Untold Italy Episode 332: Countdown to Italy - What to Do and Check Before Your Trip

Your flights and accommodation are booked. Your itinerary is sorted. You have dreamed about this trip for longer than you would admit to most people. So what is worth organising in the final weeks before your trip to Italy? That's what we're covering today on this latest 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:
Ciao, tutti benvenuti. Welcome to episode 332 of the Untold Italy Podcast. I'm Katy, the founder of Untold Italy, and if you're tuning in, there is a fair chance you have a trip to Italy on the horizon. We know a lot of our listeners travel in September and in October, so we thought that we would cover what needs to get done before you get on the plane because sometimes we've planned a lot in advance and we may have left a few things to the last minute. A few months out from your trip, the big planning is mostly behind you. The countdown has started and somewhere in the back of your mind is that short list of small things you keep meaning to sort out. After many, many trips to Italy, my guest Monica and I have got this down to what we think is a fine art. And so today we're here to share these tips with you.

Katy Clarke:
Now, before we get started, I wanted to share a lovely review that we got from one of our recent tour guests on our trip to Umbria. And this is a really beautiful trip that's immersing everyone into the region and really meeting the locals and having a beautiful time. And so Nola said, the Untold Italy Umbria tour was a truly wonderful experience. This was only my second guided tour. I usually prefer to arrange things myself, but this trip has completely changed my mind. We visited places, met people and discovered artisans I never would have found on my own. With just nine guests, the tour felt wonderfully personal and attentive. Our guide, Sarah, was exceptional, endlessly helpful, nothing was ever too much trouble and she consistently made sure every single person was getting the most out of the experience.

Katy Clarke:
Umbria itself was breathtaking. So many beautiful villages and cities to explore. The accommodation and food were equally fantastic. I honestly couldn't find a single fault except

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that it had to end. I cannot recommend this tour highly enough. Everything is taken care of. All you have to do is show up and enjoy it.

Katy Clarke:
Oh Nola, grazie mille! Thank you so much. You were so much fun to have on tour and we are so delighted to be able to share this beautiful region with you listeners. If Umbria is calling, we do have some spaces available on our trip departing in October, where we will immerse ourselves in the region and the all important olive harvest. The link is in the show notes or you can reach out to us at info@untolditalytours.com for details. Okay, on with the show. Andiamo. Let's count down to Italy.

Katy Clarke:
Buongiorno. Ciao Monica.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Ciao Katy. Come stai?

Katy Clarke:
Va bene. Va bene.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Molto bene. Grazie. Nice to be here with you again. And this time we can also see each other.

Katy Clarke:
I know we're going to do this on video for everyone. If you're listening on the audio, we will be posting this on YouTube as a video as well. So you can see lovely Monica in her beautiful house down in the coast here in Australia. And I'm in the city in Melbourne, Australia, so. But we are very far away from Italy. But we're always thinking about Italy, aren't we, Monica?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
All the time. Yes. How can you not? Especially this time where here is a bit chilly and I start to see all my friends like organizing, getting ready, going to the beach, like nice weather back in Italy. So yeah, of course I'm thinking about Italy.

Katy Clarke:
I think it's super hot there though this week. I think it's 40 degrees, which is for our American listeners, is well over 110, I think. So it's really, really hot. So if people are going soon, make sure you are ready for that type of weather because it's not the best for sightseeing, I would say. It's great for the beach and maybe the mountains. But sightseeing maybe not so much.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Maybe just inside, like if you are going to city, just plan lots of activity inside. Lots of museums. Aircon, we need that.

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Katy Clarke:
I just find aircon initially can be not what we expect.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, good, good museums. How big museum they have. But yes, it's true sometimes. Yeah, it's missing, isn't it? It's like so different from here. Even houses in general. Sometimes you book an Airbnb and you assume that there is going to be aircon, but they just suggest to leave the windows open or they have some fan.

Katy Clarke:
Well, my favorite one was when we were in Tuscany at an agriturismo once and they had the air con wedged like, literally sticky taped down on 25 degrees. And I said, oh, no, that's heating. That's not. That's not air conditioning. Sorry, we just turned it off. It wasn't worth it.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, it is true. Yeah. You feel like we all live in 2026 and we assume that everywhere the standard is the same. But yeah, it's not like every time where you travel somewhere, like they have their way to live. And Italians have something, I don't know if you heard about that, but it's called *colpodaria*. So everyone is very scared about aircon and different. Like if the air comes in your neck, you can get very sick.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, we are very careful as Italian as to don't get sick if it's cold somehow.

Katy Clarke:
I know that's when the puffer jackets come out. When it's... as soon as it's October, everyone's got their puffer jackets out.

Katy Clarke:
Anyway, Monica, some people may not know you, so I'd love you to introduce yourself to everyone again and let everyone know who you are and what you do and.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah. So my name is Monica and I am from Italy, Piemonte to be precise, which is northwest next to France. As you can hear, English is not my first language. I'm Italian and I learned English when I was 26. I learned English for a long time, but then I really learned to speak English when I was 26 and I came to Australia. I noticed how the way I was learning the language was probably not my way. So as soon as I came here, I learned to learn the language in a more practical way. And even if I study architecture, so I'm an architect in Italy.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
My profession and my career changed when I came here because I noticed that there is another way to learn a language. And I wanted to share that with people that want to learn my language. So I start to do language languages exchange. And then I thought, oh, this is.

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This is what I want to do. This is. I want to help people to learn a language or to like, communicate really in a more relaxed way that is not really the school sort of way where you have a program, you need to follow the program and it's the same for everyone. And so in 2018, I opened my school and I, yes, I teach Italian and with a group of teachers. And we specialize in adults and in people that wants to learn Italian to travel or to reconnect with their roots.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So sometimes we have, especially in Australia, Second generation Italian - secondary generation that they want to start speaking and with one-on-one sessions, this is what we do. My school is called Su Misura Italy. And yeah, we tend to tailor the lesson. In fact, Su Misura in Italian means 'tailor'.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, she's a very clever lady, Monica and her teachers are fantastic. So definitely we'll be giving you some more information about how you can get in touch with her. But what I wanted to do today is, Monica had this suggestion; actually is like, what do you do when you're getting ready to go to Italy? So what are the things that you need to do and think about? And is it even too late to learn Italian? So we're going to go into a little bit of that as we go through this episode today because a lot of people at this time are getting ready to go later this year. So September is the busiest month for non-European tourists in Italy and especially in the major cities, actually. So today I thought we could chat about all the things that you need to do to make sure that when you arrive in Italia you're at the top of your game and you got all that pent-up excitement building and you're ready to go. Because I do know that a lot of you have been planning these trips for over, you know, 12 or 18 months. So sometimes once you've booked the tickets and you've booked all the main things that you need to do and you've got all your plans in order, everything goes quiet for a little bit. And then two months before your trip, you're like, ah, I'v gotta do a lot of things.

Katy Clarke:
So I thought we could go through all of those things and work out how you can make sure you can have the very best time when you get there. And if you're listening and you are not driving or walking or whatever and you're close to a computer. We do have a companion article to this episode that has lots of links and details. If you want some more information about what we're talking about today, we'll also link to that in the show notes. So you can search our website as well for this episode, which is episode number 332. Or you can search our website untolditaly.com for the pre-departure checklist. Okay, andiamo. How excited do you get when you're going back to Italy, Monica?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yes, very excited. I try to go every year. It's a different excitement, probably because when I go back to Italy I got first to visit my family and then we try to put. Because my husband is not Italian. We try and also I enjoy to travel in Italy. We try to put some different place to visit every time. But yes, it's so exciting. And every time is different. As you said, it depends

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the time of the year you're going, the atmosphere change and, and also all what I have to think about luggage and what to get ready.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Like how to get ready really, like depending by the city or by what I'm going to do. Yeah. So it's always new and lots of research.

Katy Clarke:
I think next time Monica will be traveling with her three boys under the age of five, everyone. So that is a big job to get a family of five from Australia to Italy, which is a 24-hour flight. So my hat is off to you, Monica, because that is a huge job. But I also get excited when I'm going to Italy and sometimes I get lulled into a false sense of security because I do go so often and I think, oh well, I know everything. I know what to do, I know I've got my routine, I know when to I get to the airport, I know who's going to meet me and all of those things. But I think I did an Instagram reel earlier this week about a document that people are missing when they go. And it's actually a very important document. So I've learned my lesson that I do need to slow down a bit.

Katy Clarke:
And the time to do that is if you're traveling in the next six months, it's a good time to take stock of that now. So that's what we're going to talk about today. So first of all, travel is not what it used to be. When I first started traveling, you could really just wing it a lot of the time and just turn up and, you know, go to the places that you wanted to go to eat at the restaurants that you wanted to eat at and do all of the things. But these days, if you've got something really important that you had in mind, please, you need to book these things early. So I'm thinking of things like Colosseum tickets, Vatican Museums, Borghese Gallery in Rome. This is a favorite gallery of mine, but, and it always sells out, you must have a ticket for that. They only allow a few hundred visitors a day, so there's very limited tickets for that one.

Katy Clarke:
Also the Last Supper in Milan. So those types of important sites, if you're traveling halfway around the world and you really, really want to see them, you don't want to miss out. So if you haven't got onto those things yet and you're traveling soon, please do that. Maybe you can talk about restaurants, Monica, because I know you used to work in the restaurant industry.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, this is exactly what I was thinking because sometimes myself, first I save all these restaurants on Instagram where I want to go when I go to Italy. Yeah. And then you realize that the day you were thinking to go is the closing day or they booked out. Especially again, I'm from Piemonte. So if you want to go in Piemonte from September to December, I really, really think that you should book months in advance the restaurant where you really want to go. Again, we are quite lucky because in Italy there are lots of place where you can eat well. But if you really want to specifically have that kind of experience, like a cooking class or a restaurant table, and also maybe where you want to sit in the restaurant because you know,

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like sometimes you have beautiful restaurant. But then if you think about the booking in advance, then you might be able to sit in front of the window where you can see the, the dome, the big cathedral.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
And you can have that request which change so much if you are sitting in the same restaurant in like near the kitchen, for instance. So the food will be the same, but the experience will be different. So definitely, yes. If it's something you want to experience. Yeah. You need to do it in time.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, absolutely. My favorite example is Roscoli Salumeria, which is, well, it used to be my favorite restaurant in Rome, but I can't get in there. Like, you need to book three months in advance. And as Monica said, the experience can differ wildly. The first experience I had there, I was right up near the deli counter there. It was so much fun. There was a lot of interaction. And then I think the last time I was there, I was down in the cellar, which is a different environment.

Katy Clarke:
It was actually quite nice. But it was a different experience to what I had imagined it was going to be because I was just so desperate to get the table at that point.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
As you said, I worked for so long in, in a restaurant is a three star Michelin restaurant, when I was studying at university. And I remember how many times people were calling, assuming to be able to find a place and they were like, oh no, but can you put me in a waiting list? But even waiting list in those kinds of restaurants, sometimes, like there is 1% of possibility that you can get table and it's such a disappointment because you travel so long, like so far away, you spend so much money to, to be there. In that place and then you can't experience that. It's very sad. Like, this is why it's so important.

Katy Clarke:
I'm sure Stanley Tucci could get a reservation.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Exactly, Stanley Tucci. Yeah. I don't know. Like, maybe not. Because sometimes this book can.

Katy Clarke:
I love that about Italy as well. Sometimes people are not impressed by celebrities at all. So, like, they'll be like, no. But why no, sorry. You go on the list like everyone else.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah. For instance, this restaurant where I used to work has a beautiful table in the kitchen. So you can actually sit in the middle of this chef that preparing the food. And it's so beautiful

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because you can see like smoke coming out of the little pots and you can see how they get ready your plates. There are 20 chef like that work for a table. So if you can sit in the kitchen, that is a crazy experience and doesn't cost more than sitting in the restaurant and the room. So if you can get that table, like, how cool is the experience, you know? So, yeah, again, yeah, good to be ready and to think about that at least a couple of months in advance.

Katy Clarke:
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Katy Clarke:
Yeah, definitely. I think everyone wants to know the name of that restaurant now, Monica, can you share it with us?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It's called Piazza Duomo Alba. The chef is Enrico Crippa.

Katy Clarke:
I want to go there now. That's the type of experience that I would love to have. I want to go there with you, though.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, we will go together. You need to save a bit of money, but I have a good discount.

Katy Clarke:
That's why I want to go with you. Only joking!

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It is beautiful. But yeah, a restaurant, it's like this, but also, yes, booking. And make sure you have accommodation because, again, one like say one event in the city can change completely. Even in my town on the week, the third week of August. And my town is such a small town where we have few tourists, but it's not as busy and crazy. My town is called Govone. If you try to book in Govone, the week that they have the sagra, which is the festa, the party of the town. And it's impossible.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So again, maybe you want to enjoy something like this, and you think, oh, why not? I'm going to go in a little village. You see that it's always like, you always find booking, but then you realize that, oh, wow. This is the same week that they all want to go there. So, yeah, that's another thing to think about.

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Katy Clarke:
Yeah. And I think the other one that people need to get on to, if you're traveling by train and you want to go on the big intercity routes, but between say Rome and Florence or Venice, it's good to book about two months out. I think you can get the best prices. And then you can also have options. I like to go business class because it's only a few more euros and you get a little bit more space, but you'll have more options. And just on that, with the trains, I had a few emails. Oh, I can't book any trains for September because in early June, and that's because every six months in Italy and in Europe they turn over the timetable. So a lot of trains weren't able to be booked in June.

Katy Clarke:
So now when we're recording this, this is the end of June, so you should be able to book everything that you need to do for the rest of the year. But yeah, definitely get onto the train.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I didn't know that.

Katy Clarke:
You didn't know.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, I didn't know that. It is true. For instance, last year I went with my family and back then we had just two kids and as you said, if you book in advance, for instance, you can find family tickets or you can also find that pay one going two, like. And that was so convenient for us. We had like our own section because actually we decided to travel during the night and was fun with the kids. So we had our own cabin and we basically pay like one ticket because the kids were traveling for free and we were two adults. So that was great just because we thought about that a bit in advance and was so fun.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Like they even put normal, like beautiful linen. It was very cute.

Katy Clarke:
Was that from Rome to Turin?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
We did from Turin to Rome. Yeah. When we came to Rome and we met there, this is what we did during the night. Yeah, the kids love it. It was such an experience. You have bunk bed and you wait... you arrive in Rome around 5:36 in the morning, which is fun. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Did they sleep?

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Monica Cazzamani Bona:
They did sleep and I sleep as well. I was so tired. I was pregnant.

Katy Clarke:
And it's probably cheaper than a hotel room too.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, exactly. So we said, okay, we will be tired, but we already booked a little accommodation. Was an Airbnb. It was an apartment. And so we said, okay, it would be fun. We arrived there and then we went for a walk. We actually went to Piazza Navona at 6 am, which was already busy but was nice.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah. And then we had a little nap in the afternoon.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, so nice. Okay, well. And I think around this time people are thinking, oh my goodness, I was always thinking that I should learn some Italian before I go. So Monica, tell us, you are the Italian teacher. Is it too late, with two months to go to your Italy trip, to learn a little bit of Italian?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Never too late. Even if you just have a week and you just want to put a bit of effort. You can learn just a few things to be nice with people. And, and this is what we do with the travelers. So as I said, we have different kind of Italian learning language learners or students. So who wants to like be fluent? And so they have been studying for years. But then there is people that just want to be nice when they go there. And I think it's such a good way to extend your travel.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
We have a course that is called Four Weeks to Italy. So you can learn in four weeks just a little things to be nice with people to greet, to order something at the restaurant, to also say what you don't eat. Because lots of people they travel these days, unfortunately. We can be celiac or you can have an allergy or you just don't want or you have a kind of diet that you want to keep having in Italy. And sometimes it is true that you can ask in English, but if you really need... so for instance, we had a student, her daughter was celiac, but in a very severe way. So she need to make sure that nothing was like this. So she was saying that in Italian and in English and she just learned that.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So it's a fun way to extend a bit your travel. Again, you will not be fluent if you haven't studied Italian before. But you will learn just few things to get by or even just to say grazie in the correct way. And so people that doesn't look at you like 'she's speaking Spanish, not Italian'. Don't say me gracias, please. So yeah, it's definitely achievable and will change your

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experience. And I do it every time when I, when I go to a country that is not in English or Italian-speaking country. I do a bit of French before I go to France.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I do a bit of even Balinese when I go to Bali. It's nice to be nice with people where you go. People will appreciate so much and will change your experience with them as well. So you can connect better with people,

Katy Clarke:
I think especially now when people tend to rely on Google Translate and things like that, if they're thinking oh I don't need to learn because I can use this translation app. But there's something so special about having that one-to-one interaction with people and there's no better place to do that than Italy. I think in Italy it's a personal relationship, it's a feeling and if you make that effort you were going to get it back many times over. A friend of mine just contacted me, she's in Italy at the moment, she's in Puglia and you know like they've had their usual, they've had a few issues. She fell over and hurt herself and things like that and some issues with their car. And her husband, he actually looks a bit Italian - he's not Italian but he looks a little bit but he can't speak any Italian. And so, but when she speaks Italian, she said "oh, you should see the red carpet get laid out. I get all this attention".

Katy Clarke:
People want to help because she's made the effort to try and she speaks a handful of words really, she doesn't know too much, but it's making all the difference to their trip and especially down south, where they are at the moment in quite a - not a well-known part of Puglia, people don't speak English very well. So it's really worth having a go.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, it's a, it's a beautiful way to connect and really I said that for experience. But all the students that start to learn a bit of Italian before their trip, they really think oh it's like traveling, you know, I learn a bit of that culture. I make me dream that I'm going to be there and you know, you ask to your personal teacher like her experience what she likes. So we have teachers around, they come from different places in Italy. So, for instance, if you ask Marcella, that she's from Sardinia and you are going to Sardinia, she will tell you everything about. So it's almost like having your friend already in Italy that give you her suggestions on how to approach people. So yeah, it definitely one of the things that I always do and even if you don't do it with a tutorial, I suggest just to, yes, if you remember the old Lonely Planet, at the end had few phrases; just read them and try to pronounce them.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It's something that you can do till it's, it's a bit less fun because when you read the sentence you don't know how to pronounce them, actually. But yeah, we'll help you as well.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, Monica, you've forgotten that you're the voice of our Italian in our app.

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Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I forgot about that. Exactly. Katy. That is something fun. If you go in the language section of Katy's app, we did together this little tiny section where you can listen the main words. And so you can listen, you can see how they're spelt. So if you need to write them, you can just copy them. It's so easy.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It's handy because it's on your phone. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
And you can hear Monica's voice saying the phrases and how to pronounce things correctly. So that's all in the Untold Italy app, actually. That was actually one of my favorite parts when we were building the app because I just. I love hearing Monica's little voice coming out of the phone at me.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It was fun. Yeah, it's was a little fun project to do together.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, it was, wasn't it? Yeah. So definitely have a go at getting some Italian language down into your brain. Even if it's learning how to order a gelato. Definitely how to say buongiorno, buonasera. The differences in different types of greetings. Because as much as everyone likes to say ciao, ciao, bella, it's not really the standard way of approaching people, is it?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
While you were speaking, I remember a section of our Four Weeks to Italy course, and that is how to order your coffee. So it's not just about the language, but it's really to communicate what you want. So as an Italian, we always love to hear English speakers because they order two or due cappuccinos. Because cappuccino is a word that you use in the English language now. And so one cappuccino, two cappuccinos, you put s to make it plural. When for us, cappuccinos doesn't exist, it becomes cappuccini. Okay. So o cappuccino becomes cappuccini.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So just being able to order a cappuccino for you and your husband or you and your girlfriend and just to order in a nice way so people don't laugh, that will be - that would be good. So "Vorei due cappuccini", that is good. Or, you know, like if you like latte. In Australia, we order a latte, which is a coffee with milk. But in Italian, if you just order latte, it's just a cup. Like a big cup of milk, because latte means milk. So that is a fun way as well, to just to be able to do what you like not and how you like so.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah. Are little things that will change completely your experience, especially if you travel out of Rome, Venice and Florence.

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Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Well, I think when people order latte and the server will go, oh. And they'll go, fredo o caldo. So cold or hot. And you'll be like, don't know, just a latte. Latte.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, yeah.

Katy Clarke:
And I think everyone has the latte culture around the world. And in Italian it's definitely cafe latte, isn't it?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Exactly, cafe latte, which again has a, like a big quantity of milk compared to the coffee. So yeah, when you want to order a latte. Ish. In Italy, I always suggest, for instance, to order a cappuccino without the chocolate because it's what resembles the most a latte in Australia, for instance. But yeah, it is part of the language. Is communication and you don't need to learn the war, all the words, but you need to recognize what is written on the, on your menu. Or ask. Yeah.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
For instance, if you have a problem in the hotel, lots of time, you know, like you, you need your hair dryer doesn't work or you want a change of your towel to go to the pool. So it's nice to ask in Italian, like anything. If it doesn't make sense, you'll see the biggest smile on people. Like, even if you make a mistake when you speak in Italian or even if you have to read out what you've written on a piece of paper, it will change your experience. And I always do that everywhere I travel.

Katy Clarke:
Me too. But I think Italians are unique in that they do genuinely appreciate the effort. And not every culture does. Let's just say the French aren't famous for it, but definitely in Italy they definitely appreciate it. And you'll see a lot of generosity of spirit heading your way when you have a go. So the next bit that I wanted to talk about is just getting all those dotted eyes and crossed. T's about doing all your paperwork when you go there and all of the things that make everything go smoothly. Passports, you need to have six months' expiry.

Katy Clarke:
It's actually three months is the rule, but I like to have six months just in case. I think there's nothing worse than getting to the airport and being told, no, you can't board because you don't have the right documentation on you. So do check your passports are up to date and check when they're expiring because you can get yourself into a little bit of a bother. As I mentioned, I did a little mini episode on a very important document. If you're driving, which is the international driver's permit. And Monica, does your husband drive when he's in Italy?

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Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Last time he drove, he used this, the Australian driver's license for three months and he was able to do that. But yeah, I don't know if it works the same for every country or if the rule is different.

Katy Clarke:
Well, you may not have rented a car, so you may not have found out the hard way.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I know we didn't rent.

Katy Clarke:
No, you had that family car. But what you do need is your local license plus your international driver's permit. So next time he goes. Because if you get stopped by police or there's an accident, you do need to have that if you've got your and license from outside of Europe. So it's very important. I went into a bit more detail earlier in the, in the week about this international driver's permit and people turning up to pick up their rental car and not being able to get it because they did not have the right documentation.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I'm Italian and I should know this stuff, but because you. I don't work in that kind of field. Yeah, I commit quickly. They didn't know about that. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
But I think we're also into this false sense of security is like we. If you, especially if you're a frequent traveler and you're just like, right, okay, go. Got my passport, got this, got that. Booked everything online. Whoops, I forgot to check. And another one that's really important is, depending on when you're traveling and how you're going into Venice, is that Venice has a tax now for day trip visitors that you have to pay in advance. But even if you are not going for the day and you're staying on the lagoon, you still need to have an exemption. So you need to apply for it now.

Katy Clarke:
Let's take a quick moment. We'll be right back. For daily travel tips and behind-the-scenes content from our tours, make sure to follow us on Instagram at @untolditalytours.

Katy Clarke:
But you need to pay attention. Sometimes they're giving you really important information like this Venice tourist tax, which if you haven't paid for it or you haven't applied for the exemption, this is like €3 or 4 hundred, which can really make a dent in that holiday budget.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, I actually, when I traveled to Rome and Naples last year, I noticed even like Airbnb now they have to charge the tax on top of the Airbnb fee. And I was like, oh yeah, I forgot about

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that. You know, you assume that things are like here in Australia. When I book something, I just go and it's done. I forgot how thorough they need to be when they check your passport. So again, you just go in a place and that's it. Now they have to check your passport, they have to write all the things in their paper.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So it's - there is a lot of work.

Katy Clarke:
One thing please, no one forget - is to get insurance. Please, please make sure you have your travel insurance, especially the health one. I can't say this enough. Basically, Italy has an amazing health system and you will probably be able to access it if you are traveling and something goes wrong. But the real challenge is if your vacation is disrupted or you need to be flown home for whatever reason. Some of our tour guests have had to leave our tours early for family health emergencies and other things. And if they don't have insurance, you know, basically the cost of flying back, getting an extra ticket, canceling the tour, getting additional accommodation and transportation and even if you are unfortunate enough to have to be Medi-vacced home, that is, that can be life-changing in a really terrible way from a financial perspective. So the cost of the insurance is small in comparison to your trip and it's a really important thing to do.

Katy Clarke:
So if you haven't done that yet, go ahead and do that because I think that's a very important step that you need to take.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, that's a good one. My mom is coming from Italy to Australia in July and again for her I said the same. The first half is, was booking the insurance, especially how things are going and we have older grandparents at home and you want to make sure that whatever you need to do, like you can fly back and you are covered because it's easy, especially with flights cost. It's easy to blow out your budget in a very bad way.

Katy Clarke:
And probably the other thing around that is really work out how you're going to use your phone and how you're going to communicate with people. So in Italy, everyone loves using WhatsApp, don't they? It's a WhatsApp culture. I reckon that's the number one app in Italy,

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
In the restaurants they like you to book on WhatsApp. I was like, oh, okay.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, I know, it's crazy. Yeah. And you can easily do just send them a text on WhatsApp. It's very easy to book the restaurants online that way. But if you are concerned about using a lot

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of data or you want to get a local sim, you should do that. I recommend using an eSIM. There's a company called Airalo. There's a lot of different versions.

Katy Clarke:
I personally just use my plan from home because they're getting cheaper and cheaper all the time now. It's like can be $5 a day or something like that. Some of the operators here in Australia offer international roaming plans for very little and I personally find that the most convenient because of, you know, now with all the security stuff you need access to your actual phone to get the codes and all of that. But you can get an eSIM. I wouldn't bother doing it when you're there. It's just. It's too much hassle.

Katy Clarke:
Definitely, if you've got a phone that takes two sims, get an eSIM.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, exactly. Yeah, but you don't need the second SIM as well. Like, yeah, the right way to just do all electronic one. But yeah, it's something you have to think about. I remember back in time when I was. I had to grab another phone and like use the other phone as a router for or like in wireless connecting.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So it's much easier. But again, it's something to think about. When you travel, it's so much to organize, isn't it? Like when you put things together like it's a lot. So it's a lot of information. Especially if you are a parent, you have to think all the other things. For instance, what I notice again is when you travel with kids and you need to make sure that all the hotel they have a cot if you need a cot or because not all the hotel has a cot or because maybe they have three and they already have three family. So make sure that this is all restaurants have like a seat for your kid.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
There are, if you go in major city I know there are companies that even rent your pram. So if you need a pram with bigger wheels or whatever. So there is a. As a mum there is a lot of things that I had to think - that before I didn't have to think like even finding formula baby food it's not impossible, but you need to look into this information before going.

Katy Clarke:
Oh yeah, traveling with small children like it's a. It should be an Olympic sport. I reckon it's amazing to do. I love doing it, but yeah, yeah we would go with our two porta cots that we had travel carts that we had. We would put them on the plane because we knew the kids would sleep in them and they were very good. Okay, now we're getting very close to getting there. We need to pack.

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Katy Clarke:
I mean, look all these people - my hat's off to you if you can travel for longer than two weeks with a carry-on. Amazing. Personally, I get bored of my clothes. There is a lady on Instagram and she does this method, Sudoku packing method, where you have like nine items of clothing. I mean, it's amazing. I do like it, but I just look at it and I go, I get bored, you know, with all of that. And also not just that, but I like to travel with a medium case. Now everyone's different.

Katy Clarke:
But I don't know how people can get their hair, you know, like to be just coming out of the shower and dried nicely. But I need my hair tools. I need things that are going to take up space and I like to leave room to bring things home. I love shopping in Italy, so I don't travel carry-on. I always check a bag, but I don't usually take a big case. I just take a medium one.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, I agree. Big cases is too heavy. It's too difficult. Sometimes cars are smaller than our cars. So sometimes it's even difficult to put in the, in the car. And it's true, as you say, you want to buy something in Italy and everyone had this idea and me includes. Sometimes I have this naive idea of like, oh, I'm going to Italy and buy everything because it's going to be cheap. Well, if you don't know where to buy, it could be like pricey.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So you want your nice piece of clothes; at least you have them. If you have beautiful nights on a villa outside, you want your, like floral dress, for instance. So something that you can, you really enjoy, you feel well in it based on the weather. So do a bit of research on what weather is going to be and, and then some space free in the luggage. But make sure again you do a bit of research on where to buy things because it can be. Yeah. Difficult to find exactly what you have in mind. Like handmade things made in Italy, like hand, like beautiful bags and shoes.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So space but the same times your stuff based on the weather and comfortable shoes. Remember how the streets in Italy are. We forget about cobblestones and high heels. They don't really work well.

Katy Clarke:
Can you do it though? Monica, as a proud Italian woman, can you walk on cobblestones and heels?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I actually used to do. I was much younger and, you know, like you, you want to do Bella Figura, which for an Italian is very important. So when I go to a restaurant, I used to park not too far and I put my high heels on and I had to walk on it. But, yeah, my body changed, and I feel like a nice pair of comfortable shoes are best.

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Katy Clarke:
Yeah, me too. Oh, my gosh. I think my heels days are over. I've got such a collection. I used to be such a heels person, but, yeah, really comfortable in sneakers now.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
And flats. Anyway, you can still get very nice ones of those. But to your point about shopping, actually, in our app, we have hundreds of listings of artisan shops where we love to recommend people to go to for buying food, for buying gifts, for buying linen. I love buying linen in Italy and ceramics as well. And a lot of these places will ship home, but, you know, sometimes you don't want that precious purchase to leave you. I know I bought this beautiful ceramic star when I was in Urbino last year, and I loved it so much, and it was packed and snugly put into my case. So, yeah, it's a really important thing to have space in your case for all those purchases.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So explain me. If I go in your app and I want to find. Yeah, like, how is it organized to find, for instance, shops where I should look? Because I have your app. And again, every city is different, so I can say, I'm Italian, I will find everything. I can't because I. You don't know the city.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So how does it work?

Katy Clarke:
So, yeah, if you go into, say, your region, if you go into Piemonte and you can go into the shopping section, then there's a whole list of shops that we recommend, and they're all ones that we love. You know, there's the. I think that famous cheese shop in Bra is in there, if you know that one. And, you know, like, there's our favorite chocolate shop in Torino, the Gubino Chocolate Shop, which is on one of our favorites. So things like that is, like, really specific to the region. We have clothing boutiques, we have leather, we have ceramics. But yeah, we love collecting this information and putting it in the app. So.

Katy Clarke:
And it can also be mapped out on a map so you can zoom in on where it is.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Ah, so you know where they are. Oh, good. That's very handy.

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Katy Clarke:
I think so. Well, I mean, you know, I do it really for myself more than anything else. Because I want to remember all these places. Like you said, you put everything in Instagram and it ends up being 100 items. And then you have to sift through them and you don't really know why you saved them in the first place.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Knowing where they are in the map will help because again, maybe you stay in Rome, but if it's like an hour and a half the other side of Rome, you can't really go. So it's, it's good to see what's, what's around you or where you stay. Yeah, that's. That's a very good idea.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, I think so. So just unpacking, though. We have like a full episode on packing and what to wear if anyone's interested. Like, we go into a lot of detail because everyone's got a little bit of a different packing style. And obviously, as Monica said, if you're traveling with kids, oh, my goodness. It's a whole different kettle of fish really, isn't it? It's just packing for three boys. I don't know how you do the three.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
I didn't try yet, but I will eventually. So, yeah, wish me luck.

Katy Clarke:
I have two words for you. Packing cubes. Color coordinated. Everything goes in the packing cubes. And then you just pull them out. That's the only way that I can see that would work anyway. But yeah, it's a whole other ball game.

Katy Clarke:
So the last thing that people should do and probably do this one to two weeks out, and this is something really important. Monica probably gets collected by her family, very excited when she arrives in Italy. But I don't. I get picked up by a driver. And this is the best thing that I do. It is so important to me because once, especially if You've traveled for 24 hours from Australia or more sometimes, depending on where you've stopped over or, you know, if you're coming from the west coast of the US or even the east coast, you're tired, you're exhausted. Yes, you can get a taxi, but taxis, yeah, they can - you know, taxi drivers the world over, they don't have the best reputation, do they? I mean, they can be really painful.

Katy Clarke:
And you don't know exactly what you're going to pay. You have to sort out money. You have to pay with a card. They might turn around and say, no, we don't take the card. It happens all the time. The other option is depending on where. If you're landing in Rome or Milan, which is where most people land, there are definitely trains into the city. But then you have to get from the train station to your accommodation.

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Katy Clarke:
Like, it's still another step. So I like to eliminate steps. And I like to get straight to my accommodation. And that's why I book a transfer.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
My family come and pick me up - used to. Since I have the kids, I don't want anyone to pick me up first because again, I need the car seats. Yeah. And they don't have car seats in the car. And also, as you said, I'm so tired that I actually don't want to speak with anyone for the hour and a half that takes me from Milano Airport to my village. So we have a driver as well comes to pick us up. It's big. It's like a multivan.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
We all fit in there. They have car seats, so I don't have to worry about setting up car seats. My mum, like she has, but she can't really put them up nicely. So when we are at home, we do it. The good stuff is like, I come out and they help me with luggage. And again, so handy because if you are by yourself or like with your husband, but you have kids and you have quite a bit of luggage or whatever, it's so good that they just. They pick you up.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
You don't have to think about anything. So it's worth every single penny. And also they don't speak. So I can just close my eyes until I'm at my mum's and I'm okay. I just want to think about that. Yeah, it's good.

Katy Clarke:
I think people think transfers are really expensive as well. But, like, you might pay maybe 10, 15, €20 more. And honestly, it's worth every single cent. I honestly think, you know, I mean, unless you're really, really on a budget and you're backpacking and you have a lot of spare time, this is literally the smartest thing to do, if you ask me.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Of course, if you're backpacking, you probably are not even listening this podcast.

Katy Clarke:
Monica, that's not true. Actually. I've been texting my friend's daughter. She's listening to our podcast. I convinced her to go actually up to Liguria instead of going on a party boat in Croatia. And she loved it.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Well done. Okay, so sorry, backpackers, you're here listening us.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, no, we have so many different types of people listening, and I think that's what's really great, actually, because we try and help. No matter how you travel, we've got a way to help you and hopefully everyone's learned something today. So what do you think, Monica? Like,

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let's send everyone off on their way that everyone who's heading off soon, have a wonderful time. Hopefully you're all organized and excited and ready to go. And we wish you the very best experience in Italy. Make sure to say, buongiorno, have a go, try some words. And if you want to really get into it and really speak like an Italian, maybe, I don't know.

Katy Clarke:
Monica, just as an aside, did you see Dua Lipa's wedding in Sicily?

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yes, I see it.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, my God, she looked gorgeous.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Bellissima. Yeah, the dress was so beautiful.

Katy Clarke:
She speaks some Italian, I think. Dua. So she's a very talented lady.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
How many celebrity actually do speak Italian? It's so cute. Sometimes I see some stuff coming up and then I'm thinking, ‘oh, wow, they speak Italian’. And again, it's so nice to hear that.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
It was beautiful to speak with you. And yeah, if anyone wants to travel and they want to keep this suggestion, I think they're so precious. It's beautiful to travel, but it's beautiful to travel when you understand more about the place. So it's good when you can. Yeah. Explore a little more, whether it's the language or not.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So if you want to get in contact with me and you want to just explore Italian language a bit, please do. I want to offer two extra sessions on our Four weeks to Italy for your listener, Katy. So for anyone that books the Four Weeks to Italy with 'untolditaly' code at the checkout, I'm happy to add on to extra sessions. So you actually not just do the course and practice with your tutor, but you actually have more time to ask questions about the language and be specific on what you need when you are in Italy. Yes. And I think as well on your app, you can also ask a question, isn't it? That is like Ask Zia what's on your app.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, that accesses our online little AI, which accesses all our information. Yeah, it's so handy.

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Monica Cazzamani Bona:
So, yeah, again, ask your questions to me or to Katy and your trip will be amazing. I know. And please, even in the comment, just let us know where you're going. I'm curious to see where your listener are going this year or next year.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, my gosh. I love our listeners because they're all doing the most amazing things. I just had an email from one lady who's going back to Parma and then she's going up to Alba and she's going all around Bergamo up in the north. Like some really unique and different places that I love. People are going, exploring Italy, and it's what we're here for, really. That's why we. That's why we do what we do.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Yeah, exactly. Parma. I just came as soon as you say Parma. Parma Rotta is this restaurant where they whip your ice cream in front of you at the end of the beautiful meal. Oh, my goodness.

Katy Clarke:
Stop it. Stop it. Okay.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Every year, hopefully, hopefully next year. This year is a bit too busy with three kids, but next year I will and I definitely will remember to do a drive license for David. Oh, yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Don't forget that. Okay. Buon Viaggio, everyone. Have a wonderful time in Italy.

Monica Cazzamani Bona:
Ciao, Katy.

Katy Clarke:
Ciao. And that, Italy, travelers, is your countdown to your trip. Make sure to get the tickets, the trains, insurance and documents all organized. Learn a little Italian and get your communications and packing in order. And also don't forget to order your pickup from your transfer when you arrive. I think it's really a nice way to start your holidays. The thing that I will carry from this conversation is Monica's point that one small word, 'buongiorno', opens doors that no amount of planning can. My friend in Puglia getting the red carpet treatment for a handful of words she barely knew says it perfectly.

Katy Clarke:
Have a go at the language. Say buongiorno. Order your coffee the Italian way. Enjoy Italy through all of your senses. Everything Monica and I talked about today, including our companion article to this episode, her Four Weeks to Italy course, and the little language section that the two of us built into the Untold Italy app, is linked to in the show notes at

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untolditaly.com/332. For episode number 332, Buon Viaggio. If your trip is imminent, have the most wonderful time. Soak it all up and make sure to get an idea of your next Italian adventure while you are there.

Katy Clarke:
Next week on the pod, I'll be answering some more of your questions. But until then, it's ciao for now.

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