

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

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Be a Tourist
In Milan

Italy's fashion capital isn't all business. Pleasure-seekers are warming up to its many diversions that don't come with a label

By ANDREW FERREN

THERE'S A HOT NEW destination—a cultural, culinary and style center—trending in northern Italy. It's called Milan and it's been hiding in plain sight for decades beneath its reputation as "Italy's industrial capital" with countless references to its factories belching gray smoke over gray buildings in gray weather. Though social media has paraded the city's charms during Milan Fashion Week (held each September and February) and the annual Salone di Mobile (where furniture and interior design trends are unveiled each April), the city's transition from gritty and gray to gorgeous and green has still surprised many.

In the past few years, Milan's urban planners have been implementing a vast new network of tree-shaded parks to link the piazzas and promenades of its historic center with the verdant hills and forests that surround it. And no building can out-green Bosco Verticale (Vertical Forest), architect Stefano Boeri's 2014 residential towers whose facades are covered with tiers of some 800 trees and 12,000 plants.

To further entice skeptical tourists, some of the old factories now museums and cultural centers, like the Prada Foundation art complex, designed by architect Rem Koolhaas and his firm OMA, and Mudec (Museum of Culture), by David Chipperfield. Located in a former granary, Armani Silos, which started welcoming visitors in 2015, houses 600 garments that provide a 40-year overview of Giorgio Armani's career.

While Milan remains the undisputed Italian capital of the fashion and design industries, visitors are coming here to do more than purchase its products. According to Andrea Grisdale, CEO of bespoke travel specialists IC Bellagio, book-

ings for Milan are up 30% over the last five years: "The city is no longer considered a one-night stop. Clients now want two or three nights in Milan because it's not just about a day of shopping or touring a few historical sites."

In light of the city's new broader appeal, local hostelry has upped its game considerably. The Bulgari Hotel and Mandarin Oriental, both with stellar restaurants that draw discerning Milanese diners, have joined the Four Seasons and Park Hyatt at the top of the market. A range of smaller hotels are thriving too.

Ditto for the culinary scene. One could spend a week dining around the fashionable Risorgimento neighborhood without getting bored. And steps away from the designer shopping near Via Montenapoleone, restaurants are buzzing. Among them: the new Paper Moon Giardino, where the garden is like a movie set with tables arrayed in view of what appears to be a picturesquely decaying classical temple.

"Milan is not so obviously beautiful as Venice or Florence because it's far more discreet and private so it can take a little longer to discover," said Filippo Curinga of I.D.I. Travel. "But for anyone remotely attuned to design and aesthetics, the city will quickly seduce."

He suggests starting at the Villa Necchi Campiglio, the sumptuous 1930s rationalist villa (now a house museum) that was the real star of the 2009 Tilda Swinton movie "I Am Love." Other "musts" include the Pinacoteca di Brera housing one of the world's finest collections of Renaissance paintings. "People battle crowds at the Vatican Museums in Rome to see similar artworks," said Mr. Curinga. "And here you sometimes have them all to yourself."

► For more details on visiting Milan, see wsj.com/travel.



FAIR AND SQUARE From top: The Rem Koolhaas-designed tower, completed earlier this year, at Milan's Prada Foundation art complex; the city's Mandarin Oriental hotel.

ANDREA WYNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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