



Milan has been an important city for well over 2,000 years. It was a significant political and commercial center for the Roman Empire, and it has maintained that position ever since. The name *Milan* comes from an ancient word meaning "the center of the plain." It's a reference to the fact that Milan was built in the middle of the Po Valley Plain, a crossing point for a number of roads that came down out of the Alps and connected to the commercial trade routes in what is now Italy.

Today, Milan is an industrial powerhouse. It is the financial and commercial center of Italy, a focus for electronics, publishing, television, textiles, international trade-fairs and fashion. This is the fashion center of the world.

Milan became the fashion center of Europe right after the Second World War. Americans were the only people with enough money to buy good clothes, and they wanted things that were easy to wear and not expensive. Paris wanted to stay with the costly stuff. Italy saw their chance and started making fashionable clothes at half the price of the French. And they were able to keep pace with fashions.

The commercial tone for the city of Milan was set all the way back in the Middle Ages. During the 300s a bishop by the name of Ambrose was also the governor of Milan. He was a talented administrator with a very clear idea of how things should be done. He built a strong and powerful administration with one major objective: to get rich. He also didn't think much of the idea of separating church and state. He felt he had to control everything that was going on in the government and everything that was going on in the church. And clearly that was okay with the people of Milan because today he is

known as Saint Ambrose, and he is the patron saint of this city.

The church of Sant'Ambrogio was originally founded in the year 379 and is an excellent example of medieval architecture. Saint Ambrose felt that acquiring wealth during your lifetime was not only acceptable in heaven, but if you spent some of

your money on good works for the church you might even end up with superior accommodations in the afterlife... a thought which led the wealthiest



families of Milan to put up the money for the construction of some splendid churches and some magnificent religious art. It made good business sense -- put a little aside now and enjoy it later. It was sort of a pension plan for Paradise.



The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele was built in 1865 and it is one of the earliest buildings to use a system of holding glass in place with cast iron. It was the prototype for the

covered malls of the 20th century and today is filled with shops and cafes.

One of the most elegant streets in Milan is Via Monte Napoleone, and every day it attracts thousands of tourists looking for something with a designer label. But if you're looking for great design without a fancy label, let me suggest a short detour.

Just 100 yards down a side street at Via Gesù Number 5 is the Museo Bagatti Valsecchi. It's a 16th century Italian palazzo, filled with

authentic furnishings and objects from the Renaissance. During the middle of the 1800s, two brothers, Fausto and Giuseppe Bagatti Valsecchi, decided that they wanted to live in a place that was just like a noble family's household during the Renaissance. This is what they built. It's open to the public and it's the real thing.

DR. LUCIA DINA:

Specialist in Italian Renaissance art

This Palazzo was built personally by the two brothers, they superintended all of the work of the building, restoration, furnishings.

For example, here we have an arch which was built in the nineteenth century and it was in the Renaissance style... you see the classical round arch and the



two columns, but then, what they did was they inserted those two medallions. Those are authentic. They were made in the fifteenth century and they were bought by the two brothers in the antique market. So instead of just putting them on the wall, they really gave them life again and they framed it in and out. And they personally designed the arch and setting of all the things inside here.

They did not have a degree in architecture, but they were very good at drawings and they were very passionate about art. So here we are in Fausto's bedroom and this is his bed. It was made in northern Italy in sixteenth century. Quite comfortable.

It was actually a part of an altar which was then transformed into a bed. So it's really a work of art. You can see Christ's ascent to Calvary. You can see it



was something which belonged to a church actually. And I know this room is a bit gloomy...

We wanted to preserve it like this with the same atmosphere because it was the taste of the nineteenth century, sort of romantic, dark, gloomy taste. But we must

not think that Fausto was a gloomy person, he was a very lively person. He was a bachelor. He had many girlfriends. In Fausto's private bathroom, and it was not only the tub, but also the shower. And on the ceiling, you can see that one of the roses was actually made of iron and it was the shower. It was a very modern invention for that time. And the inspiration came from a very famous painting which is now kept in Brera, the Museum of Brera in Milan, it was made by Piero della Francesca in the fifteenth century, and when the brothers saw the painting they thought it was a good model for their shower and tub. So this is how the whole thing came out. So this is the Arms and Armors Gallery. It was very fashionable in that time to recreate the classical Armors Gallery with all the antique art and armor.

So during the Renaissance you had to be very careful about your weight. You couldn't just gain a couple of extra pounds and go into the tailor and say "Hey, Tony, would you let it out, I put on a little weight at lunch!" I guess you could let it out, but it would cost you a fortune.

THE LOMBARDIAN PLATE

During the 700's Charlemagne came into the neighborhood and set himself up as king. Then Barbarossa arrived and sacked the place. In the 1500s the French took over, followed by the Austrians, and then the Spanish. Then a second period of domination by the French under Napoleon and finally a second period of domination by the Austrians. Lombardia didn't actually become part of Italy until 1859. A difficult history in terms of power and politics but very tasty in terms of what each of the invaders brought to the Lombardian plate.



Today, Lombardia is the third-richest province in Europe, and Milan, its regional capital, is the country's financial center. But it's also the heart of an important agricultural area, and the source of some of Italy's best cooking.

The Spanish arrived in the middle of the 1500s' and during their two-hundred-years of rule they

Milan, Italy

introduced rice-growing to northern Italy, along with the recipe which eventually became risotto. The Spanish also imported saffron. Together these two ingredients produce *Risotto alla Milanese*, one of the most traditional dishes of the city. The Spanish also brought in *Cassoela*, a dish of braised pork, sausages and cabbage. The Milanese consider *Cassoela* as one of their great comfort foods.

The Austrians took over from the Spanish in the early 1700's, and you can see their influence in a dish like *Costoletta Milanese*, a pounded and breaded veal chop with the bone in, sautéed in butter. Very similar to the schnitzel dishes of Austria and Germany.

And when the French House of Savoy took a turn in the kitchen they left their *Brioche* recipe with the Italian bakers.

The Milanese took the pastries of France and Austria and invented a shop that is a combination bakery, pastry shop, candy store and coffee bar. And they're one of the great pleasures for both local residents and visitors. And in response to the mid-day rush of a modern commercial center, the Milanese have adopted the sandwich, which they've modified to meet their own idea of what a quick lunch should be.

Other classic recipes from Milan include *Minestrone alla Milanese*, a vegetable soup that has become a favorite throughout Italy. *Ossobuco alla Milanese*, braised veal shank cooked with garlic, parsley, and lemon zest. *Bollito Misto*, a collection of boiled meats and one of the great winter dishes. *Polenta*, made from corn meal, is Italy's answer to grits. It's served as a soft mush or dried and cut into blocks, and then sautéed.

The cows of Lombardia give excellent milk which is used to make butter, which is used for much of the cooking instead of oil. The local dairy farmers also produce a wide selection of cheeses; their most famous is a fresh Gorgonzola.



SWEETS TO THE SWEET

Italy is famous for its sweets, both its confections and pastries, and there are historical reasons for this notoriety.

For thousands of years, honey was the primary sweetening in the human diet. And during those years, it became a symbol for goodness and purity.

For centuries, honey lived its sweet life without competition. And then, in the 11th century, things began to change. Sugar arrived from the east, and western food has never been the same.

We know that for at least 2,000 years sugar has been in use in both the Near East and the Far East. And the Arabs brought it to Sicily and Spain during the 700s. But nobody in Europe really paid much attention to sugar until the time of the Crusades. The Crusaders got a really good look at the stuff in Tripoli and very soon thereafter it was being imported to Europe by the traders in Venice. But for over four-hundred-years, it was rare, it was expensive, it was used only as a spice or a medicine, and only by the very rich.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning of its use in Europe, we can document an increase in the number of recipes using sugar. Our sweet tooth had begun to grow. And when sugar production got started in the Caribbean, the sugar business took off. Suddenly there was a clear increase in the use of sugar in place of honey. As sugar became more and more available, and at a lower and lower price, the general public began to use it as much as possible.

Sugar made them feel that they were eating like a king. And sugar became an important item of international trade, which was never the case with honey. Sugar was big business, and it was a sweet deal for the governments that taxed it. Sugar became the first luxury to end up as a mainstay in the diet of an entire continent.

But even in the early years when sugar was coming into Europe as a rare and expensive



WHERE TO STAY

In 1987 the Four Seasons group purchased an 18th century palazzo in the most fashionable district of Milan, and started converting it into a small hotel. As the construction got underway the workmen discovered columns that looked considerably older than the palazzo. Then a fresco showed up that was clearly from the Renaissance. Within days, they realized that beneath the palazzo was a complete cloister that had belonged to a convent founded in 1428. The original plans for the building were given up. A new design was made and based on the ancient structure. The cloister became the center of the hotel. The lobby is the original chapel. The public and private rooms surround a garden that was modeled on 15th century period drawings.

Everything about the hotel is quiet and restful and the nuns would have enjoyed that aspect. But they were an order that avoided the comforts of life, so there's no telling how they would have responded to one of the most luxurious properties in Italy. Twenty-four-hour room service. Twenty-four-hour concierge service. A staff devoted to comforting their guests. A restaurant that has become a favorite of local food lovers as well as the residents of the hotel. It's quite possible that the nuns might have none of this. On the other hand, Saint Ambrose, the patron saint of Milan, was into the good life and he would have loved it. Especially the cooking.



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spice, the Italians were developing pastry and candy recipes that used sugar as the sweetening agent. The Italians also began to develop an international reputation for their skill with sugar. They were so well thought of in this area that up until the last century it was the custom for wealthy households to employ Italian pastry cooks and confectioners along with their French chefs.

Many of the early European specialists in pastry and confectionery were from northern Italy. They had learned about sugar from the Arabs who were living in Sicily and from the Crusaders who brought it back here in the 1100s. They also had easy access to the spices that were coming in through Venice. One of the earliest recorded examples of their skills



deals with a recipe for a cake called Panettone. There are lots of stories about how Panettone got started but the most popular is set here in Milan in 1490.

For many years Panettone was a traditional Christmas gift given by the businessmen of Milan to their employees. Today it is a favorite cake throughout Italy and eaten throughout the year.

NEW WORLD FOOD

Chocolate is a New World food that was first shown to Europeans when the Mexican emperor Montezuma gave a sample to the Spanish explorer Cortez. When it got back to Spain it was held as a court secret for over a hundred years inside the royal household and the churches. Until a group of traveling monks got their hands on some of it and brought it back to Italy, where it was mixed with sugar and spice and everything nice that was being imported by the traders in Venice.

Milan, Italy

Chocolate in the form of candy became an important part of Italian confection. It shows up in a number of famous forms. Two of the most popular are Baci and Gianduiotti. Gianduiotti is a mixture of chocolate, cocoa powder, sugar, and hazelnuts and it's always presented in this distinct shape. It was introduced in 1852 in the northern Italian city of Torino in the district of Piedmont. The chocolate is named after *Gian d'la duja*, a symbol of the struggle for freedom and independence that was fought in the Piedmont at the end of the 1700s.



Baci is the Italian word for "kisses," and it has been applied to this candy since 1907.

Young Giovanni Buitoni had been sent by his family to set up a candy factory in Perugia. Luisa Spagnoli was the product developer.

They fell in love but were forced to keep their relationship a secret. They exchanged their messages of love by wrapping notes in the chocolate samples that they sent up and back between them. Today Baci contains a message of love in every package to commemorate that relationship.

The final chapter in the book of Italian sweets contains the biscotti, the amaretti and the cantuccini. The baking of biscotti in Italy became important during the 1600s when the Venetian navy began searching for foods that would not go bad at sea. They realized that dried cookies would be perfect and set up a Biscotti Procurement Office. I would have liked to have worked there. During the 1800s the manufacturers widened their audience, in more ways than one, by marketing their biscotti to the upper classes. They designed all of their packaging to attract the rich and famous. Biscotti, by the way, is not the Italian word for "biscuit;" it means "twice baked."

Amaretti are light, crisp confections made from egg whites, sugar and the ground kernels of apricots. They were invented in 1789 to surprise the Bishop of Milan, who was surprising the people of Saronna with a surprise visit.

Cantuccini are almond cookies that were



originally developed in Tuscany but are now popular all over Italy. Like biscotti they are twice-baked. You take cantuccini dough and you roll it out into a tube, bake it, take it out of the oven, then slice it along the diagonal to get little disks like this. They're laid out on a tray and baked a second time. Biscotti and cantuccini tend to come to the table at the end of a meal to be taken with coffee or dipped into sweet wine.

MUSIC TO MY EARS

Castello Sforzesco is a huge fortified castle and the 15th century home of the Sforza family. The most famous of the clan was Francesco, a mercenary who became the Duke of Milan, and would duke it out with anybody if the money was right. An iron hand in an iron glove. Today the old



homestead is a museum with paintings, sculpture, and craftwork. What most visitors to the Castello don't see is one of the world's great collections of antique musical instruments, and its just down the hall.



The antique instrument collection at the Castello is only a small part of what Milan has to offer in terms of music. Milan is also the home of the most famous opera house in the world, Teatro alla Scala. It was built on

the site of an old church called Santa Maria della Scala, "Saint Mary of the Steps," and that is the origin of the theater's name.

La Scala opened in 1778 with a work written by Antonio Salieri. He was the court composer in Vienna, and the teacher of Beethoven,

Schubert and Liszt. But in the end, he will probably be remembered as the bad guy who tried to kill Mozart in the film *Amadeus*. Such is the power of the media.



La Scala was the home field for the great composers of Italian opera -- Verdi, Donizetti and Bellini. Puccini used La Scala for the presentation of *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, *Tourandot*, and *Madame Butterfly*. In 1920 Arturo Toscanini became the artistic director of La Scala and during a period of reconstruction he took the orchestra on tour to North America. That gave La Scala an international reputation.

Attached to the main theater is a museum that contains an extensive collection of objects relating to the history of Italian opera.

The first Italian opera was presented in 1594. It had grown out of the little musical spectacles that were being presented in the homes of the aristocracy to mark an important occasion: something like a birth, or a wedding, or a royal visit. Eventually they became full-blown drama set to music. They also moved out of the homes and into the public theater at which point they became more varied, more dramatic, and more violent.



The opera season at La Scala runs for six months and starts each year on the 7th of December, which is the birthday of St. Ambrose, the patron saint of

Milan. Getting a ticket through the box office is almost impossible. But if a visit to La Scala is your dream, you might consider the services of the *baggarini*. The *baggarini* are highly specialized dealers who traffic in opera tickets. They pay students to stand on line at the box office, often for days at a time. The tickets that are purchased by the students are turned over to the dealers, who resell them for between two and five times

the original price. Consult with the concierge at a good hotel, and they can usually direct you to the services of the *baggarini*. But don't say I didn't warn you about the price!

Well, that's a quick look at the Italian city of Milan -- world famous for business and fashion -- but when you get to know the place, you find out that it's just as important in terms of history, art, music, and great food.



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