

Day 4 - 12th September

Milan Cathedral



Milan Cathedral

Milan is famous for the enormous white marble Cathedral which was started in 1386, but only completed in 1897. It is one of the largest Gothic cathedrals in the world, and amazing to visit. It is a jaw dropping moment as you step through the bronze door portals, after having a security bag check, to see the pillars of the Cathedral with sculptured figures circling the top of every pillar. A rehearsal is taking place so music wafts through the holy space. We descend to the Baptistry which has the 1st octagonal basin in Christendom from 378. The stained glass and chapels make up this colossal masterpiece. We climb the stairs to the terraces of the Cathedral and see some of the 3400 statues that adorn it and walk on the marble sloping roof down to a forest of pinnacles taking a somewhat hair raising climb up more marble steps to the plateau of the roof to see the golden Virgin Mary at 108.5m high (365 feet) on the spire, glinting in the hot sun!

By the Cathedral is the Museum of Mecento, which houses 20th century art including Mussolini's Arengario. We walk up on a space ship like spiral ramp to see paintings by Campigli, de Chirico, Picasso and Umberto Boccioni.

Next door is the Royal Palazzo Reale with a futuristic exhibition, but also the tapestries and ceilings of the restored Royal Palace. The other spectacular building in the Cathedral Piazza is the 1877 Gallery Vittorio Emanuele II which his buzzing with people shopping and eating. The architect was G Mengoni (the last architect to work on the Cathedral), and there are lovely part moon mosaics. An impressive arcade in a cross, and well worth a rest in a café!

Lunch

We enjoyed a delicious Frittata slice with spinach from the Panificio del Centro SRL delicatessen at via Bigli 21, accessible only on foot and serving a wide selection of traditional Italian dishes and pastries to take away or eat in. Many local workers bought lunch from this shop.

Gardens, Galleries and Churches...

We visited the Botanical gardens where art students are sitting exams in the Palazzo Brera (a famous art gallery not open today). The nearby Museum of Poldi Pessoli is wonderful, even though it was bombed in the war, the paintings and artifacts were saved. The last room, Dante study with frescoes and colourful stained glass windows shows what it must have been like.

We popped in some churches and can recommend St Mark's Church (1254) with a wonderful fresco in the right chapel by Giovanni Lomazzo, plus a canvas by Legnanino. Martin Luther and the young Amadeus Mozart both worshipped here. Another painting of the Madonna with child in her arms is in the Master School of Leonardo da Vinci.

We saw an exhibition about Leonardo da Vinci at the Museum of Art and Sciences, about how in the 1480's Ludovico Sforzo was ruler of Milan and sponsored Leonardo to design a Great Horse statue in Milan, now more recently created in a Milan garden. Also looking at the much restored 1495 Last Supper which was not painted to last in tempera on stone in a nearby church in Milan. The exhibition also looked at how to tell an art fake. Did you know that woodworm holes are different sizes from different locations?!

A great day in Milan!

We walk back rather hot and tired through the cool and shady back streets, and through the public garden from the old city back to the hotel, taking in the oldest church from the 4th century built by Bishop Ambrose, the Basilica San Simpliciano. It has been a wonderful full day exploring Milan, and well worth the visit.

A good inter rail stop with plenty to see for longer if you had time to stay for a few days, plus you can get a discount on the Milan sightseeing bus with your rail ticket.

Milan Market

