

**Client:** Lungarno Collection  
**Source:** National Geographic Traveller  
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CITY LIFE

# MILAN

There's always something fresh to discover in the northern Italian city, from a new hotel in a converted seminary to a cultural hub with contemporary art and a rooftop restaurant

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It's too modern. It's too fashion-focused. It's fast-paced, devoid of *la dolce vita*, it doesn't feel *Italian*. Milan has had the same old criticisms levelled at it for decades, and for decades Italy's business capital has shrugged them off. Because anyone who really knows the city knows it's not like that at all. The difference between Milan and the rest of the country is that where most Italian cities put their heritage on blousy display, Milan stands back, willing you to discover hers gradually.

Heading out from the Piazza del Duomo, home to the marble-drenched cathedral, you can rattle around on the city's vintage trams and wander through the village-like districts spiralling out from the centre; each has its own identity, from artistic Brera to cool Ticinese. Peer through every open gateway and you might see a palazzo, a hidden garden, a 1930s villa — or a piazza-sized Renaissance cloister that just opened to the public after centuries of silence (the Portrait Milano).

That's the other thing about Milan: it's ever changing. This mercurial city has seen many lives — from Roman Mediolanum (traces of whose walls sit in the archaeological museum) to a city state so powerful that ruler Ludovico Sforza cajoled Leonardo da Vinci to migrate

here as his engineer, leaving the world's most famous mural, *The Last Supper*, in his wake. Milan also played a pivotal role in the unification of Italy, created unimaginable wealth during the Industrial Revolution, and was subjected to heavy bombing during the Second World War. The latter left blank page after blank page for the designers of the 1950s to hone their creativity, streamlining a 'Made in Italy' style that entranced the world.

And it keeps reinventing itself. Global powerhouses from Pirelli to Prada have donated world-class galleries, arranging them around the bones of Milan's industrial past — a converted gin distillery here, a train factory there. Well-to-do locals honour their dead by donating to galleries or opening their own — the Fondazione Luigi Rovati, opened in 2022, is arguably Italy's finest Etruscan museum. This is a place of constant refinement, and not just in the ever-changing fashion collections — work on the Duomo, Italy's largest church, began in 1386 and ended only in 1965.

To be in Milan is to join this eternal quest for perfection, to never rest on your laurels, as many other Italian cities do, but to stretch out a hand to the future. Leonardo wanted to be part of that. You will, too.



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#### SEE & DO

**DUOMO:** The grand, gothic Duomo is best seen from on high. Take the lift or climb 256 steps to the *terrazze* — meandering rooftop terraces where you can see the intricately carved flying buttresses, pinnacles and statues up close, as well as clocking blockbuster views of Milan's modern skyline. Excavations of the fourth-century baptistery lie underground, while the adjacent Museo del Duomo is filled with original versions of many of the statues spotted on the terraces. Each is so intricately carved it's as if they were always going to be seen at ground level, not several hundred feet up. [duomomilano.it](http://duomomilano.it)

**QUADRILATERO D'ORO:** In the 1950s, Milan's status as Italy's fashion capital was made here — the Golden Quadrangle of shopping streets, bordered by Via Sant'Andrea, Via Senato, Via Manzoni and, the most famous of all, Via Monte Napoleone. Whether you're actually wanting to make a purchase or just window shopping, it's a good chance to people-watch and enjoy the famously inventive window displays — Larusmiani and Bottega Veneta are always outstanding.

**PINACOTECA DI BRERA:** Cobble Brera has long been Milan's arts district, and the Pinacoteca di Brera is one of Italy's finest galleries. Its collection includes an exceptional range of Renaissance works, from Mantegna to Raphael, and continues with Caravaggio all the way to Hayez. The building itself is a work of art — a 17th-century palace built as a Jesuit college. [pinacotecabrera.org](http://pinacotecabrera.org)

**THE LAST SUPPER AND LEONARDO DA VINCI'S VINEYARD:** Leonardo's The Last Supper, which is in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, barely needs an introduction. Book ahead to see the mural that changed the course of art history, portraying the moment Jesus predicted his betrayal. Across the street is what remains of the vineyard that Ludovico Sforza gifted Leonardo as thanks for his works. Visits wind through the 15th-century Casa degli Atellani palazzo and finish at the small vineyard — planted with the Malvasia grape variety that Leonardo grew there. [cenacolovinciano.org](http://cenacolovinciano.org) [vignadileonardo.com](http://vignadileonardo.com)

**CASTELLO SFORZESCO:** The Sforza family's vast 15th-century castle is now a museum, home to medieval Lombard carvings, Leonardo's

forest painting in the Sala delle Asse (room of the tower), and Michelangelo's last sculpture, the emotionally charged Rondanini Pietà. To the north west, it opens onto Parco Sempione, the city's green lung. [milanocastello.it](http://milanocastello.it)

**FONDAZIONE LUIGI ROVATI:** Milan's newest museum combines Etruscan and contemporary art — you might see a Picasso vase next to a 2,500-year-old one, for example — in a design-centric hub of culture and gastronomy. Exhibitions change regularly. The underground Etruscan section, mirroring ancient tombs, is superb. Andrea Aprea is at the helm of the exceptional one-Michelin-star rooftop restaurant of the same name and there's a bistro in the garden. [fondazioneluigirovati.org](http://fondazioneluigirovati.org)

**FONDAZIONE PRADA:** Miuccia Prada commissioned architect Rem Koolhaas to transform an old gin distillery south of the centre into a repository of contemporary art. A new tower block houses the permanent collection, including works by Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, while temporary exhibitions lie in the distillery, next to the Wes Anderson-designed cafe. [fondazioneprada.org](http://fondazioneprada.org)



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**BUY**

**10 CORSO COMO:** Fashion editor Carla Sozzani's concept shop stuffs impossibly cool clothes, design tomes, ceramics and even pet bowls into a plant-fringed, multi-level townhouse. If you're not buying, enjoy the photography gallery upstairs or the indoor-outdoor restaurant. [10corsocomo.com](http://10corsocomo.com)

**IL MENEGHELLO:** The late artist Osvaldo Menegazzi started reproducing medieval tarot cards and inventing his own decks in the 1970s. This shop, now run by his art historian niece, Cristina, sells artisan-made cards and reproductions of historic decks from the 1500s onwards. [ilmeneghello.it](http://ilmeneghello.it)

**CAVALLI E NASTRI:** Fashion through a vintage lens is the order of the day at this boutique. Today there are three branches: twin shops for men and women in the southern Ticinese district stock everything from 1920s slippers to Jean Paul Gaultier leather jeans, while the showier Brera branch starts in the 1950s, selling the likes of Chanel jackets and Louis Vuitton bags. [cavallienastri.com](http://cavallienastri.com)

Clockwise from right: Cavalli e Nastri's men's shop, Ticinese; the upper level of Fondazione Luigi Rovati; Jeff Koons's artwork in the Fondazione Prada; the 19th-century Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II shopping arcade; view of the courtyard at 10 Corso Como  
 Previous pages: The collection at Pinacoteca di Brera



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## MILAN



## EAT

**🍴 SALSAMENTERIA DI PARMA:** With two branches in the city centre, this trattoria pays homage to Parma, a capital of Italian cuisine. Dishes such as pumpkin-stuffed tortelli and lasagne are served within minutes — with lashings of parmesan. Swill it down with a bowl (yes) of wine. [salsamenteriadiparma.com](https://salsamenteriadiparma.com)

**🍴 CAFFÈ BISTROT:** Casual by name, gourmet by nature. The heart of the Fondazione Luigi Rovati is this restaurant by Andrea Aprea, which offers an affordable riff on his Michelin-starred joint upstairs. Sit in the garden under the magnolia tree to try dishes like pea soup with seared cuttlefish and quail egg, or risotto with courgette, provolone and sweet red prawns. [andreaaprea.com](https://andreaaprea.com)

**🍴 RISTORANTE BERTON:** Michelin-starred food gets playful at this Porta Nuova restaurant. Chef Andrea Berton's signature nine-course tasting menu, Non solo Brodo (not the usual broth), takes cooking's unsung hero centre stage, with concentrated broths to sip, drink or swirl over every dish. The cod — smoked over thyme leaves at the table — is in free-ble. [ristoranteberton.com](https://ristoranteberton.com)

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## AFTER HOURS

**CAMPARINO IN GALLERIA:** Taking pride of place in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Milan's 19th-century, glass-domed shopping mall, Camparino is beloved by the Milanese. A campari seltz (Campari and soda) with a side of people-watching in the Galleria, or outside overlooking the Duomo, is the classic Milanese aperitivo. [camparino.com](https://camparino.com)

**CAFFÈ GIARDINO:** Drink in the design scene at this laidback bar in the garden of the Triennale — Milan's rationalist-era design museum. There's seating by architects Gaetano Pesci and Ettore Sottsass, while a fountain by artist Giorgio de Chirico, who influenced the surrealist movement, overlooks Parco Sempione. [triennale.org](https://triennale.org)

**THE BOTANICAL CLUB:** This gin bar is a cut above the nearby canal-side haunts of the Navigli district, which often get rowdy. There are 70-odd labels racked up behind the plant-wreathed bar, and a regular cocktail list. This is the second branch, on fashionable Via Tortona, and has plenty of outdoor seating; the first, on Via Pastrengo, has its own gin distillery. [botanicalclub.com](https://botanicalclub.com)

**Back in Leonardo's day,** Milan was crisscrossed with canals — in fact, he sketched designs to improve them. When trains and cars became popular, most canals were asphalted over, but they're still there below the city

Clockwise from top left: Camparino in Galleria; The Botanical Club gin bar; Campari spritzes at Camparino in Galleria; soaking up the view of the Duomo at Camparino in Galleria; spaghetti agli scampi (spaghetti, bisque and tartare of scampi, with basil crust) and the Stranger Mule cocktail, both at The Botanical Club



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#### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Milan has two airports, Malpensa and Linate. The former is better served but is an hour from the centre; Linate is a 20-minute drive. ITA Airways flies from Heathrow and London City to Linate, while EasyJet flies from Gatwick. British Airways flies to both from Heathrow. Malpensa is served by Ryanair from Manchester and Stansted, by Wizz Air from Gatwick, and by EasyJet from airports including Birmingham and Edinburgh. Both airports have regular coach links. The Malpensa Express train runs between the central station and Malpensa. [ita-airways.com](http://ita-airways.com) [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) [ba.com](http://ba.com) [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) [wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com)

**Average flight time:** 2h.

Overland, take the Eurostar to Paris and then the Frecciarossa high-speed train direct to Milan. [eurostar.com](http://eurostar.com) [trenitalia.com](http://trenitalia.com)

The centre is walkable but for other areas it's best to take a tram or use the Metro.

#### WHEN TO GO

Milanese summers are hot and humid, with temperatures hitting the 30s. Spring is sunny and warm, hovering around 20C; the weather tends to be nice in early autumn, too, usually around the low 20s. It's quieter in winter, with temperatures around 4C, but the humidity makes it feel biting cold. It's best to avoid Fashion Weeks (February and September) and Design Week (April), when hotel rates soar.

#### MORE INFO

[yesmilano.it](http://yesmilano.it)

*Milan: The Monocle Travel Guide Series.*  
RRP: £15

#### HOW TO DO IT

Kirker Holidays offers four nights at the Echo hotel from £898 per person, including flights, tickets to Pinoteca di Brera and private transfers. [kirkerholidays.com](http://kirkerholidays.com)  
 Francesca Grignaffini sets up private clients with top-tier guides. Made-to-measure itineraries start from €150 (£130). [instagram.com/ariffra](http://instagram.com/ariffra)

#### SLEEP

**🏠 NHOW MILANO:** What was once a hulking factory in the Via Tortona design district has been jazzed up in bright colours across its open-plan, industrial-style rooms. Look out for the rotating art installations by the lifts on each floor, while rooftop pool bar Vertigo pulls in dressed-up locals. [nhow-hotels.com](http://nhow-hotels.com)

**🏠 ANTICA LOCANDA DEI MERCANTI:** A former 18th-century inn once used by visiting merchants has been turned into this gorgeous 14-room hotel near the Duomo. The sunny top-floor, glass-walled rooms have terraces, while hefty bedside trunks and woollen rugs on the lower floors hint at the building's past. [locanda.it](http://locanda.it)

**🏠 PORTRAIT MILANO:** Built as a seminary in the 16th century, this place has lived under many guises before its latest reincarnation as a luxury hotel. After stints as a military hospital and car park, the grand cloister, which straddles an entire city block, is home to two restaurants and shops — all of which are open to the public. Rooms are as jaw-dropping as the prices, with mid-century-style furniture and brushed brass tables. [lungarnocollection.com](http://lungarnocollection.com)

#### LIKE A LOCAL

**INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE:** Milan has converted some fascinating industrial spaces. These include the immense Pirelli HangarBicocca, a former factory that now has contemporary art on rotation, and the Fabbbrica del Vapore, a locomotive workshop turned cultural centre, with a peaceful bar and huge exhibition room. [pirellihangarbicocca.org](http://pirellihangarbicocca.org) [fabbricadelvapore.org](http://fabbricadelvapore.org)

**STREET TRAMS:** Milan is known for its characterful trams, with a mix of vehicles from different eras crisscrossing the centre. Hitch a ride on an ATM Class 1500 — the oldest ones out there, they're a single carriage, rattling away since the 1920s — or a bubble-style 4600 from the 1950s. [atm.it](http://atm.it)

**PIAZZA GAE AULENTI:** For a taste of modern Milan, head to the skyscraper-rimmed area around Porta Garibaldi station. Centred round an enormous water feature, Piazza Gae Aulenti has boutiques (Chiara Ferragni, Italy's answer to Kim Kardashian, has a store), restaurants, bars and prime views of the Bosco Verticale, an apartment complex swamped in plants, which have turned it into a vertical forest. 🌿