

# Untold Italy Episode 323: Active Italy - Walking and Cycling Trip Ideas for Curious Travelers

There is a way to travel through Italy where you stop being a spectator and start being part of the picture. You hear the church bells in the next valley. You smell the woodsmoke before you reach the farmhouse. Today, we are stepping outside to discover some active adventures in Italy.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week, your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao a tutti and benvenuti to the Untold Italy podcast. I am your host Katy Clarke, I'm the founder of this podcast and our company Untold Italy and our goal is to help you find the version of Italy you are looking for. Not necessarily the usual highlights, although we love them too, but the Italy that's away from the crowds and inspiring for daily rituals, seasonal celebrations and friendly people. Today, we are stepping outside into Italy's beautiful natural wonderland. Off the train, off the coach, off the well-trodden path between Venice, Florence and Rome.

This is an episode many of you have asked for. Walking holidays, cycling trips, soft adventure in Italy. It is a topic I have wanted to cover for a long time, but I needed to find the right person to talk to. Someone who knows the routes, knows the country, and understands what makes this style of travel so rewarding. Our guest, Monica Price, is that person, and I am so pleased to have her on the show.

If you have ever thought about doing a walking holiday or a cycling trip in Italy, but you were not sure where to start, you're in the right hands with Monica. And if you have never thought about it, I have a feeling you will be looking up bike tours by the end of it. I certainly was.

We are covering pilgrimage routes you have probably never heard of. The places and paths that are made for two wheels. And why some of the best meals you will ever eat in Italy are the ones you earn on a bike seat or a trail. Andiamo, let's get started.

Katy Clarke:

Benvenuta. Monica, welcome onto the Untold Italy podcast.

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Monica Malpezzi Price:

Grazie, Katy. Grazie. Ciao tutti. Thanks for having me here.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, it is so great to have you here, Monica. I've always lovely to connect with people in any part of Italy, but especially in Emilia Romagna, which is a region that I especially love. How are things there at the moment?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Good. They're a little bit rainy, which is hampering the cycling, but it's had some great weather and we are looking forward to spring and the great summer.

Katy Clarke:

As always, exciting time in Italy when everything's starting to open up in bloom and everyone's coming out of their winter hibernation.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And lots of festivals. That's the great thing about Emilia Romagna. It's famous for its sagre, which are country festivals where you go eat. There's usually a theme. So there's the sagra of the artichoke, there's a festival for artichokes, or there's a festival for the new flowers, or there's a festival. In the fall, we have festivals for the truffle or for the porcini. So tons of festivals. And it's always fun that people are coming out of hibernation and going to enjoy time together eating good food, because we have such good food here.

Katy Clarke:

You're very lucky. And we are big Sagre fans on the Untold Italy podcast. And so maybe I'll have to get you back to tell us all about their sagre in your region, because we love them. Anyway, this episode is long overdue because I really wanted to talk to someone who had a lot of knowledge about active adventures in Italy for some time, and I hadn't really found quite the right person until I bumped into you on this random WhatsApp chat. So, Monica, before we dive into all of that, could you please let our listeners know a little bit about you and your background and what you do?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yes, of course. So my name is Monica, like we've said, and my mother is Italian from the town of Forli, and my father is American. So I grew up mostly in the United States, but my first language was Italian, and then I started learning English when I went to school and started interacting with other kids at age about four or five. And I run two bicycle tour companies. One is an outgoing company from the United States. It's called Experience Plus Bicycle Tours, and I run that with my sister. She's based in Colorado, and I'm based here in Northern Italy. And Experience Plus does bike tours all over the world, including South America and all around Europe.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And then I also run an Italian company here which is a travel agency in, like we said, Emilia Romagna. It's called Bikes Plus Travel and it does both guided tours as well as self guided tours and custom tours and non bicycle tours and hiking tours. Anything that's active, basically, like you said, we have a fleet of about 500 bicycles here that we then deploy all over Europe for all of the tours. In addition to these two companies, I'm also the president of a business network, sustainable travel Business Network, called Active Italy. So that's a grouping of 35 operators and travel agencies that specialize in active travel. Both incoming, so people who bring and work with travelers coming into Italy, but also outgoing, so people who take Italians to Kilimanjaro, Himalayas, anywhere in the world. So there's a lot of interest in active travel or adventure travel, which is the common English word for it.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

We've chosen to translate the word adventure travel in Italian into active travel just because adventure. When you say Turismo da Ventura, it sounds a little bit hard, like hard adventure. And here most of what we're talking about, most of what people do is soft adventure. So cycling, walking, maybe some paddling, some multi sport, but really anything that's again, soft adventure.

Katy Clarke:

So not abseiling down cliffs?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Not necessarily abseiling down cliffs or you know, canyoning or things like that. Although some of our members in Active Italy do that. I personally don't do that. None of our companies do any of that. But yeah, there's all kinds of adventure that you can have in Italy for sure. That's the amazing thing about Italy is there is so much variety of landscape, of roads and trails, of things to do and things to see that it's just perfect for this kind of travel. And not to mention the food, right? I mean the food, you know, the pasta, the carbohydrates, it helps you keep fueling and keep going. Just the whole thing.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Just all of Italy that it's just a perfect, perfect destination for active travel.

Katy Clarke:

It really is. I mean, is there anything this country can't do? That's what I want to know.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

That's a really good point.

Katy Clarke:

It seems like it has an unfair advantage sometimes. But Monica, I know from you told me earlier, before we came on this call that this is a family business and it's a long standing family business and your parents had a big passion for the outdoors. Was there any particular

moments in your life that you can remember being outdoors and being in Italy and somehow it all came together. But was there something that really sticks in your memory that was a catalyst for that?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So, yeah, it is a family business. My parents led their first commercial bike tours in 1972 when they were trying to get back to Italy somehow, and they thought, well, maybe we could sell some bike tours. And so they sold four bike tours in 1972 from Pisa to Forli, which, again, was where my mom is from. They camped. It cost \$200 to do the trip, and it was a roaring success, although limited to that first year. So then when they started up again in 1985, because they wanted my sister and I to grow up bilingual and bicultural, we would come over in May to Italy from Colorado, and then we would go back in August and they would lead tours and then we would go scouting together. And so I have great memories of traveling by bike, but also in our, you know, California coach camper van, where then we would do bike rides around there in Sardinia, in the Dolomites, just seeing amazing places and being in amazing places and doing things that I, you know, other tourists were there. I have this vague recollection of other people being there.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

But then we would get on our bikes and go into some small towns or go through some small country roads, and it was just. It was just wonderful. So I don't have any particular single memory, but definitely Sardinia is a soft spot in our hearts. And the Dolomites has always been one of my absolute most iconic and beautiful parts of Italy. Absolutely.

Katy Clarke:

It's so spectacular, it's really hard to find the words to describe how beautiful it is, even in the winter or the summer. And I've recently become a bit of a South Tyrol addict. So I can always find a reason to go back. Now when you were talking about, you know, getting around and going into Sardinia and Dolomites, what is it about doing something active or soft adventure that helps you experience Italy in a way that, say, more traditional cultural based trips simply can't do.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So the difference between being on a train, being in a car, or being in a bus versus walking or cycling, or you can add anything else, you know, kayaking, is that you become a protagonist. You are a part of the landscape that you're in. You're not just traversing it, but you're actually interacting with it. And I'm not saying that if you're in a car, a coach, or a train, you're not doing that, but you're more of a spectator, because even just the physical glass between you and the environment, whereas when you're on a bicycle, you are smelling, you are breathing, you are hearing so much more than what you do when you're passing quickly. So one thing is actually being, like I say, a protagonist. You are making your own adventure. I don't know if you remember those books when I was a kid, it was make your own adventure where you would choose what to do. But that's what you're doing when you're self propelled.

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Monica Malpezzi Price:

You're choosing what to do. Do you want to go down this way or do you want to go down this way? So you're the protagonist, you're totally immersed in what you're doing and it's so much more joyful or satisfying again to sit down in the evening or at a bakery, at a lunch spot because you've worked up the hunger, the appetite to be able to enjoy such delicious food. So both being immersed in the scenery and then just having such satisfying interactions with food and then with people, because you might be biking and then there might be, you know, a team of cyclists that's out practicing and racing or whatever. And you know, there's a camaraderie even though you're a leisure cyclist, maybe on an E bike and they're a team of a serious cyclist, but at least there's still a camaraderie between you. And then the other thing too I think is that people really, so locals, you know, villages, towns really enjoy having people come through that are biking or walking and you are able to just pull up easily. There's no noise, there's no pollution. You pull up to the, like I said, the local bakery. People are always willing to say hi.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

They're just, there's more, there's a closer contact. So I think there's, there's so much to be said for self propelling mechanisms to travel in places. And like we said, Italy is such a great place to do this because the distances aren't that far, right. You have towns every 5km, 10km, 15km, 20km. So there's plenty of things to do. There's a variety of landscapes to cycle through or walk through. So walking and cycling in Italy is just, is a really great way of seeing it.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's beautiful. And one of the memories that I have in the Dolomites actually or up further off across to Murano is we go on a quite a famous walk which is like a leisurely stroll called the Tappeiner Walk. And along that way some of the local farms, farmers have set up a grape juice stalls. It's not wine, it's grape juice and you, you know, you sit down and you have this amazing view and there's they actually squishing the grapes in front of you and. Yeah, it's amazing, beautiful experience because you are touching all of the senses there.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Absolutely. And the thing, so we talked about Dolomites and Sardinia, which are, you know, spectacular parts of Italy. But what I love about other parts of Italy, even if there's not the spectacular scenery, is just the fact that you see such daily life and you are riding, for example, through farmland and through towns and there's so many hidden gems and jewels around that again, Italy just never ceases to amaze.

Katy Clarke:

I mean, I think Emilia Romagna is one of those regions where it maybe doesn't have so many spectacular natural landscapes, but it's got these gorgeous little medieval towns that are fortified and they've got so much character and there are so friendly and they always have at least one sagra a year, so.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Oh, absolutely, yeah. The Renaissance cities like Ferrara, and then the art cities like Parma and Bologna, of course, Forli and Rimini. So there's these important cities that have impressive, you know, town squares. Even the town square where I live in Faenza is one of the largest of Italy. And it's, you walk into it and it is just awe inspiring. So beautiful, so beautiful. But then you have like you say these little medieval towns or these hilltop towns and then such passion.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Now, you know, we, we're so lucky that Emilia Romagna is considered the fruit basket of Europe. So most of the fruit, plums, peaches, apricots that you get even in Austria and Germany come from this region. And there's a lot of farmers now, younger generation that is going back to trying to cultivate ancient fruits, what they call ancient fruits, or going up onto the hills and doing less intensive agriculture. So there's just such a variety of, of interesting things to do and see in addition to the culture, the art, the, like we said, the gastronomy, the wine, everything is just so, so interesting.

Katy Clarke:

I do think Italy really does have an unfair advantage in a lot of ways to compare with some other countries. Monica, what are some of the places or some of the trails that people might not know if they're hikers? Because, and we're not really talking here about like hardcore hiking because if you want to do that and you want to do your hardcore hiking, you can go up into the mountains. And there's plenty of mountain opportunities in Italy on the Apennines and the Dolomites and the Alps. But just if you people were wanting to do more of a low key hiking, what are some of the options that are around?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So there's a few different options for walking or hiking. One are there's tons of companies and we do this for custom groups where it's not even following a specific trail, but it's just doing a walking tour in a destination. The one that we've developed and are selling a lot is in Emilia Romagna. So we visit some of the Lambrusco wineries, do some walking on the hills, and then we come to Faenza and do some walking on the hills here. So there's either just walking around in, you know, destinations that are like tourist destinations that are interesting, but it's not a specific trail. But the other thing that Italy has really done a lot of, and historically, obviously it's done a lot because we're talking about the pilgrimage routes. So the Via Francigena is the most important one. And that one starts in England, of course, and comes all the way down and crosses all of Europe and then enters Italy in the Val d' Aosta and travels all the way to Rome.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And that is a very famous pilgrimage route. It's like the Santiago de Compostela. Lots of people are doing it. There's companies that sell that as well as you can do it on your own and just book lodging on your own and carry your own backpack. Otherwise there are companies that are specialized in transporting your luggage. But there's many, many other pilgrimage

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routes. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism has just published a list. It's about, I think between 70 and 100 pilgrimage routes that are official tourism destinations and they are everything.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So there's other ones that come from abroad. So the Via Romea Germanica or the Via Romea Strata come from Germany and one comes from Estonia, all the way from Estonia. And those also all come to Rome. And so they come through the Via Romea Germanica and the Via Romea Strata come through Emilia Romagna and then they cross the Apennines and then end up in Rome. But there's others, there's smaller ones, there's the Camino di San Benedetto. There are a bunch of these smaller pilgrimage routes. One that's really popular now in my region is called Via degli Dei, which is actually not a pilgrimage route. It's between Bologna and Florence.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And they've put it together. It's the five day hiking across the Apennines. They've done a great job. It's brought so much economy back to the local towns. So all of the small, little abandoned villages. They've built up bed and breakfast. And it's a really, really beautiful, beautiful walk. So there are so many options.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

If you go online and look at camini, which is the Italian word for the pilgrimage routes, Cammini d' Italia, there are so many. So many options for anybody who wants to do something that historically has been walked for pilgrims for a long, long time and now can be enjoyed both by pilgrims and also by travelers.

Katy Clarke:

I love this. I love this because I think a lot of people who are into hiking or, you know, walks, et cetera, they think of Italy and they think of the Path of the gods in the Amalfi coast. They think of maybe the Cinque Terre, and maybe now the Dolomites is getting a bit more attention. But let's all spread out. We don't need to go to all the same places. And you have the most incredible experiences and also some beautiful scenery as well as you're going along.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah, there's some, for example, that have become really popular. There's one in. In the south of Italy. I think it's in Campania. It's called Via Silente. So that's an interesting one to do - the Silent Way. Sardinia now has been really popular with a lot of camini. What's cool about it is it's born for pilgrims, but now more and more travelers are...

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And tourists, people who aren't necessarily doing it for a pilgrim or a spiritual or religious reason, are really enjoying them, and they're noticing how much, again, local economies can really be benefiting from this. Because the great thing about these kinds of camini is that it's small groups of tourists that are coming along them. It's not large, you know, it's not a busload of 50 people, but it's small groups of 2, 4, 10 people that are. That are walking through.

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Katy Clarke:

Yeah, what a great way to build some bonds together. Just having a walk through some beautiful countryside and then stopping for a bite to eat, which is bound to be delicious, because it always is in the countryside in Italy. You can't really go wrong, can you?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

That's another advantage that we didn't talk about, about doing an active travel through Italy is that bicycling and walking. Again, we're just focusing on those two, but there's other ways. But bicycling and walking together with people is just - it's such a communal thing to do. So you really get close to either. If you're coming with your own custom group, you're getting close with your people that you're coming or if you're meeting new people that are also interested in the same kind of thing that you're doing.

Katy Clarke:

Is it mainly European travelers that are doing these, these camini walks or. Because I feel like European people, they will travel for that type of reason. But are we seeing more English speaking travelers wanting that experience?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah. So traditionally the Germans, the Dutch, the Austrians, the kind of the dock countries, they have been big proponents of active travel in Italy, but so have the Brits. I mean a bunch of people historically would come and walk. So the Francigena is historically walked by the uk but yeah, there is so much more interest now, just the idea of doing a historical walk or bike ride. Because some of these rides, especially the long ones like the Via Francigena, the Via Romeo Strata, the Via Romeo Germanica, those ones you can, you also can do by bike. And there's more and more interest about them. So yes, traditionally it's been more Europeans or even Italians doing some of these walks, but now there's more and more interest from, you know, Australians, North Americans, as they're looking for different things to do or they've done the Camino de Santiago and they enjoyed it because there's a feel about these walks when you're with other people, even if you're not necessarily a religious person, there's still again, a historical and spiritual sense that kind of accompanies you along the way.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And a lot of people really enjoy that, I think.

Katy Clarke:

So I think people are looking for that more now. Like community is so important, whereas the world is a little bit crazy. You know, when you can commune with people and spend time with them, you realize how much in common we all have.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Well, and that's why adventure travel and active travel is so good because it really brings you to people's homes. Like you're really, you're cycling through towns, through villages. There's no filter. And it really does, you know, help us bring us all closer together.

Katy Clarke:

This is the reason I really wanted to have this chat was because some people had reached out to me asking me specifically if I had any recommendations. But also I was talking to my sister-in-law's sister and she was thinking about doing the Camino in Spain and then going on to Italy. And I said, well, why don't you just stay in Italy? I'm a very good salesperson like that. And I said. She said, oh, but you know, like I wanted to do the walk. I said, well, actually the Via Francigena is right there waiting for you. And yeah, she was really happy not to be having to fly around and do all that. So, yeah, I'm really hoping we can get the word out about all of the options that are available in Italy.

Katy Clarke:

So let's have a little look at the bikes now because I know that's your real passion. So tell us about that.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Well, the reason the bikes is more of a passion than the hiking, although I love hiking and we've done so much around here, is because for a travel perspective, with the bike, you are able to cover a little bit more ground, right? Every day you can cover between 50 and 100 kilometers, but you're still doing it at a pace that's really acceptable and that's human, so that you're still seeing everything that you're going through. So that's the reason. So yeah. So bike touring is such an interesting way, like we've already said, of seeing a place and there's different ways that you can do bike touring. You can do it with a guided tour. So where you come, there's a guide, usually there's a support vehicle, all of the luggage is transferred, you know, and there's activities. So you're really well connected. Now our tours experience plus bicycle tours are a little bit unique in that we don't bike as a group, but everyone has the ride with gps, which is a software that we have all of the information on the tracks.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

But really people come on our tours because they are able to follow the white chalk arrows. So we still, even in the digital age, we still have this thing where one of the tour leaders goes off in the morning and marks the road. And this is with chalk, it's with plaster that then goes away when there's enough rain. But it's a great way of cycling. And so we call it guided independence because really it's a framework that you're traveling as a group, but you're cycling at your own pace. You're cycling, maybe you've found somebody else that has the same pace as you. And then you meet up during the day and then there's of course there's group meals and it's just a great, great way of traveling together. So that's one way of doing it, is guided.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Otherwise we also have self guided tours and self guided tours. Some people prefer it, obviously it's a little bit less expensive because there's not a guide and all of the support vehicle that there is with the, with the guided tour, but some people prefer it because they want to be traveling with their own self made group and they don't really want or need a guide. And so a self guided tour, we meet you at the starting hotel, we give you the bikes, we do a briefing, go over everything and then every day your luggage is transferred by a company to the next hotel and you have the tracks that you follow with cultural information that's written and you know, suggestions for lunches or dinners or things to do and see. But your timing is on your own, you're not beholden to another group. So self guided has been really popular with Europeans and in the past, you know, five, ten years it's gotten much more popular also with Australians, North Americans, which is our main market. North Americans and Australians, Kiwis obviously. So yeah, these are both great ways of seeing a country. Obviously when you're with a guided group and a guide, you get a little bit more knowledge or interpretation about what you're seeing.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

But if you are someone who's curious or who reads or who can do that on your own, then a self guided tour is also a great way to travel.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, amazing. And what are some of the favorite places that you go to on these trips?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So we have two or three in Emilia Romagna because there was hardly anybody else doing tours in Emilia Romagna in terms of self guided tours. And those are really appreciated. Both our guided tour, the culinary tour and our self guided tour also does some of the visits, the culinary visits. So visit Parmesan cheese factory and visit a balsamic vinegar place and some wineries. So that's a lot of fun if you're interested in culinary experiences because you again you can bike and then visit some of these iconic Italian Emilia culinary specialties. But then we have tours in the Dolomites. The nice thing, there's a few self guided tours that are along the bike paths in the mountains. One of them goes through Merano as well, starts in Silandro, so up the Val Venosta and then continues down and goes to Merano, Bolzano and then down into Verona near, actually near Lake Garda.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

And then our guided tours we have really all over. We have a great one in Piedmont. Piedmont is such an interesting area, Piemonte, because it's a real boundary or it's a border region between Italy and France. And so the food is a little bit more French characteristic. And the wines, of course the red wines are just absolutely amazing, although I also like the white wines. So Piemonte is great for cycling. That's a little bit more hilly. We have a great new tour guided tour in Sardinia, which starts in Alghero and does one of the most absolutely amazing bike routes.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

That first day along the coast where you're just cycling along the coast, there's vultures that are endangered, vultures that are flying, and it is absolutely stunning, stunning scenery. We have a new tour now, Experience Plus has a new tour in the Prosecco and Friuli areas. So going up into the northeast of Italy. And then of course, we have tours in Tuscany, Sicily, Puglia. Puglia has always been quite a great destination for cycling because there's tons of tiny roads and there's low hills, so it's not very difficult cycling. Whereas Tuscany, for example, and Piedmont have a little bit more higher hills. But of course, hills have now been pretty much, I don't want to say annihilated, but managed for, even for novice cyclists. Anybody who's new because of E bikes, you know, E bikes, the new revolution.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

More and more people are choosing to bike with E bikes. The great thing about E bikes is that it allows everybody who has some bike handling skills. So you still need to know how to, you know, pedal in, navigate and maneuver, but it allows everybody, independent of how strong or fit they are, to be able to really enjoy these tours. So what we're finding, more and more people are choosing E bikes, Even people who might be strong but are just a little bit worried and want to have that extra assurance that in case they need it, they would have a way of having a little extra oomph on those hills.

Katy Clarke:

I've got to say, I have an E bike. That little bit of extra oomph is so satisfying. In Australia, the children can't have E bikes. And so my kids are riding along, their little legs are going so fast. And I've like pressed my button, off I go. It's fantastic. So for anyone listening out there, because I know a lot of families like to do this type of trip, so I did ask Monica this before, and I'll ask you this again now, because I think it'd be really great to understand whether children can have E bikes. So you said that there's some caveats around it.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So there is no law, despite what you might find online. And because if you ask any of the LLMs or artificial intelligence, they will tell you that children under 14 are not allowed to use E bikes. But that's actually not true. There is no law that says that children under 14 are not allowed to use E bikes. However, if you are choosing to use an E bike under age 14, which is kind of traditionally the age that people assume children are more responsible and able to use a vehicle, even a little motorbike. In fact, 14 was the age that little Italians were able to have motorbikes, at least when I was a kid. So there is no law. But if you do want to have a kid that uses an E bike, highly recommend over the age of 11 or 12, and that they're tall enough to actually maneuver it well, and that they have good bike handling skills.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Because you are on bike paths, you know, there's traffic, and having an E bike does give a lot of extra power. Now, let's clarify what kind of E bikes we're talking about. This is. I think this is important. The E bikes that we're talking about that most travelers and tourists used are called pedal assistants, which means they're not, for example, you were mentioning the one

that you pressed a button and it made you go. These bikes generally are assisted - the more you pedal, the more they help you.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So there is no accelerator that you can press by yourself, which is also a good safety reason. They're also capped at 25 kilometers an hour. So after 25 kilometers an hour, they don't help you anymore. And these are the bikes that are allowed in Europe that are still considered bicycles and not considered a motorcycle vehicle. Okay, so those are the ones that you'll find for rent everywhere. Few rental companies or tour operators that I know of, and we did this research recently, actually rent E bikes to children, so under 10, 11, 12. So that's why I'm saying that it needs to be somebody who's able - who's big enough to be able to use one of the E bikes and then also has good bike handling skills so that they're not a danger to themselves or others.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, And I think people have to be very realistic about this, because a few years ago when I was in San Gimignano, I saw a lady trying to drive a Vespa, and she'd obviously told everyone that she was capable of it, and she launched herself straight into a car, and it was very embarrassing for her. Thank goodness she was okay and everyone was okay. But, like, you know, it's really important to be honest about this stuff because, my goodness, you can get into all sorts of trouble.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

But it's still for anybody who's capable, you know, kids that are older than 12, 13, 14, and anybody who is hesitant about coming on a bike tour, any adult who's hesitant on coming on a bike tour because they're afraid of fitness. E bikes are an absolute great, great, great way of doing it.

Katy Clarke:

Now, Monica, I wanted to get to this. It's a bit more cultural, but I didn't really realize this until maybe, you know, quite a way into my traveling in Italy journey. But Italians love being out in nature, don't they?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yes, absolutely. Italians love being out in nature. So the most common thing that you do that on Easter Monday, it's called Pasquetta, is you go out on a picnic and, you know, with friends or enjoy time in the outdoors. But in general, Italians love it. There's lots of associations. There's big mountaineering association which does courses for kids, but also does, you know, weekly hikes. There's the same for biking, there's a FIAB, which is the Italian association for bicycling. And they go out on trips all the time.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So in general, Italians absolutely love, love going out in nature and like to be active. So Italians, you know, there's a lot of jogging, running, gym going. And so Italians in general like

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it. Bike travel or active travel is still new. And the idea that you would go somewhere and do a walk or do a bike tour is new, but it's gaining popularity like it is in other parts of Mediterranean Europe.

Katy Clarke:

There's so many options open up to you if you can do a little bit of everything. I'm one of those people that likes to, to dip my toes into history, art, food.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah, that's why these kinds of trips are great, because then you can visit the museum, you can go to the, you know, the wine cellar, you can visit an artisan. But then you also have two or three hours that you spend biking or walking and being outside.

Katy Clarke:

So if anyone's listening and is thinking, oh, this sounds fantastic, but I'm a little bit nervous that it's not for me. And I would know really how to go about getting one organized. How can we help people feel comfortable and confident that an active holiday is something that they can do themselves?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah, well, for sure, consider the difficulty level. So every company that is out there has different difficulty levels. And like, there are some easier destinations and terrains in Italy, there are some harder ones, so you'd probably want to choose an easier one. You can also look for something that's a little bit shorter. So more like 4, 5, 6 days instead of 10, 12, 13 days. And if you're really, really hesitant and you don't want to commit to a whole bike tour, then there's lots of single day guided tour that you could do. The only thing about single day guided tours that I would warn about is that if it's a big city, for example, so I'm thinking Rome or Florence, that they have like a two hour bike ride that won't really give you the feel of a bike tour because you're in traffic, you're in the city.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

The bikes are probably not, I'm not saying that they're not well maintained, but they're not high performing bikes, but they're more, you know, just city bikes that you're using. And so I wouldn't want you to get the wrong impression of a bike tour. You definitely, anybody who's interested, I think, like I said, start with a low difficulty, a shorter tour, and then do practice at home. Because the one thing that you want to do after being on a bike for three or four days in a row is that you do need to get those little calluses on your sits bones. And if you practice that in advance, it won't hurt as much on the saddle. So if you practice, you know, do a little bit of biking at home, if you have a favorite saddle that you like, bring it along on the tour and we'll install it on your bike so that you, you know that you have a good saddle. Otherwise we have different saddles and sometimes people, you know, use a few different ones during the tour. But I definitely think for biking, it's a great way of trying and visiting a new country, especially if you've been to that country before and you're wanting to see something in between.

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Monica Malpezzi Price:

You've already seen Venice, Florence and Rome, and now you're wanting to see the towns that are in between Venice and Florence, which, by the way, is one of our most popular tours. Just like we were saying, not necessarily because of the spectacular scenery, but because you're biking through daily Italian life. You're going through small towns, villages, farmland, rural areas. It's flat at the beginning before you cross over the Apennines to get to Florence. And that's a great beginner tour because you have four or five days of flat and then you have two days of climbing. But there's options. You can take a train, you can get in the van, you can use an E bike. So there's lots of ways of getting around it.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So definitely consider it. If it's a bike tour, do those things also for any kind of a walking or hiking tour, same thing, difficulty. In that case, you don't have the assistance of an E bike. And so it is important that you make sure that you're only doing a six to nine kilometer a day hike or walk and not more. If you're afraid of having to do repeated days of lots of walking.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. A little bit of preparation never goes astray. And I would have to say having been on a bike in the Via Appia in Rome, which was fun, I wish I had my cushion saddle for that one.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Bumpy. That's definitely not the most comfortable biking I would think of.

Katy Clarke:

This is the thing, it was very bumpy because of those Roman cobblestones, which are huge and the way they've laid them and there's like little grooves in between each one.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah, the paving stones. Paving stones were not made for bikes. I don't even know how horse drawn wagons could comfortably travel over those.

Katy Clarke:

On that road you have to also go, you can go on the side, but it's very narrow. And so unless you're really confident, it's quite confronting. And we went there when the kids were, I think they were, must have been about 9 and the traffic there was a little bit hair raising. Even though I did choose to go on a Sunday, which is when it's supposed to be closed to traffic. So. Yeah. So this is the other thing from a family perspective and just from a general safety perspective, if you're going around in the countryside, you don't have to worry about that stuff.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

Yeah. And there are some family specific tours that are, you know, really good for families because they stay mostly on bike paths and so they're, they're good for younger children.

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Although there's also other, you know, there's trailers - if you have really young children, then there's trailers or what's called the tag along, which is a, you know, a third wheel that attaches to the adult bike so that they're not independent. Because until about age 10 or 11, awareness of traffic isn't top of mind for kids.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

It's only from about 10, 11 that it's good for them to be, to be biking on their own.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, I didn't know that was a thing. Well, and I'm looking at my kids now and they're 12 and I'm thinking, oh yes, now I see that there is a little bit more awareness. You're right. Monica, this has been fantastic. I'm so inspired. I think I'm going to go downstairs and tell my family.

"Right. The next vacation that we're going on in Italy is a walking or a cycling one". I think it'd be so fantastic to do.

Katy Clarke:

And I do feel like the people don't really know what the options are. So thank you so much for sharing with them with us. And if anyone would like to get in touch with you, how can they go about doing that?

Monica Malpezzi Price:

So they can look at any of the websites. The two websites are [www.experienceplus.com](http://www.experienceplus.com) and the other, the Italian company is [www.bikesplus.travel](http://www.bikesplus.travel). And they are, you know, welcome to, to look them up and reach out to us and let us know that they heard about it through you. And we'd love to have any aspiring or novice people coming or anyone who's already done bike tours or who's an avid cyclist in their home country and wants to come and and travel around the world.

Katy Clarke:

Sounds amazing. And we'll of course share everything that you mentioned, Monica, in the show notes so that people can have easy access to that. I do think Italy has an unfair advantage Monica. So, so many people go there for history, art, culture, food and landscapes. But I think we've really clearly established today that there are so many more reasons to go outdoors and to get amongst it and meet the people, get some exercise and see some beautiful things and eat some delicious food. Is there anything this country cannot do? I don't know.

Monica Malpezzi Price:

No, I agree. It's amazing for bicycling, walking, any kind of adventure travel, it's just perfect because there's such a variety, like we've said, and people are so welcoming and there's so many opportunities.

Katy Clarke:

Grazie Mille, Monica, thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy.

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Monica Malpezzi Price:

Grazie. Katy, thank you so much and glad to be here.

Katy Clarke:

Well, I am so glad we finally made that happen. I came away from it ready to lace up my walking shoes and go wandering through the hills of Emilia Romagna, and I hope you feel the same way. Monica has kindly put me in touch with some experts you will be hearing from in upcoming episodes. In particular, I really wanted to dive into the pilgrimage routes. As the Camino de Santiago in Spain becomes increasingly popular, I know many people are looking for alternative walking trails in Europe and why not Italy? Listen out for that episode coming up soon.

You will find all of Monica's links, the websites for Experience Plus and Bikes Plus Travel, plus everything else we mentioned in the show notes at [untolditaly.com/323](https://untolditaly.com/323).

And while you are there, I want to send you something. I have put together a complete guide to every episode of the Untold Italy podcast. Over 320 episodes covering every region, every season, and every kind of trip you can imagine in Italy, all organized by topic so you can find exactly what you need for your next vacation. It is yours when you join the Untold Italy newsletter. Head to [untolditaly.com](https://untolditaly.com) to grab it.

If you have a question or a story to share, you can always reach me at [ciao@untolditaly.com](mailto:ciao@untolditaly.com). I love hearing from you.

Grazie mille for listening, next week I'm sharing some of my favorite streets in Italy, but until next time, buon viaggio and "Ciao for now!"