

New reasons to linger in Milan

TRENDING

BY SHIVANI VORA

Milan is known as Italy's fashion and business capital, but as a leisure destination like Florence, Rome and Venice? Not so much — at least according to Maurizio Naro, the president of the Provincial Hotel Association of Milan. He said Milan “is typically thought of as a place for business, not vacation, and international tourists tended to not include a visit to the city as part of their grand tour to Italy.”

Lately, however, this trend seems to be changing. According to data from the association, which represents 200, or about half, of the city's hotels, the average length of stay in Milan has doubled in the last two years to two days. Hotels say much of the increase is coming from a growing number of leisure travelers.

Some hoteliers say Milan's recent appeal as a vacation destination is because the city hosted the World Expo with the theme “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” in 2015. “The Expo put Milan in the limelight, and we started to see more people who wanted to stay and explore the city instead of just passing through it,” said Luca Finardi, the general manager of the Mandarin Oriental, Milan.

While “The Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci and the Gothic-style Duomo may be Milan's best-known attractions, several new and innovative tours give travelers additional incentives to linger in town.

The leather tour from Elesta Travel is an opportunity to learn about Italy's long history of producing leather goods. The two-and-a-half-hour guided excursion begins at the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum, which has a notable collection of handmade Italian leather goods from the 15th and 16th centuries. Also included is a visit to a shoe atelier, where shoemakers continue to maintain the centuries-old tradition of hand-stitching footwear. Information at info@elesta-travel.it; 350 euros, or \$400, for up to eight people.

Fashion fans may appreciate the Altgamma Ermenegildo Zegna experience, offered in partnership with the Altgamma Foundation, a group that promotes Italian brands. The excursion is at the Ermenegildo Zegna flagship store in the center of Milan. Guests will meet the director of retail, Vittorio Proietti, who will relay the history of the fashion house, which is more than a century old. Then, in the store's couture room, they will see a private fashion show highlighting the latest Zegna men's and women's collections. Similar Altgamma tours are available in Milan for six other brands including the fashion house Gucci and the housewares company Alessi. Prices from €1,200. Book by emailing info@altgammaitalianexperiences.com.

Milan has a growing microbrewery scene, and with the Milan Beers and Bites Walking Tour, offered by Viator, travelers head to the city's Navigli district to learn about Italian craft beer. A guide takes them to four bars along and

near the Naviglio Grande canal for tastes of lagers, IPAs, wheat beers and more. Samples of fried fish and local cheese are included. The price is €59 a person; book by calling 855-275-5071.

Children between 5 and 14 are the focus of Perfetto Traveler's Milanese History Lesson for Kids tour. Highlights include a scavenger hunt at Sforza Castle, which has frescoed ceilings by da Vinci; a soccer game at Parco Sempione, where locals gather to unwind; a visit to “The Last Supper,” where a guide will tell a story about how the painting was created; a trip to a popular bakery to sample local desserts; and a blind taste test of gelatos. The tour can be tailored to the ages of the participating children. From €630 euros for two people. Book by emailing info@perfettotraveler.com or by calling 212-340-0306.

Hotels in Milan are also offering new tours, although most are just for overnight guests. The Mandarin Oriental, Milan, has an excursion to the Pinacoteca di Brera art museum on Mondays, when the museum is closed to the public; the tour is led by one of Pinacoteca's educators or curators, who tailor the visit according to the interests of guests. Tickets are €250 a person. In addition, for guests staying in a suite, the hotel is offering a private tour with one of the museum's restorers, who will relay the process of restoring the Pinacoteca's masterpieces like the oil painting “Lo Sposalizio Della Vergine” by Raphael. Tickets, €600 a person; nightly rates from €590. Reserve by emailing momln-reservations@mohg.com.



The Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan has a notable collection of leather goods.

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