

A Springtime Visit to Milan

“It means no worries, for the rest of your days” – *The Lion King*

Every moment spent in Milan felt like that. Like freedom. I had not a care in the world, and I was wholly captivated.

The streets are wide and clean, and bright green trees line the sidewalks. Grass grows between the trolley tracks that run throughout the city. Unlike other popular European cities I have visited, Milan is not overcrowded, leaving space for slow, wandering steps.

Milan emits authenticity, which is something I cherish these days. People do not attempt to project a certain image for the sake of travelers — they have their own lives to attend to that don't constantly intersect with tourism as they seem to elsewhere. Everyone moves at a calm pace, but with confidence and intention. Milan's vibe is its very own.

My friend and I arrived in the middle of Spring. The breeze was warm, and the sun was out every day. There were just enough people walking around to show that the city is a destination for many international visitors. Still, Milan conveyed an undeniably strong Italian identity. Most of the locals we met first spoke to us in Italian, which allowed us to practice speaking the few words we had studied just days before. I appreciated that a lot because people from other cities are often quick to communicate to foreigners in English without any hesitation. While the widespread understanding of the English language allows for increased convenience and connection, I sometimes feel as though it can take away valuable challenges. Milan gave us the opportunity to experience the language and culture of Italy in ways that no other city managed to.

Although the busyness of indoor tourist attractions can trigger claustrophobic discomfort for me, attendance at the Duomo di Milano was very manageable on the day we visited. The architecture and carvings were gorgeous and intricate. I loved the coolness that emanated from the stone walls and pillars. But even more lovely was the view from the roof terrace. We climbed up twelve stories to the very top, and walked out to 360 degree views of Milan in all its springtime excitement. I have always had a thing for rooftops.

We wandered down a long promenade, past busy shops and through the gates of the castle. Two

street sellers approached us offering handmade bracelets. We politely declined, but they insisted on giving them to us anyway. “Hakuna Matata,” they said to us, and waved as we went on our way. The interaction was both delightful and unexpected, because it surprisingly cost us nothing but smiles.

Moments later, we arrived at the far end of the city, where the expansive Parco Sempione sits. Traveling from one city to the next is made all the more wonderful when natural spaces

are at the very top of your priority list. Of the many European parks and gardens I visited after this one, Parco Sempione holds a very special place in my heart. As we walked, I couldn’t help but admire every tree, flower, pond, and face that we passed. It was simple and beautiful and refreshing. Our pace slowed, and for a time I forgot that I was exploring one of the fashion world’s capital cities. No matter where it is or what form it takes, the presence of nature never fails to inspire reflection and gratitude.

On the last night of our stay, we acquired a local’s recommendation for the best pizza in the entire city. We looked up directions on the trusty no-wifi-needed Maps.me app, and headed over to Pizza AM. Located far from the tourist crowds that filled the main thoroughfares on a Saturday night, it was the perfect spot to get a taste of local Italian cooking. The small side street was somewhat deserted, apart from the lively group of people standing outside the doorway to our destination. It was an impeccable eating experience for so many reasons. Most of them are impossible to fully describe, as is the case with all truly exceptional things.

After stepping inside, we had ourselves added to the seating list. In exchange, the squinty-eyed hostess offered us free appetizers, which we happily accepted. A waiter promptly appeared, and to our amazement, he handed us two full glasses of free champagne. Naturally, we were immediately overjoyed by the great lengths that this local business went to achieve customer satisfaction. We chose to stand outside with the others, all of us patiently waiting with champagne in hand. A half hour wait goes by marvelously fast when tispy.

When our table was ready, the waiter returned, refilled our glasses for a third time, and led us to a table on the tiny second floor. Every wall of the restaurant was painted bright yellow, and colorful art pieces decorated each one. The space was filled with lively Latin music, multilingual chatter, and the smell of fresh basil.

As for the pizza, it is the best I have ever tasted to this day. Made with fresh ingredients and authentic Italian spices, each bite was mouthwateringly delicious — including the crust. It was perfection in pizza form.

The check was accompanied by complimentary shots of flavored liquor. I chose melon. It was bright orange in color and tasted of sweet honeydew.

And yes, the whole dining experience cost us only nine euros each. Oooh, I will definitely be going back.

Thank you, Milan!