

FOREIGN CITIES

Milan and Genoa, Italy

Milan, Center of Chic

Milan is cool, way cool. Everyone knows that major trends in fashion, design and lifestyle often begin here. Take its vibrant bar scene beginning at 6:00 and ending when the last guest goes home. It's de rigueur to go out on the town every night. In many bars, the price of a beer, drink or wine, often just six to eight euros, also buys a buffet that doubles as a delectable dinner and guarantees patrons will be fed as they socialize.



Absolut Icebar Milano

At the town's newest tavern, **Ice Bar**, the temperature registers 27 degrees Fahrenheit, but on the chic meter it breaks the ceiling. We learned of its opening just 10 days before we were to be in Milan and it was the first place we hit after checking in.

The bar in **Piazza Gerusalemme** is equipped with a large ice lens visible from any spot in the square. The blue glow emanating from inside shines through the front window and acts as a beacon guiding patrons toward the door. Not only don't you check your outer clothing at this drinking hole, but

you are provided with more of it--a hooded silver poncho, gloves and boots. Walls, tables, a sofa, a long bar, a hanging bar counter and chandelier are all carved from ice. Because the cold in the bar is a dry one, we felt no discomfort and could easily have stayed longer than the 30-minute limit.

V & S Absolut spirits of Åhus, Sweden is a partner in the project. The drinks are based on its flavored vodkas. Expect to find currant, lemon, pepper and raspberry cocktails served in square glasses carved from ice.

To build the bar, which has to be remade every six months, 50 tons of special ice was hauled from the Sweden's Tome River, 125 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The purity of the river's water is what makes the ice so transparent.

After the maximum stint in the Ice Bar located on the street level of the new **Townhouse 12 Hotel** you can expand the evening with a visit to the second floor **THerrace 12** for another drink and a copious buffet. In keeping with the property's theme, reindeer meat prepared three different ways is served.

Ice Bar, Piazza Gerusalemme, 12, 20154, Milano. Tel. 02 70156
<http://www.townhouse.it/icebar>

Where to Stay

UNA Hotel Tocq, located in the fashionable **Corso Como** section where many young people hang out at night, caters to both leisure and business travelers. Built 14 years ago and refurbished in 1999, its design is very contemporary. The hotel is part of the rapidly expanding Italian UNA Hotels and Resorts. A modest sign "Amgen" at the sleek front desk was the only hint that a conference was going on. Six cheery and colorful meeting rooms are relegated to the downstairs floor.

Oak wood, stainless steel, Plexiglas, glass and arc-shaped curves contribute to a modish look especially in the bar, the most outstanding design feature in the building. Empty decorative frames hanging on the walls of the room make an unusually eye-catching display. The action in the bar is the same as at any hip hotel. At lunchtime a buffet lunch and a few hot dishes are served. At night a spread of tasty bar foods are offered for the price of a drink.



UNA Hotel Tocq Bar

The restaurant, a pleasant space, can be accessed from a dramatic staircase. A very attractive terrace several times the size of the restaurant adjoins it. The restaurant seems mostly to attract

hotel guests. Noodles with wild mushrooms and tomato-based fish stew were outstanding. The grilled sirloin steak was tender but had no flavor and the kitchen was out of the potato-pumpkin tart that the beef had been paired with. When we mentioned this to Massimiliano Varriale, vice director, he said he would make the necessary changes. The breakfast buffet with many choices was most satisfactory.

Our ultra-large and comfortable room and oversized bathroom offered every amenity.

UNA Hotel Tocq, Via A. de Tocqueville, 7/D, 20154 Milano. Tel. 39 02 62 07 1
<http://www.unahotels.it/>

The Westin Palace Milan

The **Luxury Collection** is the top brand among the six divisions of **Starwood Hotels & Resorts**. Of its 13 properties in Italy, most, like the **Westin Palace**, were reconstructed from centuries-old palaces. The modern exterior belies the sumptuous classic interior. The large lobby holds many nooks where guests can socialize or read. **The Lounge**, the hotel's newest bar, has its own version of Milan's happy hour. To accompany drinks individual "Lollypop trays" filled with creative hors d'oeuvres are brought to the table.



The Westin Palace Lobby, Milano

The Heavenly Bed, a concept that originated in the United States has spread to 17 hotels in Europe. The all white bed is made up with a pillow-topped mattress set, three fine cotton sheets, a down blanket, a comforter, a duvet, and two king, two queen and one bolster pillow filled with goose down and feathers. Without a doubt these pillows were the most comfortable we've ever slept on and the bed was indeed heavenly.

Our sprawling deluxe double high-ceilinged room was the size of a suite. It was done in Empire style with a crystal

chandelier, a heavy dose of gold paneling and was worthy of the designation "Luxury." The marble bathroom with grand dimensions had two sinks and a double headed "Heavenly Shower."

Good Morning Elegance, the Luxury Collection's newest program in Italy, partners with the Ermenegildo Zegna. Depending on the length of stay and choice of accommodations, guests

receive a credit toward a purchase at one of the clothing designer's boutiques

We were surprised at the careless turn-down service one evening. The housekeeper had neglected to remove a plate of fruit peels and to refill the tissue box.

The front desk staff was very helpful, with the concierge ready with answers to our many questions and volunteering valuable information. We were told that if you haven't reserved sufficiently in advance (a necessity) to get in to see Da Vinci's Last Supper at the **Church and Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie**, book a half-day sightseeing tour that includes entry to the church. To reserve on your own try <http://www.cenacolovinciano.it/> or 02.89421146.

Westin Palace Milan, Piazza Della Repubblica 20, 20124. Tel. 39 02 6336 3640-1
<http://www.westin.com/palacemilan>

Where to Dine

In a large city, a few short blocks can make a difference. Two quick lefts beyond the intersection of **Via Manzini** and **Via Montenapoleone**, Milan's spirited high-fashion street, in the **Via Privata Fratelli Gabba**, the ambiance flips from charged to tranquil. Looking much like an Italian-style Country House Hotel, the street's sole occupant, the **Bulgari**, is hidden in a large garden, its boundaries further extended by its placement next to the **Botanical Gardens**. But unlike most country houses the hotel celebrates tomorrow rather than today.

Bulgari in Milan is the first hospitality venture between the prestigious jewelry company and the Ritz-Carlton Corporation. As soon as the hotel opened an international crowd came flooding through the door and headed straight to the lounge, which is presently the "happening" place in town.

Attilio Marro, General Manager, showed us around and said that one architectural firm created the building, furnishings, accessories and fabrics. Black, brown and white are the only colors they used. To make all guests feel comfortable, whether they are in jeans or dressed to the nines, the staff wears unstructured uniforms. We looked at one of the inviting guestrooms with its dazzling black matte bathroom as well as the spa and pool lined with golden tiles.



Bar and Garden Bulgari Hotel, Milano

Mr. Marro also mentioned that the garden created with four terraced areas drew several hundred people each summer evening. The carefully chosen trees, shrubs and flowers create an unexpected bucolic atmosphere, unusual for the center of any city.

Mainly we visited the hotel to eat in the restaurant, an elevated half-moon shaped room overlooking the circular bar lined with exotic plants and the gardens beyond. Most of the patrons wore black and many spoke languages other than English and Italian.

Dinner began with an innovative amuse bouche of tasty grilled sardine bruschetta. "Acqua pazza" spaghetti won our applause as it was well executed with fresh seafood, chunks of fish and olives all bound together with a properly spicy tomato sauce. Every grain of rice that swam in a splendid creamy lemon, vanilla flower and herb-based risotto had a velvety texture. Honey and chili pepper roasted baby pig was toothsome. The fat was rendered from the delicate crisp skin leaving it greaseless. In this modern and light rendition of a classic dish, the skin was served separately from the succulent fork-tender flesh. The crudities and yogurt dip that accompanied the entree may have been served to get the attention of the calorie-counting public, but they were not a good choice to complement the meat. An apple tart dessert with raisins, marrons glace and chestnut ice cream was prepared with sponge cake rather than crust, but was just as satisfying. Our server suggested a merlot, Castelo de la Regene 2001, and we were pleased with the choice. The meal was well-paced. Bulgari's restaurant is an excellent example of dinner as theater.

The restrooms, down a flight of stairs and off a confusing corridor were not easy to find. Perhaps

that is why a staff member who escorted us offered to wait. Signs pointing the way there and to the exit are needed.

Bulgari Hotel, Via Privata Fratelli Gabba 7b, 20121, Milano. Tel. 39 02 805805 1,
<http://www.bulgarihotels.com/>

Attractions

Everyone who visits Milan for the first time soon discovers that some of the must-see sites are the **duomo**, **Museo Teatrale alla Scala** and the **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**. Lesser known, but of equal worth is the **Museo Poldi Pezzoli**. Think New York's Frick Museum. Housed in what was once a private residence, the museum's treasures were assembled by Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli in the 19th century. Many of the oils are masterpieces attributed to Botticelli, Tiepolo and Bellini. The variety of high-quality collections—jewels, time pieces, glass, bronze, porcelain, arms, tapestries, lace and furniture—makes this museum unusual.

Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Via Manzoni 12, 20121 Milan. Tel. 02-796334/794889.
<http://www.museopoldipezzoli.it/>

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