

Untold Italy Episode 309: Puglia Before Everyone Else Gets There

Puglia is having its moment in the sun right now, and it's in that rare moment between undiscovered and overcrowded. So the time to visit there is now. Join us as we unpack the highlights of this beautiful southern Italian region on episode 309 of the Untold Italy podcast.

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:

Ciao, friends. Welcome to Untold Italy, a podcast where we celebrate the places, history and culture of Italy that we love to travel and enjoy. But what we like to do most here is talk to and understand the people of Italy. Because let's face it, without the people, this country, like our own, just would not be the same. I'm Katy, your host and you can hear by my voice that I am Australian, but I am also a traveler and consider myself to be a citizen of the world. I'm 52 years old and I've lived in the UK twice and visited over 40 countries. Apart from the UK and Italy and Australia, the country I have spent the most time in is the United States, as my parents and brother and sister-in-law have all lived there for several years. And before starting Untold Italy, I worked for two great American companies, Hewlett-Packard and IBM, and have many friends from 15 years in the IT industry. And now clients and friends from this podcast and our small group tours. So it has been with great sadness that I have watched the fabric of America seemingly unravel before my eyes over the past months, with huge ripple effects around the world. Never before have I seen such meanness and cruelty on the part of Western leaders. But I know this does not represent the views of all, or even most people. What I do know is that most human beings around the world share the same needs and desires, and that's to feel safe, respected and welcomed. At Untold Italy, we believe that no one is better than anyone else, regardless of their nationality, race, skin colour, gender, religion, ability or who they love. We believe that if we see injustices that we should call them out, that fair laws and due process matter. We believe in people over profits and humans over machines. And we believe in democracy. Through travel, you observe how people live, laugh, hug and cry together. And it becomes very clear that most of us want to live a purposeful life surrounded by the people we care about, with a few adventures on the side. If respect for our planet and each other, curiosity and shared humanity are values that you hold, then Untold Italy is a safe place for you. The world seems incredibly chaotic and cruel right now, but I can tell you without any shadow of a doubt that time that you spend in Italy with people - people who work the land and are connected to their culture, gives you

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infinite hope. So let's now take a little trip to Puglia, a place where travelers are welcomed with open arms. And the cheese is, in fact, life-changing.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao, Liv. Come stai?

Olivia Windsor:

Ciao, Katy. Tutto bene, tu?

Katy Clarke:

Va bene. So excellent. Hey, Liv, are you ready to take a trip back to where it all began? And by that I mean beautiful Puglia? And if you're new here, this podcast started back in 2020. And I know that we're all trying to forget the COVID days, but it was actually a great time for Untold Italy. And it's when I started the podcast with my friend Josie, who is now doing other fabulous things these days. But through the podcast, I met so many people, including Olivia, while she was living in Turin in the north of Italy.

Katy Clarke:

And several months later, we joined forces to start Untold Italy Tours. And our very first trip was in fact to Puglia in 2022. They were fun times, weren't they, Liv?

Olivia Windsor:

Oh, so many good memories. That's still. Yeah, I think about that trip all the time. And we're still in touch with pretty much all of the guests on that trip, too. So it's a really special one for us.

Katy Clarke:

It really is. And we had a really fun time going to do the pre-trip research and finding all those special places that we continue to take people to today, because I think it's really our signature trip that informed the rest of what we wanted to do with Untold Italy Tours. So what we thought we'd do today is give everyone an idea of why Puglia is one of the most up-and-coming regions of Italy and it's becoming very, very popular and how we approach exploring there when we're on tours with our Untold Italy guests. And so even if you're not joining us on tour, you're going to find this helpful as we're going to talk about the places we visit and the experiences we have there. But we will go a little bit deeper into the experience that we give our guests. Now, Puglia is definitely having a moment right now, isn't it, Liv?

Olivia Windsor:

Oh, it sure is. If you want to get to Puglia, you've got to get there now because it's really becoming the must-visit place.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And you know, it's quite charming there because they don't have a lot of robust tourist infrastructure, like say something like the Amalfi Coast, which has got boats and ferries

zipping around. It's very new to tourism, but they're learning pretty fast. It's becoming more and more crowded, but because it is having this moment, there are some advantages as well. And you can fly direct to Bari, which is the capital of the region, from the east coast of the United States now. And you can bypass the Rome stopover completely. We'll talk about logistics a little bit more later, but let's get started and talk about what the feeling that you have in Puglia that's maybe a little bit different to the rest of Italy.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, I love this. When Katy and I went on our pre-trip research for Puglia, the feeling that we got instantly was this is like a chilled-out version of Sicily. So by that I guess we meant that Italian Southern charm, Italian hospitality, but very relaxed. And I guess that's also because, you know, there's not this, you know, huge amounts of tourists there yet as well. So you can really just kind of relax into things. It's very chic and just very welcoming. You feel this instant kind of slowing down, breathing this sigh of relief when you're there. And the hospitality, I have to say, is just second to none in Puglia. They are just extremely welcoming. Welcoming. And that just makes for a really, really wonderful vacation.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, it really does. And I love the fact that it's chic because Italian design elements can be a little bit over the top. Like, if you think of the Amalfi Coast, you've got all these vibrant colors and everything. But in Puglia, everything's a little bit more paired back. It's a little bit.

Olivia Windsor:

It's clean.

Katy Clarke:

Clean. Yeah, it's lovely. And you've got, you know, the whitewashed towns and there's some beautiful contrast with the earth there, which is this rich red colored earth. The ancient olive trees, which are these monumental olive trees, some of which are well over a thousand years old. So that's really like an important part of the landscape. So, yeah, it's got a really ancient feeling. But they found a way to modernize everything with this really chic and elegant style that they managed to do. And I really like down there, they.

Olivia Windsor:

Have a real life of design. Especially I love Lecce, which a lot of our guests really enjoy too. And you know, it's often touted as the Florence of the south, but that is a really just beautiful kind of ancient yet modernized town that's all kind of golden, the sandstone and that's just lovely to wander through as well.

Katy Clarke:

There's a lot of different contrasts as well. So you have that elegance in Lecce, but you also have like the real vibrancy of Bari and the community-driven spirit in the towns of Val D'Itria, which is where a lot of people know this is the main town. There is Alberobello, which is known for its Trulli houses. And, you know, if you are wanting to avoid tourist places, that is

probably the number one place in Puglia to avoid. We have ways of avoiding the crowds, actually. But I'm so proud of that signature move. And we're not sharing it, unfortunately, because otherwise the crowds will go. But it is a beautiful town, but that's where you're going to find the most crowds there.

Katy Clarke:

Liv, are there any moments that you can remember from the time you've spent there? Because you've taken groups down there, and you've spent quite a lot of time in Puglia - that really capture the energy of the region.

Olivia Windsor:

Something that stands out for me all the time. And we've mentioned this before on previous episodes, but it's just such a good example of the Pugliese hospitality is our bus driver. You know, we were driving on our very first trip, and one of the guests was just desperate to hug an olive tree, one of these monumental olive trees that are, you know, thousands of years old. And she said it to me in the middle of the trip, and I thought, okay, all right. And our bus driver said, no problem. I'll take you to my mother's agriturismo, our family home. We've got tons and tons of olive trees, monumental olive trees as far as the eye can see.

Olivia Windsor:

And so here we go. We're on our way to Lecce, and we veer off to go to his mother's house in the middle of the countryside with beautiful olive trees everywhere. And, oh, my God, she could have cried for how happy she was hugging this monumental olive tree. And all the other guests were so enamored because they got to meet Vincenzo's mother. They got to meet all the animals and the traditional Masseria, because that's what it is in Puglia, the Masseria. And it was just this moment of only in Puglia and feeling Puglia, because, I mean, you know, this is what we do on our tours. Yes, we've got itineraries, but we always allow space for these magical moments to kind of happen. And so that really sticks out for me because it was the hospitality, it was the landscape, and it was the people.

Olivia Windsor:

So that was a really, really special moment. But even, you know, some simpler things, like just going for a walk at Passeggiata hour through some beautiful white hilltop towns like Locorotondo, that's one of our favorites, because it's a little bit less busy, and you just kind of up high, away from the crowds, wandering through these beautiful whitewashed streets and you can really just slow down, breathe a sigh of relief, look forward to a beautiful meal, have a chat with the locals and yeah, I think that really captures the energy too.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, agree. I remember we had a nice aperitivo in Martina Franca as well.

Olivia Windsor:

Love it.

Katy Clarke:

That's a very nice town to visit and there are many, many, many beautiful towns. But you're right, that does capture the energy. One thing that I remember was when we went to the Caseificio, the cheese-making place, and Liv and I went there and we watched them make a mozzarella burrata and we were helping to stir and watching them get their hands into the cheese and make the little - these balls of joy I call them. And when the... If you've been around this podcast a while, you'll understand when I say this. This was the life-changing cheese moment because they got this ball of cheese and then they studded it with pistachios and they handed it to us and then we just took this bite. There was cheese juice drizzling down our chins and we just couldn't look at each other. Laughing so hard. They're all smiling as well. It's a. It's a very relaxed place. They're not - there's no pretensions there, is it? It's really. No, it's really. It's very different vibe to, say, the north of Italy, which I also love.

Katy Clarke:

But if you want something relaxed and where the people are generous, Puglia is definitely the place to go. So on that point, what do you think? Now, travelers have heard a lot about Puglia and they've seen the pictures and all of this. But what do you think that they are looking for when they go to visit Puglia?

Olivia Windsor:

I think they're looking for like the real southern Italy. And by real, that can mean a lot of things to different people, but that kind of authentic wandering, these, you know, beautiful southern Italian towns without any crowds, having these generous meals that go for hours and hours and, you know, just this hospitality that you hear a lot about when it comes to southern Italy, but certainly on the Amalfi Coast, it's a very different experience because they just have, you know, just so many tourists that I'm sorry, but it's extremely hard to have that real southern experience that you're probably imagining. So for me, I think that's what people are looking for when they come to Puglia. Obviously, they've heard about it because it's on everyone's radar at the moment. And yeah, maybe they've been to Amalfi before, and they're looking for something a little bit more real and authentic. Or we also get a lot of people when it's their first trip to Southern Italy and they've just taken the plunge because they really, you know, want to experience this really real, authentic southern Italian hospitality.

Katy Clarke:

I think that's right. The other thing about Puglia is - it's got these very unique landscapes. I guess so when people are looking for that as well, and those cute little towns. And also, let's not forget the coast, because we're on the Adriatic coast.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

And a lot of people have seen these pictures of Polignano a Mare, this gorgeous town that has a spectacular beach. If you see a drone shot of it, you'll understand it's a very rocky inlet,

people are jumping off cliffs, etc. It's not like wide, sandy beaches. But Puglia does have those as well. So it's kind of like the complete package, isn't it? You've got beaches, history, food, hospitality, and without like a lot of the big crowds that you will see on the other side. And look, I love the Amalfi coast. And who does not love the Amalfi Coast? It is stunning, but it's also a place where you are going to be fighting a lot of crowds.

Katy Clarke:

So lately, I haven't heard many people saying that they want to go back to the Amalfi Coast. I said, I've been there and I'm happy I've been there, but I don't necessarily want to go back. But they don't ever say that about Puglia. They always say they want to go back.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, that's the thing. You could go back again and again to Puglia and search that feeling of relaxation and kind of inspiration too.

Katy Clarke:

So, with that in mind, let's take everyone through some of the highlights of Puglia and how we built them into our trips there.

Olivia Windsor:

I guess the first would have to be Alberobello, which you mentioned before, Katy, because this is somewhere that's definitely on people's radar. If you haven't heard about Alberobello, it's where they're famous for the little Trulli houses. Google a picture of what a Trulli looks like right now. And it's like a fairy tale gnomes house or something like that. And Alberobello, look, they're all - these Trulli houses are all through the Itria Valley, which is where our tour is based, but in Alberobello, it's where they have the largest concentration of these houses. So, naturally, this is a real tourist hotspot. But we've been able to work through a secret way, I guess, of taking our travelers there to avoid the crowds and really soak in this town and why it became famous in the first place.

Olivia Windsor:

And that's always, yeah, real trip highlight for our guests. After that, I would say Polignano a Mare. So this is the famous beachside town on the Adriatic coast that you were mentioning, Katy, as well as Ostuni, which is kind of the whitewashed town in the Itria Valley. They are real trip highlights. Again, if people, you know, know anything about Puglia, they've probably heard of these towns, too. So they're really looking forward to going to these places.

Olivia Windsor:

And that's the thing with our tours. We do take you to the places that you've heard about and want to go, but we do it in a really Untold way. And then we also kind of take you a little bit further off the beaten track to see some places that you haven't heard about before. What I love about when we go to Ostuni is we've got a very fun and energetic way of getting around that town. So I won't do any spoilers, but you'll be zipping around and kind of yahooping as you go. So, yeah, that's a lot of fun. An absolute highlight is staying in Matera overnight, because

we stay at a cave hotel, and this is just a really iconic experience. I don't know where else you can stay in a luxury cave for the night.

Olivia Windsor:

And I think the joy of doing an overnight stay in Matera is that this is a town that is no stranger to tourism. They get a lot of day trippers, so during the day it can be really, really, really busy. And so the great thing for our guests is that we get there kind of in the afternoon when the day trippers are starting to filter out for the day, and we have an overnight stay. So we're able to see the town lit up at night, which is when it becomes magical, because it's just this glowing, ancient town built of cliffs and caves and ravine, and it's just an iconic place to see at nighttime when it's lit up. So that is an absolute highlight.

Katy Clarke:

Now, 'Matera actually is not in Puglia, it's in Basilicata. But we've incorporated that into our trip because, yeah, it is very special. And as Liv said, I don't know anyone who has regretted going to Matera. And usually when they say that they want to go to Matera - they will always say, I wish I'd spent longer there because it's so interesting. It's one of the most oldest inhabited cities in the whole world. You know, like, if you're into movies, it's been on James Bond and Star Wars and things like that. But for me it's the history there which is so interesting.

Katy Clarke:

And not just the ancient. I think it's prehistoric, it goes way, way back. But also the recent history is incredibly interesting. We have a few podcast episodes about Matera that you, if you're interested in, you might want to listen to because what actually happened there was, I won't say too much, but it was run down and it was even called the 'shame of Italy'. And the locals got together and reinvigorated their city and invested very heavily in making a future for themselves. And I love this spirit about this part of southern Italy. They have got a very strong community-minded spirit and they get together and they help each other and they make something that's beautiful. And I think now more than ever that spirit is something that it's really inspiring to see people getting together and doing something not just for themselves, but for each other. And I, I just love that.

Olivia Windsor:

I absolutely agree. A few other highlights, I guess of our trip particularly is that it's very people-driven and by that - it's the locals. So I'm not going to do too many spoilers, but we do have one local man on this trip that, oh, you know, some of our guests just cry when they hear his story. Happy tears, of course, because you think you're going to visit a ceramic workshop and it's so much more than a ceramic workshop. Dan Brown is involved in this story and that's all I'm going to say about it because it's just incredible. And then, you know, it's not only this gentleman, we've also got some other lovely locals. Giacomo is another fan favorite on his olive oil farm. He was a journalist in Rome and kind of gave up, you know, fast-paced city life to go back to the family farm in Puglia and take over when his father passed away.

Olivia Windsor:

And that was a huge lifestyle change. And so, you know, it's not just about visiting the olive oil farm and walking and seeing these monumental trees and learning how to taste oil, but it's also about understanding his story and it's just so inspiring. And our guests find that they can have lessons for their own lives too by listening to some of these people. And then Flavia, she's another wonderful Local, who's been on Katy's podcast before, and she lives in Polignano, and she comes to our Masseria, where we have this incredible cooking class. And again, it's not, you know, we're not just learning how to make a basic pasta or something like that. We're making very local dishes with storage stories behind them, ingredients that, you know, are native, indigenous to Puglia. So it's not just a cooking class. It's so much more.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I think that's really interesting because a lot of people, and you can do day experiences like olive oil tasting, wine tasting, go and see a ceramics place. And I think sometimes we struggle to articulate what is different for us, because, yes, we're doing all of those things, but we're not going to - you can definitely shop if you want to, right? But we're not going there to shop, or there's no kickbacks or anything like that. We're going there because this isn't a very important part of the local culture. Preserving the ceramics techniques and the actual style of ceramics that they make in this recipe are very important to the culture. So these are the stories that you're going to hear, and they're not just personal stories, they're cultural stories. And it's a very different experience than if you're doing a drive up to a ceramics place, getting out and going for shop.

Katy Clarke:

So, like I said, you definitely (don't worry, I like shopping), and there's no pressure to buy anything. If you do feel like buying a piece and you have that in your home and you've heard the story, story behind it, it becomes just a lot more special to you. I have things that I, you know, got there, like a Pumo, which is these traditional Pugliese, like, good luck symbol. And I have. And I just look at them every day and I go, oh, reminds me of that special time that I spent with Liv. But also the stories behind, you know, what happened that day and who we met and. And what they shared with us.

Katy Clarke:

So for me, that's why we include these experiences on our trips. And, you know, there are plenty of people offering this type of experience. They're terrible at promoting themselves online. They're getting better. But if you're wanting to travel on your own, you can find them. But you're probably going to find the people that are good at marketing, because these people aren't, unfortunately. But, yeah, we like to support them because they're happy sharing their stories with people that also care, that they care to share their stories.

Katy Clarke:

If you know what I mean, like, it's.

Olivia Windsor:
It's very personal.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Okay. So what about Liv? Any surprise moments that we have on the trip?

Olivia Windsor:
Yes. So I've mentioned our ceramic gentleman that's so much more than ceramics, but that is a massive surprise because we don't do any spoilers on the way to visit him either. So, you know that you're heading off to a ceramic town and, you know, our lovely tour hosts tell you that you're going to meet someone very interesting and that it's going to be more than a ceramic visit. But when people actually get to this gentleman's home, because we visit his home, what you uncover there is a huge surprise. So I'm just going to leave you with that because I don't want to spoil it for anyone who's coming on our trip. But as I said, you know, we've had people in tears before because it is just so. Well, it's just so incredible, the story.

Olivia Windsor:
And he's such a humble man and just so - really a salt-of-the-earth kind of guy. So, yeah, so that's definitely one big surprise moment. I would also say kind of, to a lesser extent, a little bit more kind of upbeat, we have some very fun and surprising music elements that come into this tour, and that's really important to Pugliese local culture as well. So you get to, you know, we like to engage all of the senses when you're on tour with us, so you really feeling everything. And music is a big part of Puglia, so that's another fun surprise for our guests.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, I just want to go now. Anyway. I have to work out my itinerary for later this year, and it may just include Puglia, but I will keep everyone posted. And, yeah, we even had, you know, one of our very special guests that was on our first tour. I remember she was very emotional when she went to Polignano because she'd seen on one of her favorite TV shows. And we've got such a great photo of her hugging our local guide, who was sharing stories about this. And there's been a lot of great stories from Puglia.

Olivia Windsor:
And a lot of emotion. I think this is a really emotional tour in a good way. Just brings out the best in everyone, I would say.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, I also remembered our other guest who had been stationed there after the war.

Olivia Windsor:
Yes.

Katy Clarke:

And he. This beautiful ceramic little figurine that had been made of him. And we just - we tried to find the same ceramics place that made this figurine, and we couldn't quite find it. Could we? But yeah, it was really special for him to go and his wife to go back to Bari and see, you know, how things had changed and spent some time there. So that was really lovely as well.

Katy Clarke:

It does have this way of getting under your skin, Puglia. And like, people always want to go back. We didn't even mention Monopoli, which is one of my favorite places.

Olivia Windsor:

I love Monopoli. Oh, it's kind of like a more chilled-out Polignano, though. Yes. It's no stranger to crowds either, during. Well, I'm not going to spoil our secrets of how we take you to kind of the real Monopoli, but that's just such a beautiful, beautiful fishing village where, you know, the fishermen are still owning the fishing boats in the sea that you see the very colorful fishing boats. And it's a really chic town too. It doesn't feel kind of tacky tourist either. It's really nice.

Katy Clarke:

Remember that first trip and we went walking around and just we had a little aperitivo here, a seafood feast there, because that's the other thing. Obviously they're by the sea and this was - I don't actually... I think everything went a little bit crazy there. And they. I don't know if you can do this anymore because Flavia said that they're not doing sea urchins. But at one point, you could get sea urchins, which are a delicacy there, for one euro, which I've had them in Singapore and they were not one euro. They were like. I think they were more like €50.

Olivia Windsor:

Yes.

Katy Clarke:

Food is very, very important to their way of life. And seafood, meat, cheese, very healthy vegetables. All the bitter greens. Oh, it's a very healthy food region.

Olivia Windsor:

And what I would also say in regards to food is we've also had vegans on this tour, so there is honestly something for everyone. And this was a daughter of our very special return guests who've been on maybe six trips with us, and their daughter thinks that she's never eaten better anywhere else. So there is really something for everyone in Puglia, food-wise.

Katy Clarke:

Okay, now let's tell everyone about some of the logistical things with Puglia, because we mentioned before, there are some direct flights in to Bari from the East Coast of the US now,

which is surprising, but it's great. I think there's one from JFK and Newark and that's really handy. It's a tiny little airport, Bari, but it's cute and it's like you're not going to get stuck in any, any big customs queue there. Typically, in the past, people have flown into Rome and from there, what do they do, Liv?

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, so a lot of our guests have flown into Rome. They have a couple of days in Rome if time permits. And we're always happy to help with suggestions for what you do in Rome. And then there's the high-speed train that goes from Rome to Bari Centrale, which is where our tours start. And that's a really easy four-hour train. It's quite relaxing. You look out the window as you're having your coffee on the train and enjoy the beautiful scenery. We always recommend that our guests get to Bari at least the day before, just so that, you know, you can acclimatise, you can check out the town a little bit and you can be in time to meet our tour the day after.

Katy Clarke:

But if you were going to travel around, one thing you really need to know about Puglia is that logistically, you really do need a car. There is a train that goes down the coast, which can stop Monopoli and Polignano and Ostuni and eventually makes its way to Lecce. But it's not a fast speed train. This is definitely slow travel. You need to have time on your hands and you need to be a bit patient. There are local buses, of course, so if you're on a tight schedule, you need a car and you are on the other side of Italy to Rome and to Naples and all of those things. So you do have, you know, if you're not coming on one of those direct flights that I mentioned, you're going to have to spend a bit of time in transit.

Katy Clarke:

So yeah, so car is needed. It's not that difficult to drive around Puglia, though. I drove. Olivia is still alive, which is great.

Olivia Windsor:

Exactly. I would just recommend that you don't drive in Bari. Bari airport is obviously fine, but not inside the city because it's very hectic.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Olivia Windsor:

But everywhere else is fine.

Katy Clarke:

And like we mentioned, Puglia is up and coming. One of our friends, Paolo, he's been around in the tourism industry there for a long time, since, you know, I think early 2000s and that's really when tourism first started in Puglia. So it gives you an idea that, you know, they're kind of feeling their way a bit. And you know what, that's part of the charm, I've got to say. But

you might not find a lot of things online to, you know, these type of things. So when you get there, then you might need to sort out tours and etc yourself if you're traveling around. But obviously, if you're traveling with us, we do it all for you. You just have to relax and go and, you know, just have a little snooze while we're traveling from place to place.

Katy Clarke:

Although we don't spend a lot of time on our little buses. But you do need to be a little bit flexible and relaxed about things when you're in Puglia, because it isn't that super efficient.

Olivia Windsor:

No, you're on Southern Italian time. The other thing I wanted to mention, just about logistics, because I notice a lot of our guests who come on our tours, but also our travel consult clients, a lot of them interested in, after their time in Puglia, heading to the other side of the coast in Italy, so that Amalfi Coast, and just the logistics of getting there. So I thought I would mention that there is a FlixBus that runs from Bari over to the other side to Naples. But there are also opportunities for transfers that we've helped many of our guests organize, either from Matera or from Bari, where. Where this tour ends, back to Naples or onto the Amalfi coast. So that's an option.

Katy Clarke:

And also, just in terms of accommodation, we've had a few people lately interested in staying in a Trulli place. What you need to know about these truly places, if you're traveling on your own, is that they were very humble storage units, basically, that could be quickly dismantled for taxation purposes. So basically, you were taxed on however many footprints of buildings that you had when you were in Puglia. So the Pugliese found this ingenious way to create a building that they could take up and take down very easily if the tax inspector was coming. Anyway, they're not luxurious.

Olivia Windsor:

No. And they're very dark inside.

Katy Clarke:

Very dark inside. So we've had people that were looking for, like a luxury Masseria, you know, with a pool and everything. And I think what they're thinking is that these places are in the middle of a town. So number one, they may not be luxurious. Well, if they're typical, they're not luxurious. They may have been recreated and then they're kind of not authentic. But if you want to stay in a Masseria, you're definitely going to need transport because they are not in the middle of the town. Because a Masseria, by definition, is a country estate.

Katy Clarke:

It's kind of like a fortified country estate. So you will need transport to get there and around. You can't. I mean, it's a unicorn. We're looking for the unicorn, the place that. That has got all of that and a pool that's close to a town. It's just as far as we know, it doesn't exist.

Katy Clarke:

And also to know the outskirts of the town, they're more modern. They're not, you know, if you were to find somewhere quite close, the outskirts of the town are more modern. You really want to be in the old town and getting that beautiful piazza, old town feeling...

Olivia Windsor:

In the pretty part. of town, not the kind of more industrial outskirts as well.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, exactly. So you just have to set people's expectations. And what I would say as well in terms of accommodation is there are some really fancy hotels and Masserias coming up in Puglia to meet the demand of its new popularity. And some of them, like, you've got Rocco Forte hotels, which are stunning, but you're looking at thousands of euros a night.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

And so there is a broad range of accommodation. You've got some fairly budget stuff, they've got the luxury, luxury stuff. Not a lot in between, I would say.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah. Just when it comes to accommodation, I mean, if you are planning a trip by yourself too, just keep in mind that Puglia is wedding central too. So that's why do not hesitate to book, especially for spring. Got some final spots left on our spring tours as well. But really you do not want to be leaving your accommodation to the last minute because a lot of these Masserie are completely booked out for weddings.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, we found that out the hard way didn't we Liv?

Katy Clarke:

Yes.

Katy Clarke:

That's a really good point. And just one more thing on the actual accommodation, like I said, it's fairly new to tourism and it's pretty traditional Italian way and Italians like to share their bed. Twin beds are extremely difficult to find. We do our very best. We've got options for our guests on our tours, but like, like really, it's difficult in Puglia. So I mean, I know we've had one of our trip consult clients had really wanted to have like a suite.

Katy Clarke:

It's a concept that's not - they just don't get it. I mean, maybe they will soon, but...

Olivia Windsor:

It'S a sofa bed at best, let's just say.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, the sofa beds can be comfy.

Olivia Windsor:

Very comfortable, lovely. It's just maybe, you know... it's not like Tuscany, where they're really set up for. For twin beds.

Katy Clarke:

So I mean, all of these things in my mind make for a charming visit to Puglia and I love it. But you just need to be aware of a few little quirks that they have, I would say. So before we wrap this up, Liv, what are some of the reactions that our guests have had about their time in Puglia?

Olivia Windsor:

Well, I'll never forget just seeing some of our guests when we got to our Masseria accommodation. Just, oh, my God, the emotional kind of tears of joy when they saw where they were staying. It just, you know, sticks in my mind forever. I don't think we've ever had such an emotional response to accommodate - just, you know, to accommodation, because it is really just so picturesque. You know, we stay out in the countryside with all these monumental olive trees around. There's a beautiful swimming pool. You've got beautiful, spacious bedrooms, and it just feels like you're in some kind of fairy tale world, really. So that is a, you know, really emotional reaction that some of our guests have.

Olivia Windsor:

Interacting with the locals as well.. You know, Katy, you mentioned before our very special guest, Vicky, who we've got that amazing photo of her embracing our local guide. And that's the feeling that you have when you're in Puglia, because these people that we meet, they really care, and you feel that you just want to give them a hug, and they want to give you a hug. And it just feels so. Only in Puglia, I guess, you know, it's a very different feeling to really anywhere else in Italy, I would say. Not that they're not hospitable in other regions, but it's just so friendly there. They're just so eager to help you, I think, in Puglia. And so our guests just really are delighted by that.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, everyone really feels part of Puglia, part of Italy. They love that. That experience of being welcomed. I think it's that welcoming feeling that you're looking for. And again, the perfect escape, because this is nothing like, it's very different to ... when you're on the other side of the coast - things are more what you'd expect because they've sort of adapted themselves to international visitors, whereas in Puglia, they're not so much adapting yet, which is really charming. So, yeah, that's why we love it.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, okay. Liv, when are our trips departing in 2026?

Olivia Windsor:

So we've got two trips in May, and then we've got two trips in September. So we like to travel in May and September to Puglia because it can get extremely hot in the summertime. So really, you know, from June until the end of August, start of September can be really, really hot. So this way we get the best of the weather, but it's still comfortable temperatures for swimming. Yes, but also, you know all of our sightseeing and local experiences, so. Yes, that's why we offer trips in May and September.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, absolutely. I can't stress enough. Even June.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, it's too hot.

Katy Clarke:

You know, you want to be able to enjoy your glass of wine and your pasta and, you know, I think when we go there, there's just those beautiful sea breezes. Yeah, it's lovely. I really can't wait to go back. Oh, thanks, Liv. Thanks for sharing Puglia. And for anyone that's thinking of going, don't delay. I. I do see that this region, not that it's going to lose its charm so much, because it is a little bit of an effort to get there and get around, but will change.

Katy Clarke:

It will become a little more tourist machine. So I think the time is now to go to Puglia. Just soak it all up. Come and gather around the big table. This is our favorite part. This is one of our favorite parts of our tour, isn't it? When we first arrive in Puglia and we just get everyone around this big table and we just relax into the vibes, the feeling and the food.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, it's just beautiful. I love Puglia.

Katy Clarke:

Thanks, Liv.

Olivia Windsor:

Grazie. Katy. Thanks, everyone.

Katy Clarke:

Okay, listeners, we have some spots on our group departures in spring and autumn for 2026, and we will be releasing dates for 2027 in the coming weeks. We also offer private trips for groups of four or more, and we have some lovely family groups who do this with us over the

years. Get in touch with us at info@untolditalytours.com if you would like to know more. And of course we will leave this email address and all the details of the places mentioned and the tours into the show notes at untolditaly.com/309 for episode number 309 and if you are traveling independently, you will find curated accommodation, restaurant shopping and activity suggestions in the premium version of the Untold Italy app and you'll also find local transport information for Puglia and Italy's regions from the top to the toe of the boot. Download the app for free and explore our Milan guide to see what it is like before making any commitment. Plus, the app is a one-off payment and there's no subscription required. That is all for this week, sending everyone listening around the world a big 'abbraccio' - that's Italian for hug from me in Australia and our team in Italy and across this beautiful planet. In the words of one of my heroes, Brené Brown - stay awkward, brave and kind. Until next time. It's ciao for now.