



Masters of Milan

Lombardy and Milan as ruled by the Visconti & Sforza dynasties

19–26 October 2026 (MM 216)

8 days

Lecturer: Dr Luca Leoncini

The artistic excellence of Milan, and palaces, castles, abbeys and more in the surrounding towns and cities – the heritage of some of the richest and most powerful rulers in late medieval Europe.

Based in Milan, a stone's throw from the magnificent marble Duomo.

Great fresco paintings a major feature.

Passes through some beautiful Lombard countryside and little-visited historic towns.

A telling indication of the esteem that Milan enjoyed is that Leonardo da Vinci chose to spend much of his working life there rather than in other Italian cities which are now more commonly associated with artistic endeavour. It is often forgotten that the wealthiest and most powerful territory in medieval and Renaissance Italy was the Duchy of Milan, and its eponymous metropolis was probably the largest city in Europe.

The ruling dynasties here were the Visconti and after their extinction in 1450, the Sforza. They produced a succession of the most feared tyrants in Italy – but also created around them the most glittering court in the peninsula, the rival of any in Europe. Artists, musicians and men of letters flocked here to participate in the unending spectacle of court life, and to compete for the unparalleled opportunities for the exercise of their genius.

It was not only in the metropolis that the Visconti and Sforza and men of talent left their mark. Throughout their Duchy – approximately coterminous with modern-day Lombardy – there is an abundance of beautiful old cities, buildings and works of art. It is an additional pleasure, moreover, to discover an area of Italy little frequented by tourists.

One of the most distinctive features of the region is the quantity of very fine Romanesque churches. Gothic buildings demonstrate the Duchy's close connections with northern Europe. With the presence of Leonardo and Bramante, the Duchy was a cradle of the High Renaissance and Lombard builders exported the Italian style all over Europe.

A fascinating feature is the series of Visconti and Sforza strongholds; the fierce and functional forms, tempered by the region's principal building material, a lustrous red



Milan, cathedral and tower of S. Gottardo, watercolour by C. T. G. Formilli, 1925.

brick, can achieve great beauty. The fertile plains with their centuries-old farmsteads and villages are most alluring, and are surprisingly unspoilt by industrial development. Much of the countryside through which you pass is designated a National Park.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.30am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Milan Linate. Drive to Milan, where all seven nights of the tour are spent, and begin with an introductory walk taking in S. Satiro, a jewel of the early Renaissance.

Day 2: Milan. Visit the spectacular marble Gothic cathedral and the surrounding area, site of the headquarters of the rival powers of municipality, bishop, duke and commune. Continue to the Pinacoteca di Brera, one of Italy's finest art galleries with most of the greatest Italian artists represented. In the afternoon the Castello Sforzesco, the vast

fortified palace of Leonardo's ducal patrons, which has room decorations attributed to him and houses a wonderful variety of works of art and artefacts including Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*.

Day 3: Cremona. The birthplace of Monteverdi, Stradivarius and Guarini, Cremona has one of the finest squares in Italy, composed of the cathedral, Italy's tallest medieval campanile, baptistery and Gothic civic buildings. The Romanesque cathedral here is magnificent, and richly embellished with 16th-century paintings. Other visits include S. Agostino where there is a Perugino, and the civic museum.

Day 4: Soncino, Lodi. Morning visit to the little walled town of Soncino, which has one of the finest of Sforza fortresses. Then on to Lodi, stopping for lunch en route, another highly attractive town. The Tempio dell'Incoronata is a richly decorated Renaissance church, and nearby in Lodi Vecchio there is an impressive Gothic church.

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Day 5: Bergamo. The ramparts around the Upper Town of Bergamo are immensely impressive, as befits the westernmost outpost of the Venetian empire. This is among the most attractive of old city centres in Italy, and the architectural complex of the Piazza del Duomo includes the Romanesque cathedral and the Renaissance Cappella Colleoni with frescoes by Tiepolo. See the outstanding collection of paintings in the Accademia Carrara on the way to the Lower Town.

Day 6: Milan. Visit the Renaissance church of Sta. Maria delle Grazie, in whose refectory is Leonardo's Last Supper. Then Sant' Ambrogio, a most important early medieval church with a very rich treasury.

Day 7: Pavia, Certosa di Pavia. Drive along the border of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna to Pavia, the most illustrious Lombard city after Milan. Outstanding here are the Romanesque church of S. Michele and the brick-built Renaissance cathedral. In the afternoon visit the Certosa di Pavia, perhaps the most richly endowed monastic foundation in Italy, and mausoleum of both the Visconti and the Sforza.

Day 8: Vigevano. The last morning is spent in Vigevano, another surprisingly attractive little town, at its heart is one of the largest castles in Italy, a major Sforza palace and stables. Adjacent is a beautiful arcaded square and several churches of interest. Fly from Milan Linate, arriving London Heathrow at c. 6.30pm.

Lecturer

Dr Luca Leoncini. Art historian specialising in 15th-century Italian painting. His first degree and PhD were from Rome University followed by research at the Warburg Institute in London. He has published articles on the classical tradition in Italian art of the 15th century and contributed to the Macmillan *Dictionary of Art*. He has also written on Mantegna and Renaissance drawings.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach for airport transfers and excursions; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. **Rosa Grand Hotel, Milan** (starhotels.com/en/our-hotels/rosa-grand-milan): a smart 4-star hotel excellently located directly behind the Duomo. Rooms are well appointed in a clean, modern style. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is lot of walking and standing in churches, museums and galleries. The tour is not suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair climbing. There is quite a lot of coach travel. Average distance by coach per day: 50 miles

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.