

Milan on Your Own

The Way To Italy



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Navigli district - Milan has canals too!

Navigli is a popular hangout for the Milanese pastime of the "aperitivo" and Canals in Milan. They say there's no such thing as a free lunch; however, they clearly haven't been to Milan. Among the most famous areas of Milan is Navigli, known for its picturesque canals, hip bars, restaurants and the cultural phenomenon, aperitivo. Strictly speaking, aperitivo means a pre-meal drink, but here in Navigli it's also code for 'free dinner'. Purchase any beverage at one of the many canal-side bars around sunset (look for a buffet table inside, and you'll know you've arrived), and you'll be treated to an all-you-can-eat treat. Each of the bars has unique specialities, but you'll usually find cold cuts, bruschetta, bread, cheeses and salads. Sip your drink as slowly as you can manage, and you can spend a happy evening munching away for free while you watch the world go by.

Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II

If you know your Gucci from your Giordano, a visit to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in the heart of Milan is a must. And even if you don't, the Galleria is also an architectural, artistic and cultural experience in itself. Whether or not the purse strings are tight, browse the glitzy displays of Prada, Versace, Montblanc and Ferrari, and stop for an espresso at one of the many (overpriced) cafés, just for the pleasure of the people-watching experience. Go in search of the bull mosaic on the pavement; legend has it that if you stand atop it and spin three times on your right foot, it'll bring you good luck. There's no need to worry that you'll look like a bit of a nut doing it, as there are likely to be a handful of other visitors lined up to have a go.

Castello Sforzesco

Castello Sforzesco is one of the many attractions nestled within the vast grounds of Parco Sempione and is among the most-visited places in Milan. While there are swarms of tourists, the site is so huge that it's easy to find yourself alone as you wander around the perimeter. Constructed in the 1300s, the castle was severely damaged throughout the years after multiple attacks on the city, and Francesco Sforza, the duke of Milan at the time, commissioned a new structure in the 15th century. After several expansions in later centuries, it became one of the largest citadels in Europe. Entry to the castle proper is free but the Museum entry is a mere 5 euros and extra for a guided tour.

Parco Sempione

While much of Milan is grey marble and stone, there are pockets of lush greenery to be found. Basically Castello Sforzesco's backyard, the centre of the city is the enormous Parco Sempione. Spanning some 39 hectares (96 acres), it's the largest park in Milan and host to some unique attractions. Join many of the residents on warm days for a picnic on the grounds, or take a walk around the footpaths to stumble across the Napoleonic Arco della Pace (Arch of Peace), the beautiful central lake, a smattering of museums and more. It's quite easy to spend an entire day meandering around this place, so bring your most comfortable walking shoes.

Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio

Not only is this basilica the heart of Milan's spiritual life, it's also a homage to the much-admired fourth-century bishop of Milan. Saint Ambrose was a Roman governor who was made a bishop by popular vote back in AD 374, and although he refused the prestigious appointment at first, he was pressed into acceptance of the role, upon which he gave up all of his lands to support the poor. Now the patron saint of Milan, his remains are interred within a crypt in the basilica. Take a guided tour of the premises to learn more about this bishop and saint, or wander around at your own pace (for free) to marvel at the dazzling mosaics, which mount the otherwise minimalist halls of this red-brick cathedral.

Orto Botanico di Brera

For another tranquil retreat away from the bustling crowds of Milan, visit the local botanical garden. Tucked away up a private street and just a short walk from the Duomo or Parco Sempione, the Orto Botanico of Brera is a leafy oasis that was once a scientific institution. The 18th-century garden was designed to help educate medical and pharmacy students, as well as being used to grow medicinal plants. Today, it's a beautifully maintained attraction for plant lovers and those looking to take a break from life. Find one of the many benches dotted around the grounds and relax until you're ready to face the outside world again.

Cimitero Monumentale di Milano

In case the name didn't give it away, Cimitero Monumentale is a giant cemetery. Covering over 25 hectares (62 acres), it's the second-largest cemetery in Milan, but definitely its most captivating. Boasting over 15,000 statues, the graveyard is also home to some of Milan's most famous buildings, including the Famedio (or Pantheon), which is the final resting place of some of the city's most legendary writers and politicians. Wandering through the laneways of graves is a unique, albeit slightly spooky, experience – you'll be spellbound by some of the most artistic and decorative tombs in Italy.

Leonardo's Horse

Unlike The Last Supper (for which tickets must be bought up to four months in advance), you can check out this Da Vinci masterpiece for free at any time of the year. Leonardo's Horse, also known as Gran Cavallo, was commissioned in 1482 by Ludovico il Moro, who later became the duke of Milan. Some seven metres (24 feet) long, the sculpture is enormous and imposing. While Da Vinci never finished the statue, only designing it in clay, his plans were later used to forge the monument in a much more durable bronze.

About Me



Hello!
I'm Pamela



I have been organizing and leading tours throughout Italy since 2011.

Fond experiences of time with my Italian grand-parents (grandfather born in Sicily) lead me to seek out and share authentic adventures in Italy.

- ❖ 23 years of experience in traveling to and from Italy. Currently living in Florence Italy.
- ❖ Passionate to work with local, family-owned, small businesses for authentic Italian experiences.

I can't wait to see what we can create together in the future. *Pamela Bomkamp*

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