

Where to Stay

The lowdown on getting your head down.

Where to Stay



Townhouse Galleria is where the serious shopper stays when in Milan. See *p41*.

Well-heeled corporate customers flock from all over Europe to Italy's commercial capital. Whether in textiles, engineering or banking, they nearly all have one thing in common: they're not the ones paying for the room.

What does this mean for the visitor looking for a place to stay at? For one thing, a preponderance of large establishments in the upper price brackets and a shortage of small, inexpensive options. On the up side, though, there's usually plenty of room available on Saturdays and Sundays, often at special rates: you may be surprised just how special if you ask about weekend rates when you book, or check online. Similarly, around Christmas and in summer, rates drop like a stone, with the odd five-star room going for a mere €99 in August.

Since Milan models itself as a design and fashion centre, many of its hotels have been modelled as chic, minimalist establishments. The rise in recent years of the boutique, boundary-crossing and price-busting hotel has been nothing less than staggering (see *p47 Hip replacement*). Some high-end guestrooms look like NASA space pods; others, like contemporary art showrooms.

Outside the slack summer period, booking in advance is absolutely essential. As well as the constant flow of business travellers, thousands from all over Italy and further afield descend on Milan to attend trade fairs, and prices go up during these periods: the key events are the fashion shows, four times a year (mid February and late September for the women's collections, mid January and late June for men's); and the annual furniture fair, Salone Internazionale del Mobile (mid April).

Milan also suffers from a shortage of parking spaces. Few hotels have their own car park (in this chapter, we have indicated where this is the case), although many have deals with local garages for overnight parking. The price of this service varies considerably, but can be as high as €50 per day. That said, a car is superfluous in compact Milan: there's an efficient public transport system, and your hotel can call you a taxi if you must arrive in style.

STANDARDS AND PRICES

Opting for a three-star or above is likely to reduce the risk of unpleasant surprises – although bear in mind that huge differences

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exist between the best and worst deals in each category, especially at the cheaper end, and higher prices do not guarantee better service. Shop around. We've listed what we consider to be some of the best budget options below. Some of the worst are not worth thinking about.

There's more than one way to get the best deal. Booking online lets you compare a host of similarly equipped and similarly located hotels. Websites like www.venere.it and www.booking.com have good coverage of Milan, and www.tripadvisor.com has a function that searches for the cheapest rate on all the relevant booking engines. If you're coming for more than a few days, call and ask about long-term rates. Hotels are very open to this in Milan, especially moderately and lower priced ones. Finally, *solo soldi neri sono soldi veri* ('only black money is real money'): cheaper hotels often offer discounts for cash.

Most hotels in the city include breakfast in the price. In a country where a *caffè e brioche* (coffee and a croissant) is the early starter of choice, a hotel breakfast is normally a simple buffet of sliced cheeses, hams and jams. If you're asked to pay extra for breakfast, you may be better off going to a local bar instead.

If you arrive at Malpensa or Linate airports and have nowhere to stay, avoid the travel agency desks. They will book a hotel for you, but the choice is limited to places that pay the agency a commission, and the cost will be passed on to you. The tourist information centre (piazza Duomo 19, 02 7740 4343, www.provincia.milano.it/turismo) by the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II can no longer provide a list of hotel details, although their website has the name, telephone number and up-to-date price of every one.

Duomo & Centre

Expensive

The Gray

Via San Raffaele 1 (02 720 8951/www.hotellthegray.it). Metro Duomo/tram 1, 2. Rates €520-€680 double. Rooms 21. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V. Map p252 E6 1

The Gray, together with the STRAF (see p41), represents one of the latest Milanese trends in high-end hostelry. Despite the name (chosen by architect Guido Ciampi), little is half-tone here: the dominant colour scheme backs neutral colours with splashes

1 Green numbers given in this chapter correspond to the location of each hotel as marked on the street maps. See pp248-252.

of electrifying vibrancy. The clean-lined rooms – three of which look out to Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II – are sleek, contemporary and equipped with enormous TVs and jacuzzis. One room has its own Turkish bath, and two have private gyms. The hotel also has its own chic restaurant, Le Noir. Bar. Concierge. Disabled-adapted rooms. Internet (high speed/wireless). No-smoking rooms. Restaurant. Room service. TV.

Park Hyatt Milan

Via Tommaso Grossi 1 (02 8821 1234/<http://milan.park.hyatt.com>). Metro Cordusio or Duomo/tram 1, 2. Rates €500-€600 double. Rooms 117. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V. Map p251 E6/p252 E6 2

Carved out of an old bank building, the Park Hyatt is an exercise in serenity and elegant simplicity. The courtyard was covered over with glass to create a splendid top-lit lounge; the warm, beige rooms are equipped with generously proportioned bathrooms (around the same size as the sleeping area) and modern luxuries such as flat-screen TVs and free internet. Relaxing treatments are available in the small

The best Hotels

For celeb-spotting

Four Seasons Hotel Milano (see p44).

For your own swimming pool

Principe di Savoia (see p41).

For oligarchs

Townhouse Galleria (see p41).

For design hounds

3Rooms (see p43).

For booze hounds

STRAF (see p41).

For eco-warriors

Ariston (see p46).

For sheer luxury

Bulgari (see p41).

For a home away from home

Foresteria Monforte (see p45).

For those not paying

Grand Hotel et de Milan (see p44).

For French chic

Petit Palais (see p46).

For Asian chic

Vietnamonamour (see p45).

For euro-pinchers

Hotel Aspromonte (see p45).

Hip replacement

In times past, Milan was swimming in elegant *grande dame* hotels, relics of House of Savoy tastes; but thanks to the conference industry, it gained more nondescript 1970s business hotels than there are pigeons in piazza Duomo. But now (and long overdue), a design hotel tide has been sweeping over Milan's massive accommodation industry. In a business where the word 'hip' is woefully overused, and the term 'boutique' has come to mean a vase of lilies in reception, Milan has injected some of its style capital into a new wave of überhotels. The eagerly awaited launch of the Armani Hotel in 2009 will cap a decade of groundbreaking design.

The first post-millennial attempts to fuse style with necessity came off expensively and starkly. **The Gray** (see p39) went bravely forward with neutral tones, combined with hard lines and the odd splash of bold colour – and if it weren't for the playful touches like suspended beds and sexy but trashy white leather partitions, the project could have come off as seriously overdesigned. Then **STRAF** (see p41) softened the heavy urban

style with appealingly hippyish aromatherapy seats and personal fitness centres. Both were priced at over €500 a night, which made them as much of an eye-opener for Milan's hotel owners as for the guests.

Then, in 2006, two personalised options took boutique to a new level. The inexpensive **Foresteria Monforte** (see p45) launched a suite-only concept, where visitors are served breakfast in bed, and share a petite kitchen in case they want to chill their own champagne rather than pay minibar prices. Guests at the **Townhouse Galleria** (see p41), meanwhile, can recast the upper level of their duplex suite as a children's playroom, or as an office with printer and Italian mobile phone waiting on the desk. Prices nudge €1,000 a night, but the location and discreet entry system are cooler than cool (although you do still have to pay for drinks in the minibar).

Perhaps surprisingly, given Milan's ability to cherry-pick the finest international products, **Vietnamonamour** (see p45) and the **Petit Palais** (see p46), both opened in 2004,

were the city's first hotels with a pronounced overseas flavour. The former is a calm fusion of furniture from a Balinese beach hut and Milanese designer fittings; the latter has reinvented Louis XVI chic.

Finally, north and south of the city centre, the conference hotel standard has been smashed by two hotels offering a slicker business trip option. **The Chedi** (see p43) near the Triennale Bovisa has been winning awards since 2007. Its staff are bright, bubbly and well-trained, not bored, narky and dim. The Asian gardens are a delight, and with rooms from €99, it's certainly affordable. The previous year saw the opening of **NHOW** (see p46), handy for the fashion crowd by the Prada offices in southern Milan. The entrance features transparent plastic chandeliers and polished concrete floors, guaranteed to appeal to any design aficionado. It's still good to see a bit of good old-fashioned style over substance, however: trendy beanbags have replaced chairs in the foyer's business area.



NHOW.