walk together, and I won't pass, I won't walk through the street with traffic and noisy. I would like to show you a different point of view from the city, and I would like to walk very close to the river. The river in Rome is called Tevere. Tevere because if I go to my mom telling her like, let's go to have a walk along the Tiber, she look at me like, are you crazy? What are you telling me? So walking in the river banks of the river is very nice because you are basically in the ground of the city on the side of the Tevere, there are big walls and you don't feel the noise of the traffic. And it's a very nice walk in the morning because there are a lot of people that are running, walking with their dogs or there is like a cat communities.

Manuela:

People love to leave food for the cats. So it's a nice walk in the morning because you are surrounded by the natures, the colors, the light and this clean your mind. Passing on the bank side of the river. I can show you something on the top. For example, the Gazometro, which is a huge building made with steel that is just in front of the windows of my kitchen, actually. And this is the industrial part of the city. What it was, in the industrial part of the city, was a building that stored the gas for the town. Now it's not in use anymore.

Manuela:

I will pass very close to the ancient port of Rome, the Emporio. And I will let you imagine the city how it was in the past. In Rome, you have to use your imagination. I will show you the boats and the ships that used to arrive from Mediterranean Sea, stopping in the port that doesn't exist anymore, but they arrive with the goods from everywhere. And I will stop after passing through a couple of bridges in Trastevere. So my Trastevere is a big memory. I think that I walk in the streets of Trastevere since when I was in the belly of my mom, because when she moved from Sardinia to Rome, she lived there. So when I was born, all their friends were there.

Manuela:

And I have this memory of Bar San Calisto and Piazza Trilussa. And I would like to show you the narrow street, very silent. I usually walk far away from the crowd. If it's not necessary, I will show you what doesn't exist anymore in Trastevere. Woman sitting out of their house in the street, peeling potatoes, chatting while the kids are playing in the street. And this is an old memory, but this was the picture of Trastevere till the 60s, the 70s, not so far away. It's morning, so first of all we need a coffee and going to the bar, an Italian bar mainly is a coffee bar. And we pass through a little market, very local, few stalls with seasonal vegetables and fruits, with a little shop with fish.

Manuela:

And also I would like to thank the man that work there, because he recommend me how to cook squid and artichoke. So beautiful recipe for dinner, if you want. And then we'll stop in Bar San Calisto, where we met the first time.

Manuela:

We'll go to say hello to Marcello and we're going to have a very yummy coffee with a whipped cream on top, homemade.

Katy Clarke:

What do we call that one? What do we call it? If someone wants to order a coffee with the whipped cream on top.

Manuela:

Cafe con panna.

Katy Clarke:

Cafe con panna.

Manuela:

And what I love of Trastevere is that it's like being a part of a big theater. San Calisto Bar attract all the people that are born and raised in Trastevere. So I will show you like the woman with a flower behind the hair, men that are playing cards and they say the worst bad word of the world that I cannot translate because the game is very serious. And after the coffee, we'll pass through Santa Maria in Trastevere. We'll pass through narrow streets where buildings are totally covered with the climbing plants. And we'll arrive in a very original pasticheria. So where they make fresh pastry every day. I would like to choose between a maritocco con la panna or a cornetto full of custard cream, or a little cookie, just to put some layer in your stomach.

Katy Clarke:

I don't know how you choose. It's so hard. It's very hard to choose. What's your favorite, Manu?

Manuela:

My favorite is the Ciambella. It's like a donut, deep fried and then dip in the sugar. Yeah, that's very good. And then probably the music will attract us like magnets, because Trastevere always full of street artists. So the music is everywhere. We'll pass probably through Piazza Trilussa and then we'll cross the bridge, Ponte Sisto. Ponte Sisto is the place where every Roman people when walk through.

Manuela:

The Ponte Sisto, even if it was a horrible day, very stressful day, once you are there and you look on the right and you see the Tiberina island. And you look on the left and you see the boss, which is the Dome of St. Peter. You are there, you breathe and you say, But I was born in the best city, in the most beautiful city all around the world. So I cannot complain. Today is a good day.

Manuela:

Crossing the river, we'll arrive in Regola, which is a different neighborhood. Rione Regola. So the neighborhood Regola is like an old Google Maps. I mean, reading the name of the street is the best way to understand which type of artisans or workshops were there in the past. In the past they hadn't in Google. And if they break something like an umbrella, like a key, they repair everything. And people in the past knew that if they go in a specific street, there were the artisans that repair umbrella, for example. So all the name of the streets are like Via degli Ombrellari, Umbrella Street, Via del Chiavari, Key Street, Via Dei Cappellari - hat street. So it's like a hidden gem of Roma.

Manuela:

It's like I like to translate this vocabulary for people that, of course, they don't know Italian and they are fascinating about everything. But I like to explain those little details and to show the lasagna, I would like to enter in a little church. It's called Santa Salvatore in Onda. It's a little church. It's very cute and nice, no more than the other 900 churches that we have in Rome. But the thing that I love of this is that if there is the priest, and usually they are very nice and welcoming, you can ask them, may I go in the ground? And suddenly you finish in a house of the second century and you feel parted, you feel like a little meatballs in the layer of lasagna.

Manuela:

And imagine that after our breakfast, that in Italy is a sweet breakfast, because Italians have a sweet tooth. But then the level of sugar first go up and then go down. So at 11 am, you are hungry and you want something, you want a snack. And when you are around this area, it's like mandatory to go in a bakery and ask for pizza.

Katy Clarke:

Pizza. Roman style.

Manuela:

Roman-style pizza bianca - white, which is like a focaccia and filled with mortadella. So pork meat with pistachio and black pepper. I say to all the people of Emilia Romagna, because the mortadelle and Emilia Romagna region doesn't have pistachio, black pepper. But in Rome we love it. And the pizza is crunchy and soft and salty and oily. So it's the best thing that you can ask for at 11 am.

Katy Clarke:

Why not? We've already had a ciambella, so everyone, you just notice that everything with Manu always comes back to food. One minute you're a tiny meatball, the next minute you're eating pizza. It's great. Continue, please.

Manuela:

And it's 11, 11:15, it's of glass wine time. So we'll go to a place of a natural wine - without table, without chairs. But what we love to do is like be on the street with our glass of wine,

while scooters and cars disturb you, but you know how to move like a snake. And the car become like your table. But don't tell to owner of the car. So pizza and a glass of wine, maybe gently bubbling, fresh, salty, mineral... perfect! We had our aperitivo

Katy Clarke:

At 11am...

Manuela:

At 11, of course, we have to walk and eat and eat and walk. That's the game in Rome.

Katy Clarke:

Okay, I like it.

Manuela:

And so second layers... we are fine and now we have decided what do we want for lunch. That's an important question. We want to have a seat in the restaurant. It's a beautiful day, blue sky, no cloud. There is this vibrant air around. Let's do a walk.

Manuela:

Let's do a walk - we go to Testaccio, but we walk now in the river banks. We go on the. We walk on the street level. So we'll pass close by the Jewish ghetto. We'll pass close by the Aventino Hill. And then we arrive in Testaccio, which is a very popular area where you can find a lot of locals, a lot of nonna with a cart that go to the market to shop for daily ingredients for lunch and dinner. And it's not the biggest market of the city, but you can find vegetables, fruits, fish, meat and a lot of street food. So to make our stomach happy, I will go to have a sandwich in Giuliano's Place.

Manuela:

His father was Sergio, and Sergio was one of the butcher of the slaughterhouse, which is the main building that was in Testaccio, now is closed, of course. And in the slaughterhouse of Testaccio was born the Roman tradition that we call quinto quarto, the fifth quarter. So basically, the best part of the meat were given to the rich people. And all the offals and the leftovers were given to the poor starving butchers that found themselves full of this meat. That was very hard. Probably not the best smell, but thanks God to the mama and the nonna and the slow cooking and lots of ingredients like tomato, pecorino romano and mint, they cover all the flavor. The meat became so tender. And this was the dishes of the people in the past that Sergio, the father of Giuliano, to give a new honor to the Roman food put between two slices of bread, became a sandwich that now is so popular and yummy and tell the story of the city.

Katy Clarke:

So good. I didn't know this one. You're telling me all these things I didn't know.

Manuela:

So when you come back in Rome, I will take you around with a lot of. So imagine that now is like 2:33 pm we are not tired. Our stomach, it's fine, it's happy for the moment. So we can keep going and walk a little bit more. We can pass very close to the Pyramid and we can go to the metro. Now I'm so proud to announce that in Rome we have three lines of the metro. Very international city. And I would like to explore an area which is not very deep in the baroque architecture or the ancient Roman history.

Manuela:

But is the new, cool underground area of the city. So I would like to move in the east of the city, in that area that when I was teenager, my mom used to tell me, don't go there then. Now, if you live there, you are very, very cool. We don't find their ancient ruin, we don't find their old churches, but we find Morales, the new art, the new street art. And it's completely another phase of the city because it's very international. In Pigneto or Tor Pignattara, you can find a lot of different culture, a lot of restaurant with African food, Bangladesh, Argentinian. But also in Pigneto you can find anyway something that come back in the days. There is a place called Necci that opened in 1924, where we can have an aperitivo, we can relax, we can enjoy watching people love.

Manuela:

And then of course, we'll be hungry again in a very popular and old osteria of Tor Pignattara, which is called Osteria Bonelli. And the nice thing there is that you see the local, the Roman people having the Roman food. So at that point, I didn't give you my favorite food of Rome, not yet. So first of all, I will give you a suppli. Suppli is this rice croquette deep-fried. Because when something is deep-fried, it's much better. It's amazing. Make with tomato and cheese.

Manuela:

So if you break it, the mozzarella, which is in the heart, totally melts and is like super yummy. And then I have to give you. I must give you the queen, the carbonara. Carbonara is the queen of the city. It's my favorite. Between the Roman pasta, it's very simple, made with few ingredients, egg yolks, pecorino romano, black pepper and guanciale, which is the pork cheek. We finish with an amaro, a digestive, so we don't feel guilt. And then we are tired.

Manuela:

I mean, we walk a lot. We don't feel guilty because we burnt a lot of calories. We can call a Uber. That is a bit more expensive than other cities, but if, you know, you know, and we can come back home planning what to eat tomorrow.

Katy Clarke:

I love it, Manu! That's the perfect day in Rome. Perfect. And I love how you started talking about layers and lasagna of Rome and you ended this little journey in Pigneto, which is very, you know, multicultural. And I think people, maybe they want to come to Italy to see maybe just Italian stuff. But I mean, the reality is, in ancient Rome - Rome was already a melting

pot. It was people from all over the world. I mean, you had, at one point, if you want to talk about the elites, you had Cleopatra there, and obviously she was coming from Egypt and North Africa and, you know, from all over the empire, they had people there just gathering and mixing and creating things. And I love that you started at the start, and then you ended up in something that's quite modern. And I love seeing these different parts of the city and the way Rome has evolved. And so thank you for sharing that with us. That's really amazing. And of course, through the lens of food, because. Why not?

Manuela:

Why not? We have life.

Katy Clarke:

No food, no life. Yeah, it's true. Why? If you. If you have to eat, you might as well make it really delicious.

Manuela:

If you have to eat good things, do it well. The right things in the right place.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's. So I'm really loving this. I'm just gonna start to do this as a series because I think it's so interesting to see cities through the eyes of a local. And, you know, I think a lot of times we hear this saying, but what you've just described is something that is very personal and also very, you know, that I think people can really relate to. So thank you so much for sharing your day in the beautiful city. So, Manu, as you mentioned, you do, apart from working with Untold Italy Tours, where, if you've been on tour with Manu, she's managed to win the hearts and minds and souls of everyone that she made, which is a very special talent for being extremely. I think she really embodies Italian hospitality. So we love having her on our team, but she can't be on tour with us all the time, unfortunately.

Katy Clarke:

So she does also do some work in Rome and also her beautiful island of Sardinia. So, Manu, do you want to tell everyone how they can stay in touch with you and book him with a tour or an experience with you?

Manuela:

You can find me on my website, which is www.bonsyintour.com. B O N S Y I N T O U R. Bonsy is my Roman nickname. Bonsy comes from the word bonsai, which is the small tree. And you know me, you know how much small I am. So I have this nickname from the high school, and many people know me as Bonsy and not as Manuela, but you can call me Manu, Manuela, Bonsy, as you want.

Katy Clarke:

I didn't know that. I love that. Can I tell you a story? My grandmother, who I also used to watch, cook, she had very interesting hobbies, and one of them was to make bonsai's. So

there you go. Means we were destined to meet. Oh thank you so much. And I'm really intrigued... like I'm gonna have to pick your brains when I get to Rome because I really want to discover this squid and artichokes recipe that sounds amazing and obviously come back into the arms of Mama Roma and get stuck into that lasagna.

Katy Clarke:

Manu, that was fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing your city with all our listeners today. Appreciate it. Thank you grazie.

Katy Clarke:

Manu, grazie mille, thank you for taking us on this virtual wander through Roma.

Listeners, it makes me chuckle a bit when people say they have “done Rome” after one visit because there is always something new and incredible to explore there. I’ll never get tired of it and as you can tell from Manu’s perspective, exploring a city like this is as much about the small interactions and daily rituals as it is about the incredible highlights of which there are many. Seeing the city through Manu’s eyes makes me want to jump on a plane right now. I love hearing how people interpret the city differently and it is a big objective of Untold Italy to raise the profile of female Italian voices and businesses like hers. Because they don’t often get heard and I think you’ll agree, the world needs more of Manu’s energy and spirit.

Rome’s treasures, both obvious and untold, are ready waiting for you in the premium version of the Untold Italy app, but of course if you would like to get a more up and personal perspective on life in Rome or Sardinia, absolutely reach out to Manuela. She will look after you like no other! I cannot think of many people who embody the spirit of Italian hospitality like she does. We have, of course, put all her details into the episode show notes on our website, along with the full transcript at untolditaly.com/307 for episode 307.

Katy Clarke:

That’s all for this week, next week we are delving into a very important anniversary - the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis, that is taking place in Italy this year, with another one of our tour hosts, Sarah. But until then, it is “Ciao for now”.