

Chapter II - Milan

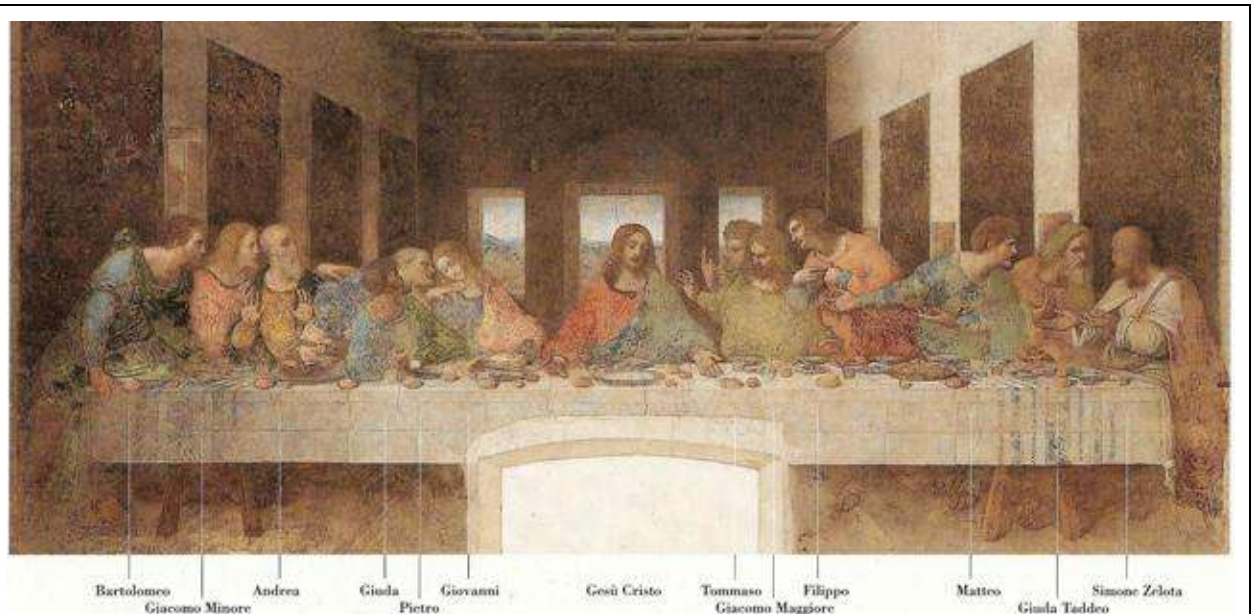
1. *The Last Supper*

Our reservation drop dead time to see Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper* is 8:15 am. We reserved the time before leaving the States and this was the best we could do. Still leery of navigating and parking we ask the hotel to order a "wheelchair taxi." In the U.S. a wheelchair taxi is usually a van with a lift or a ramp; in Italy it's a vehicle with enough room in the back to stash the chair. Paul needs to transfer from his chair to the passenger seat of the taxi. The space in back is big enough only if the chair is disassembled – wheels & batteries, seat cushion, wheelie bars and arm rests taken off and the back folded down. We are using the [e-motion power-assist wheels](#), which allow Paul to cover rough ground without destroying his shoulders, but they are heavy and difficult to take on and off the chair, which is harder for Dee. We somehow make it work and barely make our appointment to view the famous painting.



The Last Supper is in the refectory of [Santa Maria delle Grazie](#).

It's an impressive piece of art. We had no idea that it was so big – the figures are life-sized! Photos are not allowed. And for the fans of Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code*, yes the figure sitting on Jesus' right definitely looks feminine. The literature available in the bookshop identifies the figure as the apostle John but we are skeptical. What did Leonardo have in mind?



[The Last Supper](#) scanned from a bookshop postcard. Left to right (in English) are Bartholomew, James the Lesser, Andrew, Judas Iscariot, Peter, John, Jesus, Thomas, James the Greater, Philip, Matthew, Judas Thaddeus and Simon.

There are other paintings in the church: on the opposite wall from The Last Supper is a depiction of the [Crucifixion by Donato Montorfano](#) (1495). It's a large painting with lots of figures in it. What's odd is some of the people are painted wearing 15th century garb at a 1st century event!

After the viewing and some time in the gift shop we walk a few blocks to a metro station. The Milan Metro (subway) claims to be wheelchair friendly so we investigate. We hope to take the subway to the Duomo, reputedly one of the finest cathedrals in Italy, and then take it back to the hotel. No luck; the metro is only partially accessible. There is an extra wide gate for wheelchair entry and elevators between the levels, but there is a 5 inch step up to get from the platform into a train car and a 3-5 inch gap to get over as well. They are trying but they don't quite get it. This investigation takes over an hour and we still need to pack up for the trip to Bologna tomorrow. Also we are suffering from a lack of sleep. Instead of taking the subway we have lunch then navigate another block to a transit station where there is a long line of taxis. However, none of them have room for a wheelchair! Did we mention that most European cars are small? So are the taxis! It takes about 45 minutes to find a taxi with enough storage space. We grab it and go back to the hotel to take a nap during the hottest part of the day. Italy is having a heat wave with temperatures in the 90s and high humidity. The Duomo will have to wait until next time.

2. Traffic

It's no surprise that traffic here is different. Scooters are everywhere, and motorcycles. There are even scooter-sized parking places on some streets! There are lots of little cars;



the 2-person Smart Car is very popular. Milan claims to be the fashion capital of Italy and you see all sorts of men and women on scooters, from leather jackets and jeans to tailored suits to women in dresses and high heels. Many of the scooters have covers installed that

function as lap blankets providing protection from the waist down. The covers are popular with the suits and dresses group. The driving style is different as well. Unless they are raised curbs lane dividers are considered advisory and lane sharing is necessary if you want to get anywhere. Two wheelers will take any and all gaps and quickly, zipping past you with a 10-20 kph difference in velocity. It looks chaotic but it seems to work -- we saw only one accident and that was on the autostrada.

3. The Food

At the hotel we ask about a restaurant within walking distance. We are told the better restaurant is closed that day but there is one that is "not as good" a couple of blocks away. There's one step to get in but the waiter and a busboy are happy to lift Paul up. We have dinner and if this place is not as good, the better one must be amazing. The pasta is freshly made and cooked perfectly and everything else is of equal quality. We are introduced to *tagliatelle*, which is similar to *fettuccini* but slightly thinner and wider.

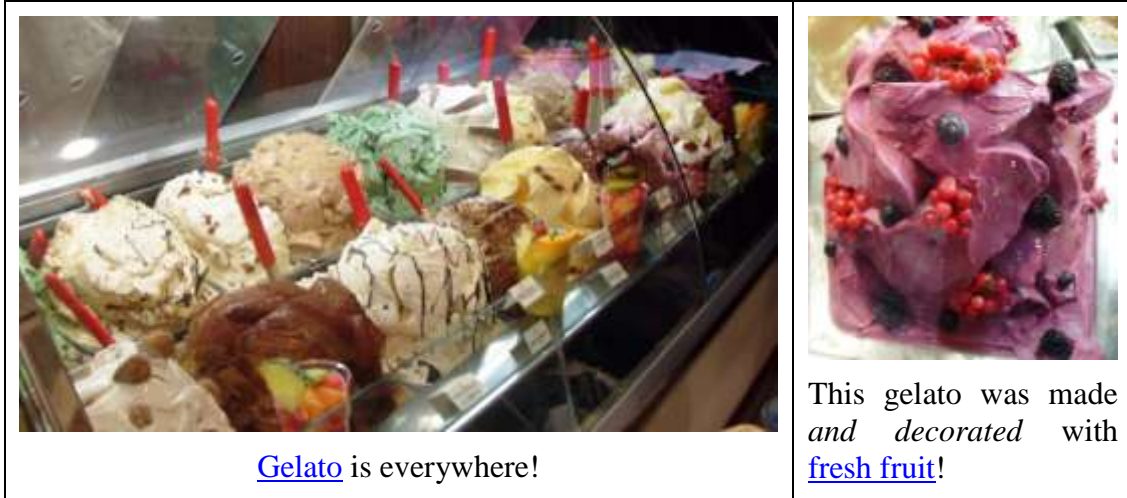
Pasta seems to be pretty important here. *Tagliatelle* was developed in nearby Bologna, and the Chamber of Commerce there has a sealed glass case where the ideal dimensions of *tagliatelle* are embodied in a solid gold noodle! It's very important to use the shape of pasta that matches well with the sauce. See the [Pasta Shapes Gallery](#) if you are interested.

There's also an amazing variety of pizza and no self-respecting tourist can spend three weeks in Italy without having the real Italian version of this U.S. invention! Pictured is a restaurant display that draws us in for dinner. We select the pizza on the upper left: a creation that combines eggplant, salami, roasted peppers, goat cheese, and sundried tomatoes – freshly made, of course. You ask for a slice and they give you a quarter of the pie! *Oh, yum!*



[Pizza](#) in a restaurant's outdoor display.

Then there is the gelato! Like anything else it can vary in quality. The average gelato is similar to our premium ice cream, but the good stuff...oh my! It's denser, creamier and smoother and the flavors are intense. Stroll down any downtown area and there are at least 2 gelato stores – boutiques, really – to every block. These delights are hand made from fresh fruit – no general distributor look-alikes here! Look for the shop where the local people gather if you want the good stuff.



4. Architecture

Milan is one of several cities that our trip coordinator classifies as “Art Cities”, which of course includes Florence, Rome, and Venice. There is interesting architecture wherever we go and it is impossible to resist gapping, pointing, and snapping pictures!

Some Milan images:



Paul and Dee's Great Italian Adventure



There is [Interesting architecture](#) everywhere you look.



[Brickwork detail](#) of one of the buildings we passed.



Very old [handmade doors](#) & hinges are still in use.



A [decoration](#) on the side of a building. Here be dragons!