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How Milan embraced affordable luxury, from secret speakeasies to accessible art

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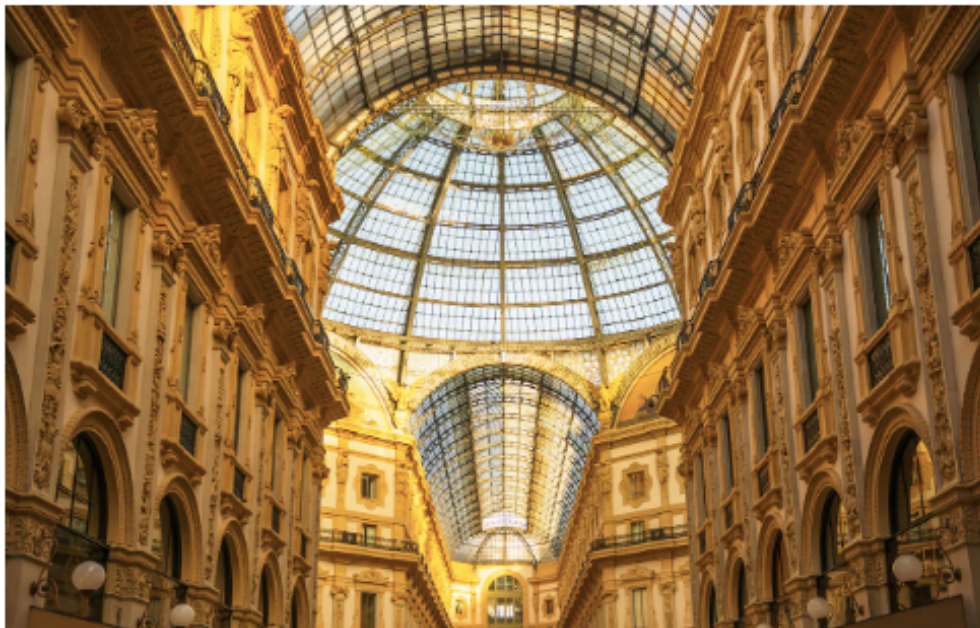


A fresh scene, built on community and creativity, is thriving in Milan, writes Julia Buckley

Milan has always cultivated an air of exclusivity, what with La Scala, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (its gilded shopping arcade) and the designer-stuffed Quadrilatero d'Oro shopping zone, where the air hangs heavy with money.

But in recent years, a new scene has sprung up – and, fittingly for a city that thrived on industry and saw entrepreneurs outrank the aristocracy, it's much more democratic.

Even the sumptuous Galleria – one of Italy's most recognisable buildings – is getting on board. While tourists swarm in the centre to stamp on a mosaic bull's balls (a good luck ritual), I dip through a nondescript door and take a marble-lined lift to the sixth floor and the Osservatorio Prada – Miuccia's photography gallery, suspended over the famous glass-domed roof. The view, though, has nothing on that of my hotel, Galleria Vik Milano. The first European outpost of the South American jet set's favourite chain, which opened last month, its 89 rooms stalk along one wing of the Galleria.



Inside Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, the city's grand shopping arcade CREDIT: GETTY

Here, too, art is everything – a cast of Rodin’s The Thinker sits brooding in the lobby, works by the likes of Mario Schifano and Julian Lennon adorn the restaurant, and every room is themed by a different artist. On my balcony I find myself right below the colossal caryatids propping up the Galleria. It’s a spectacular new angle on one of Italy’s signature sights.

How to do it

Galleria Vik Milano (0039 02 8905 8297; galleriavikmilano.com) offers rooms from €324 (£275) per night. Return flights with British Airways (ba.com) from London Heathrow to Milan Malpensa or Heathrow and London City to Malpensa and Linate (closer to the city centre) cost from £48.