

**Ep #191: Italy on Points:
Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Want to hear all about Jess's recent trip to Italy? She and her family flew to Italy on points and stayed in Milan, Lake Como, and the Dolomites. Listen in as she shares exactly how she did it and how you can do it too.

Welcome to *Points Talk*®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points.

Alex: All right, well it's just the two of us today. My mom is off traveling the world. She is over in Europe right now. But Jess is actually here to talk about her recent trip to Italy with her family. Jess, we want to hear all about how you got there, where you stayed. First up, tell us about the flights.

Jess: We've got some feedback that people want to know when we were there. Because I went in June, but this episode probably isn't coming out 'til July. So we were in Italy June 13th to the 22nd. So, like mid to late June is when we were there.

For our flights to Italy, we flew from Houston to Milan. We actually flew into Linate, which is the smaller airport in Milan. I highly recommend this option if it's doable for you. We booked it through Flying Blue. We had a layover in Amsterdam, so we flew on KLM. It was just 29,000 miles per person in economy plus \$134 in taxes, which I thought was a great deal. Alex, I know you're gonna ask when I booked these tickets. So we flew, we left June 12th, 2024. I booked the flights June 26th, 2023. So almost a year in advance. I think I booked these right when the schedule opened.

Alex: Yeah.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Jess: The thing is the schedule opened, I went on there, they were 29,000 miles. I was like, I'm not gonna get a better deal than that.

Alex: Yeah. So when you looked, did they have, what do you remember if they had, I know this is a hard question 'cause it was a year ago, over a year ago. Did they have any decent prices for premium economy or business, or were they insanity?

Jess: No, because I would have booked those for sure. So if they were decent.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: So they did not, and I was like, it's our flight time was weird. It was like we left Houston at 3:30 p.m.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: We got, so it was kind of a daytime flight and kind of an overnight flight also.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: So I wasn't too worried about having a bed in the sky because I was like, it leaves at 3:30 p.m.

Alex: You're not gonna go to bed at 3.

Jess: I'm not gonna go to bed at 3:00. And so, yeah, unfortunately, the youngest person on the trip was 12. If I had a child 2 to 11, I would have gotten an additional 25% off that award price, which would have been amazing. But I thought, you know, 29,000 miles for the whole way, you know, from Houston to Milan, I thought that was a really good price, and so I went ahead and locked it in.

And then coming home, so I actually went to, me and my two stepdaughters went to London from Italy to see Harry Styles. We're not gonna talk about that in this episode, but what we originally booked and what the other half of our family did is they flew from Venice to Houston. Again, booked via Flying Blue. This time

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

it was on Air France. It was 30,000 miles plus \$180 in taxes each. They actually had an overnight layover in Paris, and so they left Venice at like 9 p.m., got to Paris around 11, and then their flight to Houston was 11 the next morning. So they were in Venice, they were in Paris for 12 hours.

So I wanted to book them at the Sheraton, which is connected to Charles de Gaulle Airport. This place is a racket, the amount of money that they charge because I think they know they can charge a lot because people just book it for convenience. You know, it's connected to the airport, super convenient. This is, so it's a Sheraton, the Marriott property. They wanted \$550 or 70,000 Marriott points.

Alex: That's crazy.

Jess: To me that is, like if you can't even redeem a 50k Marriott certificate at an airport hotel...

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: That is ridiculous. I ended up booking it through the Chase portal and Points Boost. It was 34,000 Chase points for their night, which I was, I mean, still, it's ridiculous that I have to spend 34,000 Chase points for an airport hotel, but I was not about to pay \$550 or transfer 70,000 points to Marriott.

Alex: And so I did that exact same thing, Jess, when I was staying in Denver at the Westin airport. That's connected to the airport. I booked it through the Chase travel portal, too, because it was just insanity to pay Marriott's prices.

Jess: I feel like Points Boost really comes in clutch with a lot of Marriott properties because, you know, what they want to charge to transfer just doesn't make sense. So if you're getting like the 1.65X to 2X with the Points Boost, then you're doing really well. So that's why I ended up booking for them. They said it was nice. They literally were there to sleep and then leave, so.

And then, as far as where we stayed. So like I said, we flew into Milan. At this point in the trip, there were five people on the trip. We're gonna add a few

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

people later on, which you'll hear about. But at this point, there were five people on the trip.

We rented a car with Hertz. Ted has Hertz President's Circle with his Venture X card, and so we rented directly through Hertz. We stayed one night at the Hyatt Centric Milan using Hyatt points. It's a Hyatt category five. I redeemed a suite upgrade award for the kids' room. Even though it pained me to use a suite upgrade award for just one night, it was worth it because that allowed us instead of having a room for two, that allowed us to get a room for three.

And so Ted and I had a standard room on points that they ended up upgrading anyways, but then the kids had a king suite that had a sofa bed, and so all three of them were able to stay in one room. We really weren't in Milan very long. It was basically, I didn't want us to drive straight to Lake Como after that, after getting no sleep on the plane, basically.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: I was like, I don't want to get no sleep and then have to drive two hours. So we just, you know, had one night in Milan. We walked around, we saw the Duomo, we went to the Starbucks Reserve roastery in Milan, which was awesome. The Hyatt Centric is a really great location. If you want to take public transportation in Milan, we took both the metro and the tram. It was really easy. You just tap your card. And so, really convenient if you want to take public transportation.

And we had a, we had a great stay. They gave us, you know, I booked both rooms under my account with my Globalist status. They gave us free breakfast for everyone. You know, I know sometimes hotels can be kind of weird about the breakfast benefit, but they gave us free breakfast for all five of us. So I thought it was a really great stay.

Alex: Yeah, I was proud of you for staying at the Hyatt Centric and not the Park Hyatt.

Jess: You know, I actually had the Park Hyatt booked originally.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: And again, we would need two rooms there. And then Chase got kind of strict with their approvals, and it was gonna cost 45,000 Hyatt points a night for two rooms. So it was going to cost us 90,000 Hyatt points for our Park Hyatt stay. And like when the Ink, when the Ink train was going, that wouldn't have been such a big deal. But now that they kind of, they kind of got a little bit more strict on that, and I was like, I cannot spend 90,000 points for one night. So we, so I moved us over to the Hyatt Centric.

Alex: That's smart. Smart move.

Want deeper dives beyond what we cover here? Points Talk premium gives you more detail, more strategy, and more insight. Subscribe now at pointstalk.supercast.com or through the show notes.

Jess: All right, next up, we headed to Lake Como. So we got our car, drove to Lake Como. It was about a one-and-a-half to two-hour drive.

Another thing I will say is Ted and Ella were our two drivers. You're gonna see in a second, we're gonna pick up a second car. They both got international driver's permits from AAA before we left because I have heard technically, you're supposed to have an international driver's permit anytime you drive internationally. Most countries don't really enforce that. Italy does. And so I have heard stories of people going to pick up their rental car, and they asked to see their international driver's permit, and they don't have one, and oh, you can't, you can't get your car. So, just a tip, if you're heading to Italy, I highly recommend getting an international driver's permit. They actually didn't ask Ted or Ella for theirs, but we had it just in case, and it was only like \$20

Alex: Yeah, it's only like \$20. Is that a pretty easy process to do?

Jess: You can actually do it online, but it was like the week before we were leaving and I was like, oh y'all need these, and it wasn't gonna be enough time. So they just went into a AAA physical location. It cost \$20 and they were in and out in like 10 minutes.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Oh, that's great.

Jess: And so if you have a physical AAA location near you.

Alex: And then how long does that last? The driver's license?

Jess: A year.

Alex: Okay.

Jess: Yeah, so they have a year until they need to get a new one. I was glad to have it just for peace of mind.

Alex: Oh, for sure. That'd be a nightmare.

Jess: Yeah, so just a tip, get one if you're planning to head to Italy. Okay, so yeah, one and a half to two-hour drive to Lake Como. I knew I wanted to stay at the Grand Hotel Victoria and then the dates opened up, they had availability. We also had to get two rooms at the Grand Hotel Victoria for the five of us. We used, I think, Ted and I each used points for one night and a free night award for the second night. And so at the time we booked it, it was 140,000 Hilton points a night. Now I think it's 170,000 Hilton points a night.

Alex: Yeah, that sounds right.

Jess: So it's gone up. This is a great property to use a free night award if you have one, because you will definitely get a really great value. I think nights here go for like, the standard rooms for like \$2,000 a night, which, who is paying that? So.

Alex: Yeah, that's it. That's why my mom says when she goes there, she just feels like she's living the life of the rich and famous because that's who can, that's who can afford it. It's the rich and famous.

Jess: We did not pay \$8,000 for our two nights in two rooms. The standard room sleeps two. We had five, so I emailed them ahead of time right after I booked, I emailed them. And I said, hey, we're gonna have to have three in one room. What are our options? And so they said we could have paid hundreds of dollars

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

to upgrade to a bigger room, or they said I could pay 130 euros a night for a rollaway bed in the standard room. So that's what we did. We paid 130 euros a night.

Alex: Which is kind of ridiculous for literally rolling a bed in your room, but that is how things go when you stay at a fancy hotel.

Jess: It was either that or book a third room, and I did not have the points or free night awards to do that.

Alex: No, I would do exactly what you did. I would do the same thing.

Jess: Yeah, and the nice thing was they our rooms were not connecting. I don't know if this property offers connecting rooms, but they were literally right next door to each other. And so really convenient. I have diamond status through my Hilton Aspire card and Ted has Hilton Gold status with his American Express Business Platinum card. So we got free breakfast for all of us. It was, I just love this hotel. This was my third time staying there. I would love to go back.

We only had one full day there, so we arranged for a boat tour, a Lake Como boat tour directly with the hotel. They just charged it to our room. And Charlie, we went out on the water for like two hours. Charlie was really excited because we got to see the Star Wars Villa. And so it was really cool. It was a really nice way to spend the first half of the day.

And then the second half of the day, they have a beach club that opened, I think last two years ago. And so we went to their beach club. It's just right down the street from the hotel. You can either, it's like a five-minute walk or they can drive you in a golf cart. You do have to pay for the umbrella and chairs. We got a discount as hotel guests. And so I think for one umbrella and two chairs, it was 60 euros and we got two and so we paid 120 euros. But it's nice 'cause you reserve, it's kind of like how in the US you can reserve like a cabana at a hotel pool, you know?

Alex: Yeah. You don't have to fight for a chair.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Jess: You don't have to fight for a chair. It's reserved for you all day. And so they have a pool there, they have an adults-only pool if you're not traveling with kids, they have a splash pad. They have beach access, lake access for you to go, you know, swim in the lake. And so that's what we did. There's also a pool at the hotel that you can just use for free. But I was like, I can use a pool anywhere. I want to go swim in the in Lake Como.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: And so we did that. I think it's a great addition to the hotel. But yeah, so we pretty much just were in the water, were on the water or we're eating gelato the entire time that we were in Lake Como and it was,

Alex: And did everybody love it as much as you and Ted love this hotel?

Jess: Yes, everyone loved it. Their spa is amazing. The day we got there, Ella and Charlie and I went to the spa. We didn't get any treatments, but you get, you get complimentary access to the spa as hotel guests. They have a sauna, a steam room, an ice room, a foot bath, a cold plunge, a hot tub, a regular pool, jets, like they have about 12 different rooms you can go in. And so I highly recommend even if you're not getting treatments, a visit to the spa because it's, it's definitely life of the rich and the famous down there.

And then the whole reason we went on this trip was 'cause I wanted to go to the Dolomites. And then as soon as I saw how close, you know, for the Dolomites, people normally fly into Milan or Venice, even Munich, people fly into and drive down. I would say Venice is probably the most convenient as far as distance, the closest, but I wanted to tack on Lake Como, which is why we flew into Milan.

Alex: Yeah. But how long of a drive, did you go when you drove from Lake Como, did you have to go back to Milan or do you go a different way?

Jess: So you can either go back through Milan, or you can go like up and around. I think that they're they are comparable distances. But this is where our group went from five people to eight people, and the other three people flew into Milan.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Oh, gotcha.

Jess: We basically backtracked, and we went back to Linate Airport in Milan, picked up a second car, picked up three additional people, and then we all drove from there to the Dolomites.

Alex: And these were friends, right? Friends of Ella's?

Jess: So one was Olivia. So Olivia couldn't come with us the day we left originally because of a work thing. So she was flying in that day. And then so it was originally just gonna be the six of us.

Alex: Yeah, the family.

Jess: And then Harry Styles announced his tour dates. And he ended up having a tour date like two days after we were scheduled to leave Venice anyways. And so I told them like, why don't we go from Venice to London, see the show and then fly back from there. The other three flew home as scheduled from Venice.

But then Ella had two friends that wanted to go to the Harry Styles show also. They were originally going to just meet us in London for the show. But I was like, you know, the chalet that we rented in the Dolomites sleeps eight and the price is the same whether there's six of us or eight of us. And so if they can get to Milan, they could come with us for the Dolomites portion. I'm not generous enough to get them a room at the Grand Hotel Victoria. Let's be real. But I was like, if they can get to Milan, they can come with us for the Dolomites portion. And so Ella is so funny. She has gotten her friends into points and miles, opening credit cards.

Alex: I love that.

Jess: They're in their mid 20s, and so they're all old enough to have their own credit cards. And that day I was like, let me see what's available. I searched from Chicago to Milan, and it was still like 29,000 or 30,000 miles.

Alex: Oh, that's amazing. Yeah.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Jess: Yeah. So they booked. So they booked their they were actually on the same flight that Olivia was on. All three of them flew from Chicago to Milan together. We picked them up and then headed to the Dolomites. So I thought that was so funny. I was like, I'm not paying for their flights, but they can stay with us. And Ella was like, no, they have points.

Alex: You got points. That's awesome. I love it.

Jess: They have points. They have points. And I was like, oh my gosh, I love it. And so, we drove, it's like a four, five, four to five-hour drive from Milan to the Dolomites. And so we did that, and I will say that...

Alex: And then how far is Venice? I want to say, is it like three hours?

Jess: It's like two and a half.

Alex: Oh, okay.

Jess: It's like two and a half, yeah. So Venice is definitely the closer airport.

Alex: Yeah. When we were just in London, my family, you were getting ready to leave on this trip. And my brother-in-law was reliving his, their trip and like showing... Okay, so spoiler alert, Jess planned this trip because my mom went with my sister and her family, and you saw the pictures, right? And you're like, I have to go here.

Jess: I think it was three years ago they went. Pam texted me pictures, and I was immediately like, I have to go there. Where are you? Where? And she was even like, here's my view, you know, like here's my view this morning. Like pictures from the chalet that they stayed in. And I was like, send me the link, send, but you'll know I plan so far ahead that it was, it wasn't until 2026 that I could actually have time to go here.

Alex: Yes, she only had last summer planned.

Jess: She couldn't go last summer.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: But yeah, we stayed at the exact same place where Pam and your sister and their family stayed because I was just like, that is gorgeous. I have to go there.

Jess: And they actually added a hot tub and a sauna since Pam was there 'cause I was texting Lindsay. I was texting Lindsay while I was there. And I was like, oh my god, I'm obsessed. And I was sending her pictures. Lindsay is Alex's sister. Yeah. And she was like, oh my gosh, they did not have that hot tub when we were there. And I was like, what? The hot tub is the star of the show. So...

Alex: Well, it was so funny 'cause he's like showing me these pictures and he's like, we got to do this trip. Like, you guys should come with us and we can, we can, he's like telling us you guys need to go to this trip. Like telling Mitch and I, you guys need to take your kids and go stay here and do this. And Jess will talk a little bit about Switzerland, how it compares. He loves them both. Absolutely loves them both. As I know you do too, but he was partial to the Italian Dolomites. And so we're like, yeah, we will go, we would love to do this because I had the same thought as you when we saw my mom and sister's pictures like, oh, we got to do this trip. And so I'm like, well okay, well if we're gonna go, you guys need to come with us. And they're like, we are in. So they're, we might be making another trip to the chalet or whatever sometime.

Jess: Oh my gosh, we're gonna single-handedly keep them in business.

Alex: Right.

Jess: And I will link, I will link to the chalet in the show notes. It is on Airbnb, but I booked it directly through their website 'cause it was cheaper. And as a data point, it coded as like hotels booked directly. And so if you have the Chase Sapphire Reserve, you can get 4X on that booking. I did not use points for this portion of the trip, just because with eight of us, we would have needed four hotel rooms wherever we went. And I was like, it's just not worth it to try and like piece all that together.

The other thing is a lot of people, when they go to the Dolomites, there's a lot of like famous touristy things on the west side and then on the east side. And so

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

people will do like three nights on the west side, and then they'll drive and do three nights on the east side.

Again, with a group of eight, I was like, I don't want to be staying there and packing up and driving and like unpacking. I just want to stay in one place the entire time, which is the same thing Pam and Lindsay's family did. And so we booked the chalet, which is right, it's in the Alta Badia area of the Dolomites, which is literally directly in the middle. And so we stayed there for five nights and we were able to just like drive and do little day trips to whatever we wanted to do. And I found that to be much easier.

The location is amazing. You need to go check out my Dolomites highlight on Instagram because you really need to see it to believe it, but I will say there is a grocery store like a two-minute walk away from the chalet. There's a cafe, there's restaurants all within walking distance, so quiet, so peaceful. And the deal I made with the kids and Ella's friends, I was like, I will pay for the chalet, but y'all have to cook the meals and clean, and that is our deal. And they were, they were more than on board with that.

Alex: Smart.

Jess: And so I had my scrambled eggs and my yogurt parfait every morning.

Alex: You had your Globalist breakfast.

Jess: I had my Globalist breakfast made by them. We did like make your own pizzas one night. They made pasta one night. And so it was just fun to have...

Alex: You know, I thought of you when you were there and I was like, oh, Jess, I don't know, I didn't know if there was restaurants nearby. And I was like, I know Jess, you don't love cooking.

Jess: I do not.

Alex: You'll do it, and you can do it, but you don't, it's not like your favorite thing to do. So I'm like, ooh, I can't imagine Jess being on vacation cooking because

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

like that's the whole point, like going out to eat and not having to like do that. So I'm glad you found a way around it, so you didn't have to cook on your vacation.

Jess: No, that was my when Ella was like, can they come to the Dolomites? I was like, do they cook? And she said, yeah, and Ella loves to cook too. And so I was like, this is perfect because I will just sit out here on the patio and enjoy my glass of wine, and y'all can, you know, serve me and bring me dinner. And so it ended up working out really well.

Like I said, five nights, there were four bedrooms, three bathrooms, hot tub, sauna, laundry room. Laundry room came in clutch, you know, in the Dolomites, you're doing a lot of hiking and your clothes get dirty and they get sweaty, and so having that laundry room was really nice.

So all in all, I loved our stay there. I told Pam, I was like, if it's good enough for you, it's good enough for me, and it exceeded expectations. And so I really loved it.

And then, as far as things we did, the very first day, so we got there, checked in, just kind of took it easy at the chalet. The next day I didn't want to do anything too far from the chalet 'cause three of us were still kind of recovering from jet lag and all of that. So we took the Piz Sorega cable car from San Cassiano, which is just less than 10 minutes away from the chalet. We took it up into the plateau, we hiked around the top.

The really nice thing is the Dolomites, like Switzerland, it's very family-friendly, it's very kid-friendly. And so you can take, instead of hiking up the mountain, you can take a cable car up the mountain. There are playgrounds at the top, there's a restaurant at the top. And so there are things for kids to do. It's not just hiking. So we went up there, we had lunch up there, we hiked around a little bit. So just a really great place to kind of spend an afternoon there.

Another thing we did, this is one of the more popular things to do in the Dolomites, it's Lago di Braies. I have how to pronounce all these words in my outline in parentheses.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: I saw that on the outline, and I was like, that was really smart. We should start doing that all the time 'cause it's actually embarrassing, I feel like, how often we get on and we're like, I don't know how to pronounce this. I'm like, just do a little more prep work.

Jess: Yeah. So hopefully these are like within the ballpark of being pronounced correctly, but Lago di Braies. It is, they have wooden boats that you can rent. If you've researched anything about the Dolomites, you've probably seen photos of this beautiful blue water with these wooden boats. So I was like, I want to rent a boat. A lot of people just go to this lake, and they hike around it, which is still absolutely beautiful, but I was like, I want a wooden boat and everyone else in our party wanted a wooden boat also.

And so I will say you want to get there early. For us, we got there about 30 minutes early, and then it turned out that 30 minutes before the boat shop before we thought the boat shop was opening and then it was actually an hour and a half. So we got to just admire the lake for a while while we waited in line. But it was amazing. Each, you can rent a boat for 55 euros. You get it for 45 minutes and each boat fits a max of five people. So we got two boats. We put four people in each, and we got to kind of just, you know, row around for 45 minutes on this beautiful blue water.

And people in our DMs were like, is this filtered? Like, is this looks like AI? And I was like, there is no filter on this video. Like that is just how beautiful and blue the water is. And so highly recommend this, you know, very family-friendly. You can hike around the lake, you can hike part of the lake, depending on the abilities of the people that you are with.

The only thing I will say is you want to arrive early. And I do think that this is one where you need parking reservations if you're going in July or August. That is when the crowds in the Dolomites are the worst. If you can go mid to late June like we did, I think that's sort of a sweet spot. I mean, it was still, there were still definitely people, but I've heard August is just crazy with people. So we didn't need any sort of reservation. We did get there early, though.

Alex: My, and then my mom and sister, they went in mid-July.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Jess: Okay.

Alex: So I don't know how the crowds were, but they had a magical time. So I'm assuming it wasn't that bad.

Jess: The nice thing too is like where the chalet is is super quiet and like very just like naturey. And so even if it's crowded during the day wherever you're at the touristy spots, like once you go back to the chalet, it's like, oh, you feel like you're the only person around.

Alex: And I think that's true. It's like you just want to get there early because if you get there late, like I remember my sister, I don't know what lake it was, but it was one of them and she's like, it was amazing and like it's so beautiful, but then like as they were leaving, it just was so many people. So you just want to be there early.

Jess: Yeah. The third day, half the group stayed back and they went, there is a deer park that is sort of near the chalet. They went to explore that. The other half of us did this moderate hike according to Alltrails. I put "moderate" in quotes. This it was Lago di Sorapis. Again, if you've seen images of the Dolomites, you've probably seen this beautiful blue lake that you have to hike to. It was around a 7 to eight-mile round-trip hike. Y'all, I'm not a hiker. I don't know what got into me.

Alex: I couldn't believe it when you sent us, like she sent us a screenshot of, what was that? Your Apple Watch screen?

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: And I was like, what? You went on how long of a hike? Like, who are you?

Jess: I am not a hiker and I, but I was in this, so I joined this like Dolomites for beginners Facebook group leading up to the trip. Everyone was posting their pictures at this lake and the hike, and I was like, I got to do this, I got to do this. So I put out feelers in our group and Ella and her two friends were like, we want to do the hike too. So I was like, great, we'll do the hike.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

And then by the end of it, they were like, why did you tell us about this? Like this was terrible. We are not hikers. So maybe for some people it's moderate. I will say if you do want to do this hike, you also want to get there early for parking purposes. You want to wear actual hiking boots, not just your sneakers. So I brought, I wore my hiking boots on the plane because you know that I am team carry on only, and I could not have my boots taking up half my suitcase. So wore my hiking boots on the plane. You want to bring way more water than you think you're gonna need. You're gonna want to bring sunscreen and snacks. We packed a lunch to go. We carried backpacks.

And so I am glad I did it. It is, it starts out, you know, pretty easy, pretty flat, and then there's like a bunch of uphill portions. There's stairs. There's like exposed cliff sides with like a Via Ferrata cable that you have to hold on to so you don't like fall off the side of the cliff. And there's a wooden bridge. And so I did see kids on the hike. Would I have brought my young kids on this hike? No, but we are also not a hiking family. And so, like, maybe if your kids are experienced hikers, then they would be fine on it. Once we got to the lake, I cried tears of joy 'cause I was like, we made it.

Alex: And then I was like, and now we have to go back down.

Jess: And now we have to go, we have to do the whole thing over again. I thought it was worth it for the beautiful lake. We had lunch by the lake, it was amazing. On our way back, there was a rain and thunder and hail storm for the last hour of the hike. So for the last hour of the hike, we are in, we're getting pelted by hail. And Ella and one of her friends, Ella and one of her friends were like, if we could go back to this morning, we would have turned off our alarm clock, rolled over, and gone right back to bed. We would not have done this hike.

Alex: Oh my gosh.

Jess: But I was like, guys, I was trying to hype them up. I was like, guys, we're never gonna forget this. Like it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And they were like, no, this was terrible. So probably depends. I'm glad I did it. Another one of Ella's friends was like, "I'm glad I did it, it was worth it." Two of them were like, "What were we thinking? This was crazy."

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

So, you know, proceed at your own risk. Take a look at the pictures and the videos, see if you think, but if you're a hiker, I think you will love it. It's just...

Alex: If you're a casual walker, maybe not so much.

Jess: it was a little more intense than I anticipated. I will say that.

So that was day three. And then our last full day, we went to Alpe di Siusi. It is an Alpine meadow. This would actually be great for kids. There is a cable car from Ortisei. Ortisei is, I would say, one of the more populated touristy areas in the Dolomites. It's a popular area for people to stay in. There are a lot of hotels there. I think there's actually a couple of Marriott options around there if you did want to do this on points.

So we took the cable car from Ortisei up to the Alp, Alpe di Siusi. You can look at my show notes to see how to actually spell all these things. But again, we took a cable car, so you don't have to hike up a mountain. That's why I said it would be great for younger kids. Again, there's a playground at the top, there's a restaurant at the top where you can like sit and have your lunch and have amazing views. I hiked downhill for like 20 to 30 minutes to get better views of the meadows, and then they even have like a chairlift that will bring you back up that I took. It was, I think it was like 5 or 10 euros. And I was like, sold. So I don't have to hike back up.

I've already done my hiking. My legs were so sore from the day before. I was like, I don't care what it costs, but only 5 euros. Yes, I will take this chairlift back up. So...

Alex: Question, did you need cash for things there?

Jess: No.

Alex: When you... Okay, so you could use your card for that?

Jess: We did not. Yeah, even like a lot of the places, like Lago di Sorapis, Lago di Braies, you have to pay to park, but even the parking lots take credit card. And so I did not, we got cash when we got there.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: But I don't think we used really any of it because basically anytime they took a card, we used it. And so the only thing is they're not great with American Express. And so a lot of places did not take American Express. So I would plan to have at least a Visa or Mastercard option with you. But yeah, we got a bunch of euros out, and I don't think we really used any of it. So, that's a great, that's a great point.

But yeah, I think that this one would be any of the ones with a cable car, I feel like are just great for young kids because I know, you know, kids, they don't want to hike six miles. They're going to complain. Like, I don't even want to hike six miles.

Alex: I don't want to hike six miles either.

Jess: They're going to complain that their legs hurt. So you could even do like you a lot of people like take the cable car up and then they hike down, or you know, you can do whatever combination is best for your family, but I will say it's very family-friendly. They have hikes that are really hard, they have hikes that are easier, they, you know, and so would not hesitate to take kids here.

Alex: All right, so how did it compare for you, the Dolomites and Switzerland?

Jess: Yeah, so Pam actually texted me while we were there, and she was like, how do you compare it to Switzerland? Because my mom and I went to the Jungfrau region of Switzerland last fall. They are really comparable when it comes to the amazing views. Like everywhere you turn, you're just, you're just like your jaw hits the ground. You're like, oh my god, it's so beautiful. Oh my god, it's so beautiful. So they're really comparable in those ways.

There are some pretty big differences. Switzerland has a very extensive public transportation network. And so they have gondolas, they have boats, they have trains, they have cable cars, you know, and so they have buses. And so if you are wanting to not rent a car and just solely rely on public transportation, I think Switzerland is a better option. I think a rental car is a must in the Dolomites. And

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

so the pro in that regard to the Dolomites, though, is, I talked about this in our Switzerland episode, I felt like I was getting a master's degree in transportation when I was preparing for our Switzerland trip, because they have...

Alex: So, Switzerland, you can't just be like, I'm gonna hop on my Citymapper app and figure out where I'm going.

Jess: No. No, you have to, and there's like, there's like a handful of different train pass options. And you have to figure out, like which, which pass makes the most sense based on the places I'm gonna be traveling between. I mean, I spent hours watching YouTube videos.

Alex: And you're a very seasoned traveler, too.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: So for it to be that confusing for you, I'm like, sheesh, how did I do this?

Jess: I spent hours researching which train pass to buy. And it's expensive. I mean, the train passes are hundreds of dollars. And so I think for eight people, renting two cars for 10 days was cheaper than buying those train passes in Switzerland would have been.

Alex: Just for you and your mom?

Jess: No, probably not, not just, but like if eight of us had gone to Switzerland, we would have spent way more money on train passes than we did renting the two cars. And so I, with a family, I found it much easier to be able to just hop in the car and decide where we're going, and do that versus like, this train arrives at this time and then I have to hop on this boat and then I have to, it was just,

Alex: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jess: I found the transportation aspect of Switzerland overwhelming. And so, the other thing is Switzerland is much more expensive than the Dolomites. So if you are looking for more budget-friendly, I think the Dolomites wins hands down. The only other thing that was really different was the food. In Switzerland, it's a lot of like fondue and sausage, like meat, like Alpine meats.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: And things like that. In the Dolomites, obviously, it's Italy, and so it's a ton of pizza and pasta. And we have some picky eaters and so pizza and pasta were great for our family. But, you know, if you want to be, pizza and pasta is stuff you can also easily get back in the states. I ate a lot more food in Switzerland that was different and a little bit more adventurous. And so that was another big difference. I cannot even imagine how much it would have cost to bring eight people to Switzerland. I don't want to find out. I'm not going to find out. That was a, that would be crazy expensive.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: So those were the big, I mean, I love them both. I would go back to either one in a heartbeat. But yeah, just pack your patience when figuring out Swiss transportation. That's all I have to say.

Alex: I think I just need you to go with me to Switzerland and show me how to do it.

Jess: Just basically copy exactly where my mom and I stayed, and just buy the train passes that we bought and then you'll be good 'cause...

Alex: Yeah, if you want to go to Switzerland, you need to listen to the episode of Jess's trip to Switzerland and just copy everything she did is what it sounds like.

Jess: Yeah, it was just like I didn't, I really didn't do much prep for the Dolomites. I really was just like, this is where we're staying. These are the things on my wish list, but a lot of it is weather-dependent. You know, like if I'm not going to hike eight miles round trip to this lake if it's cloudy outside or if it's foggy. You know, and so there was something freeing about just being like, here's what we want to do. I'm not booking anything ahead of time. We're just gonna get there and see how we feel.

Alex: It's more relaxing, it sounds like.

Jess: And where just gonna go.

Ep #191: Italy on Points: Jess's Family Trip to Lake Como and the Dolomites

Alex: When you're just, you're just like, oh, this is what we feel like today. Oh, we're just gonna like hang out in the hot tub and look at the views and eat some food and just kind of relax and then, okay, now we're going to go out.

Jess: Yeah, and for the most part, I mean like I said, for the most part, we ate at the chalet, but there were a couple meals where we, you know, went out to eat, and we consistently ate for less than \$200 for eight people, which would never happen in Switzerland. And so...

Alex: That's nice.

Jess: It was nice.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: So Jess covered flights for her family of six to Italy, three hotel nights in Italy on points, and that allowed her to splurge on an amazing vacation rental in the Dolomites.

Alex: If you enjoyed today's episode, please share it with a family member or friend who you want to travel to Italy with. Thank you so much for your support.

Thanks so much for listening to *Points Talk*®. Make sure to hit the subscribe or follow button from wherever you're listening so you never miss an episode.

Wanna start jet setting even faster? Follow the links in the show notes to learn about everything we discussed in today's episode. And to stay connected and follow along, follow us on Instagram @PointsTalkSquad. We can't wait to see where in the world points and miles take you.