

MILAN

What to Do in Milan: An Insider's Guide to the City's Best Experiences

Beyond the usual sights, Milan's insiders share their favorite museums, neighborhoods, and design galleries

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OCTOBER 23, 2026



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Milan is best known as Italy's fashion capital, but the destination offers much more than designer boutiques.

Much of the city's cultural and historical appeal lies in its less obvious corners. To help you make the most of your visit, we've asked some of Milan's leading hoteliers and local experts to share their highlights.

The best things to do in Milan, according to insiders

Discover Milanese art and culture



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A visit to Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, the 15th-century painting on the refectory wall of the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, is top of many visitors' lists. But for those seeking an extra-special experience without the crowds, Stephanie Greger, general manager of Mandarin Oriental, Milan, recommends booking a private after-hours tour with a dedicated art expert.

"What surprises [guests] most is not the fame of the artwork itself, but the intimacy of the experience," Olmo Feudatari, concierge at Four Seasons Hotel Milano, says, noting that the masterpiece remains in the original room for which Leonardo created it more than five centuries ago.

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Feudatari also recommends San Maurizio al Monastero Maggiore, a 16th-century church on Corso Magenta often referred to as the Sistine Chapel of Milan. "While many visitors immediately think of the Duomo or Leonardo's Last Supper, few expect to find such an extraordinary Renaissance masterpiece tucked away on Corso Magenta," he says.

Alongside the city's more famous attractions, Greger also suggests stopping at Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Once the private residence of art collector Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli, today the museum's collection features paintings, sculptures, and historic furnishings, including works by Sandro Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, and Antonio del Pollaiuolo. Unlike the city's larger galleries, its domestic setting gives visitors a sense of how these artworks were originally collected and displayed.





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For a glimpse into Milan's "intellectual and artistic soul," the team at Portrait Milano suggests visiting the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, an "unexpected cultural gem in the heart of Milan." Founded in the 17th century, the library holds a historic collection of manuscripts and books, and its adjoining Pinacoteca houses masterpieces by Caravaggio, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci.

Among the library's greatest treasures is Leonardo's *Codex Atlanticus*, an extensive collection of drawings and writings covering subjects including engineering, mathematics, anatomy, and architecture.

Feudatari also suggests, for a more contemporary experience, Arnaldo Pomodoro's Labyrinth, an immersive installation hidden beneath a former industrial building on Via Solari. Inspired by the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the labyrinth leads visitors through sculpted passages filled with mythological symbols. "Even many Milanese residents have never visited it," Feudatari says. "It offers a completely different perspective on Milan: one that highlights the city's vibrant contemporary cultural scene alongside its rich historical heritage."

And though a cemetery might not be the first place that comes to mind when planning a trip to Milan, the Cimitero Monumentale is one of Portrait Milano's CEO, Valeriano Antonioli's most beloved places in the city. Established in the 19th century, the cemetery is filled with elaborate mausoleums, sculptures, and family chapels created by generations of Italian artists and architects. "The tombs reflect changing tastes across generations, from 19th-century historicism to early modernism," Portrait Milano's team explains, recommending it to anyone interested in Italian design and architecture.

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Explore the lesser-known neighborhoods





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For a completely different look at Milan, head towards Piazza Cinque Giornate. "I love the authentic Milanese spirit that pervades the area around Piazza Cinque Giornate, a central yet distinctly residential neighborhood," Greger says. "My favorite spot is Via Lincoln, with its picturesque pastel-colored houses that feel like a hidden village in the heart of Milan."

Feudatari also loves the colorful street, which he likens to London's Notting Hill. "Walking through Via Lincoln feels like discovering a secret corner of the city," he says. "There are no grand monuments or famous museums here. Instead, visitors experience a more intimate and authentic side of Milan." Originally developed in the late 19th century as a garden village intended to provide affordable housing for railway workers and their families, it is now lined with around 40 villas painted in shades of pink, turquoise, yellow, and blue.

Another neighborhood worth exploring is Brera, with its narrow streets, independent boutiques, galleries, and cafés. Greger recommends wandering along Via Ciovasso and Via Solferino, where vintage boutiques and specialist shops sit alongside independent Italian brands, for what she describes as "a truly exceptional vintage fashion hunt."

Brera is also home to the Pinacoteca di Brera, one of Italy's most important art galleries, with a collection spanning centuries of Italian painting. For those with just one afternoon in the city, Greger suggests pairing Brera with a walk toward Via Montenapoleone, continuing to Piazza del Duomo, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, and Teatro alla Scala.

For the concierge team at Portrait Milano, the best way to explore Brera is via a guided private Milanese shopping itinerary, which takes guests through "the secret alleys of Brera and the ancient charm of the '5 Vie'" to discover the city's historic workshops. Among the suggested stops are Pettinaroli, a historic stationery shop, and Antica Barbieria Colla, a traditional barber with roots dating back to the early 20th century.

Visit Milan's design galleries



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Milan's influence on international design extends far beyond the annual Salone del Mobile and Milan Design Week. Throughout the year, the city's galleries and showrooms attract collectors looking for everything from rare 20th-century furniture to experimental contemporary pieces.

For those interested in art, architecture, and interiors, the concierge team at The Carlton, a Rocco Forte hotel, recommends three of the city's leading

design galleries.

First is Nilufar, founded by Nina Yashar. Its gallery on Via della Spiga, in Milan's fashion district, brings together historic furniture, contemporary commissions, and works by emerging international designers. For serious collectors, Nilufar Depot, the gallery's exhibition warehouse space in a former industrial building, is also worth a visit.

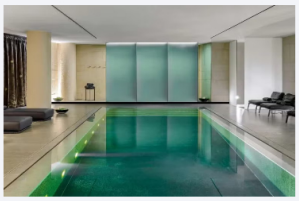
Another recommendation is Rossana Orlandi, described by The Carlton's team as "one of the city's most influential design destinations, known for championing emerging talent and collectible contemporary design." Housed in a former industrial building on Via Matteo Bandello, part showroom, part exhibition space, it's a particularly interesting destination for those looking to discover new creative talent.

Finally, for collectors with a preference for 20th-century design, Robertaebasta in Brera. It specializes in decorative arts, vintage furniture, and collectible design. Founded by Roberta Tagliavini, the gallery specializes in aArt Deco and 20th-century Italian pieces, offering an opportunity to discover rare works by established designers alongside unusual furniture and decorative objects.

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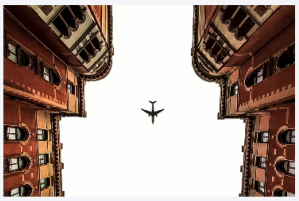
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