

Untold Italy Episode 339: The Odyssey - Legendary Italian Locations from Homer's Epic Revealed

Have you seen the latest blockbuster movie, *The Odyssey*, starring Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Zendaya, and Tom Holland? It's a truly epic production full of beautiful scenery. But while I was watching, I kept thinking, wait, many of these places are in Italy. So with the help of an expert anthropologist, we're going to explore those locations and discover what Odysseus was doing in now what is modern-day 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, buongiorno, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast, where we help travelers move beyond the checklist so they really feel part of Italy. This is the Untold Italy way. I'm your host, Katy Clarke, and on today's episode, we are going to explore the Italian locations visited by Odysseus in Homer's epic poem that inspired Christopher Nolan's movie that is currently taking the world by storm. Regular listeners of our podcast know that I'm a bit of a history nerd, and I love walking in the footsteps of the people that shaped our world over many millennia. And it doesn't get much bigger than the legend of the Odyssey, does it? A few weeks ago, while I sat in the cinema soaking up the movie, it occurred to me that while everyone was talking about ancient Greece in the context of the film, places like the islands of the sirens, Aeolia, and Circe's realm are actually in modern-day Italy. Of course, back when the poem was written, southern Italy was known as Magna Graecia and was a series of Greek colonies, and evidence still exists of these settlements today all over Sicily and at the temples of Paestum south of the Amalfi Coast. Now, I'm an enthusiast and definitely not a scholar of this era, so I've called in for reinforcements to help us explore the legend and how the Italian sites are included in it. Today, I'm joined by my friend, Professor Monique Skidmore, who is going to help us explore the locations that Odysseus visited on his epic journey home to Ithaca. Andiamo! Let's get started.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao Monique, bentornata. Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast. It's so great to have you on the show.

Monique Skidmore:

Thank you. It's really fun to be back again.

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Katy Clarke:

And so fun to be talking about a very timely topic, which is this amazing movie that's come out with this very cinematic movie of Odysseus. But before we get into exploring all the different places that he went to that are actually in Italy, which I had that moment of realization as I was sitting in the chair watching the movie. Can you tell our listeners all about your background and what you do?

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, so my name's Monique Skidmore. I'm a professor of anthropology. I won't give you my CV, but you can look me up on Wikipedia if you are interested. The last few years I've been interested in the area that's in the middle of archaeology and anthropology, which is called material culture. So it's pretty much about anything that people make or build or do. So anything that's left over from the past or that people are doing now, like ancient ruins, weddings, wine, weavings, anything that people can make is what I'm interested in. And of course that spans the past and the present. So that's kind of what I've been doing.

Monique Skidmore:

But for the last several years, I've run a, like you, a small group multi-day tour company, but it focuses on history and archaeology. So it's for people who really love old stuff.

Katy Clarke:

And that's all over Europe, isn't it? So you've got a, a company that takes people to all corners of Greece and parts of Italy as well.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, that's right. And Malta, Sardinia, Cyprus, starting Egypt, which is not technically Europe, but you know, it's around that big bathtub of the Mediterranean.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Amazing. So honestly, in another life, I will come back as an archaeologist or an anthropologist. I'll just, and then I'll just tag along behind you. That would be so much fun. But today we're gonna talk about Odysseus, so I'd like to, if that's okay. And I'd like you to give us a short overview of The Odyssey, which is, you know, the name of the movie and the name of the epic poem that it's based on, and maybe explore why so many of these sites are in today's Italy.

Monique Skidmore:

The Odyssey is set in the 13th to the 12th century BC, so a really, really long time ago, but it wasn't composed till the 8th century BC. And between the 8th century BC and the 3rd century BC, so for a period of 500 years, there was this area of southern Italy called Magna Graecia. So this was Greater Greece. It was where a whole bunch of Greeks came and colonized for 500 years. So about the time that Homer was creating the Odyssey, composing the Odyssey, Magna Graecia was being created. And then by 300 BC, The Romans had pretty much taken

over it, but that's why you see those amazing Greek ruins and Greek temples in places like Taormina and on the mainland. We know that the Odyssey wasn't written down the way an author writes a book. It's a collection of oral folklore from a time long before the Greeks were writing stuff down.

Monique Skidmore:

It's 27,000 lines long. It's 24 chapters. And the reason I'm boring you with these numbers is that 27,000 lines is repeated. So there are actually 9,200 lines that keep being repeated with formulas like the same descriptions of characters and scenes, kind of like we're being reminded about what happened last week. And so that's how we know it was a folk story, a poem repeated through the millennia by these oral storytellers called rhapsodes. They were transmitted by singers. It was more of an entertainment or a performance than a history book. And it told about the great deeds of heroic men and gods and even some women.

Monique Skidmore:

And it had all sorts of important morals and truths and values that were important back then. And most likely the people who were telling it, depending on where they were, may have changed the location slightly to be about the world that the Magna Graecia Greeks knew about. The Iliad and the Odyssey contain memories of Mycenaean Bronze Age Greece. And we've seen lots of ways that we can date this stuff with tablets and other things that we found in the great Mycenaean and Minoan palaces. But we also see that it didn't stop being added to. So even the Iron Age and centuries and centuries later, bits and pieces are still being added into the Odyssey. So it's got some real genuine Bronze Age memories like we see in the Odyssey film, but that doesn't mean it was composed during the Bronze Age.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah, it's interesting. And it's, it's kind of like those, one of those things where you, if you, someone keeps telling the story, everyone adds their own little embellishments and extra little pieces of excitement and context that they want to, you know, or the message that maybe they want to get across. So Monique, is it possible we have these ancient Greek theaters in Taormina, as you mentioned, and also just in Syracuse, which is not far from Taormina, these Greek theaters. Is it possible that this poem, the Odyssey, was performed in those theaters?

Monique Skidmore:

Eventually it would've been. It was performed all over the world, all over the known Greek and Roman worlds in the millennia before now. And even though we don't know that Homer's a real person, cuz we don't have a tomb or anything that connects us to him. We still know that by the 6th century BC, he was a big figure in Greek cultural memory. These were big poems and people always attributed to them, and people got together in scholarly groups like at the Library of Alexandria and talked about them. The Odyssey was the seminal literary text of the Western world. It was a big deal. And yeah, it was performed all over the place.

Katy Clarke:

When we were talking about this last week, you, you told me something really interesting is that maybe it's not just a Western legend. Maybe it's something that's been adapted or maybe cross-pollinated somehow with, with another story, which I found really interesting.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, it bears some truly uncanny resemblances to the Epic of Gilgamesh. So from the Near East, it's this almost the same hero, the same kind of landscapes, the same kind of stories and the same values. It's an uncanny resemblance. So it was clearly taken from the Near East and translated into the ancient Greek world.

Katy Clarke:

There you go. We're always borrowing, aren't we? Nothing's original these days. So I think, you know, a lot of people have had some issues maybe with Christopher Nolan's adaptation of the poem to the movie.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

I mean, my view is, and I'm not an expert, but like, I think that if everyone's been adding their own adaptations over time, then maybe we can just let him have one and, um, just enjoy that cinematic experience because it was very beautiful. I thought the actual cinematics of it were stunning.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, I, I loved seeing things like the Castle of Methoni, seeing the Peloponnese. You know, we have these tours, we're there all the time. It's such a buzz to see them. And my son said, it can't really be that beautiful. And apart from the bits set in Scotland, I said, yeah, it really is that beautiful.

Katy Clarke:

As I was watching the film, it was, it was clear to me though that many of these sites were actually in the Italian memory or what is Italy today. So let's dive in and explore some of those places that come up in the film and also in the poem that are probably, you know, or very likely to be in places that were in Magna Graecia, which for everyone listening really was southern Italy, including Sicily and also maybe up as far as Sardinia.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah. So in the mainland it was Campania, Basilicata, Apulia, and then down into Sicily.

Katy Clarke:

Fantastic. All right. What have you got for us, Monique?

Monique Skidmore:

I thought we could start with the witch Circe. So this interesting woman lived on the island of Circe. Now, if you were back in the Tyrrhenian Sea and you were a sailor in one of those really little flat boats that the Odyssey was in, and you saw a 541-meter rock rising from the sea, you'd go, hey, that's an island, let's go over there. And in fact, it wasn't an island. It was Cape Circe, which is on the west coast of the Italian mainland, about 100 kilometers from Rome. But this is a really interesting area, which in antiquity was surrounded by these impenetrable marshes called the Pontine Marshes. But eventually a lido, a thin strip of sand, joined it together as a peninsula. And Christopher Nolan obviously made lots of artistic license to get that whole thing done in 3 hours.

Monique Skidmore:

And so he doesn't tell us all the things that happened. One of the things that happened in the Odyssey is that Circe tells Odysseus to bring his ships up onto the shore and hide them and to hide all his stuff in a cave. And it just happens that at the bottom of this promontory, some speleologists have used 3D scanning and have found this enormous cave that you can't see from the sea that, in fact, completely holds a ship's cargo. And archaeologists have found a whole bunch of ancient terracotta fragments in there. So it was a cave used to hold ships' cargoes in ancient times and to hide them. So Cape Circe looks like a pretty good spot to maybe think that this was Circe's island.

Katy Clarke:

Amazing. Oh, that's so exciting. I just love all the new technology that's coming out with archaeology at the moment. It's opening up so many more possibilities to, you know, carbon date things and, you know, put context around poems like the Odyssey. This area actually is just a very beautiful area. And, you know, it's very 'Untold' for our listeners because even though it's between Rome and Naples, most people kind of just dart down to Naples, maybe by train from Rome and completely missed that whole area of the Tyrrhenian coast. And it's absolutely beautiful. And there's a Monte Cerceo National Park, which is really great if you're into hiking and if you love coastal towns and things like that.

Katy Clarke:

But yeah, I mean, what an amazing story to go follow in those footsteps, to go and check out those areas, because I also understand there's a lot of grottos around there from the Stone Age where you know, they're finding a lot of different artifacts. So if you're interested in really ancient, ancient history, maybe that's an area that people would wanna check out.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah. Well, you've made me wanna check it out.

Katy Clarke:

Excellent. All right. Where do we go to from here, Monique?

Monique Skidmore:

Well, what we are going to do is we're gonna do this in a kind of geographical order rather than the mythical order of the Odyssey. So we're gonna go down now near Naples. So we're gonna go south. And we're going to go to the entrance to the underworld. The thing that strikes me when I reread all this stuff about the Odyssey in Italy, the Italian Odyssey, is that it's about the volcanic landscape. Everything in this landscape is about volcanoes, most things. So we go to Lake Avernus, which is where in the Odyssey he sails to the end of the world. But more recent scholars, and I mean about the year nought AD, they've likened it to this deep, dark portal, which is a deep volcano crater lake near Naples in the Phlegraean Fields.

Monique Skidmore:

And it is a really spooky area. So in antiquity, it was covered by dark, thick forests around it, and it had really toxic, poisonous sulfur emanating from it - hot springs, volcanic activity. And this area had a strong association with the dead. So there was already a Nekyomanteion, an oracle of the dead who lived near there. It had a big, big reputation for prophecy. And so this volcanic character made it very, as I say, seemed very compelling. The name of the lake even means no birds in Italian, which you would know, but I didn't. And that's because they weren't dumb enough to fly over a highly sulfurous, toxic lake.

Monique Skidmore:

Then Virgil, when he wrote the Aeneid, he describes Aeneas descending into Hades here. So that's really what cemented it for Italians as the entrance to the underworld.

Katy Clarke:

Well, you can go in that area, and I've been there for a day, and I really wanna go back and, and do some more exploring there because that's very close to Pozzuoli, which is right, as you said, on the Phlegraean Fields. And this, for those of you who don't know, it's an area of very high seismic and volcanic activity even today. And I was there with one of the guides and he was explaining that the ground had sunk by, I think, 1.5 meters even in the past 5 years. So there's like a lot of ground shifting and moving and, you know, they keep a very close eye on what's happening in that area because there are millions of people that live in the Bay of Naples area that would need to evacuate if there was something more violent was to happen with Vesuvius or any of the seismic activity around there. It's very interesting actually. There's another really great site that's just near there, which I don't think is related to Hades because it's actually very beautiful. But I just wanted to mention it because there's, um, an archaeological site that's close by, which is called Baiae, and it's this sunken villa.

Katy Clarke:

Which, um, you can go on a glass-bottom boat and see all the mosaics and, uh, ruins. Yeah.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah. Yeah. It's a sunken city, isn't it?

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Yeah.

Monique Skidmore:

Um, it's considered one of the most exciting hidden archaeological finds in Italy.

Katy Clarke:

This, uh, entrance to the underworld. Some people don't like Naples. I personally love Naples, but I think maybe some people could draw a parallel there. But I, I actually love Naples and I love its energy, and I think that energy does come from that. Volcanic activity that's happening in that area.

Monique Skidmore:

That's right. And then the other thing besides this volcanic landscapes, these otherworldly landscapes, are geographical traps in the Odyssey. So things that look brilliant but really aren't. So once we leave the other world of Hades, we get to the Sorrentine Peninsula, which of course is kind of perfect, right? And we get the rocky islet, the Sirenuse, Li Galli, just off the Amalfi Coast, where this legendary home of the harp bird, harp women, sirens whose songs lure sailors to their death.

Monique Skidmore:

And in book 12 of the Odyssey, Circe the witch warns Odysseus about the sirens. And she says they sit in a meadow, so not on an island, but in a meadow beside the sea, and they sing to the sailors. So they occupy a coastal position on the shipping route. And so Homer tells us there are bones with flesh rotting, lying all around them. So it shows us that this is a landscape of seduction surrounded by death. So the geography's a trap. It's a geographical machine for killing sailors. And the Greeks and the later Romans associated the sirens with the coastline around southern Italy, particularly around Campania.

Monique Skidmore:

But the most famous place that it's identified are these Siren Islands. Near what's now Punta Campanella. And the small archipelago is Li Galli, and they're off the Amalfi Coast between the Sorrento Peninsula and Amalfi. They're steep rocky islands that rise from the sea, and all that's a very convincing part of the maritime myths of the Mediterranean where these rocky islands were pretty scary. Yeah. So that's the kind of landscape that sailors created stories about monsters and supernatural beings. And so the sirens fit right in with the scary Mediterranean traditions of sailing around the Mediterranean back then.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. And it is absolutely stunning if anyone has been to the Amalfi Coast, and it's absolutely beautiful. And I think sometimes you can get caught up in that beauty and, you know, just like the sailors did, I guess. And maybe like lose sight of the fact of everything that's going around you if you're in there with so many people, et cetera. But if you wanted to go and soak up the nature and really discover what that area is all about and really appreciate that

pristine beauty, there is an actual hike to Punta Campanella along that coastline there, which is pretty easy, I think. And you can see out towards the Li Galli Islands and Capri from there. Unfortunately, you cannot visit the Ligurian Islands because it is privately owned. They're privately owned, but you can take a boat trip around there and check it out, and I think the closest place is Positano.

Katy Clarke:

So if you were to hire a boat and get boat driver, if you're really interested to go see it, you can go check it out from Positano, where there is also a very famous hotel called the Sirenuse Hotel, which is named after these sirens of the sea. That would set you back perhaps two thousand Euros a night. So that one's for a honeymoon or a very special occasion, or if you want to invite me.

Monique Skidmore:

Right. Look, we're gonna move on to some more scary sea monsters rather than very expensive, lovely hotels. I do wanna eat there actually. That restaurant I think is Michelin starred, isn't it?

Katy Clarke:

Absolutely. Or just at the bar even, you know?

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah. I, just a drink would do really. Yeah.

Monique Skidmore:

Right., let's move down south to the Strait of Messina. So now we're gonna see the wonderful Monsters of Scylla and Charybdis. These monsters are on either side of a very narrow, turbulent strait that does have eddies and currents that at its narrowest is only 3 kilometers long. So this strait separates Sicily from the southwestern tip of mainland Italy, and they're close enough to give you a sense, if back then in a little boat, of being trapped between 2 opposing dangers. So on the Italian mainland, mainland side is Scylla, who in the Odyssey was my favorite monster. Traditionally associated with the town of Scilla in Calabria, it lives in a high above the sea in a rocky cavern. And then Charybdis is essentially a gigantic marine vortex. And Homer said that 3 times a day, Charybdis swallowed the sea, then vomited back up again.

Monique Skidmore:

And it's logical to set a whirlpool here because you do get strong tidal whirlpools and eddies in this area. And the ancient Greeks knew that from sailing these tiny boats through it. So it was a really dangerous place to be. And how wonderful to have stuck Scylla on the other side just to make sure that it was really dangerous to get past the whirlpool.

Katy Clarke:

It's, um, it's a very interesting area. And if anyone has been to Calabria and taken the ferry across, it's quite a short ferry, right? It takes 30 minutes door to door over from Reggio Calabria over to Messina. And it's quite a funny trip. And you also can take the train and the train actually goes onto the ferry because they haven't built a bridge there. And so maybe that's because they're worried about monsters, I don't know, but there's a lot of conjecture about why that bridge, even though they've got funding, hasn't yet been built.

Katy Clarke:

But And it's maybe on a, on a move forward plan now, but who knows? It's Italy. Piano piano. We take things slowly. But yeah, it's a very interesting place. And you know, from Reggio Calabria, you can actually see on a clear day, you can see Mount Etna on the other side, smoldering away in the background. And I mean, it must have been fairly, yeah, intimidating for those sailors, I guess. No wonder they made a story about it.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, indeed. But once they got through there, they were in Sicily, the island of the Cyclops. So these lawless one-eyed giants are historically linked to Sicily, although of course they're right through the Greek world and we have lots of Cyclopean walls in ancient sanctuaries in Greece. So the Riviera dei Ciclopi. How did I do? Did I do that with a reasonable accent?

Katy Clarke:

You're good. Well done. Yeah. Brava, as we say.

Monique Skidmore:

So on the eastern coast of Sicily, just north of Catania, near the villages of Acce Trezza and Aci Castello, just beneath Mount Etna, which is certainly, as you said, dominating the landscape here. So again, very different from those beautiful white sandy beaches. It's a dark volcanic, rocky coastline. And the most famous feature is the Faraglioni of Aci Trezza. These enormous jagged-looking rocks, which are also called the Cyclopean Isles. And these are the rocks that are traditionally identified as the boulders with which Polyphemus, the Cyclops, threw at Odysseus' ship.

Katy Clarke:

And again, everyone, this is another place that people miss. Everyone's busy rushing from Catania to Taormina, and you can easily go and explore this beautiful coastline along here with some really cute little fishing villages and all of those spectacular rock formations. So it's kind of like we're getting like a little map of places to go that, you know, this is a little bit more exciting than just going to the obvious places. So as you know, always on Untold Italy, we love to share places that are a little bit unique and have a story behind them. So I don't think I'd want the Cyclops throwing a rock at me or running into the sea chasing after me, but it is a beautiful place to explore, so.

Monique Skidmore:

Well, we only have 2 more places to explore, and one of these is definitely off the beaten path, which is the Aeolian Islands. So Homer calls the island Aeolia, the home of Aeolus, the keeper of the winds. It's described as being surrounded by a bronze wall and having a sheer rocky coastline, but that's absolutely all that Homer tells us. But later Greek and Roman writers associated it with the Aeolian Islands. They're spectacularly volcanic, an archipelago just north of Sicily. And for the Odyssey, the 2 islands that we need to know about is the main island Lipari and Stromboli. And ancient sailors could see and navigate by the volcanic glow of the Stromboli volcano from the sea. So Aeolus was the mythical keeper of the winds.

Monique Skidmore:

And that's important to the Odyssey because winds are just really important in these - they only had sails, so they weren't going anywhere without any wind, and they were going in whatever the direction the wind was if it was strong enough. So Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag of the winds and it's got all the bad winds in it, and the only winds kept out is the west one because he wants to get home to Ithaca. He needs to sail west. But as we see in The Odyssey, the movie, Odysseus's troops aren't always completely on side with him and they don't always trust him. And they wanna know what's in the bag. So not in the movie, but in the actual Odyssey poem, they take the bag off Homer, they open it up, and the winds blow them all the way back to the Aeolian Islands. So it's about this episode about him almost coming home, but in fact, the physical power of the winds and how you, during the ancient Mediterranean, were at the mercy of the winds.

Katy Clarke:

My goodness. Well, I think there's worse places you could be stuck, actually.

Monique Skidmore:

Absolutely.

Katy Clarke:

And the fact is that Stromboli is sputtering out on a daily basis. And so it's one of the amazing things that you can do is see the volcano at nighttime and during the day as well. But obviously it would look very spectacular at night from one of the other islands, having a little bit of explosions, but it's more sort of little mini eruptions, I guess, that light up the night sky. And it's definitely on my wishlist for Italy and just maybe cruising around there for a few days.

Monique Skidmore:

I think most people miss it because Sicily's so big that even if you give yourself 2 weeks, you still often don't get time to get over to Lipari, for example. And yet it's such an important part of the Sicilian world and it's such a beautiful part of the Sicilian world.

Katy Clarke:

Well, absolutely. I mean, I've been, you know, there many weeks and I've always found it interesting when people come to me and say, oh, I've got 5 days, what do I do in Sicily? You really need a minimum of a week. Minimum! And then you're only really gonna scratch the surface. Actually, you need 2 to 3, 4 weeks. I mean, I could stay there forever, but yeah, it's one of those places where there is just so much to explore, just not only from a natural environment, but also the history, the culture, and all of the food and ruins and everyone's been to Sicily and everyone loved it and they left the best pieces of themselves there. So even Odysseus, I think.

Monique Skidmore:

Probably.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah.

Monique Skidmore:

So we're gonna go north now. We're gonna go up to Sardinia. So one of the wildest, least visited areas of Italy, but one of my favorite areas, the land of the Laestrygonians. So you wouldn't actually wanna go there if you thought you were gonna meet these race of giant cannibals. But when he leaves Aeolia, before Odysseus gets to Circe, he actually had all of his ships except his - oh, there's a spoiler alert - crushed by the Laestrygonians. So one of the possible places for this mythological island is the north part of Sardinia near the Strait of Bonifacio. So facing out to Corsica. Homer says it, he calls it Telepylus.

Monique Skidmore:

All he tells us is that it's a dramatic land, a deep sheltered harbor surrounded by steep cliffs. But like anywhere that looks good in the Odyssey, it's a trap. It's a geographical trap that's set up to kill sailors. So he sees what looks like a fantastic harbor, narrow entrance, but beautiful and broad and sheltered. So in he goes. In he goes with 11 remaining ships into the harbor. Wisely, he keeps his own ship outside, and then the Lestrygonians set on them and eat them and spear them and throw rocks at 'em. So it looks like in Sardinia, a possible location is in the northeast, up near the beautiful Costa Smeralda.

Monique Skidmore:

There's this French scholar, Victor Bérard, and there's stuff about him all over eastern Sardinia. Because he's a really good marketing ploy. He proposed that Capo d'Orso was the place where Odysseus' men landed to find water, and that Porto Pozzo was the enclosed harbor where the fleet was attacked. And it is true that it's got a beautiful geography that matches that rugged coastline, high cliffs, freshwater sources, sheltered inlets. There's also a bunch of natives in the northeast whose names resembled Laestrygonians. which is another reason why the ancients thought it might've been there. But there's absolutely zero evidence that they had anything to do with any Laestrygonians. And a lot of people feel that, that it

was in Sicily rather than northeastern Sardinia, but that geography is just such a perfect match for it that later scholars have attributed it to being in Sardinia.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. Sardinia is very well known for its beautiful coastline, but I guess it's when it's go - you go inland and you get all these wild, natural phenomena, big mountains as well, and rugged countryside.

Monique Skidmore:

Yes.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. It's so evocative. And I think this is the magic of Italy as well. It's obviously inspired so many writers and poets throughout the years, going back thousands and thousands of years. And so no wonder that we are also inspired to visit these days. So we've followed Odysseus. And we understand that they've been inspired by these Italian landscapes somehow. Maybe they're in Greece.

Katy Clarke:

I don't know. My husband is Italian and he says the Italians invented everything. He's trying to destroy my children's history exams, I think, because that is patently not true. Although they did improve on a lot of things. So I think that it's a really great way to explore. you know, by a theme to explore Italy because, you know, it is such a beautiful place and no wonder people were inspired.

Monique Skidmore:

And it shows you those 2 kinds of astoundingly gorgeous landscapes, the stark volcanic beauty of erupting volcanoes at night, where you can see the sky lit up, and then these astonishingly beautiful sheltered bays and harbors and golden beaches.

Katy Clarke:

Yeah. So amazing. I just love how there's this collision of nature, history, myth, and legend.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah.

Katy Clarke:

It all comes together. And, you know, I feel sad if people miss that part of Italy because you have all of these layers of stories that deserve to be told and heard. And, um, it brings those landscapes more to life. And you know what, Monique, I reckon I could build a whole trip around this, which, you know, we might actually do. I'm so inspired by this Odyssey movie and, you know, revisiting the poem. So I am considering running a tour that takes in these sites, but what we'll do is, oh, we'll make a form for anyone who's listening that would be interested in this. We'll probably look at it for early 2028, but what we would do is try and

cover as many of these beautiful sites and have these stories told as we visit them. So I think it'd be something very cool to do.

Katy Clarke:

And if no one wants to come, I'll just go by myself and bring Monique with me and we'll go and, um, have that drink on the Sirinuse balcony and toast ourselves and Odysseus and thank him and Homer and the poets for bringing this whole world to life.

Monique Skidmore:

Absolutely.

Katy Clarke:

Now, in the meantime, Monique, as you are running archaeological tours in different parts of Europe that listeners might be interested in, can you please let everyone know where they can follow you and stay in touch with you and get some more information about where you are traveling and taking people to discover the history of, you know, Western Europe?

Monique Skidmore:

Thank you. Yeah, the, it's probably best just to hop onto the website to see the places that we go to and the kinds of sites that we visit and how we travel. So that's takemetoeuropetours.com. You can find us on Instagram and Facebook, but most of the things you'll find out about us will be through our newsletters, through new and upcoming trips and last-minute things. So I'd say the website takemetoeuropetours.com is your best way to see how we put places like Sicily and Sardinia together. And sometimes with places like Malta and Corsica and the Mediterranean epic journeys that we love to do because we just love seeing ruins and things that still exist and how they exist, you know, around people who've lived there in cultures for thousands of years and look at them like they're just, you know, a pile of rocks cuz they live with them all the time. Whereas we just have our jaws dropping at these incredible sites that we come across in incredible places like Italy. So please hop onto our website if you're interested.

Katy Clarke:

I mean, like, how amazing is it that we are still telling this story 3,000, 4,000 years later and it's still resonating with people in capturing everyone's imagination? And I like to think that with history, we like to think so much has changed and that we're so advanced, but you know, really maybe we've got electricity and the internet, but apart from that, we are all human beings and we love to hear a story. We love beautiful places and telling stories about them and, you know, more of it please. And let's tell more stories and hear more of these things and, and go back to, you know, these places and revisit this magic so that we can be inspired for our own future generations.

Monique Skidmore:

Yeah, indeed.

Katy Clarke:

So fantastic. Thank you, Monique. And thank you so much for taking us into the Italian world of Odysseus today. It's been absolutely fascinating to learn all the background and context of one of the Western world's greatest stories. Grazie mille. Thank you for joining me.

Monique Skidmore:

Pleasure. Bye.

Katy Clarke:

Ciao ciao. Bye. And my dear listeners, this is why I think history is so important. How much fun would it be to go to or return to some of those wonderful places described in the Odyssey and view them through the lens of this epic poem? I've certainly dug out some old photos to do this. We didn't get a chance to explore some of the many themes of the Odyssey in this episode, but I wanted to make mention of is Zeus's moral code of xenia, or hospitality, and the obligation to offer food, shelter, and safety to travelers. I guess here at Untold Italy, we're trying to live by that law, but with an extra layer of generosity and goodwill, unlike poor old Penelope and Telemachus, who were really doing it under sufferance. Of course, all the places that we mentioned on the show today and links to Monique's website are available in the episode show notes on our website at untolditaly.com/339 for episode number 339. I'll also put a link to the form where we will be collecting interest for an Odyssey-themed tour in 2028.

Katy Clarke:

Make sure to let us know if you're interested. And I have to tell you, I already do have some interest. One of the guys I do Pilates with said he's in. But only if there's plenty of good food and wine. Don't worry, Chris, that is 100% guaranteed on an Untold Italy tour. That's all for today. Next week on the Untold Italy podcast, I am introducing you to the author of a new book that explores Italy's natural wonders and how they have influenced not only epic poems, but the deep culture that we experience in Italy today. But until then, it's - Ciao for now.