Untold Italy Episode 348: Why Italy Keeps Calling - Food, Connection and Repeat Travel

Some people travel to Italy once and that is enough, but for others, myself included, we can't get enough and we go back again and again, even though we know there's a great big world out there. What is it about Italy that keeps pulling us back? Where do the repeat travelers go and what do they do that makes Italy their destination of choice? Let's find out as we chat to a dedicated repeat visitor to Italy, Olivia Becker.

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, benvenuti, friends, and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast. And this is the podcast where we help travelers move beyond the checklist so they really feel part of Italy. This is what I call the Untold Italy way, and I'm your host, Katy Clarke. On today's episode, we are talking to repeat Italy visitor Olivia Becker about her love for Italy and why she keeps returning again and again. We will hear about her favorite places and the experiences that draw her back to Italy after many years of travel, including the surprise inclusion of one of our regular podcast guests. We had absolutely no idea we were connected to each other this way. It sure is a small world. I love that about our Italy-loving community.

Katy Clarke:
Joining us from her home in Seattle in the United States, Olivia has a passion for sharing the delights of the Italian table and has created a fun way of doing this and for people to stay connected. Stay tuned to the end of the episode for an untold surprise that we are both excited about. So without further ado, andiamo, let's go to Italy.

Katy Clarke:
Benvenuta, welcome onto the Untold Italy Podcast, Olivia.

Olivia Becker:
Hi, Katy. It's great to be here.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, I am so excited to chat with you today, Olivia, as we've been getting to know each other a little bit over the last few months, but we haven't really delved too much into our shared love of Italy - in so much detail about the places that we love. But before we dive into all of that,

© Untold Italy 2020

can you please introduce yourself and let everyone know a little bit about you, how you came to travel in Italy so much, and what you do?

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, sure. So my name is Olivia Becker, and I am the founder of Dalla Fonte. We are an online Italian food and wine e-commerce business, and I am Italian-American. And so I have been in love with Italy even before I traveled there because, you know, the Italian food has always been a part of my family. and a part of our culture. My family immigrated over to New York, and so it was always this like, magical place that we talked about where our family came from, but somewhere I had never been until I was in high school and my parents sent me over there on a trip. And so I have just been fortunate to continue to visit Italy, to work in Italy, and now start a business where I get to share all of the things I love about that country and love about my culture with so many people in the United States. So I'm excited that we're connected and I can share more about just all of our travels and adventures over there.

Katy Clarke:
Olivia, we've got so much in common in that respect. It's so fun. I love it. So tell me about that first trip. Where did you go and what were your expectations and what happened?

Olivia Becker:
So it was one of those trips where, you know, my parents - it was a graduation gift. And I don't know if they do this in Australia, but it's like you're gonna go to 3 different countries, 30 different cities in 4 weeks. And we went with a group from school. And so - oh my gosh, it's not how I would travel today, but it was one of those where we flew into Rome, we took a bus to Florence, we went up to Milan. And I remember just the first time I was sitting there on a pile of suitcases outside of some, you know, it was probably like a Marriott or a Holiday Inn, and I was almost moved to tears. I mean, I was just so overwhelmed by just the light, you know, the color in Italy is different, you know, the light hits differently, and the smells and the sounds and that first coffee off the airplane. I mean, I was even blown away by, like, the airport food and it was just amazing. So we were marched through, you know, all the museums and all the historical sites, you know, a day and a half here, a day and a half there.

Olivia Becker:
But after that first trip, it was like, I have to go back. I have to be there. I have to live there. I have to marry an Italian. You know, all the things - those first trips. When you're a teenager and you start romanticizing, you know, a life there somewhere down the line.

Katy Clarke:
It sounds like you fell in love with the vibe of it, like not anything specifically, but like all the senses that were awakened for you.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, exactly. It was, you know, even like the energy of the people there. I think also, you know, coming from an Italian-American family, it's like everything is alive, you know, every

© Untold Italy 2020

conversation. Some might think like Italians are arguing, but you know, they're just like interacting, they're excited, they're using their hands. There's so much passion and excitement and it just sucks you in. It is that vibe. It's hard to explain until you feel it, until you're really experiencing it there.

Katy Clarke:
So, how long was it until you got back? Like, you obviously got home and then were you plotting your next adventure?

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, yeah, I was plotting, like, because then it was, you know, college applications and where should we go to university. And it was like, there must be a study abroad program in Italy. So I was able to study abroad, spend more time in Europe. And then after college, I actually found a job opportunity with a - it's a maritime shipping company, but they were headquartered in La Spezia. So then I started traveling there for like extended durations in Italy, which, I mean, I felt like I had hit the jackpot, you know, to be in my early 20s as an American. All my friends were, you know, very jealous. And I was traveling to Italy. You know, that's where our sales trainings were and our customer meetings.

Olivia Becker:
And, you know, I was hosting these customer advisory board meetings with all of these global clients, but doing it in Rome. And that's - having that opportunity to actually be there with Italians and have that opportunity to sit at their kitchen table and see the places where they go and build those deep friendships and see that side of Italy, you know, that was really where I fell in love and had that true passion for the things that people, I think, don't always see if you do like the first trip I did in high school. You know, it was like, yeah, I could really immerse myself in the culture and with Italian families, which was wonderful. It was such a gift.

Katy Clarke:
It's a very different business culture, isn't it, from like an English-speaking culture?

Olivia Becker:
Oh my gosh, Katy, the - I remember the first time we were doing a customer meeting there, and so I was working on the timeline with the, you know, we had all the conference rooms and everything. So as an American, I was like, okay, 7:30 breakfast, 8 AM meeting start. And my Italian colleagues are like, are you crazy? It's 10. We're going to do breakfast. We're going to do coffee. And you know what I also learned? Because as an American, and I don't know, as an Australian probably too, you're like, oh my gosh, so inefficient. You know, that's what comes to mind. But it's like that relationship building and leaving space over the breakfast.

Olivia Becker:
You know, that was just as important as - well, it was more important, frankly, than whatever kind of nonsense we were presenting at 10 AM and, like, software demos. You know, it was

© Untold Italy 2020

that. They leave space for those things. You know, same thing with, like, the afternoon coffee or an aperitivo or the dinners. It's like they create this space for, like, true relationship and connection. And, yeah, I just, like, really grew to value that.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, right. So you landed in La Spezia - for people that don't know, it's the kind of like the gateway to the Cinque Terre. So a lot of cruise ships come in there and there's a train line that goes to the villages from La Spezia, but it's in the region of Liguria. Now you do have a special, special affinity with Liguria.

Olivia Becker:
I've spent so much time there and you're right, La Spezia itself is a port town. It's lovely, but there are so many beautiful coastal towns. Of course, people know the Cinque Terre. But we had very dear friends that live in Trebbiano, and it's this medieval hilltop town above the coast, and you can just see everything from there. You can see the Mediterranean, the Carrara Hills, the rolling mountains. Like, it is just beautiful. And of course, it's the land of like pesto and focaccia bread, and it's just fantastic.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, it's a really special region, and it's such a shame that people really don't go far beyond those 5 villages, which are spectacular and absolutely gorgeous, but -

Olivia Becker:
But they're packed too. They can be...

Katy Clarke:
They're packed! People just need to get on the train and just go a little bit further north.

Olivia Becker:
I know. And actually, I always recommend to people that they rent a car, which I know that can be like intimidating sometimes, but then you can see that little village on the hill and say, you know what, I'm gonna go there and just check it out. And I think that whole region has so many of those small little hilltop towns with like wonderful wines, wonderful food, and just incredible views. And it's really special.

Katy Clarke:
It is really special. And I think the Europeans have very much discovered it, but it does take a little bit of effort somehow to get to some of these places. And I think that's what maybe puts off some English-speaking travelers, because you, like you said, you have to get a car or, you know, but if you stick to the coast, you can just get the train.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, it's so easy. And they have that new - it's not Uber, but it's something equivalent, like a new car service too. So even if the train station is a little outside the small town, it's just so easy to get around.

Katy Clarke:
We'll share with everyone once we know this great car service. It's good to know because this is actually a real challenge in Italy because obviously Uber is only in Milan and Rome, and every city has their own special taxi service, which drives everyone crazy. So we have - if we have alternatives, that's a good thing. Oh, I love that tip. That's great. And so when you're not going to Liguria, where, where else do you like to go?

Olivia Becker:
You know, for the first time, we went to Abruzzo recently, which is where most of my family is from. I mean, talk about another region that's completely overlooked. You know, it's due east of Rome and it's, it's easy to get to. But what's incredible is that Abruzzo has these like beautiful hilltop mountain towns, but you're also right on the coast. So we stayed in Sulmona, which is where my family originated from. We were able to visit, you know, the churches where they were baptized and married. But it's this beautiful walled town, beautiful piazzas, amazing restaurants. And we'd spend the day like winding to these like cheese producers.

Olivia Becker:
Just gorgeous. It looked like The Sound of Music. And so we would do these cheese and wine tastings. And then we would spend the afternoons, we would go down and eat at the trabocchi, which are those over the water, the old fishing. It's like a fishing platform where they would just scoop - they would throw their nets into the sea and grab everything. And so now they've converted these to restaurants. So we would go to beach clubs and out for these wonderful fresh fish dinners and then, you know, spend the next day exploring the mountains. So there's so much diversity in Abruzzo.

Olivia Becker:
So that's a place we've just recently fallen in love with. But, you know, of course Florence and Tuscany can't be beat, either. There's so much to choose from. It's hard to narrow down.

Katy Clarke:
I know. It's very difficult. But, you know, Sulmona, it's - I think this is quite interesting that you really love Sulmona because that's a place that's really got its own delicacy, isn't it?

Olivia Becker:
Yeah. The confetti is from there, those little Jordan almonds. And there's so much history and there's so much, like, local pride around that. And they have the candy museum, and you can learn all about it and what all the different colors mean for all the different candies. And it is just lovely. And then there's a lot of history with World War II there as well. And so it's

© Untold Italy 2020

wonderful. And I think also having the balance of seafood, but then also a lot of meats, you know, they're also hunters because they live in the mountains.

Olivia Becker:
So you have a nice, you have a nice mix of the 2 cuisines there.

Katy Clarke:
Oh my gosh. I have - I haven't spent any time there either. I need to go, like, desperately. One of our team lives in Abruzzo, so we've got lots of reasons to go.

Olivia Becker:
Yes. Oh, you do need to go. And the Pecorino wine is the white wine. And, you know, Pecorino is also the sheep cheese, but they think it's called the Pecorino grape because it's where the sheep would graze and eat along those trails - is where those grapes grew wild. So anyways, Pecorino wine if you're there. And then do a cheese tasting.

Katy Clarke:
I think that was my best discovery during COVID I was talking to some people for this podcast actually, and I said, they mentioned the Pecorino white and I'm like, "I'm in!". Cause I love a white wine.

Olivia Becker:
It's so good. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
So good. Yeah. Did you find some good producers for Dalla Fonte that's in Sulmona? You got some of the confetti?

Olivia Becker:
We did. We, we worked directly with Pelino, so, like, the confetti producer. And then also there's a Zaccagni; it's a pasta producer, and they do a chitarra pasta. So it's interesting in Abruzzo because they lay their pasta dough over - it looks like guitar strings, which is why they call it chitarra - and then they roll over it, and then those metal strings cut the pasta. And so it was really cool to provide something like that because I think it's a pasta shape and a cut that you wouldn't necessarily hear about. And of course, to work with producers and tell them the story about how my family came there and create those relationships, it's really nice because I think it's all about connection, especially in Italy. And so to meet some of those folks and then share those stories and everything with our customers here has been a lot of fun.

Katy Clarke:
Amazing. And how good's your Italian, Olivia? Are you fluent?

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
No, I can order food and, you know, all the important things and say the bad words. I think, you know, and that's kind of the thing about so many Italian immigrants that came to the US. It was like, how quickly can we assimilate? We need to change our last name, we need to kind of stuff the language, and, uh, and just make sure we're as American as possible. So yeah, it didn't get passed down, unfortunately. And it's always on my New Year's resolution list, like, this year I learn Italian, and then - It doesn't happen.

Katy Clarke:
You know what? Look at us, like running these businesses, but mine needs improvement too. So maybe we should do, we should do a class together and let's go. Yeah. I mean, I, I don't know about you, but I can understand a lot, but I feel like my speaking is not where it needs to be and I'm always trying to improve.

Olivia Becker:
I know exactly. And then I feel a little shy to respond as well, you know, cause it's the same thing. You know, the more you're around it, the more you understand. But yeah, to actually engage.

Katy Clarke:
There's a lot of dialects as well, especially in the south. So my husband's family immigrated to Australia in the 1950s, and he does speak quite good Italian, even though he says he doesn't. But his Neapolitan is better, and he's got a bit of Calabrese as well. And the insults are really good.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, the insults. I mean, some are just so wildly inappropriate, but we did in my family. This is like a G-rated story. Like, we thought the worst thing that my grandparents would say when they were really angry, they would say 'vafanapoli'. And we thought that was like the worst word possible, but it really just meant go to Naples because they were from farther north. And, you know, of course it was like seen as such an insult if you were from southern Italy. So it was like, go to Naples. So we thought that was like the really bad word.

Olivia Becker:
But turns out, yep, it's just, go to Naples. But to a Northern Italian, that is like the greatest insult.

Katy Clarke:
We'll return in a moment with the rest of the episode. If you've been dreaming of experiencing Italy the way it's meant to be lived - slow, unhurried, and with locals who open their homes and hearts - our Untold Italy tours are now open for 2026 and beyond. We handle every detail so you can just show up and soak in the magic. Spots are limited and many fill months in advance. Check the link in the show notes or visit untolditalytours.com for details.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
I know, which is really interesting, isn't it? Like, I mean, like when people say it's one, it's not one country. It's, it's at least 20 different countries.

Olivia Becker:
Yes.

Katy Clarke:
That's probably why I love going there because there's such diversity and there's so many different experiences that you can have.

Olivia Becker:
Oh yeah, I don't think people realize it was unified so recently. And I mean, there's so much diversity, even just like village to village, forget about region to region. I mean, it's incredible. And they really take pride, like, this is our local dish, or this is our dialect, this is our patron saint, you know, and they're very specific.

Katy Clarke:
I think it's really special that they do continue these traditions. And what I love is when you see the young people getting really into it, wearing the local costumes, participating in the traditions, I just think it's more connected. And, you know, this crazy world that we live in now, it's a very special thing. And that's why I love going to Italy, because you are reminded that, you know, no matter how fast the world's changing around you, you still have the agency, and if you have the passion, to keep those traditions alive.

Olivia Becker:
It's so true. There's so much connection. And I think it is something we kind of miss in the US, like that deep-rooted cultural connection, that like unifying cultural connection, you know, whether it's like traditional dress, traditional dance or music, but also the food. You know, we see it so often through like the specific pasta shape or the specific preparation or the specific spice. And they really do take a lot of pride in that. And they take a lot of time and they're very intentional on passing it down. And I feel like too, so many of those traditions, they take time or they require time in a good way, you know, family time, time in the kitchen, time at the table. And it just creates more, more connection.

Olivia Becker:
And we can get away from it, you know, so, so often. So it's, it's great to feel that when you're there.

Katy Clarke:
I think so too. And the one thing about Italy, except when they're driving, so we'll just leave that to one side, but like everything, everything is more - is slower.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
So slow.

Katy Clarke:
And there's nothing wrong with that, you know? Like, I kind of exhale, you know, when I get there because it just makes you feel like calmer because it doesn't have to be going that fast. We've kind of been conditioned that everything has to be more efficient, faster, more productive, all of these things. And it's, oh, it's not necessary, you know?

Olivia Becker:
I know they really value it. And I think that's what I always tell people that are traveling there. I'm like, leave time just to soak it in and to do nothing. Like, I remember my husband and I, we sat outside the Pantheon at one restaurant at one table for 6 hours. We started there for lunch, but we just started watching the people go by and the colors changing. And there were, you know, performers in the piazza. And I mean, at home, there's never been a time I've just sat someplace for 6 hours. But there was so much joy in that, and there was so much just to, like, decompress in that way.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, it's just they create the environment for that, and it's lovely. It just recharges the batteries.

Katy Clarke:
It really does. And I love that people watching, because, you know, Italians make, you know, such a big effort to look good.

Katy Clarke:
You know, like, I've got this game I play with my daughter because she's in her tracksuit era, you know.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, sure. Yeah. Okay. Every teenage girl, yeah.

Katy Clarke:
And, uh, like when we go out and about, I say, let's look at - look for some outfits that are really fabulous. Like, let's do that. And in Italy, you don't have to wait for very long until someone comes around with an absolutely fabulous, like, dialed-in outfit with, like, all the colors, you know. Ah, fabulous.

Olivia Becker:
It is. And, you know, even if they are in, like, a tracksuit, It's perfectly - like, it's pressed, it's matching. They have, like, designer tennis shoes. There's maybe a scarf. Their bag is fantastic. Like, everything, everything is just so put together. You wouldn't see anybody with, like, wet hair. You know, that's, like, the big no-no.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
You're only in gym clothes if you were really at the gym. I mean, I, I love looking at those outfits. I always come home with, like, a suitcase full of clothes because I'm like, oh, I need these shoes. I need this jacket. Like, I need, I need to up my game back at home.

Katy Clarke:
Oh my gosh, I've just discovered these new handbag brands, Italian ones, and they've got like all these different colored velvets. And, um, yeah, I'll be sharing those, everyone. I just, I'm like, this is, this is danger. This is a danger zone here for me.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, it's so fun. Or the new bag charms. Last time I was there, everybody had like bag charms and little pins to decorate like a woven leather purse, and it was just spectacular. There's a little flair on everything there.

Katy Clarke:
They do, they do it so well. Okay, so we've been to Liguria, we've been to Abruzzo. Now you did just mention Tuscany, and like, yes, it is a big, big favorite, but is there anywhere particular in Tuscany that you really love?

Olivia Becker:
We love Montepulciano.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah.

Olivia Becker:
I think that is our favorite. And I think for anybody going to Tuscany, like, choosing one home base is so important. So we usually choose Montepulciano or Lucca. That's another favorite town of ours. And I think, you know, what's wonderful about Montepulciano - obviously it's a wine town, but, you know, you've got the actual city limits and then you've got kind of the area of Montepulciano. So we love to stay within the city walls, and it's just wonderful because you have all these little wine tasting rooms, you have wonderful restaurants, you can wander for hours. And since it's on a hilltop, the views to watch the sunset over Tuscany, I mean, I don't, I don't think there's anything better.

Olivia Becker:
Like a sunset aperitivo in Montepulciano, it just takes my breath away. And then you have access to all the wines there too. And so we do a lot of day trips from Montepulciano. And then, of course, Lucca. I'm - have you been to Lucca?

Katy Clarke:
Yes, it's one of my favorite places too. Yeah.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
We actually named our son Lucca, so that's also how much we love - we love the town. And to ride bikes around the city walls and just to explore all those piazzas. The shopping is wonderful, the food is wonderful. I just think there's something so special about that town. The hike up the clock tower, we just love it. And this is again where, if you can drive and you feel comfortable, I think Tuscany is such a wonderful place. to rent a car and explore those roads and just pull over when you see, like, a field of sunflowers. But, you know, we love to explore Pienza, Montalcino, Arezzo.

Olivia Becker:
I mean, there are even the lakes, the Tuscan lakes. I mean, it's - oh my gosh, we love to just drive all over that region.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, it's so beautiful. And I don't know if you've been to the Garfagnana Hills up there outside of Lucca. That's a really nice area to go to. I can recommend that.

Olivia Becker:
No.

Katy Clarke:
Go there next time. Yeah, it's a nice surprise.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, really? Okay. No, we have never been. Okay.

Katy Clarke:
And I've got another tip for you, um, and I will send you a photo of this, Olivia, and maybe I'll put it up on the, uh, show notes. I'm not sure. I'll have to ask my kids first, maybe. But when we were in Lucca, you can hire, you know, not just bikes, but you can hire these little - they're called, I think they're called surreys, and you can put 2 kids in the front of the bike thing and drive them around.

Olivia Becker:
Oh my gosh.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, so it's really good if you've got twins.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, for the future, my family will also be using this tip. Oh my gosh, that sounds wonderful because it is nice to get around by bike in these towns. It's so much easier.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
Then there's other people going for their passeggiata, and it's just, again, it's slower.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
They're slowing down, they're talking to their friend, they're sitting on the park

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, my car advice does not extend to within city walls, I should say that. Walking or bike riding to explore these towns is the way to go.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, absolutely. And if you don't want to drive in Tuscany, Lucca is actually very easy to get to by train, so from Florence, uh, and so is Arezzo, actually.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, Arezzo.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, so nice, isn't it?

Olivia Becker:
I know, all the ceramics and everything. Have you been to the ceramics stores, like off that main piazza and the antique shopping.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah.

Olivia Becker:
Those are things that don't really fit in a suitcase very well back to the US. But

Katy Clarke:
No, but it's fun. But you can - there's always shipping. Yeah,

Olivia Becker:
That's true. That's true. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Olivia, I know you both and I share a love of food and wine. Have you got some memorable experiences that you've had when you've just been eating and drinking in Italy? Because I feel like everyone's got, you know, a top few moments that they've had.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
I know, so many. If you were to ask my kids, like, what was our best ever day in Italy, there's this little place on the Amalfi Coast called Marina del Cantone, which means like beach in the elbow or like beach in the corner. And it's in the town of Nerano, and it is just this rocky, beautiful beach, but they have like 2 or 3 Michelin-star restaurants even in this small little area. But the best eating experience there is to go to the little beach club. And first of all, it's incredible because it's all Italians. You don't hear English. And that to me is always like, okay, I'm in the right place. And we did have our Italian friends recommend this to us.

Olivia Becker:
And at the beach club, they do a fritto misto and a sangria. So the fritto misto, for anybody listening that hasn't had it, is like one of my favorite dishes in Italy because it's like they scraped the sea and flash-fried all these fresh little fishes, and then you just sit there and enjoy it. And they make a sangria with white wine with the peaches and apricots picked from the trees on the beach. And we sat there on these chairs on this rocky beach eating this like fresh, salty fried seafood, drinking sangria with peach and apricot pulp, and it was like heaven. There was nothing - better. I mean, do you know those moments where it's so simple? It was just like served from this little beach hut, but it was just so fresh and using those local things. I mean, local, like literally right there on the beach, there were fruit trees lining it. And, um, yeah, it just, it just sticks out for all of us as just one of those peak moments.

Katy Clarke:
I love Nerano.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, you do? People don't go. You know, they go to, like, Sorrento and they go to Positano. And again, it's beautiful, but those - oh my gosh, I should have known that you've, you've been there. I love it.

Katy Clarke:
I just love it. And they've got a really like a retro, vintage sort of gelato shop at one end of the beach where you can go and get this lemon granita. And it's just, uh, chef's kiss.

Olivia Becker:
I had this espresso granita there. I was actually in line back at the beach club and I was gonna get an Aperol Spritz. And this Italian man behind me, he was like, no, no, no, no. And he was like, that's not what you want, in like broken English. And like, if a man did that to me in the US, I'd be like, what? Like, are you kidding me? I know exactly what I want. But in Italy, they usually know. Like, I've learned to listen to the locals. And he ordered this espresso granita for me.

Olivia Becker:
And it was, it was the most perfect day, Katy. I'm telling you, it was - That's so sweet. It's just incredible.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
That is such a lovely place, and you don't need to go to the Michelin-star restaurant because you just need to go to the beach club.

Olivia Becker:
Exactly. And that's also such a wonderful thing about Italy. I mean, like Autogrills, you know, again, this is me driving in Italy, but you know, for people that haven't been there, it's essentially a gas station but with incredible coffee and incredible sandwiches. And it's like, again, in the US - you would never eat at the gas station, but these, these are things like, it doesn't always have to be Michelin-starred. It's nice when it is as well, but things like that can be just as fabulous.

Katy Clarke:
The Autogrill is like one of my favorite places because we would, when we lived in the UK, we would sometimes drive from London down to Italy, and then you have to go through France. In Australia, we can drive long distances, like you do in the US, and so anyone in Europe would think we were absolutely crazy to do this drive. But the thing is about France, and you know what, I love France too, but unfortunately their coffee is absolutely disgusting. Sorry, France, but it is. It's gross. And if you've driven like 12 hours straight to get through to Italy, your first stop is the Autogrill and it is for an espresso.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, exactly. That's our first stop as a family too. We leave the airport and it's like we're stopping at an Autogrill before we get to wherever we're going. And it's like, then you find your favorites too. And they have like the best pastries. And -

Katy Clarke:
They have that little section, you know, this little section with all the local produce. I love that one too. Like every single one.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, it's so true. And then there's like the little grocery shop, like as you're winding through the line to check out. I mean, it's a little of everything. It's a dream. But I promise we don't only eat at gas stations while we're there. I would say what we always try to do is find like a wonderful cooking class. And, you know, some of them can feel like a very - oh, what's the right word for it - kind of like commercial, or they're like, you know, catering to an American audience. But, um, there's one in Genoa, you know, going back to Liguria, still my favorite.

Olivia Becker:
And I don't know if you know Enrica. She runs A small kitchen in Genoa.

Katy Clarke:
Yes.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
And she's become a very dear friend, and we visit her whenever we're there. But what's wonderful about her I can't even call it a cooking class - it's more like a half-day experience. So she meets you in downtown Genoa, and she meets you at the Central Market. And so you start there by shopping for all of the local ingredients, and she teaches you so much about how to select produce and how to find things that are in season. You know, like we were getting basil for pesto, and she's like, you want to know it's fresh? Give it a shake. Like, the oil should come off the leaves. It should be fragrant.

Olivia Becker:
So, you know, it's like the learning starts there. So you're there, you're shopping, you're kind of living like a local, and then you walk to her apartment in Genoa that has just absolutely beautiful views. I mean, I feel like I'm always saying this, but over the port town of Genoa, and you cook in her kitchen. And, you know, her business is called A Small Kitchen in Genoa. It's actually very large and very beautiful, especially by, you know, Italian apartment standards. So you cook together, you have aperitivo, and then you eat this wonderful lunch that almost goes into dinner on her terrace overlooking the city. And it is just the most fabulous experience because the food is incredible. You've learned so much about cooking, you've learned about the city, you've learned about just how to shop.

Olivia Becker:
And that is just something - it's an absolute highlight for anybody that's in Genoa because we love finding people, you know, like that, and you're in their homes. It's such a special connection.

Katy Clarke:
It's something very different to a lot of the commercial cooking classes that you have in Rome and Florence. And, um, actually, that particular experience is part of our Cinque Terre and Beyond tour for our Untold Italy tours. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Time for a quick break, shorter than your morning espresso. For on-the-go curated travel tips, restaurant recommendations, and fun things to do in classic and hidden spots across Italy, download the Untold Italy app. Link in the show notes.

Olivia Becker:
I did not know that. At Enrica's?

Katy Clarke:
Yes, absolutely. Yes.

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
Okay, this makes me happy for any of your travelers that will experience that. I mean, Enrica is just such a delight, and she's, you know, she has that in common with us too. She did a pivot toward Italian food. She was actually a maritime lawyer, and it was a little bland. And she has - she's so talented and she's so passionate.

Katy Clarke:
You can hear her on the podcast, actually, on this podcast. So, um, she's been on about 3 times, I think, or 3 or 4 times. So we'll link to those episodes on the show notes too. Yeah, it's a very small world.

Olivia Becker:
Okay, that's incredible.

Katy Clarke:
As I talk to you in Seattle from Melbourne, Australia.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, no kidding. And we're talking about a mutual friend in Genoa. Have you been to the candy store? You know, those candies that she serves at the end?

Katy Clarke:
We went to a lot of candy stores with Enrica when we were there. Olivia on our team and we spent a whole morning with her going to all these different shops. And it was around Easter, so it was crazy busy with chocolate. And yeah, it was so good. Yeah.

Olivia Becker:
Oh my gosh, the giant eggs! That's a great time to go.

Katy Clarke:
It is a great time to go. I've got a lovely story about that actually, from Easter down south. Fa Napoli. The relatives down south gave my then 4-year-old twins Easter eggs the size of them, which they thought was like the best thing that they've ever seen in their life, you know.

Olivia Becker:
I mean, it is the best thing.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, when you're 4.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
But yes, they have these amazing candy stores in Genoa, and I love Genoa. It's a really interesting city. Like, it looks a bit industrial from the outside, but my goodness, if you are into design, into history, into food. They have these incredible palazzi, which we're actually trying to find someone to come and talk about the palazzi on the podcast, actually, that were owned by the merchants. And like, they are like this treasure trove of antiques and really incredible stories, actually. So yeah, it's a very interesting city, I find, but you need to make a little bit of an effort to get there. Again, you know, all of these things.

Olivia Becker:
A little extra effort and a little bit more, I think, research too, because I think some of these, like you said, like it's, it's easy to kind of glance at it and think, ah, maybe not. But there's so much to discover, like once you're in Genoa.

Katy Clarke:
They've gotten a very interesting mayor over there. It was giving very interesting vibes over the summer. They had a really famous Belgian DJ. I don't know, like I'm not really into doof doof music myself. I'm a little bit old for that. But she's a really famous DJ from Belgium, and the mayor had her doing a set in the main piazza there, and the whole thing was just jumping. And then I saw maybe a month later they had all this dining in the streets, so they had like these big long table dinners in the streets.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, I saw that. Well, I think Enrica had posted about it actually, and it just looked wonderful, like those long winding tables.

Katy Clarke:
But this is the thing, it takes effort for people to do this, right? And so when people do this and then people appreciate it, it sort of has a snowball effect of, um, connection and community.

Olivia Becker:
I know, because I just imagine walking through a town and seeing this long table. It's like everybody's involved, you know? You want to stop and sit down and figure out what's going on and be a part of it.

Katy Clarke:
Okay, now, like, when you travel in Italy, there are moments where you do have a few mistakes. I mean, I know I've got so many; it's hilarious. But has there anything that you've learned from?

Olivia Becker:
Oh my gosh. I mean, I, I think the early mistake of, like overpacking, you know, thinking that you need a huge suitcase and all of these things, and you need to be able to lug that suitcase

© Untold Italy 2020

up like 4 or 5 flights of narrow stairs. You need to be able to like heave it from the platform onto the train. And it's like, you have to be able to carry that and manage it on your own. So it's like underpacking. You can find anything you need over there, so just pack as little as possible. We also laugh about the, like, ordering cappuccinos with dinner.

Olivia Becker:
We were at dinner once with our Italian friends, and our daughters ordered cappuccinos with a seafood pasta, and I thought they were going to throw us out and end our several-decade-long friendship over this decision to have a cappuccino at dinner. So there are those like little food rules, especially if you're with Italians. They'll just look at you like you're absolutely crazy because, you know, of course the cappuccino's not after 10 or 11. It's like only with breakfast. So breaking some of those food rules has always been like very funny to us. And then I think just packing in too much, you know, again, those early trips or hearing about friends that will come to us and say, where should we go? We have 7 days. We want to start in Venice, go to Milan, then through Florence and fly out of Rome. And it's like, oh no, give yourself time and space.

Olivia Becker:
There's so much to see. And just finding one home base and just exploring from there. Uh, you know, it just makes such a difference. So yeah.

Katy Clarke:
It's such a hard one though, because as was - as you know, we plan trips for clients as well. And like, I think everyone has to go on a journey of discovery to find that out for some reason. Like, I remember when I was a teenager and first started traveling, I just wanted to see everything. I just had this voracious appetite just to soak up everything and try everything and go everywhere. And you know, I think it wasn't really until I became a mum that I realized, yeah, that it - like, I think it takes time to understand that you can't see everything. It's one of those things.

Olivia Becker:
That's a good point because traveling with a family, which of course I've done for so long now, that probably is part of the reason for the home base because then you can really get settled and you're not dragging your kids. And all of their stuff to all these different places as well. And, uh, there's just so much beauty in getting settled in somewhere. But yeah, I understand that need to see it all, and there is so much to see. I think I could spend lifetimes there and not see it all.

Katy Clarke:
It's true. Even like, even if like one place like Rome, you can - I mean, I've lost count of times I've been to Rome, and I can always find something new to do. And in fact, I try and do Everything different every time I go there. So..

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, exactly. There's like a new street, a new little bar, a new restaurant, or just a new view. I mean, oh, we recently discovered, you know, where you look in the keyhole in Rome?

Katy Clarke:
Uh-huh.

Olivia Becker:

Olivia Becker:

Olivia Becker:
And then you have the view. It's things like that. I mean, again, we had been there so many times, and actually with work, a lot of those customer conferences were in Rome. And then the first time you look through that keyhole, you're like, This is magic! I know.

Katy Clarke:
And then you can walk down the street to the Orange Garden, and with that spectacular view out over the city. And, you know, it's been there for so many thousands of years, and you really feel that. I think it's got that sense of presence that you don't when you're constantly putting up buildings and taking them down. That longevity, I think it's got a real pull for me anyway.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah, it does. You feel it. I think you feel it in the buildings. You feel it when you walk into those churches, you stand in those piazzas. I mean, you just, yeah, you feel the history.

Katy Clarke:
Okay, now Olivia, I've got this rapid-fire series of questions for you before we wrap this up. You don't need to elaborate too much, but like, these are, these are very important things that we need to know. And for anyone listening, this is a series about for people that are like regular travelers to Italy that we want to share, like, their experiences. So if you are one of those people, do reach out and we can have a chat about being on the show. But you're going to have to answer these questions. So Olivia, are you ready?

Olivia Becker:
I am ready.

Katy Clarke:
Okay. What's your first coffee order when you arrive in Italy?

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
Oh, a cappuccino. We're usually arriving in the morning, we're tired, and there's nothing like a cappuccino in Italy.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. With cornetto or without?

Olivia Becker:
Oh, with cornetto, of course. Yeah, we're dipping.

Katy Clarke:
Rome or Florence?

Olivia Becker:
Oh, Florence. Rome is amazing, but Florence, you can just walk and explore. It's calmer to me, and it's just beautiful.

Katy Clarke:
Favorite gelato flavor?

Olivia Becker:
Okay, fig or pistachio. And I think because I absolutely love figs, they're hard to find in Seattle, and to have the gelato with the fresh figs. Oh my gosh, it's such a treat.

Katy Clarke:
Yes, we love figs. We've got this salad that we make with, um, I think you call it - we call it rocket, that you call it arugula.

Olivia Becker:
Oh, arugula, yes.

Katy Clarke:
And, um, some mozzarella cheese with a drizzle of balsamic. Anyway, I'm making myself hungry now.

Olivia Becker:
I know, after this I want to fly to Italy and eat.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, 100%. Okay, beach club or thermal baths?

Olivia Becker:
Oh my gosh. I mean, I would say beach club because that Marina del Cantone memory is fresh in my head, but a visit to Saturnia. Everybody should also have that on their list.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, thermal baths. I am a big thermal baths fan, actually. But, um, yeah, I can go either.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Okay. If you could only visit one Italian region for the rest of your life, where would you go?

Olivia Becker:
I would have to say Liguria. I would have to say the water, the coastline. Yeah, I would have to say Liguria, but Tuscany comes in a close second.

Katy Clarke:
Excellent. Italy in August, yes or no?

Olivia Becker:
It's just too hot for me. I'm a little wimpy that way.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, it does get very hot. Okay. How do you take your pizza? What's your preference, Napoli or Roman style?

Olivia Becker:
Neapolitan. It's just a little thick. I like the more doughy.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. It feels a little bit more generous with the cheese and the tomatoes as well. Yeah.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah. There's more to it. Yeah. Don't tell my ancestors.

Katy Clarke:
No. All right. We won't do that. Okay. Google Maps in Italy, friend or foe?

Olivia Becker:
Oh, friend. It's come a long way. Even some trails, like things that you would consider a trail and not a road, will show up on Google Maps. So, I am a big fan.

Katy Clarke:
Okay. Cappuccino after 11 AM, yes or no?

© Untold Italy 2020

Olivia Becker:
No. As I said, I've been shamed out of that by my Italian friends. So, I can't do it. Only espresso. After a meal.

Katy Clarke:
Absolutely, because it's a digestive.

Olivia Becker:
Yes.

Katy Clarke:
It's to help you digest your meal. When you have milk, this is the Italian way, they think it will not be good for your digestion. So I kind of like that idea. I think it's good.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, I like it too. And I also recently learned that when they serve sparkling water with espresso, you're actually supposed to have - I thought the water was afterwards. No, you drink it first to like cleanse your palate, so then the taste of the coffee stays on your tongue and you can enjoy the espresso afterwards as well. Another tip for enjoying coffee in Italy.

Katy Clarke:
All right, then the last question is team carry-on or team check-in?

Olivia Becker:
Check-in. Check-in always. You know, it's just so much easier to manage, but I will roll up a small bag in there so if there's anything I buy over there, I can check it for the journey home.

Katy Clarke:
I am definitely team check-in as well. There's so many things you want to buy. I mean, I'm not into consumerist - buying everything, but if you see something fabulous, you've got to bring it home. And I always see about 10 fabulous things when I'm in Italy. So, you know.

Olivia Becker:
There are fabulous things. And then also, I love going to the farmacias. Some of the women there are like estheticians. So loading up on product there as well is always a treat. So you want space for that. If you find a fabulous bag or a great pair of shoes, or I'm always shoving things like sauces and cheeses in my bag.

Katy Clarke:
Vacuum-packed cheese is the top tip here.

Olivia Becker:
Yes, exactly. All the Parmigiano-Reggiano I can carry.

© Untold Italy 2020

Katy Clarke:
100%. Like, sometimes here they have the audacity to sell Parmigiano-Reggiano and not tell you how many months aged it is.

Olivia Becker:
That's why you need to get the real stuff.

Katy Clarke:
Olivia, this has been fantastic, but we have a bit of an exciting announcement to make, don't we?

Olivia Becker:
Yes, we do. So we are very excited to work with your team because we are putting together a collection of products for Untold Italy travelers and customers. And some of the products in this box are actually from producers that your travelers have visited in Italy. And so we are very excited to be able to package all of this up and provide it to your customers here in the US. And we just love being able to do that. It's what really started Dalla Fonte, that idea that you're there, you're experiencing all these things, and now you get to bring it home with you and have it in your own kitchen around your own table. So we just had so much fun putting it together and just very excited to launch.

Katy Clarke:
It's very exciting. And so if anyone's been on one of our tours or they've been listening to the podcast, you will have heard me wax lyrical about pistachio cream from Sicily, which is included in the box.

Olivia Becker:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
My favorite chocolates from Piedmont, Guido Gobino, which are amazing. They are those little delicious nuggety combination of very, very fine chocolate and hazelnuts, which is the Giandujotto, which is so, oh my gosh, so delicious. We have Taralli from Puglia. and we have some olive oil and also the Acetaia Sereni, which is my son's absolute favorite place in the entire world, the balsamic vinegar. And we had some of that for our dinner last night, actually. So -

Olivia Becker:
Oh, did you? Oh my gosh. And the Acetaia looks absolutely beautiful.

Katy Clarke:
It is. It's absolutely stunning. And we were happy to work with them. They're very wonderful people and some very talented young men who are running this show with a lot of strong opinions, which I love, and a big strong passion for their heritage. And I think that sort of

© Untold Italy 2020

comes out in all the bits that we've chosen for the Untold Italy box. So we're very excited. So we will put details of that into the show notes as well, and they'll be available at the end of October 2026, right?

Olivia Becker:
Yep, they will be all ready to ship

Katy Clarke:
For the holidays.

Olivia Becker:
So we're very excited to share. You guys made some great choices.

Katy Clarke:
And for everyone listening in Australia, so I can hear them all saying, Katy, what are you doing? Like, why don't we have one in Australia? I'm working on it. I'm working on it. So, uh, we will definitely have something available for our Australian listeners as soon as I find the right person to partner with. As you can see, Olivia and we really did connect strongly over our passion and love for Italy and Italian food and all the experiences that we love. So, uh, it's been a wonderful conversation. Grazie mille, Olivia. Thank you so much for coming on today and sharing your passion for Italy with me.

Olivia Becker:
Thank you, Katy. Thanks for having me, and I'm excited about our partnership.

Katy Clarke:
All right, thanks again, Olivia. Ciao!

Katy Clarke:
Listeners, I know many of you are repeat visitors to Italy like myself and Olivia. I'm not going to call us Italy tragics. And well, why not? I guess I am. I am an Italy tragic and I am proud of it. Italy is a very easy country to travel around and explore. There is so much variety from the mountains to the coast and the cities to countryside. The food is amazing.

Katy Clarke:
The wine is divine. The people are friendly and there is beauty around every corner. What's not to love? So in the spirit of a love for Italy, we are absolutely thrilled to bring some of our favorite handpicked tastes from all over the country to our listeners in North America in partnership with Olivia's company, Dalla Fonte. From the stringozzi pasta of Umbria to the Ligurian basil pesto and the most delicious chocolate from Guido Gobino in Piedmont, these are places and producers that we know and love, and they will be familiar to our Untold Italy tour guests who have experienced these places firsthand. I really love this collaboration and would also like to find a partner here in Australia and potentially other countries to do something similar. So if you know of anyone who would be interested, do let me know. We

© Untold Italy 2020

love to support these local producers when we can't be in Italy, and I have to admit, I am a little bit addicted to that Giandujotti chocolate. We put a link to Dalla Fonte and the very special Untold Italy box, plus all of the places that Olivia mentioned on the show, in the show notes at untolditaly.com/348 for episode number 348.

Katy Clarke:
And don't forget, these episode show notes are really detailed, so you can always go back on all of the episodes and grab all the information about the things that we talked about and all those tricky Italian spellings. Grazie mille. Thank you for joining us today on Untold Italy. I do hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did, it would be fantastic if you left a rating or review on your favorite podcast app, and that helps us reach more Italy-loving travelers Or tragics, just like you. This is also a shout-out to travel agents and advisors who might be listening, as I know many of you tune into the show. And if you'd like to work with us, maybe around a tour or something, maybe a little bit different, do reach out because we love working with new partners. And if you have the goal of helping your clients feel part of Italy as we do, we have some unique opportunities to help you get there.

Katy Clarke:
So that's all for today. Next week we're headed to beautiful Lecce in Puglia, but until then, it's ciao for now.

© Untold Italy 2020