

*Cutting-Edge Shopping and a Restaurant Extraordinaire*

## THE MILANESE EXPERIENCE

Milan, Lombardy, Italy

**A** must-see for shopaholics, the incomparable Via Montenapoleone and its offshoots are at the heart of the single most fashionable retail acre in the world. Shopping this exclusive "golden triangle" of showcase-studded streets is heaven for those with deep pockets and purgatory for those reduced to window-shopping. The city's tireless preoccupation with fashion, interior design, architecture, and food is showcased in this chic neighborhood—from the sleek boutiques of the high priests and priestesses of *la moda italiana* to landmark 19th-century tearooms and gourmet food stores. Window displays are either over-the-top extravagant or Zen-like in their simplicity, ditto the stores' interiors—everything is up to the nanosecond in this city that sets the trends and blazes the trail.

Whether you're laden down with designer-labeled acquisitions or just plain exhausted by the day's visual overkill, the only place to park your bags is at Milan's Four Seasons Hotel, a quiet oasis at the very hub of Montenapoleone's shopping strip. The order of nuns that established this former convent in 1450 did not take leave until the late 18th century. The cloistered villa has been transformed into a top-class 21st-century hotel—a unique space both calming and luxurious. This means fragments of exposed frescoes, ancient columns, and vaulted ceilings, but also exquisite guest rooms with spacious marbled baths and heated floors, acclaimed restaurants, and the casually elegant lobby (the convent's former chapel) that attracts local Milanese and hotel guests alike—both a mirror of the city and a haven from it.

Top off a stylish day with dinner at the delightful Aimo e Nadia, located in a nondescript corner of the city. The well-known husband-and-wife owners have been together

since their childhood in a village near Tuscany's Lucca, and today they share the cooking and tending of the garden that provides the kitchen's wonderfully fresh and savory ingredients. Much of the daily-changing menu hints of their Tuscan roots, but to dine here is to experience Italian cuisine at its purest and dishes that keep the house full of loyal patrons.

**WHAT:** experience, hotel, restaurant.  
**FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MILANO:** Via Gesù 8, between Via Montenapoleone and Via della Spiga. Tel 39/02-77-088, fax 39/02-77-08-50-07; milano@fourseasons.com; www.fourseasons.com/Milan. Cost: doubles from \$460. **AIMO E NADIA:** Via Montecuccoli 6. Tel 39/02-41-68-86, fax 39/02-48-30-20-05; www.aimoenadia.com. Cost: dinner \$90. *When: Mon-Sat.*



*The Four Seasons Hotel Milano*

*The Country's Masterpiece Gothic Confection*

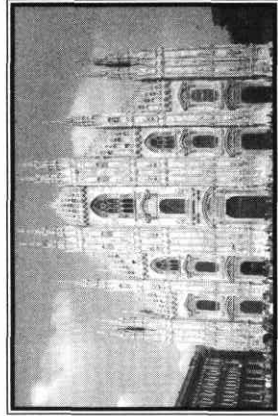
## IL DUOMO

Milan, Lombardy, Italy

**F**or sheer size and shock value, few buildings surpass Milan's Duomo. It is the world's largest Gothic cathedral (the only larger cathedral in any style is St. Peter's in Rome), begun in 1386 under the Viscontis and not

vator to the roof offers the chance to stroll amid the fanciful forest of white marble pinnacles (which take on a rose tinge if the light is right) and to study the flying buttresses up close. There are stunning views over Italy's most frenetic city, while a glimpse of the Swiss Alps 50 miles away can be had when the notorious Milanese fog and pollution aren't obliterating the view. The interior is spartan and almost always virtually empty despite the potential seating for 40,000—whom were they expecting? Shelley swore this was the best place anywhere to read Dante as it remains naturally cool even during the hottest of afternoons. True, if you can ignore the gruesome statue of St. Bartolomeo who, flayed alive, is depicted holding his own skin.

**WHAT:** site. **WHERE:** Piazza Duomo. **COST:** admission to roof and elevator.



*The cathedral dominates Milan's main square.*

completed until 100 years ago. Its 135 marble spires and 2,245 marble statues could keep you busy looking at it for days, though well-heeled Milanese women, Zegna-suited gents, and too-cool teens pass through the spacious piazza without giving this mad wedding-cake confection so much as a fare-thee-well. An ele-

*One of Leonardo's Most Powerful Works*

## THE LAST SUPPER

Milan, Lombardy, Italy

**W**here else can you tell a taxicab driver the name of a painting as your destination, and expect to get there? Every self-respecting Milanese, cabbie or not, knows the location of Leonardo da Vinci's *Il Cenacolo*

(*The Last Supper*), one of the world's most famous images, tucked away in the Gothic church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The entire country closely followed the painstaking twenty-year restoration that was completed in 1999. On a wall in what once was the refectory

of the church's adjacent convent, Leonardo created this powerful 28-foot mural. Capturing the emotion-packed moment of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, it began to deteriorate almost immediately following its completion in 1495. Its recent restoration was as controversial as that of the Sistine Chapel, with some historians claiming that precious little has survived of the original painting or coloring, having been re- (and mis-) interpreted a little too zealously over time by countless restorers (there have been seven restorations since

1726); others herald it as a milestone of patience and craftsmanship. There is no missing that it is one of Leonardo's finest works, one whose every brushstroke revealed the "intentions of the soul." He searched for years among the city's criminals for Judas's face; the result, art historian Giorgio Vasari declared, was "the very embodiment of treachery and inhumanity."

**WHAT:** site. **WHERE:** Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie, Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie. **COST:** admission. **WHEN:** Tues–Fri.

### *The World's Favorite Opera House*

## LA SCALA OPERA HOUSE (TEATRO ALLA SCALA)

Milan, Lombardy, Italy

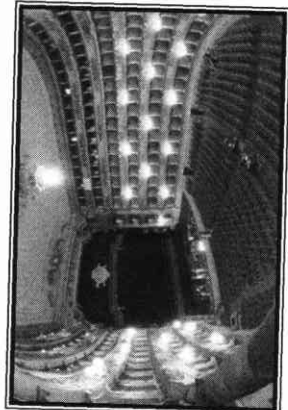
**I**t is December 7, opening night at La Scala, and all of Milan is here, dressed to the nines: a well-heeled, passionate, and impossible-to-please audience as theatrical as the opera onstage. After 1,000 days of intensive and painstaking

renovation, the world's most famous opera house reopened in 2004 to the astonishment and heartfelt approval of many, the untested star at its own reopening night. Designed by Giuseppe Piermarini and originally opened in 1778, the highlights of La Scala's \$78 million renovation are the outstanding acoustics (already considered some

of the finest anywhere) and the drastic re-creation of the backstage area, now a showcase of twenty-first-century technology. This gilt-and-velvet jewel box has hosted the best of the opera world from its earliest days, a tradition sustained today under the musical direction of Riccardo Muti. Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff* premiered here, as well as Puccini's *Turandot* and Bellini's *Norma*. Maria Callas sang here more than anywhere else. Included in the top-to-toe renovation, the intimate Museo alla Scala, a must-see for opera lovers, has reopened in its original location (entrance is on Largo Ghiringhelli).

**WHAT:** site, event. **WHERE:** Via Filodrammatici 2, Piazza alla Scala. Tel 39/02-720-037-44; [www.teatroallascala.org](http://www.teatroallascala.org).

**WHEN:** Opera season runs from Dec 7 through July; ballet and concerts other months.



*La Scala, in a splendid renovation.*