

A neighbourhood guide to Milan

The world's fashion capital has long conjured up images of runway shows and haute couture, but tucked away in hidden corners is the real Milan, a treasure trove of museums, public art, jewellers and gin bars.

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It's hard to believe that Milan hasn't always been one of Italy's big hitters. There's Milan Cathedral, a frothy wedding cake of a building dripping in gothic spires and statues. Then there's Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and the grand [Sforza Castle](#). There's food from across Italy, and vintage trams to get around in. But somehow, Milan's reputation as Italy's business and fashion capital has overshadowed its other draws. That's because this is a city where you need to scratch under the surface to find the gold. Through nondescript doorways lurk flower-filled courtyards and cloisters; museums and fashion HQs lie in former 19th-century factories. The real Milan is marvellous — just hit the Metro stops, and look beyond the crowds, to find it.

City centre

At the central point of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II — the world's most gorgeous shopping mall, where arched glass roofs spill over elaborate 19th-century buildings — tourists are swarming round a mosaic of a rearing bull. One by one, they stamp their foot on its balls and spin around.

The ritual, supposedly, brings good luck. And it chokes up the Galleria every day. But I'm watching from a heavenly remove, one floor up.

From [Vikissimo](#) — the restaurant at the Galleria Vik Milano hotel, which opened last year — I can make out individual stones in the roof mosaics, and swarthy caryatids propping up the building. It's a new perspective on one of the city's most recognised monuments.

But that's the thing about Milan: there's a city for tourists, and one for the Milanese. Even in the centre, right by the Duomo cathedral, the locals' one lurks in plain sight.

I leave Vik, and force through the crowds to a discreet door beside the Prada store. An emerald, marble-clad lift whisks me up to the sixth floor and opens onto the [Milan Osservatorio](#), a photography exhibition space founded by Miuccia Prada, cantilevered over the Galleria. Downstairs, it's bedlam; up here, I'm among a handful of smartly dressed people, dipping their eyes from the exhibits to the glass arches billowing below us.



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. Here, tourists stamp their feet on the mosaic of a rearing bull and spin around for good luck.

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Essentials

Airlines offering direct flights from the UK to Milan's three airports (Malpensa, Bergamo and Linate) include [Easyjet](#), [Ryanair](#), [British Airways](#) and [Alitalia](#). [Galleria Vik Milano](#) has doubles from £321 a night, B&B. [yesmilano.it](#)