Nicole Tujague finds change as well as tradition in her favourite city

Milan, like all well-loved destinations gets a little more familiar with each visit. Yes, a favourite designer shop may have closed or relocated but the Milanese insistence on luxe quality never changes as it seems to be threaded into the city’s DNA strands. At first glance, Milan seems to be immune from the throwaway fashion scourge that has infected cities worldwide. Here, exquisite fabrics, design and traditional craftsmanship take pride of place. According to our fashionista PR friend Flaviana, Milan does succumb to fashion trends like its southern counterparts but everywhere in the streets I just see effortless style.

The Italians appear to be daringly adventurous: I wonder who would buy those latest Gucci heels with their bulbous pearl studded detail? Then I see them daintily tucked under the table in front of me at a café, paired with the emerald green fur jacket from someone’s latest collection and suddenly I can make sense of the designer’s vision. The host of these specimens sits nonchalantly using her smartphone under large, suspended, drying hams, another Milanese inability to settle for anything that is less than creative.

However, it is not only about the big names in fashion in Milan. Just as exciting is the band of young Italian designers remaining true to their artisan predecessors, such as Alessia Xoccato who breaks stereotypes and puts a fresh, contemporary use of textures, fabrics and artistic flair into Milanese fashion. Alessia and her new-wave colleagues have burst on to the fashion stage and shaken up the establishment big-time.

Food trends are changing too. If you need some relief from the mouth-watering pastas and insalatas found in sophisticated salons on every street in Milan’s downtown, but still need your daily fix of traditional Italian olive oil, try Olio. Here, young Pugliese entrepreneurs have brought the delights of the south into Milan to deliver a fresh cuisine style which adds to the city’s dining experience. Oil from the south is liquid gold to the Italians, with some olive trees believed to be up to two thousand years old. To showcase the owners’ pride in the olives of the south, each guest at Olio gets to take home a gift bottle of their finest oil… there goes the baggage allowance.
Stylish accommodation can also be tricky in Milan when you don’t want to sacrifice quality or location. We found Allegroitalia San Pietro all’Orto, a boutique apartment hotel furnished by Armani Casa (one of 20 fully autonomous living spaces guarantying maximum privacy – in case you need to escape the paparazzi I guess) in the heart of the downtown Duomo fashion district. It’s not easy having to choose between the ‘non-snoring pillow or the musical pillow’ or waking up and looking out at those tempting shoe shops before your first cappuccino.

Leaving Milan can also be an adventure. Contrasted with this essence of quality and attention to detail is the chaotic Italian transport system. Despite a three month prior booking on the train south to Bari we find ourselves offloaded and seatless on another train that, after an unscheduled change at Bologna, will arrive four hours late at our destination. We are now squatters in the Executive Club boardroom of carriage 1, much to the disgust of the full paying club passengers. We try to ignore the animated Italian discussions of those offended and wait for a conductor to interrogate us. Luckily no-one has any idea of what is happening or a possible solution, so we are left to politely sit the journey out.

We may not have designated seats on this high speed train as it pulls out of Milan’s central station but I am smugly comforted by that small extravagant purchase securely tucked into my luggage. A piece of Milan luxe that will accompany me home.

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