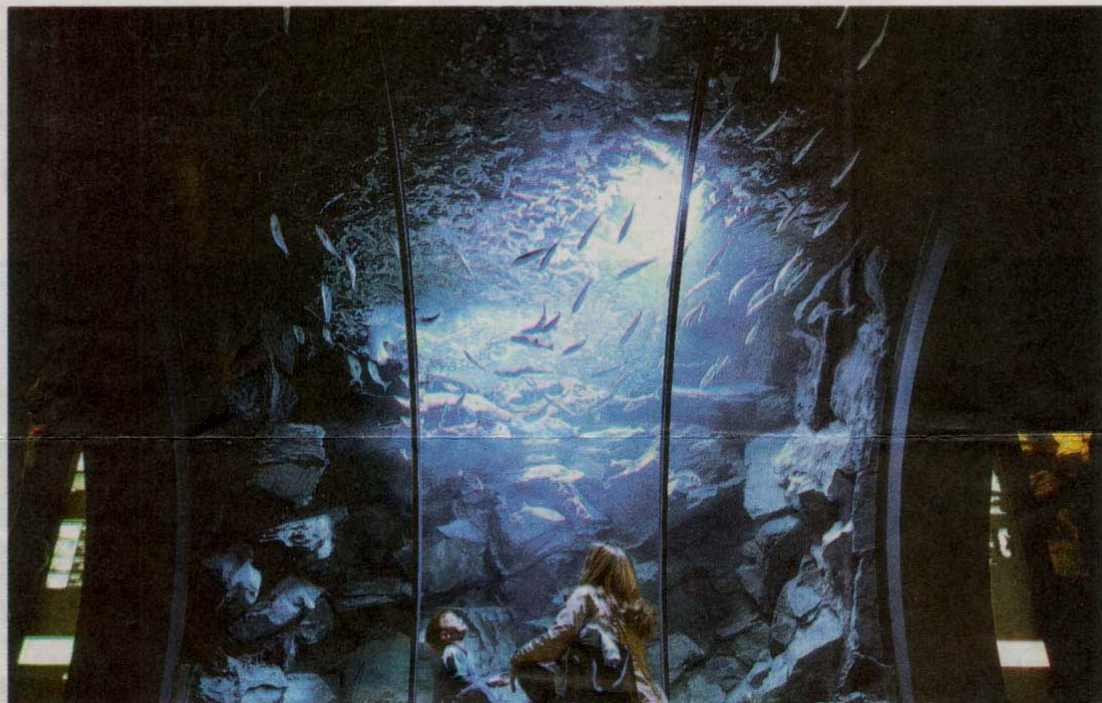


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Dave Yoder/Polaris, for The New York Times

The Civic Aquarium in Milan is one of several major attractions that do not charge for admission.

columns of San Lorenzo, a standing reminder of long gone Roman colonizers, is a popular spot where 6 euros (\$7.45, at \$1.24 to the euro) will get you a drink and a broad assortment of snacks: minipizzas, Parmesan cheese chunks or meatballs. Teatro 7 (Via Civerchio 9; 39-02-699-00702; www.teatro7.com) is one of Milan's most talked-about restaurants, in part because of the trendy décor and the open kitchen where clients can watch the flamboyant chefs Rico Guarneri and Claudio Colombo Severini cook up improbably complicated delicacies, and in part because the food is so good. Best of all there's a lunchtime special: for 12 euros you get two dishes (one recent offering: carrot and baby squid soup and potato crepes, or roast with spinach soufflé), with wine.

Lodging for Under 100 Euros

Hotel Sabotino (Viale Sabotino 16; 39-02-583-08797; www.hotelsabotino.com) in central Milan is a quirky one-star 15-room establishment popular with fashion photographers dazzled by the afternoon light that falls on the hotel terrace. Many rooms don't have bathrooms, and breakfast is not included, but there's a real homey feel to the place (complete with a live-in poodle). Imagine that your interior designer had opted for Italian kitsch as your home's main design scheme and you'll get the picture. A double is 85 euros a night.

Best Deal on a Cultural Event

A visit to the museum at the Castello Sfor-

zesco (Sforza Castle) includes a glimpse of a ceiling most likely decorated by Leonardo, and the so-called Pietà Rondanini, a statue of the Madonna and Christ that Michelangelo was working on at the time of his death. Apart from providing a glimpse of how Milan's ruling aristocracy once lived (grandly), it's a real hodgepodge of a collection, from significant examples of Lombard paintings to a wacky ensemble of musical instruments. All this for 3 euros. The Parco Sempione, Milan's largest park, abuts the castle and is open to the public, free.

Best Things to Do Free

The paint has barely dried on the walls of the recently restored Villa Belgiojoso Bonaparte Museum, a neo-Classical palace built for the Milanese nobleman Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso that now houses a large collection of paintings and sculptures from the 18th and 19th centuries (including sculptures by Medardo Rosso, busts by Antonio Canova and paintings by Francesco Hayez and Daniele Ranzoni). Near the Castello Sforzesco, the small Civic Aquarium with its array of sea dwellers has also just reopened after a three-year renovation, and it's free.

Best Money-Saving Tip

The Mediateca Santa Teresa (Via della Moscova 28; 39-02-873-9781) is a multimedia interactive library that offers free access to the Internet. All you need is an identification document, like a passport, and to fill out a

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Milan

Think Milan, and fashion, finance and fine food immediately pop to mind, with a correspondingly hefty price tag. But for those who don't usually suit up in Armani or Versace, Milan offers another, less prohibitive, side.

Where to Eat Cheaply

Happy hour is a traditional Milanese evening ritual that often includes all-you-can-eat buffets of hot hors d'oeuvres, filling enough to be meals in themselves. Exploit (Via Pioppette 3; 39-02-894-08675), near the