

Untold Italy Episode 337: The Untold Italy Way - Embrace Slow Travel, Local Experiences and Your Own Journey

Have you ever thought about the reasons why you travel? Are you motivated by history, new experiences, or all of the above? In today's episode, I'm sharing the philosophy that we bring to Untold Italy. It's an approach that has been developed over time, and it's something that we reference to help you plan your trips to Italy so that you feel part of the country, not just passing through.

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:

Buongiorno, ciao everyone. You are listening to the Untold Italy podcast. I'm your host, Katy Clarke, and it's my absolute pleasure to take you on a virtual trip to Italy each and every week with my friends, old and new, who are based in Italy or who travel there often. Our goal is to help travelers move beyond the checklist, so they really feel part of Italy and that they're not just passing through. Today I wanted to share something a little different that was triggered by a conversation that I had recently where someone asked me, what is your travel philosophy, Katy? And I have to admit that initially I was a little bit taken aback and lost for words, which is not really like me, as you can imagine. But that's only because I hadn't really taken time to consolidate my thoughts. And I'm so glad that I was prompted because it made me stop and consider how that I wanted to communicate this travel philosophy and what I would like Untold Italy's impact and legacy to be, which is kind of a lofty statement, but I think when you've created over 300 podcasts, then it's something that I really wanted to consolidate and really communicate as a proper philosophy. So if you've been listening for a while, I think, and I hope that the values and beliefs that I have and that Untold Italy has around life and travel are very clear.

Katy Clarke:

But today I wanted to really spell out what those values and beliefs are, how I got to the place that I understood them, and how they drive the way that I travel in Italy and around the world. And also how we approach everything that we do at Untold Italy, from this podcast and all the free resources on our website to our Untold Italy app, our trip planning services, and of course our tours in Italy. In a nutshell, this philosophy can be distilled into the following. Exploring Italy, or any other place for that matter, is a relationship. It's not a destination. Your

Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes

trip is personal, and it's part of your journey as an individual, and it's not a checklist to complete. We see our job at Untold Italy is to open the door to the version of Italy that belongs to you, so that you come home changed and craving more, rather than just having seen a bunch of places. And we do this the best way that we know how, and that's through respecting the land, the culture, traditions, language, and most of all, the people of Italy.

Katy Clarke:

So the first principle that I want to share is around the art of travel. I believe the art of travel is putting yourself in situations that help you see the world through a different lens. The great thing about travel is that it tends to trigger feelings that are overwhelmingly positive. But there's sometimes challenges and that's okay too. But in any case, overcoming these challenges helps build confidence and perspective, which I think is overwhelmingly positive. For me, travel is not a list of places or experiences to be checked off. It is not a checklist. And I have to admit that it has taken me a little while to get to that point, and I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

Katy Clarke:

But here is where I'm at right now. The art of travel is the rush of delight when you turn a corner and find a little piazza with a table waiting just for you in a small village somewhere in the countryside, and even better, just as the church bells toll. Or when you taste your first proper bite of proper Napoli pizza. It's feelings of awe and wonder when you walk down the Via Appia in Rome in the footsteps of senators and generals, Julius Caesar, or Augustus, or when you're looking out of a window from the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence at Brunelleschi's Dome, just as Cosimo de' Medici had done hundreds of years before. Or as you take in the natural beauty of the alpine meadows of Alpe di Siusi or the stunning coastline of the Amalfi Coast. It's the sense of pride that you get when you order your first gelato or you tell your first joke in Italian. And it's also the feeling of relief when you work out how to get to your hotel when you got off the train at the wrong spot in Naples. It's also the sense of admiration you feel as you watch someone who has spent decades perfecting a technique to make the most beautiful jewels, or as a community comes together to celebrate their local traditions and produce as they have for centuries.

Katy Clarke:

Now, our daily lives have similar moments, but I think when we travel, these feelings are heightened and more intense, and that's why so many of us love to travel, to capture those feelings and that sense of excitement. But there's one thing that I really want to say. There is no right or wrong way to travel, and your travel style is an evolution, and it's a journey of its own in its own right that no one has the right to critique. It really bugs me when people judge others for how they want to see the world. Everyone is working from a different baseline in terms of availability of time, financial resources, and experiences. And, you know, my approach has changed over time based on my maturity and experience in the world. As a young woman in my 20s, I had a totally different outlook on the world. I wanted to soak everything up and experience everything that I could.

Katy Clarke:

I was in a rush and it was exciting. These days I've got less time, but I've now got more resources and I prefer to take things slower and enjoy the moment. And I've accepted that I cannot and will never see and experience everything. I have definitely been a budget traveler in the past, and I had so much fun traveling that way. But in this season of my life, I prefer to spend a little more on accommodation and experiences. Neither is better, it's just different. Now, at Untold Italy, we have a preferred style of traveling, and I'll share that with you in a few minutes. But we will never judge you for the way that you want to see the world.

Katy Clarke:

There is one thing though, that I think is really important for everyone to do regardless of their travel style, and that's to think about the reasons why you travel. So it's much more important than the speed or the pace at which you go. I think if you really stop to consider the reasons you travel, you will have a more deeper trip. And once again, this is intensely personal, or it should be. I love talking to people about this, and just this last weekend I chatted to one of the other mums at my son's soccer match who had just returned from Rome. She was just so excited about the history and architecture and art of the city, and she said that 3 days was just not enough for her. She wanted to go back soon and really delve into some of the lesser-known museums and sites that brought the ancient and Renaissance city to life. Feeling part of history and understanding its context in our modern world is a big part of my personal why.

Katy Clarke:

I love admiring architecture and art from a time where details and symbolism were valued. Some people couldn't care less about this, and you know what? That's absolutely fine. About 10 years ago, I was shocked, and I have to say at that time, a little bit outraged, when a fellow travel blogger who was going to Florence told me she was not really interested in art and history. Shout out to you, Laura, because I have never forgotten that conversation. Laura is a travel blogger who loves food and wine. That is her passion. And when I took the time to think about that some more after my initial outrage and shock, I had to really respect that she was true to herself and not moving to the beat of anyone else's drum. She was going to Florence to taste the food and the wine.

Katy Clarke:

And you know what? There's worse places in the world to do that for sure. Florence has got some amazing restaurants and some really delicious local dishes. I'm sure everyone knows Bistecca alla Fiorentina, which is the classic that you have when you are in Florence. And I also travel for food and wine. I love hearing about the provenance of dishes, how they relate to the local landscapes, the history and the culture. And in Italy, the pride people take in their region is something that I find so inspiring. There is not one place that you will go to that they will not champion their local olive oil as the absolute best in the world. I love that they are hypercompetitive too.

Katy Clarke:

One of my favorite conversations from the past 5 years was with a young balsamic vinegar maker from near Modena. He is shaking up the traditional world of the consortium, which is the local group that manages the quality and output of the balsamic vinegar. And how he's doing that is he's trying out new and I find quite exciting techniques. The traditionalists are a little bit shocked by Francesco and some of his antics, but they could never say that he doesn't respect the traditions that underpin this experimentation. It's a really fun and interesting way to understand the culture of a country by talking to people like this.

Katy Clarke:

Other travelers love nature, hiking and biking, or they travel for spiritual reasons. And of course, this can change over time. I know I've got a lot of friends' parents that love going to Italy to paint, and that's another wonderful way to see the country, is to go and indulge your artistic passions. So if you know your why and what you love to experience, making decisions about where to go and what to do becomes so much easier. Instead of reaching for someone's lists of must-sees and dos, really take some time to think about what you want out of your trip, and that way you will have the most wonderful time ever. So how has all this informed the way that we help you travel at Untold Italy? One of the concepts that I love to explore is the concept of slow travel. At Untold Italy, we do believe in a slow travel approach. Slow travel is a bit of a buzzword, so what does that mean practically? For us, it means taking the time to get to know a place beyond the obvious checklist of highlights. We advocate for a minimum of 3 nights at every stop where possible.

Katy Clarke:

But as you've heard from my friend who recently visited Rome, that would not be enough time in the Eternal City for her. The second point is to plan what is necessary and leave lots of space to explore. There is no doubt that some things need to be planned these days, but that does not mean you need to schedule and book every minute of your days. Yes, you will need to book your Colosseum tickets and the villa that you've had your eye on to stay in, in Tuscany or down in Puglia well in advance, but you should also equally leave room for serendipity, curiosity, and time for exploring. I just love hearing from you, our listeners, about all your new discoveries and the delight that you have in them. It is simply not possible for one person or even a team of people like we have here at Untold Italy to cover every little nook of the country. So I just love it when you share them with me too, and you're always so excited. The next point that I'd love to make is accept that mistakes will be made and that they actually can be quite fun.

Katy Clarke:

Most people who have a long history of traveling to Italy have a crazy car driving story or two. We all learned and laugh a lot about those now. Or maybe you ordered the offal pasta completely by accident, but discovered it was quite delicious. It's happened to us, and these are the moments that you always remember. And I love to recount them and laugh about them with my family. Another major principle that we have at Untold Italy is seeking out local insights and experiences. This is core to everything that we do, in fact, and the way that we

like to travel. Now, the terms 'like a local' and 'authentic' are completely overused in travel writing and marketing, in my opinion.

Katy Clarke:

So we try not to use them here. And that's because the reality is our experience as travelers is really nothing like the everyday experience of most Italians. I always say, if you want authentic, go to Roma Termini or Milano Centrale station on a Monday morning and immerse yourself in the weekday commute. It's not that different to ours. I mean, there are some differences. Everyone's standing at the bar drinking a coffee, but you get the idea. We're not all wandering the countryside, just sitting in piazzas all day. People have jobs and they have things to do.

Katy Clarke:

What I do think is important is hearing from local Italian voices where possible. Many of the people online who talk about traveling and living in Italy are native English language speakers like myself, and there's nothing wrong with that, but an immigrant or a traveler's perspective is completely different to that of someone who has grown up in a culture and in a place. My friend Andrea is from Piedmont in the north of Italy, and he's a really smart and educated person. But if you get him talking on the subject of rivalry with the Milanese, the people from Milan, he shows a passion that is rooted in centuries of fighting and animosity that might seem a little bit over the top to a foreigner, and definitely coming from someone as gentle and as kind as Andrea. Especially when he gets his hands and arms moving as part of his expression. This is a sense of culture that evolved from history, and as foreigners, we can intellectually understand it perhaps, but we don't feel it in our core. And this is the experience I love to have when I'm traveling. Understanding the pride, the passions, and even the prejudices of local people can help us appreciate places in a much deeper way.

Katy Clarke:

In our case here at Untold Italy, we choose to raise the profile of women in the travel and food industry as much as we can. That's because it is very difficult for women to run businesses in Italy compared to many English-speaking countries. Not that it is easy for women in our countries, but there is an additional layer of struggle that happens in Italy, which is a highly patriarchal society. So that's why we try on this podcast to introduce you to local, mainly female voices. So you have their perspective and insights. After all, this is their country and they know it best. We carry that same principle on our small group tours where our goal is to support as many female-run local businesses as we can. So if you join us on tour, we'll visit a lot of female-run wineries.

Katy Clarke:

We will have many female tour guides. And this is the way that we can show our support for the people that make the country the brilliant way that it is. Hiring local guides for our tours and recommending them to our clients is an important part of our services. And if you have the means, a local guide will bring your experience to life, especially if you are curious and you ask a lot of questions. Italians love to tell stories, especially about where they grew up.

Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes

So make sure you do ask lots of questions, get curious, and you will find a whole new world opens up to you. We also prefer smaller family-run businesses to internationally owned corporations. Our friends at LivTours are a great example of this.

Katy Clarke:

Based in Rome and run by an Italian family, the profits stay in the country and they support local people. Italy also has upwards of 60,000 small family-run hotels, and we love to recommend those too. These places are focused on delivering great hospitality, and they're not always so good at marketing, and so they may not have the best up-to-date even working websites, especially in the budget category. So in this case, you might find us giving you Booking.com recommendation or link so you can take a deeper look at the properties, but you can always book direct via email or WhatsApp if you are comfortable with that. The next principle that I'd like to discuss is about treading lightly and being curious. As travelers, we believe in showing the utmost respect to Italian culture, nature, and its people. This could be as simple as learning a few words of Italian before you go, trying new dishes outside of your comfort zone when offered, and making sure that you understand cultural norms. I discussed this in more detail with my friend Nesim in last week's episode of the podcast if you'd like to take a listen.

Katy Clarke:

Italians love both culture and nature, so it's important to show respect for those too. Sadly, every year a tourist decides to do something really silly like jump in the Venetian canals or a centuries-old fountain in Rome. Or carve their name into a priceless building, or not dealing with their rubbish or trash appropriately. I'm quite sure anyone listening to this podcast is not doing any of that, but you get the idea. Let's always show respect. And I think if we are curious travelers that we naturally show respect. And as I've said before, Italians love to share their passion for the small patch of Italy where they are from through stories, food, and wine. So make sure to ask lots of questions of your local guide and ask for the dishes of the day when you're in a small village somewhere in the countryside.

Katy Clarke:

In that way, you will have the best opportunity to soak up the magic that is Italy. So my friends, that is the Untold Italy way. Travel slow, seek out and support locals, tread lightly, and stay curious. It's the way that we like to see and explore Italy and the world. And if that resonates with you, you're in the right place. We have hundreds of free podcast episodes and articles to explore and ways to work with us if you're looking for more personalized support. At the end of the day, we simply want all travelers to experience your own version of Italy, be inspired, and travel a little deeper each time that you leave your home country. Traveling internationally for leisure is a gift that is not open to many people in this world.

Katy Clarke:

Maybe only 10 to 15% of people can do this. So I always say, if you can travel, go see the world. Carpe diem, seize the day. Open your eyes and keep an open mind and take every opportunity to see the world, connect with people, and challenge your ideas, your beliefs,

Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes

and go on an evolutionary journey that will have the biggest, most positive impact on your life. That's all for today. If you enjoyed this episode, it would be wonderful if you shared a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. That helps us reach more thoughtful Italy-loving travelers just like you. Next week on Untold Italy, we are headed back to Puglia to hear some of the local stories, myths, and legends that are an important part of local culture.

Katy Clarke:

But until then, it's ciao for now.