

Untold Italy Episode 317: The Tuscany You Dreamed Of (and How to Find It)

Tuscany needs no introduction. It's a place of languid sunsets, hills covered in vines, timeless towns, and some of the dreamiest landscapes you will ever see. But where can you find the soul of the region? Is it in the narrow streets and galleries of Florence, Pisa's Field of Miracles, or the Towers of San Gimignano? Let's find out on this episode 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:

Welcome. I'm Katy, founder of Untold Italy, and we are a modern travel company that assists independent travelers with one-to-one trip planning services. And we have a travel app that is full of curated recommendations for the whole of Italy, from the top of the boot to the toe. We also host intimate small group journeys across regional Italy to places including Tuscany, where we are taking a virtual trip today. So I'm wondering, have you been to Tuscany? Chances are, if you've been to Italy in the past, you may have dipped your toes in there, maybe on a day trip from Florence or even a longer stay.

Katy Clarke:

It is a region that has captured the hearts of so many people and it's a backdrop to many iconic movies. But it's also one of the more touristed areas in Italy.

Katy Clarke:

So if you're looking for the Tuscany that you've dreamed of, one of golden fields and rolling vineyards and all of those beautiful scenes that you've seen in the movies, how can you find it? Joining me today is my colleague, Olivia. And we're going to explore the Tuscany that we love and share the personal moments that stay with us when we think of Tuscany. So let's welcome her onto the show. Buongiorno, Ciao Liv!

Olivia Windsor:

Ciao, Katy. Ciao, everyone. Come stai.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, bene. Molto bene. Okay, let's do this. Do you want to go to Tuscany?

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Olivia Windsor:

Oh, when do I not want to go to Tuscany?

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. And I think for many of us, when we think of the Italian countryside, we think of Tuscany. And, you know, why do you think that's true, Liv? Why does everyone think of Tuscany when they think of the Italian countryside?

Olivia Windsor:

Because it's just gorgeous. But they've seen Tuscany in a lot of popular film and culture. So under the Tuscan sun, Francis Maye's novels, Room With a View, all of these, kind of, you know, big films in Tuscany, mean that people really have seen Tuscany, have an idea of what it might be like, and it's a really dreamy kind of place they envision.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I know, I know. I certainly did. One of my most favorite movies of all time is A Room with a View, the Merchant-Ivory version. If you have not seen it, get onto that right now, because, I don't know, they don't make movies like that anymore, and I don't know why, because it's so beautiful and dreamy and it's got a great story and, I don't know, they make movies these days that are so violent and angry and cross, and they should all be more like Merchant Ivory films, although this one is a particularly good one. And so today, we thought we'd take a virtual trip to the Tuscany that we love and has inspired these movies and share with you how we approach exploring there when we're on our tours with our Untold Italy guests. Liv, what is it you think about these movies and these visions of Italy that really captures people's imagination?

Olivia Windsor:

I think it's that romantic feeling of being in Tuscany that doesn't necessarily mean romance in the traditional sense of the word, as in for couples, but romantic in the rolling hills, the soft, dappled light, the medieval hilltop towns, visions of yourself riding a bicycle through the markets and, you know, picking up some cherries or something to make dinner. It's just this romantic idea and feeling of what it means to be in Tuscany that gets under your skin in. In a way that's different to other regions for me. Yeah. I think a lot of our guests who are coming, it's their first time to Italy, and they're really drawn to this romantic vision of themselves in Tuscany.

Katy Clarke:

And who would it be like? I'm going to deep dive into this a little bit, but A Room with a View is like this story of this young woman, Lucy Honeychurch, and she goes to Florence with her aunt, who's chaperoning her on, like, a grand tour of Italy. And she's in - she will be in her early... she'd be in late teenagers, early 20s, I guess. And it's set in the turn of the century, the night in the 19th to 20th century. So they're wearing those, you know, big bustley dresses and the hairs up and the hats are on and all of that. And, you know, you first see her, Lucy, when she's in Florence.

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Katy Clarke:

And she's all.... she's kind of a little bit stiff and she's, you know, she's not. You can tell she's not enjoying herself so much. But then one day, they take a trip out to the countryside in Tuscany and everything changes. And there's this just amazing awakening of this young woman. And she finds her passions and she kind of comes to life, I would say. And how that happens, and we'll get into this in a bit more detail, it's through the people that she observes and meets. And so I find it a very emotional movie. And I watched it first as a teenager, and I have no doubt that it inspired my trips to Italy.

Katy Clarke:

And I think *Under the Tuscan Sun* is kind of similar in that way, in that she arrives in the countryside and, you know, it's kind of the changing seasons and the way that life moves there is a metaphor for her life because she's, you know, recovering from a divorce and all of this stuff. So, yeah, like, it's got that magical background, hasn't it?

Olivia Windsor:

It really does it really. It gets under your skin and. Yeah. You just want to be taken along for the ride.

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. Okay. Even if you're not joining us on a tour of Tuscany, I hope you find this episode really helpful and inspirational as we're going to talk about the places that we visit on our tours and the experiences that we have there that we think are really, truly magical and bring some of those feelings to life. Because I think what happens in the movies, as well, is you get this, you know, and people that make movies, they're so clever, aren't they? Like, they bring places to life. And it's not just about, like, visuals, which are super important, but it's also about, like, sound and light and just bringing people into a story.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

In a way that if you were just watching a YouTube video, I don't know if you've seen those YouTube videos, Liv, where some guy sticks a camera on his hat or something and walks around, walks around places. But, you know, you don't get that feeling that you get when you're in a place quite like that. It doesn't evoke that same feeling. I mean, sure, you get those beautiful visuals and everything, but it's missing something. So to help get us started as we go and explore Tuscany a bit more, can you tell everyone about the feeling that you have when you're in Tuscany that's really different to other parts of Italy?

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, I think it's this feeling, again, riffing off the romantic kind of feeling, kind of whimsical and relaxing and refined, though, as well. It's different to being somewhere like in Sicily,

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where it's kind of a vibrancy. Here, it's a little bit more like a slow settling in to the Tuscan countryside. And, yeah, just this real storybook romance and storybook kind of fairy tale feeling, I guess, of being in such a pretty place. But it's not just, again, it's not just about the visuals of what you're seeing. It's about the people that you're meeting in a slower pace of life that's different.

Olivia Windsor:

And also to Florence. Florence can be quite chaotic now and busy. And I know when a lot of our guests meet us, because we pick up in Florence, they might be feeling, you know, it's lovely and by all means, visit, but they might be feeling a little bit stressed by all the crowds and, you know, tick box list of things that they've got to do. And when they meet up with us and we go into the countryside, it's this kind of deep sigh as you settle into the relaxing nature of the countryside.

Katy Clarke:

There's something about the light in Tuscany which you can't actually take a photo of it. It's impossible. It's kind of like thick air and it's got a really languid, beautiful, like, relaxing tone to it. And so when you watch the sunset and you can watch that in Florence, by the way, and some really great places to do that, and you can go there with half of Europe at Piazzale Michelangelo, which is amazing by. And you can pay €15 for an Aperol spritz in a plastic cup. But, you know, if I look back on some of the times that I've spent in Tuscany, that are the most magical, it's really around sunset and I love those sunsets.

Katy Clarke:

But it's usually in a small town and we're sitting in the piazza and kids are out to play and locals are out in the piazza. Everyone's enjoying, you know, maybe a glass of wine that costs €7. You know, it's just a very - it's a more lovely experience and it's relaxing and it's slow and it's just. And you just don't want it to end, but you know that it will. So the sun's inevitably going to go down and you just have to be there another night to experience it one more time.

Olivia Windsor:

Exactly. I agree.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. So, I mean, is there any other moments that you have in Tuscany that really capture this energy? Because for me, having those slower moments, walking down a trail in the countryside with the little insects buzzing around, no scary bugs, but just like, you know, just the buzz of country life, I think.

Olivia Windsor:

And the fireflies, even out in the balmy kind of evenings, that's always kind of sets the scene, too. The smells around you, too, like the wood smoke. It's not just the visuals, but it's all the senses kind of involved. The smell of the ragu simmering away in the kitchens. Or the waft of

pecorino cheese as you travel through some of these hilltop towns. That is just. Yeah. Really gorgeous as well.

Olivia Windsor:

The music, too, in some of these towns.

Katy Clarke:

I know, Liv. One of my favourite things. I remember when we first got to know each other, one of the favorite things you'd ever done was you'd done the Cena in vigna, which is the dinner in vineyards. And I know you found that really inspiring.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, I really, really did find that inspiring. And I think that is some of the feelings that we really want to recreate on any of our tours. Because it was this conviviality, not just a beautiful setting, being in a long, pretty table in the middle of the Tuscan vineyards, but surrounded by a group of people all sharing a meal together, sharing stories, sharing beautiful wine. Oh, yeah, that was a real pinch me moment that I think, you know, we try and recreate for our guests, too.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, I think, you know, we've known each other many years now, actually, and I always come back to that. I always remember you describing that and your face, you were so happy and, you know, and that was like a really one of those Only in Tuscany moments, because they do that so very well there and they make sure that it's a very special occasion. And you feel that not because everything's super fancy or, you know, like super curated, but it's actually like a really kind of natural experience out in the countryside, feeling together with people and the land.

Olivia Windsor:

Yes, exactly. Right.

Katy Clarke:

We'll return in a moment with the rest of the episode. For on-the-go, curated travel tips, restaurant recommendations and fun things to do in classic and hidden spots across Italy. Download the Untold Italy app link in the show notes.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Okay, so when we talk to people about visiting Tuscany, and we do that quite a lot, what do you think that they're really looking for? I mean, we know what we're looking for, but what do you think other people are looking for?

Olivia Windsor:

I think they're looking for some kind of connection. So, again, of course, they want to go and see the beautiful countryside, they want to do wine tasting, they want to have a delicious

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meal of, like, ragu or something like that and the cheese. And they want to visit the hilltop towns. They might have this kind of long list of little kind of tick box things and you can certainly have that. But when they get there, sometimes they can be a little bit disappointed because they're searching for that - not just the places to visit, but the feeling of being welcomed into the experience and welcomed into, I guess, the local way of life, if that makes sense. I think as well, Tuscany is a place that can be deceptively easy to travel to by yourself. You know, can rent a car and you can get a list of hilltop towns to go and visit.

Olivia Windsor:

But if you're not kind of connected to some, an anchoring experience of some kind of local, it can end up feeling a little bit transactional, perhaps, because there are so many, you know, tourists that visit and, yeah, you might kind of just be chasing that idea of the feeling that you were hoping to have when you went to Tuscany in the first place. So that's kind of a risk that it can end up feeling a bit commercial and a bit transactional. And when you come with us and with our beautiful tour hosts to these places, you're not - you're having really the opposite of a transactional experience because you're being welcomed into people's homes, locals' homes. You're getting access to things that are quite rare in a region like this now, where there are a lot of tourists and you're having, you know, an opportunity to have that feeling of being welcomed into the moment, welcomed into milking a goat, welcomed into stepping through the olive groves.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. People have, in this vision, in this mind from those movies is that especially Under the Tuscan Sun and, you know, that feeling of being welcomed into the community and all of that. And I, I think, you know, realistically, we know we're not going to get that straight away when we go to a brand new place, but it's a feeling that we hope for. And I know when people first arrive at the accommodation in the Chianti Hills, they definitely get that feeling, don't they? Like, it's a very special property. Sorry, we're not sharing it here. We have to keep something secret. But it is like an old town that's been converted into some beautiful accommodation and it's just gorgeous.

Katy Clarke:

And the people that run it are just so lovely and friendly and it just sets the scene perfectly, don't you think?

Olivia Windsor:

Oh, it really does. It's like this medieval Borgo where, you know, it's just you staying there. And everyone in the village is connected, too. They're, you know, all friends. And because it's a tiny place, and so you feel like you're just kind of staying in this tiny little Tuscan hamlet that's impossibly beautiful. But it's more than just the visuals and the beauty. It's the people that you're surrounded by that are so warm and friendly. And that, unfortunately, can be difficult to find in Tuscany.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's getting quite commercial these days. But, I mean, when you are standing in a town, in a place where the people's family have built it over many generations, there's something really powerful about that, you know, and this is coming from someone, you know, like, I hope you can't hear this noise behind me, but I've just pulled down a house and am starting again. So there's some very good reasons for that, because they're not built like they do in Tuscany. But I think there's something really to be said for having those connections. And even as we go through life, I know, you know, I'm watching, like, my parents, my mum in particular, she's, you know, really delving into her family history and wanting to know more about where the family came from. But for these people, it's right there. They don't have to go searching.

Katy Clarke:

And it gives them. It seems really more peaceful somehow.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

Okay. So when we're in Tuscany, like, you know, as we said, we arrive at this gorgeous Borgo, and everything is just divine, and you feel completely, like, looked after in your little countryside home. But what are some of the other highlights of, you know, what people can experience in Tuscany? Because, like you said, I think everyone's looking for those wine tastings and things like that. But what are some of the highlights of the region that, you know, you really must have when you're in Tuscany?

Olivia Windsor:

I think a lot of these highlights are driven by the seasonality in Tuscany. And I think that's something that's so special about traveling in Tuscany, because each season that you visit, there's something different on offer. So in the springtime, all the beautiful wildflowers are out, and just visually, that's so stunning. The irises are out. And I know certainly on our tours of Tuscany in spring, our guests get to walk through this beautiful trail of the irises, which are the emblem of Florence itself. And then in the fall again, and with the seasons and the way it changes. You've got different scenery. The leaves are changing color, and they're the vibrant reds and gold kind of colors.

Olivia Windsor:

And you've got the smell of, you know, the new season wine being made. The olive oil, certainly when we visit in our Tuscany in fall tours, we go and taste the freshly churned olive oil - that if you haven't tried before, it will change your life. There's, like, nothing else than tasting that fresh olive oil. There's the truffles. So in the fall, it's truffle season, and they have white truffles in Tuscany, too. And so, you know, going along with a truffle hunter and his dog along a forest trail, you can do lots of different truffle tours, but there's a difference in a commercial one that's been staged and one that, you know, will take you on. That's a real

truffle hunt. So you've got more skin in the game because you're not guaranteed finding a truffle too.

Olivia Windsor:

But I think that makes it all the more exciting. So, yeah, there's so many highlights of Tuscany, I think, related to the seasons and the rhythms of what's going on. Certainly in the summertime as well, you know, Tuscany comes alive with festivals and food festivals and *sagre*, they're called. So there's always something exciting in whatever season you visit in.

Katy Clarke:

And there are so many kind of like - I don't like to use the word iconic so much, but there's so many iconic places, you know, so San Gimignano is one that is very, very popular. And it's like. It's gorgeous. Yeah, definitely San Gimignano. But, you know, now it can be a little bit tricky because it's just packed to the rafters and there's a lot of day trip opportunities. You can go on a day trip from Florence, and there's some really great ones that you can do, actually, so. But have that experience.

Katy Clarke:

You're not going to get that dreamy experience when you've got 5,000 other people trying to take the same photo next to you. And so when we visit these towns, we are taking a very specific approach to visiting so that you can experience them as you really want to remember them. These. These beautiful, beautiful places bathed in sunlight. And you're not lining up for half an hour for the world-famous gelato, which does happen. So all of this is possible to do on your own. You can definitely do it on your own.

Katy Clarke:

But what you're gonna miss, probably unless you have some strong local connections, is some of the stories behind what's happening in the towns, why they do the things that they do, why are they growing those particular grapes? What is the story behind the wine? These are the things that make the difference. You feel part of what's going on rather than feeling like you're kind of observing things. And, you know, there's no, you know, some people want to just watch from the sides and be a voyeur. But, you know, I can tell you now that when you feel part of something, it's just kind of a magical moment. And one of those things is really visiting a winery in Tuscany, because everyone knows Chianti, right? Like, it's one of the world's most famous wines. And there are literally thousands of places you can visit when you're in Tuscany. And so many people are offering wine tours and wine experiences and things like that, but they're not all the same.

Katy Clarke:

And so, you know, really dig deep and think about what you want to experience, because, you know, we can explain what we do and why we love it. And that's something I think is pretty unique. So, Liv, you are the master of finding the amazing vineyards. So tell us about, like, those wine experiences, the ones that we love.

Olivia Windsor:

When you come - well, when you don't come with us, you might go to, like, a really beautiful winery - that's a big commercial one. So I'm just going to say Antinori, for example, that's really well known. And you can have a really, you know, nice bottle of wine there, wine tasting, sitting at the bar and stuff but you're not going to be chatting with the winemaker there, and that might be okay for some people. And what you're after when you come with us, you are sitting with the winemaker, meeting the winemaker in a small group. It's just us for a start.

Olivia Windsor:

There's no one else there. There are no other bus groups. There are no other independent travelers. It's just our small group of maximum 12 people, the winemaker, and we're walking through the vineyards together. We're looking at the plants together, we're looking at the grapes. The winemaker will also invite you to taste the grapes, which is something that you don't get to do at some of these bigger places. He'll tell you about his, you know, his father or his grandfather, who owned the land for generations before, and how the winemaking has changed since, you know, their times and the highs and the lows of running a winery and being so dependent on agriculture and the rhythm of the seasons. And years that have been hard, where hail's come and their production has been wiped out, or years that have been great. And so you have this emotional connection to what we're about to sit down and taste together.

Olivia Windsor:

So you walk through the vineyards together. And then at one of our wineries that we visit, we go up into the winemaker's home and he has prepared dinner for us, which this does not happen - it's a real, you know, other wineries and certainly not by yourself. This is a really rare opportunity to sit down and dine with the winemaker. It's not a catered for event as well, where it's external catering. You know, this is literally made by the man himself and you're going to taste his wine. So you sit down around a long table as the sun's starting to set, which, again, if you do a day tour into the Tuscan countryside, by all means, there's some great ones, but you're not getting to see the sunset for a start, because you've got to be back in Florence or Rome. So you get to take in that gorgeous view of the sun setting over the vines.

Olivia Windsor:

Often with his, he makes a sparkling rose which is a little different, and you get to sip on that as you're having some pecorino cheese and some Tuscan cured meats. And then, you know, proceed into an evening of wine tasting. But it's not just tasting the wine because we get some guests that don't drink alcohol too. It's an appreciation for the stories behind the land, behind the glass, about him and his family and, you know, generations. So it's just so different to a commercial wine experience. They're like chalk and cheese. And that's not to say that, you know, there's different things for different people and you might be looking for that experience where it's just about for you - you want to go and buy a case of wine and you don't, you know, it doesn't really matter about the stories behind it and that's all right.

Olivia Windsor:

But I guess when you come with us, you're getting the stories and you're still getting the case of wine, if you'd like it.

Katy Clarke:

I know, but it might take a little longer to get home. Just saying, like, they don't have Amazon there. Sorry, guys. So. So it's a little bit slower and I love, at the end of our tours and they're all the guests are talking about, ah, has your wine arrived yet? And when they get it, they're so excited and then they share it on the group chat and they say what they ate with it. And it's again, it's just this connection and having the involvement of people and you feel part of it and you're feeling that you're experiencing, you know, not just, you know, like a perfunctory tasting. And don't get me wrong, I love a glam wine tasting at a, you know, fancy place with nice, you know, sculptures everywhere to walk around.

Katy Clarke:

But it is also true that I appreciate the differences and, you know, I can remember in more detail the experiences that I had when I have those more local, those more intimate experiences.

Katy Clarke:

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Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's. It's super special. And, you know, if you're going to taste wine in Tuscany, hearing their stories will just... it'll take you back to the movies and you'll sort of sink in and you'll have that warm, fuzzy feeling.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah. And I think it makes it more special, like when you do order the wine and you bring it out when you get back home, because it takes you back to your trip in Tuscany and allows you to share it with people back home, too, and keeps the memory of Tuscany kind of burning bright.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, 100%. And isn't that better than a slideshow or boring everyone with your photos - pour the beautiful glass of wine and do it that way. Oh. So are there other moments in Tuscany that I think that the guests find really surprising, Liv? Like, there are some definite ones that stand out for me, but you've been there, done that, and been with them, so...

Olivia Windsor:

Yes, there's so many. And the first one that comes to mind is our visit to a goat farm. And we need to get up quite early that day because the goats don't wait for anyone. They, you know, this is not a performative thing. We are going to a working farm, goat farm, a small one, and

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we need to be there early because the goats need to be milked. And so, you know, everyone kind of wakes up and we're all a little bit tired, a little bit cranky. And then we get into the middle of the countryside and we're kind of thinking, what's going on? And then all of a sudden, you are milking the goats by hand yourself. And there'll be a moment where the guests will say, oh, my God, I did not imagine or ever envisioned myself doing this.

Olivia Windsor:

But you're there with a massive smile on your face. Everyone has a go. And you know, there's delighted squeals when the milk comes out of the udders, because it's not as easy as it looks, might I add. But it's so fun. And so you get to milk the goats, and Valentina's there, who, you know, is the mother, the owner of the goats, and the farm. And she's just so gentle and patient and regaling everyone with, you know, all the goats have a name, too, so you really get to meet these gorgeous little goats. And then you're walking through her farm together into where she makes the cheese, and you're all of a sudden making the fresh goat's cheese together.

Olivia Windsor:

And then you go after - you know, you go through a process of learning about how she makes the cheese. And it's not just that, though, because she regales us with the stories of how she moved from Trentino to Tuscany and the life changes that she had and the different sacrifices that it means to work on the land. Yeah. There's this moment of real wow and surprise that - on paper it says, yep, we're off to visit a goat cheese farm. But in practice, it's not just about visiting a goat's cheese farm. It's about, you know, learning about all the history behind it and, yeah, I guess different challenges and sacrifices that people make in their lives. And, yeah, there's a moment for reflection on how we live our lives, too.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And for those of us who have grown up in the city, you think, oh, no, I don't know if I want to try that. But let me tell you, the moment you cuddle that baby goat, everything changes. Yeah. They're so cute. I love baby goats, everyone. If you've been listening for a while, you know how much I love baby goats, but the first time I got to see them, I was just squealing my head off.

Katy Clarke:

But I think what's really special is you see the whole process from end to end, and, you know, no one's forcing you to do the goat milking if you don't want to - like, but. But trust me, like, you somehow find the courage or the, you know, the will or the want, you know, like, it's just so natural. And, you know, you can see the process of having the cheese being made from start to finish. And I think in a world where, you know, things just kind of arrive on your plate, and it's super - just amazing to see that care and attention that goes into something that's truly, truly delicious. There's another one thing that happens on this trip that I think, you know, like, I don't know, like, you have to be there. It's one of those you have to be there moments, isn't it?

Olivia Windsor:

Oh, it really is. And, you know, it's this moment where we have, like, the most epic pizza party. Our guests in the WhatsApp chats that we set up still talk about it. The most epic pizza party of their lives. Because it's not just a pizza party, but, yeah, we go to this lovely Tuscan man's home in the countryside and we have a pizza party. We make pizza together. There's the pizza oven. But, you know, it's not just that because there's music going.

Olivia Windsor:

His cousin, who lives down the road, rocks up, and he's pouring his handmade wine and everything's talking in Italian. And, you know, the host is translating different things. And so you're swept up into what's going on. The Tuscan pizza maker's neighbor knocks on the door because, you know, he can hear a party going on. And he comes in and, you know, wants to regale our guests with his stories that are often in Italian. So the host is translating again. And it's just this moment where our guests look around and just think, oh, my God, this is what I was hoping for when I visited Tuscany.

Olivia Windsor:

And I'm actually living it. I'm actually getting it. I'm not just at a sterile kind of commercial kitchen. I'm in someone's house having a party with their friends, kind of.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, yeah. I think another moment that for me is really special is because, you know, Florence is - and I mean, it's gorgeous. It's one of the world's most beautiful cities. But it is a lot these days because it's very busy. And so another place that we go on this trip is really. Is something that surprises a lot of people.

Katy Clarke:

And it. It gives them that feeling, too, isn't it? And that's the beautiful city of Lucca.

Olivia Windsor:

Lucca is such a beautiful, real Tuscan town that I think people are hoping Florence will be. And while it's beautiful, they get there, a lot of crowds, a lot of chaos, stress. People arguing with each other over directions. You might go out for a lovely dinner, but you'll be seated next to perhaps a restaurant full of other English speakers, which is okay, but perhaps not the Tuscan moment that you were hoping or dreaming that you'd have instead. When you go to Lucca, it's so real and lived that you'll be, you know, there's this moment where we sit at an enoteca, a wine bar in a gorgeous, tiny little piazza. And we're sitting outside on our little table and everyone around in the piazza are Italian and speaking Italian and it's just a really calm, tranquil moment. No one's rushing around, there's no kind of people yelling at each other over wrong directions. And oh, we were meant to do this, we're meant to do that.

Olivia Windsor:

You're just sitting in like a real Tuscan town. And that's why we include Lucca, so that you can get that mix of the countryside with the mix of small town Tuscan life.

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Katy Clarke:

So if you do, if you, you know, traveling around on your own, yeah, definitely try and do that. Another beautiful place is Arezzo, where you can get to very easily on the train from Florence. And also, and this might surprise people, actually, Pisa is a really lovely place. I mean, everyone's going for the tower, but once you get out of that crazy situation, which, you know, sadly, that's been completely ruined by mass tourism, I mean, you know, you have to see it and it's fun, but it's a university city that's just actually quite lovely. If you get away from the Piazza dei Miracoli, there's plenty of opportunities in Tuscany to have this kind of feeling that you're part of. You can see a different way of life unfolding. So, Liv, you've been with many guests on this trip and how did they react to, to being in Tuscany? What's the feeling?

Olivia Windsor:

Oh, just huge, big smiles and people saying 'life changing'. Which sounds maybe a little dramatic. But after you've been on the tour with us, I think that you will be of the same mind and of the same opinion a lot of the time. Our visitors on this trip, it's their first time in Italy in general, sometimes even Europe and Tuscany is that real storybook moment that comes to life on our tours. One of our guests from last year, Louise, it was her first trip to Italy and she said, you know, it was life-changing. And what she loved was the careful selection of these experiences that we've been talking about with local guides and the accommodation that we mentioned. Intimate, hands-on experiences, local people, you know, she also loved the milking of the goats and the cheese making.

Olivia Windsor:

And another thing that our guest says, these magical moments, magical moments that happen that, you know, are just out of reach for most travelers on their own or in larger tours. Yeah, it's just, it is a joy really to see our guests' reactions to being in Italy. And in Tuscany for the very first time.

Katy Clarke:

And also what I've loved is people that have come back maybe after, you know, many years, and they were like, oh, wow. I, you know, I remembered it was beautiful, but I didn't remember it like this and you know, or that they'd done certain classes before in Italy, but they never had that opportunity to be part of being a part of going to pick vegetables and walking with the cook to go find the different ingredients for what they're cooking. And it's just they can get quite overwhelmed at times, can't they? With emotion.

Olivia Windsor:

Yeah, it's funny you should say that. Some guests that are coming to Sicily with us next year, the Salivis, they came with us to Tuscany last year and they'd be, I think it was their fourth trip to Tuscany, actually. But they'd never done it on a tour before or anything like that - it had always been self-guided and they were drawn to the romance and the beauty and everything, but they wanted an experience where they were going to be guided into

participating in the Tuscan life. And that's what they got when they came with us. It was really different to traveling to Tuscany by yourself.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, but I mean, it's all good and I do it, I do all of the above and. But yeah, if you're looking for something that's like, you know, a bit different and a bit deeper and emotional, then we can certainly help you with that. And so, you know, Liv, some people are just concerned about how to get there and how to get around. So what we do is make things pretty easy for people and we start this trip in Tuscany from Florence so you can have some busy, busy time in Florence and then we will whisk you off into the countryside and you can have that relaxing country experience that you're probably dreaming of.

Olivia Windsor:

Exactly. I know our guests always have a bit of a sigh of relief when we meet them at the train station in Florence because it is really busy there and they just can completely relax when we pick you up.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Yep. Gorgeous. And you know, if you wanted to go drive around Tuscany yourself, a lot of people do it. And I would recommend you need a car because unless you're just going to stick to cities like Lucca and Arezzo, you need a car to get around. And just make sure you read up on parking and road rules and all of that stuff because people are excited to go exploring on their own and things. But we were in San Gimignano a few years ago and you know, the car parks are overflowing and you have to go down to the bottom of the hill and walk up and stuff like that. So just, you know, like, go in with your eyes open, and it's totally doable.

Katy Clarke:

And like I said, I do it as well. But, yeah, if you're wanting someone to take care of you, that's what we love to do, and. And that's what we will do. Okay, so. So before we wrap this up, when are we going to Tuscany this year? When do we travel?

Olivia Windsor:

So you can come with us in the springtime, which is in May. Or you can come with us in the fall, and we've got two departures, so we do late September, so the 28th of September until the 5th of October. Or you can join us a little bit later in October on our second fall tour, which is the 10th of October to the 17th of October. I'll just say whatever time you decide to visit, that, you know, you'll have a wonderful time, whether it's the spring or the fall, there's different beauty in either season.

Katy Clarke:

Okay. So really, what we say to people who are dreaming of traveling to Italy or to Tuscany, I mean, for me, it's just like, just do it. I feel like the world is a bit crazy at the moment, and, I mean, it always is, but it's been a little bit extra crazy lately. And I think if you put things

off, like trips, you regret it. I mean, I always do. And once you make that first booking, then it's done. It's done. And you're like, right, I'm committed now, and you just make it happen.

Katy Clarke:

And that's what I love about travel. It's like, once you've made that decision, then you're stepping into a world that is completely different to your own, and everything seems to reset and rebalance and, like I said, you'll never regret it.

Olivia Windsor:

No, Tuscany is always a good idea.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And, yeah, we'd love you to come with us, but if you want to explore on your own. Yeah, we can definitely help you with that, too. We've got lots of free resources here on our podcast and on our website. And, yeah, we love helping people organize their trips to Tuscany and Italy.

Katy Clarke:

Right. Well, Liv, I'm going to go off and maybe watch that movie again. *A Room with a View*. And that scene where she's walking through the cornfields and she has that moment. She feels part of Italy, she feels part of Tuscany, and her whole life changes because she was in this really stiff dress with a stiff hairstyle and she suddenly becomes very relaxed. And then there's that kiss, of course. I mean, that is just everyone should have a kiss like that just once in their life. And I wish that for everyone. As well as a trip to Tuscany.

Katy Clarke:

Thank you Liv. Thanks for sharing beautiful Tuscany with us and for everyone. All the details are in the show notes, as always, of the places that we mentioned and where you can find help, etc, and you'll find those in our episode show notes. On the podcast app, there's a link to that and also on our website. So thanks for joining us and we'll see you next time in another beautiful part of Italy. Ciao for now.

Olivia Windsor:

Ciao, Grazie Mille. Ciao.

Katy Clarke:

Grazie Mille. Thanks for tuning in to Untold Italy. We love sharing our favorite parts of Italy with you, including oh so romantic Tuscany. And as always, you'll find all the information about our group tours in Tuscany and the places and movies that we mentioned in the show notes at untolditaly.com. And we would love for you to experience Tuscany the way we know it can be and so do reach out to us via social media or our website if you have any questions at all about joining our tours. That's all for this week. It's ciao for now.