

## Italy's North: Milan and Lombardy and optional pre-trip Wagner Ring at La Scala

March 12-23, 2026 (March 9-12 for attendance at La Scala Opera House)

Italy has served as the rewarding mainstay of the in-depth immersions that we have enjoyed together over many years, interspersed, of course, with forays to more exotic locales. To date, we have enjoyed the architecture, urbanism, landscape, art, culture, cuisine and viniculture of regions from north to south, and legendary cities from Rome to Florence to Venice. But Milan and its region of Lombardy has not been a place we have yet had the pleasure of sharing together. Some of us spent a night or two together there at the end of our recent Princely Cities study tours, and since then Jeffrey Blanchard and I have been busy crafting an eleven-night sojourn in the city and surrounding region, which we are happy to propose for this coming spring, March 12 to 23, 2026! This is a repeat of an earlier trip in 2025. We have restructured the program to allow for those with lesser mobility to participate on this one; a van will be at our disposal to assist those unable to walk long distances at a brisk pace! This year, we have the potential good fortune that our dates coincide with the Teatro alla Scala's production of the full Ring cycle by Richard Wagner. Please see the description of this optional add on at the end of this document.

It is difficult to sum up in the few words of this prospectus, the many aspects of the layered and intriguing city of Milan and its surrounding region of Lombardy. Unlike Rome, its layers do not span the millennia, do not extend so far back in time, and are not visible around every corner, however, just as each part of Italy is unique, and never conforms to a homogeneity from one place to the next, Milan has always struck me as the part of Italy most unlike any of the other parts, particularly so much of the peninsula to the south. Over the many years (more than half a century) that Jeffrey and I have frequented, and in his case called Italy home, for me at least, Milan was always somewhat of an afterthought. I would stop there for a night, particularly during my first forays, when as a student, I would often travel to and from Italy by train from France (traversing the Atlantic by ship). In my wistfulness to be leaving Italy, Milan always struck me as one step out of the rich panoply of experiences and challenges that Italy then posed. Trains, busses and trams seemed to be organized and on time, rush hour began at 7 am rather than 10, and the streets lined with stern

*Below: Milan, Piazza del Duomo, with the Cathedral front and center, 1386-1805. To the far left is the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, 1865-77, and the equestrian figure is Vittore Emanuele II, dating from 1896.*



palazzi and larger commercial buildings spoke of an industriousness and productivity less manifest further south. As one moves north in Italy the presence of Gothic and Medieval architecture speaks of the strong influence from France and the Germanic Holy Roman Empire just to the north over the Alps—somehow all a more stern and sober strain than what one finds to the south!

But in the two years that it has taken to research and prepare this seminar, we have discovered what it is that makes Milan and Lombardy unique and more than worthy of our focus for a mere ten days! First, we get to continue the theme of Princely Ducal Courts from our recent travels in the Marche and Emilia-Romagna; the Visconti and later Sforza established a flourishing center of artistic production in Milan and Pavia, where a young Leonardo and Bramante both left significant works before moving on to other centers. As Italy's second largest city (half the population of metropolitan Rome), it bears the mantle of industry and commerce, and this led to explosive growth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the production of much of Italy's important legacy in art, architecture, and urban design of these periods. There is also an abundance of art collections from the large and justifiably famous institutions like the Brera, Ambrosiana, and Prada Collections to intimate house collections, representing a broad span of artistic production.

### Seminar Outline:

Our eleven nights are divided between Milan and its surrounding region, beginning with an initial stay of five nights in Milan in a small centrally located three-star hotel, the Duca di York. During these days we will visit a range of churches, fortresses, palazzi, and museums, mostly on foot, by public transportation, or our private bus. These places have been chosen to represent the varied and rich span of Milan's architectural, urban, and artistic history. These are some of the sites we are planning for visits (others will be added and unforeseen circumstances may preclude visits to some listed):

#### Churches:

San Lorenzo (4th – 5th centuries; reconstructed 1574–1588)  
Sant'Ambrogio (11th –12th centuries; cloisters by Bramante, 1492)  
Sant'Eustorgio (11th century; Portinari Chapel, 1462 – 1468)  
Duomo (begun 1386)  
Santa Maria delle Grazie (Solari, 1463; Tribune by Bramante, 1492)  
Cenacolo Vinciano (Leonardo's Last Supper), 1495–97  
Santa Maria presso San Satiro (Bramante, ca. 1480)  
San Fedele (P. Pellegrini, begun 1569)  
San Maurizio al Monastero Maggiore (16th c.)

#### Secular Structures:

Palazzo della Ragione (13th century)  
Ospedale Maggiore (begun by Filarete, 1456; completed 1804)  
Palazzo Marino (Galeazzo Alessi, 1553–1558)  
Casa degli Omenoni (Leone Leoni, c. 1565)  
Teatro alla Scala (Piermarini, 1775–78)  
Galleria Vittorio Emanuele (Mengoni, 1865–77)  
Castello Cova, Adolfo Coppédé, 1914  
Ca' Brutta, Giovanni Muzio, 1922  
Stazione Centrale, Ulisse Stacchini, 1931, and Memorial of the Shoa, Morpugo de Curtis, 2013  
Torre Velasca, Belgiojso, Peressutti, and Rogers, 1958

Pirelli Tower, Gio Ponti and Pier Luigi Nervi, 1960

Monte Amiata Housing, Gallarate, Carlo Aymonino and Aldo Rossi, 1974

#### Museums:

Castello Sforzesco (XV to XX centuries)  
Museo del Duomo  
Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnica Leonardo da Vinci  
Museo Poldi Pezzoli  
Museo Teatrale della Scala  
Pinacoteca Ambrosiana  
Pinacoteca di Brera  
Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Ignazio Gardella, 1954/1996  
Museo Bagatti Valsecchi  
Villa Necchi Campiglio, Pietro Portaluppi, 1935  
Casa-Museo Boschi Di Stefano  
Triennale Design Museum, Giovanni Muzio, 1933  
Museo del Novecento, Arengario, Giovanni Muzio, and Piero Portaluppi, 1942  
Hangar Bicocca, and Quartiere Bicoca, Vittorio Gregotti, 1999  
Fondazione Prada, Rem Koolhaas/OMA, 2015  
Civico Museo Archeologico  
Fondazione Rovati

## Forays Outside of Milan in Lombardy:

The next four nights will take us to the surrounding centers of interest in the region of Lombardy, including Pavia (La Certosa, magnificent fifteenth century monastic complex built by the Visconti); Vigevano (magnificent central piazza planned by Bramante); Bergamo (medieval high town and Mussolini era additions below); and Brescia (picturesque town center of linked squares combining medieval with modern interventions, and a recent highly acclaimed museum complex combining Roman ruins with later medieval and renaissance additions). We will spend two nights each in the center of these two towns. Between Bergamo and Brescia, we will pass Lago di Iseo, where we will plan a stop at a lakeside restaurant for a late lunch. We will then return for two nights in Milan, staying at the five-star Grand Hotel et de Milan, steps from La Scala and famous fashion and design mecca via di Montenapoleone.

## Our Leaders:

Noted Rome based scholar, Jeffrey Blanchard will accompany us as lecturer, to the delight of those who have enjoyed his company and erudition on past trips! He and Stephen Harby have collaborated in the conception and crafting of this trip and both will accompany the group.

*Below: Bergamo, Citta Alta. On the left is the neoclassical facade of the Duomo, and the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore behind the Colleoni Chapel on the right.*







*Above: The small hotel, Duca di York, will be our home for the first five nights. It is minutes from the Duomo, Galleria, la Scala, and the Ambrosiana.*



*Above: From the rooftop of the Cathedral (which we will visit) there is a stunning panorama over Milan, where the abundance of twentieth century architecture will be revealed. The tower in the center is the Torre Velasca, by Belgioioso, Peressutti, and Rogers of 1958.*

*Below: The church complex of Santa Maria delle Grazie. 1465 to 1490. Here we will discover the work of two great masters of the Renaissance, Donato Bramante and Leonardo da Vinci. Duke Ludovico Sforza made this church his family's mausoleum. To the left is Leonardo's Last Supper, and the cubic and circular mass to the right at the apse of the basilica is the work of Bramante. Here he began the work of reviving the forms of classical antiquity that he would continue in the following years in Rome.*



*Below: The Prada Foundation is a cultural and museum complex on the periphery of Milan where existing industrial buildings were combined with new structures by OMA in 2015. It speaks to Milan's importance as a center of design, fashion, and contemporary art.*







*Above: The Citta Alta of Bergamo viewed from the new town.*

*Below: two views of Brescia--top the complex of ancient Roman remains, "Brixia" now a compelling museum complex, and bottom one of the many linked piazze of Brescia, this one designed by Piacentini during the Mussolini era. Our hotel is to the far right.*



*Above: Front entry foyer of the Villa Necchi Campiglio, designed by Pietro Portaluppi, 1935*

*Below: Interior of la Scala Opera House.*



## Attendnace at Performances of DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN at Teatro alla Scala:

Coinciding with, just preceding and overlapping with the dates of our trip this year, is a production of the full cyle of the four operas comprising Richard Wagner's 1848-74 magnum opus, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the four opera saga of epic scale and scope, based on Norse legend of a magic ring that grants the power to rule the world. According to publicity from La Scala:

After ten years, Teatro alla Scala presents a new production of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, under the baton of Simone Young and Alexander Soddy.

The direction is entrusted to David McVicar, internationally acknowledged among the most appreciated opera directors of our time and who has already staged a broad repertoire of titles at La Scala, ranging from Cavalli to Berlioz, Cilea, and Verdi.

The vocal cast offers important Wagnerian voices such as Michael Volle, performing as Wotan in the whole cycle, Camilla Nylund as Brünnhilde and Klaus Florian Vogt as Siegfried.

The performances are March 10, 11, 13 and 15 in the evening (8 pm on March 10, and 6 pm for the others). Our package will include three nights (March 9, 10, and 11), prior to the start of the main trip, at the Hotel Gran Duca di York, breakfast and a light meal together before the opera. Seating will be in boxes, which we must purchase in their entirety, and there is already a limited selection available but some good spots on the first and second tiers, side. *Some chairs in our boxes may have partial views, however, we will rotate seating amongst us, so as to share the best seats.* Confirmation will be based on availability of remaining boxes at the time of each participant's opting for this package. The cost will be \$3,000 per person double occupancy and \$3,500 for a single.





For Pricing and Registration Information

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