

October 2021

Miles Across Milan

A photo journal and travelogue

Hannah Cai





*We were wet as dogs but oh-so-glad
to be standing in Italy.*

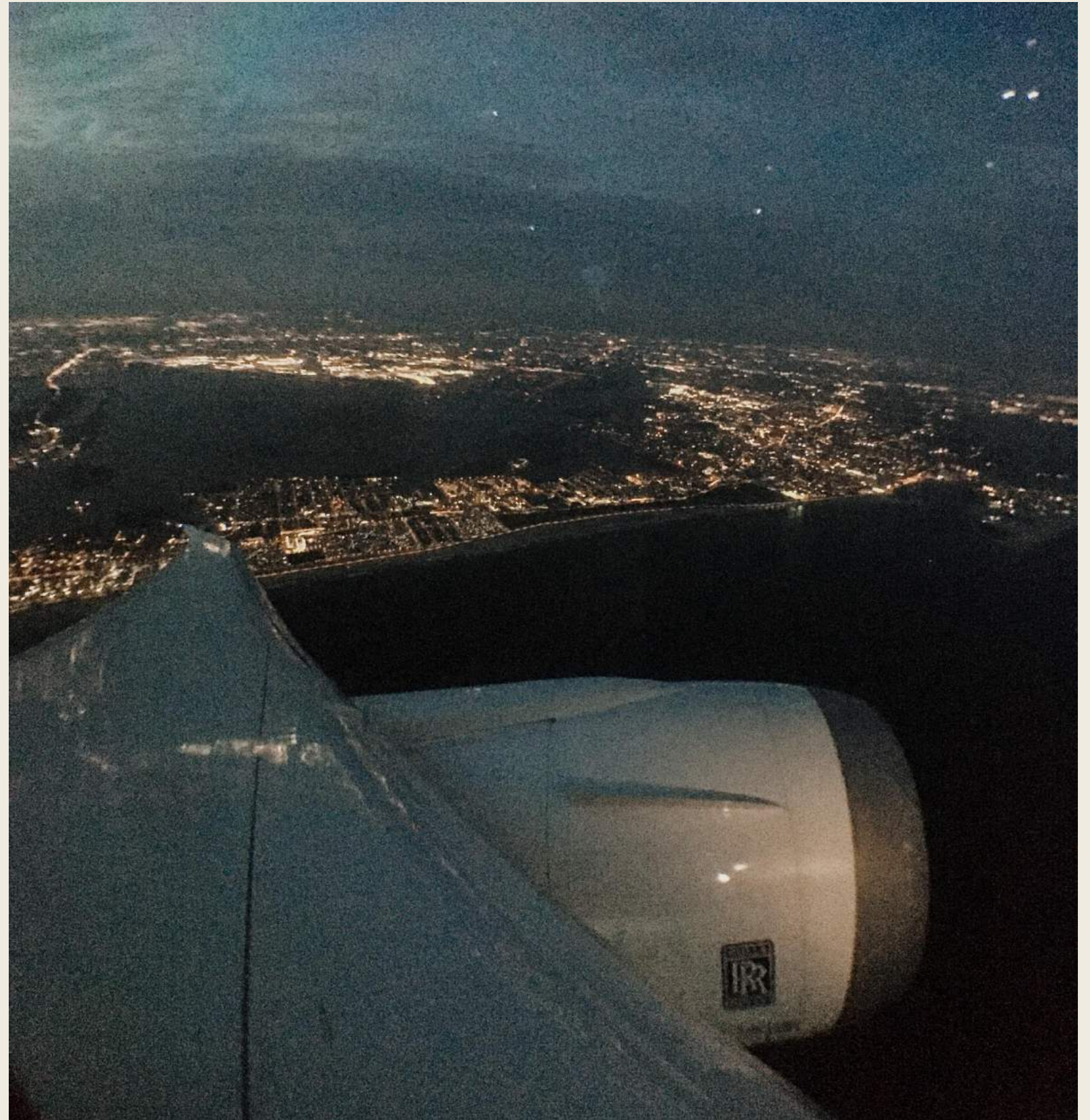
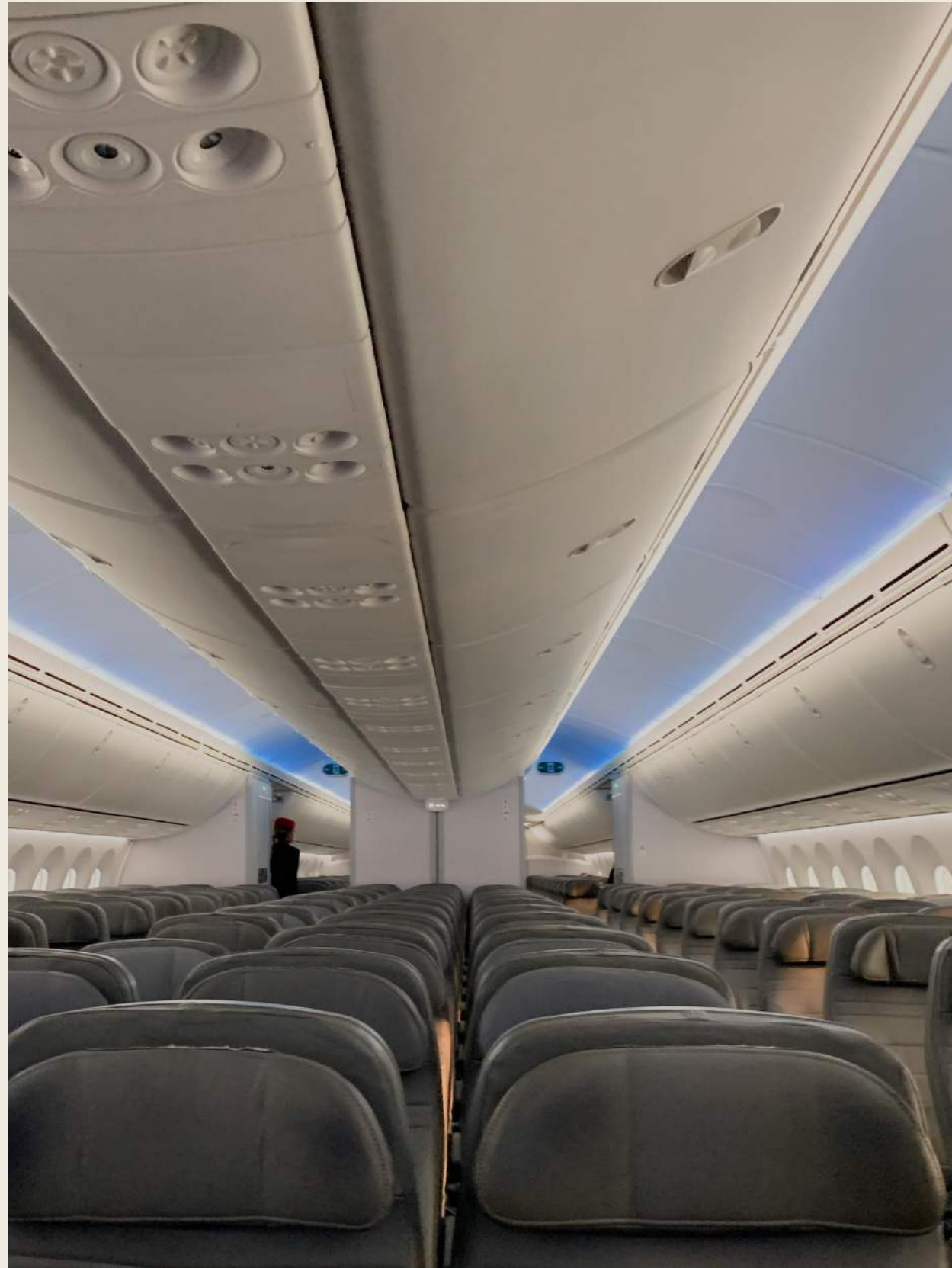
My mom's knee-jerk reaction to a deal on flights was "let's go!" while I lingered on a cloud of wishful thinking, contemplating reasons why I couldn't or shouldn't, before realizing, for the first time in a while, I had none, and gave into the tempting invitation.

Video journal



<https://youtu.be/X9OCF0l0DzY>

As if going somewhere weren't already a novelty these days, we took a red-eye on a plane that was 30% full (nearly a 2:1 passenger to flight attendant ratio) and landed in a rainy Milan.





*Delirious and drenched,
we gaped at the chic street
style and listened to
Italian being spoken by
Peruvians, Indians, and
Chinese as the elegance of
il Duomo and Galleria
Vittorio Emanuele II
towered over.*

Milan is more metropolitan than its sister cities, a contrast to the romantic Tuscan region with its Renaissance architecture and rugged landscapes. While she draws fewer tourists than Italy's other cities, Milan offers enough to keep the ambitious visitor busy for a few days, and it serves as a convenient transit hub for travelers arriving by plane and train. We enjoyed both Milan's sights and functionality over an aggregate of 2.5 days that capped the beginning and end of our trip. Referencing the steps recorded, I think we covered an ambitious amount while managing to get a sense of the local flavor.



Il Duomo

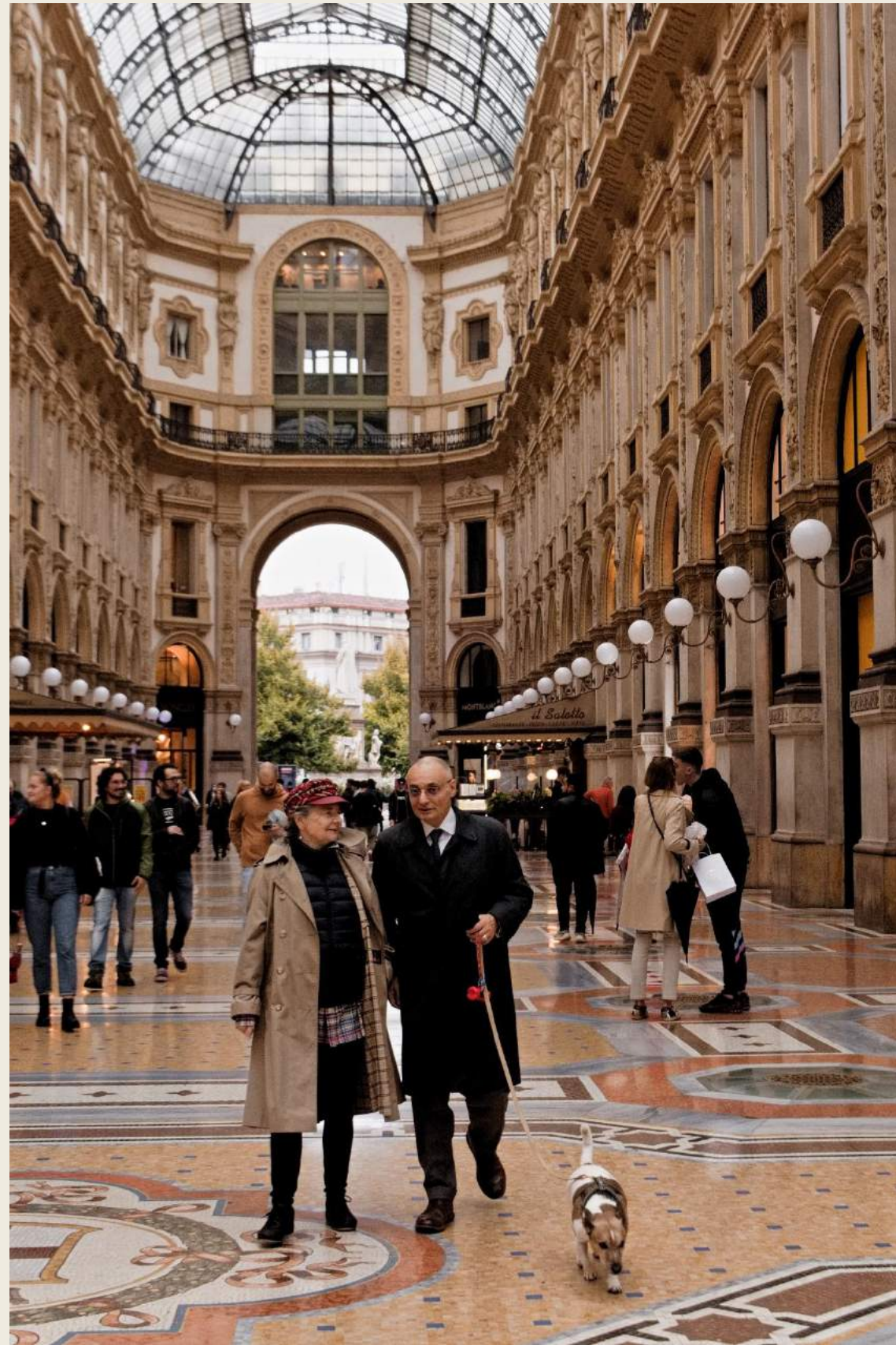
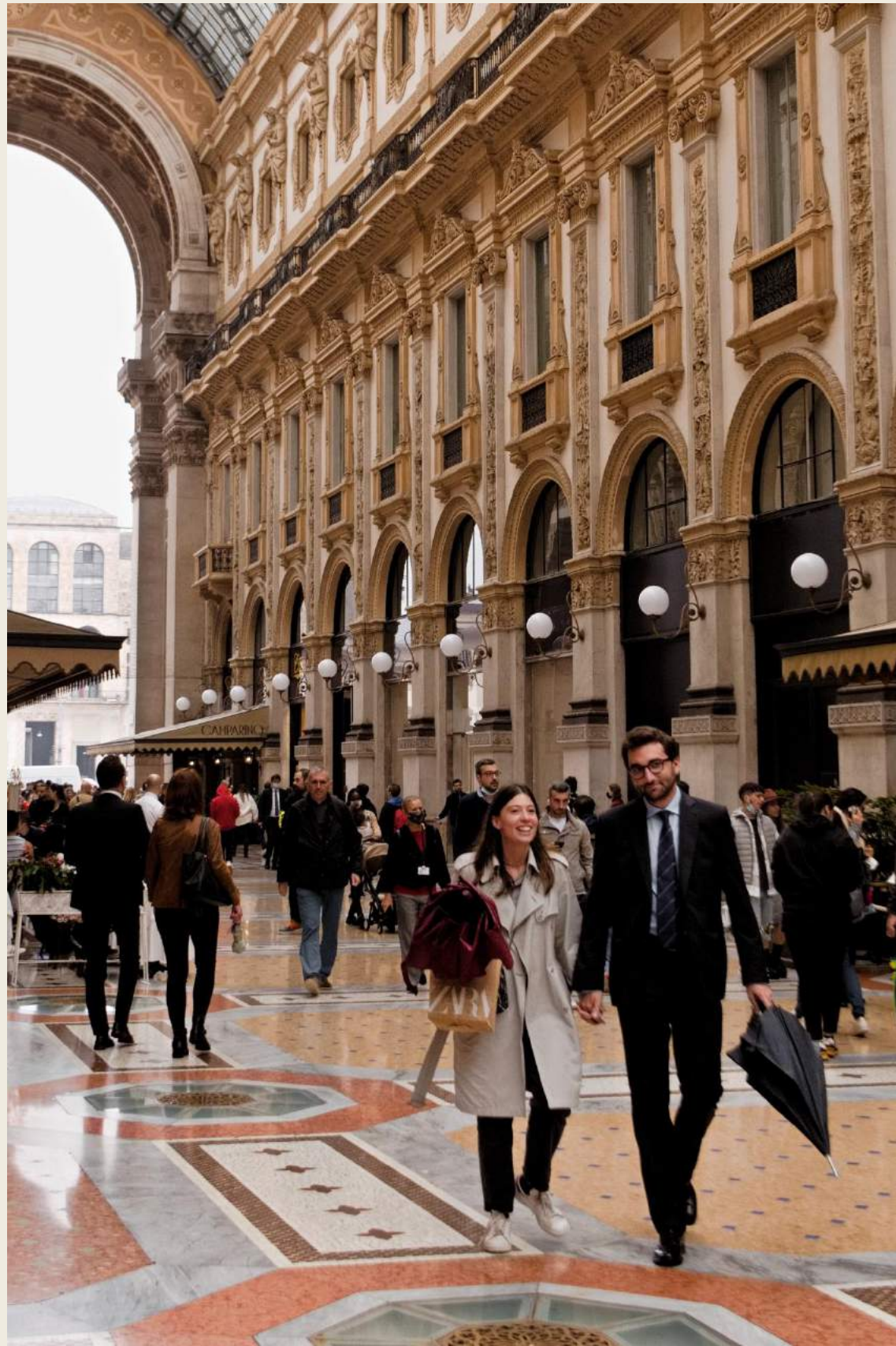
Day 1

Day 1: Once our items were dropped off at Hotel J24 Milano (thanks to the help of Clara), we headed to the touristic hub around il Duomo. We ducked into Corsia del Giardino to avoid the downpour and grabbed lunch amongst businesspeople. Per the waiter's recommendation, we had a basil lasagna, and it was good. So good that I tried to recreate it recently at home. A round of window shopping later, we took a coffee break at Spadini Café before wandering the stores again. I'm not much of a shopper, but Milan's glitz and glamour were surely entertaining. Rinascente, a department store, featured an entire floor with a coffee bar, restaurant, patisserie, and specialty foods to tuck into your suitcase as souvenirs (whether they're for yourself or for others, nobody needs to know).

While my mom leans towards the "let's hit all the sites" kind of traveler, I'm nature-oriented and enjoyed our brief walk through the Public Gardens before it got dark. With little steam left, finding a restaurant within a few blocks of our hotel for dinner sounded like a fine idea. Brisas del Peru was an unexpected but pleasant choice, and locals thought so, too - it was bustling for a Monday night with heavy rain. We had a full week to dedicate our palates to pasta and gelato, and I was thrilled to play culinary diplomat for the evening.



Galleria Vittorio Emmanuelle II



The perfect place to people-watch.



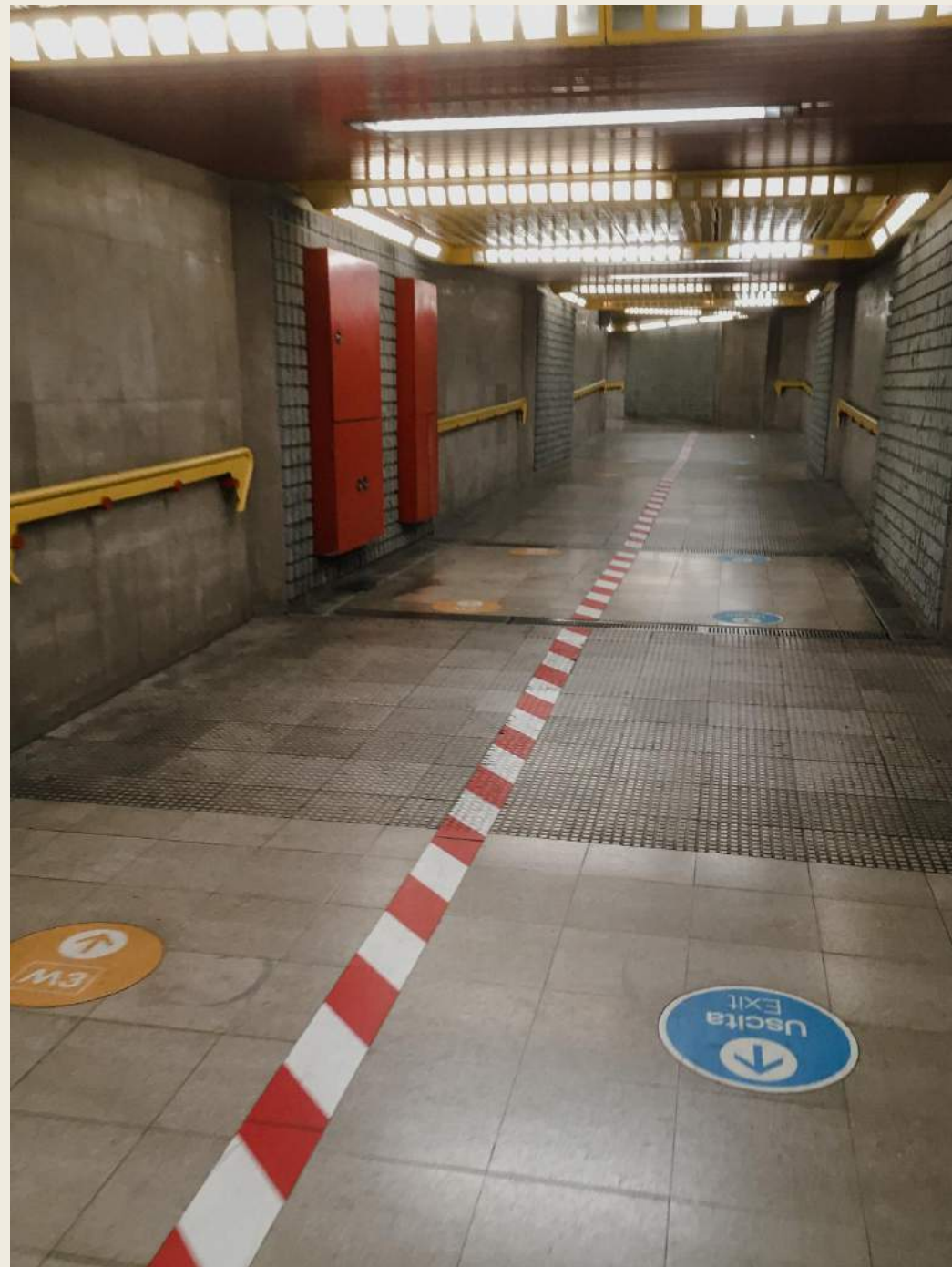


Arriving in 4.5 minutes.



Milanese fashion was truly a dream for street photographers.

Was there a formula for looking so put together? Some wore a statement piece while others wore unassuming business suits. Most donned a sharp, sleek winter jacket, smart glasses, scarf, and a KN95 mask (or a surgical one that read "Made in Italy", hah!). All walked with purpose. Perhaps confidence is the biggest factor.



Marks of the pandemic's presence.





Coffee break at Spadini Café.



Window shopping at Rinascente.



Candies and sweets at OD Store...



Halal EL-MULK LILLAH Arafah Hamada حلال
MACELLERIA E MINIMARKET
CARNE - POLLO - ALIMENTARI - FRUTTA - VERDURA

Halal عرفه حماده حلال
سلسلة جزارات الملك لله الإسلامية

Halal عرفه حماده حلال
لحوم - دواجن - معلبات - مواد غذائية









Mom and I love exploring grocery stores in different countries.



Brisas del Peru

Day 2

We were lucky to be up on the Duomo's Terraces during the short sunny and dry hours of the day. Thanks to Rick Steve's podcast, I had a better grasp of the cathedral's history and architectural context, but no research was needed to appreciate the sweeping views of the city. Perfectly al dente risotto alla Milanese at La Locanda del Gatto Rossa fueled us up after we got lost for a few hours and rushed to make our reservations at La Scala and da Vinci's The Last Supper. I'm convinced we stretched ourselves beyond our comfort zone, because we got lost again trying to find Castello Sforzesco's museums, which we had free admission to. Tucked away in Parco Sempione, this medieval fortress felt like Boston's Museum of Fine Arts on steroids. We barely scratched its surface, and I'm sure art history enthusiasts would have enjoyed it even more. After an hour to rest up at the hotel, we traveled 30 minutes by metro to Punto Navigli to try the Milanese aperitivo tradition for 12€ at Cartoccio Milano. I was content with my aperol spritz, but when it came to food, quantity was emphasized over quality. This first experience wasn't much to write home to, but it whet our appetite for another round a few days later.



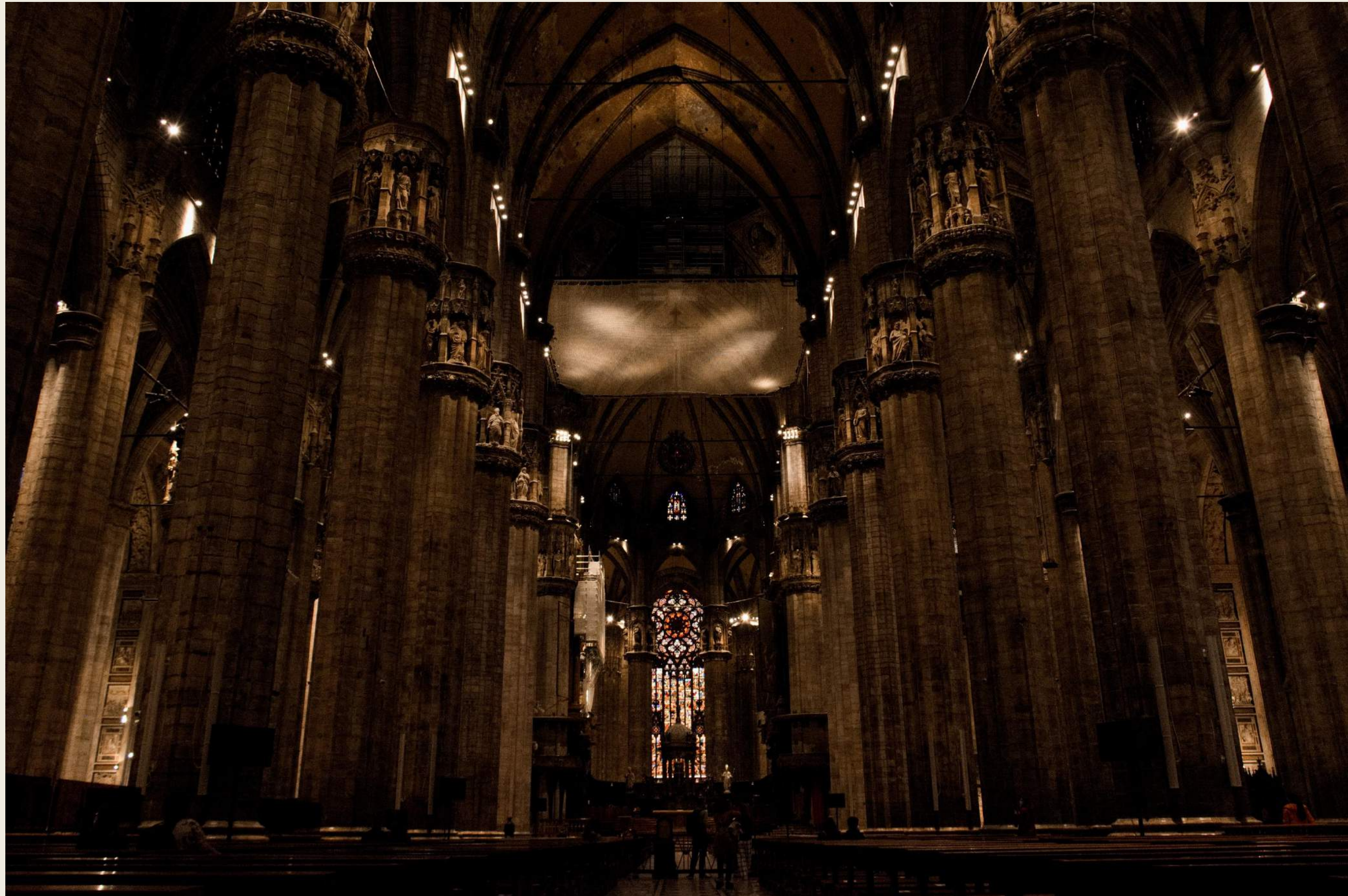
Il Duomo







Views from The Terraces at Il Duomo



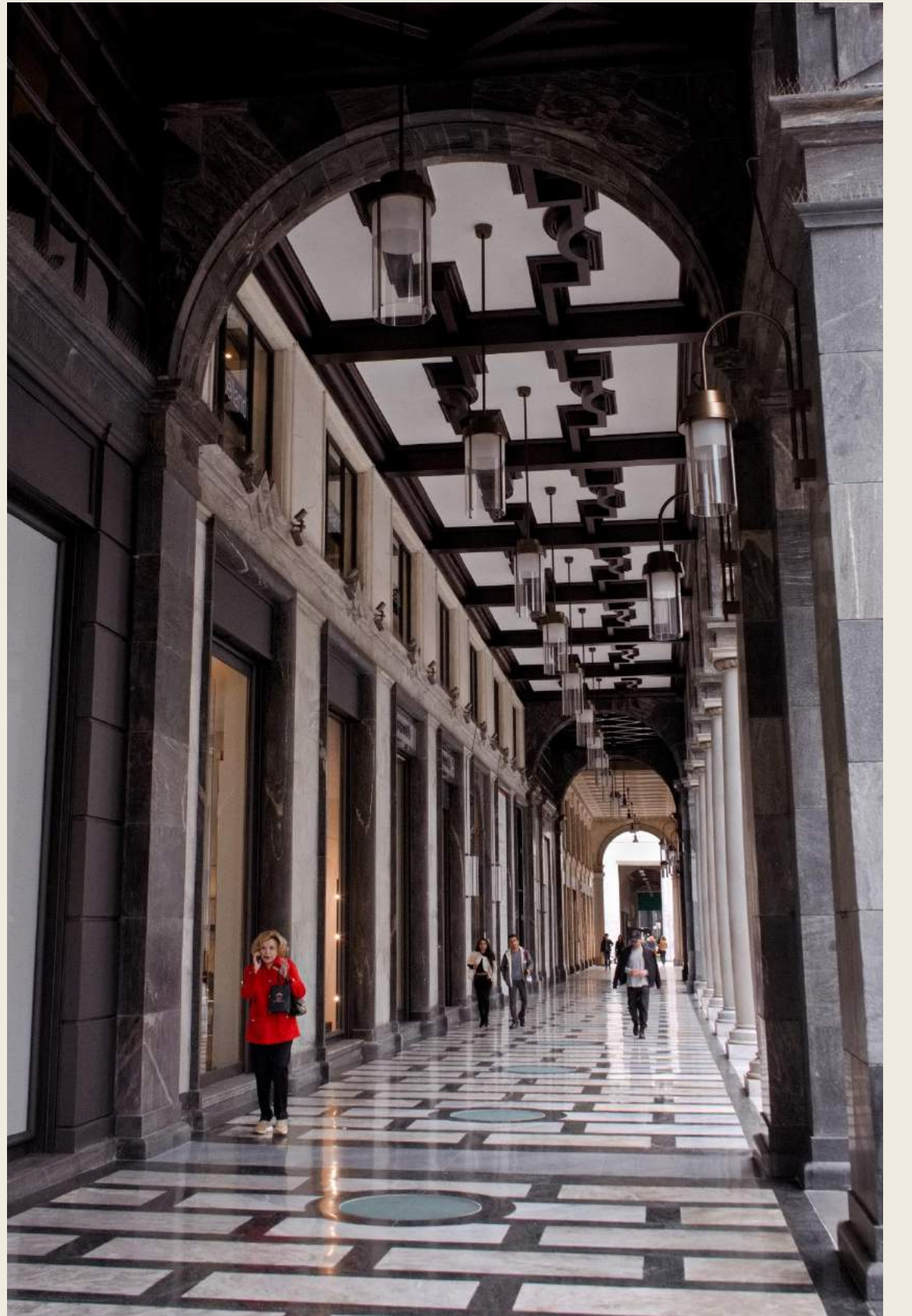
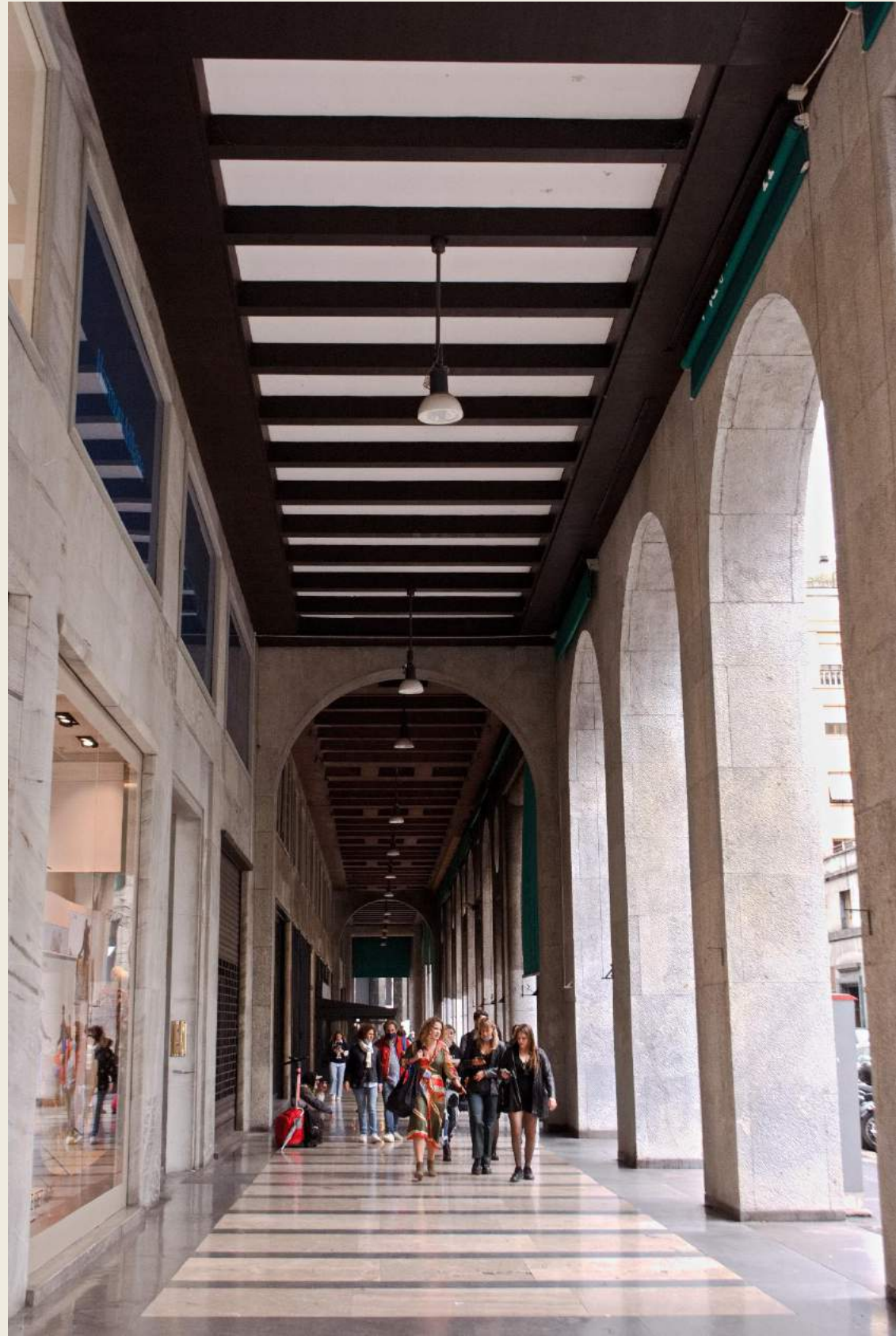
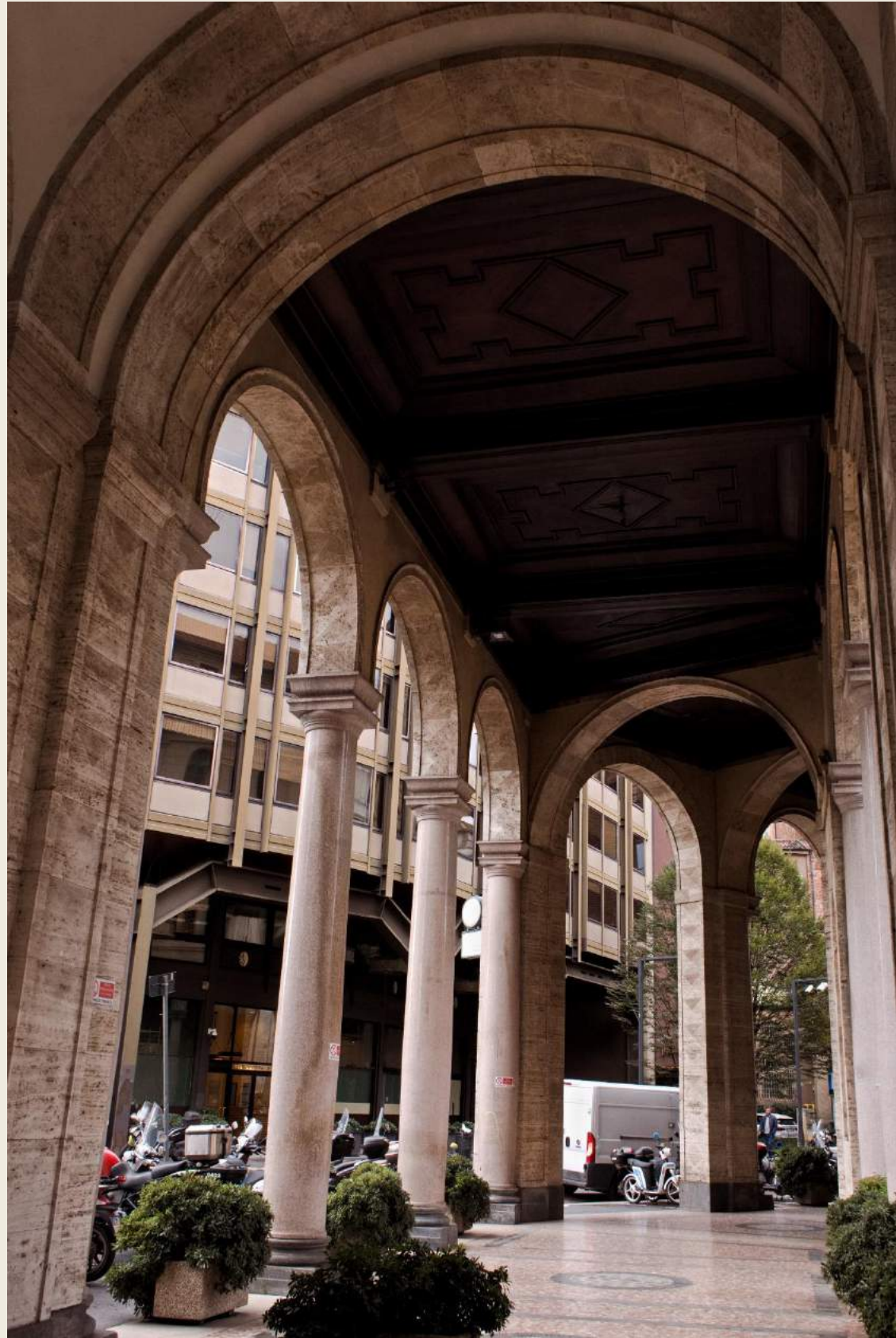














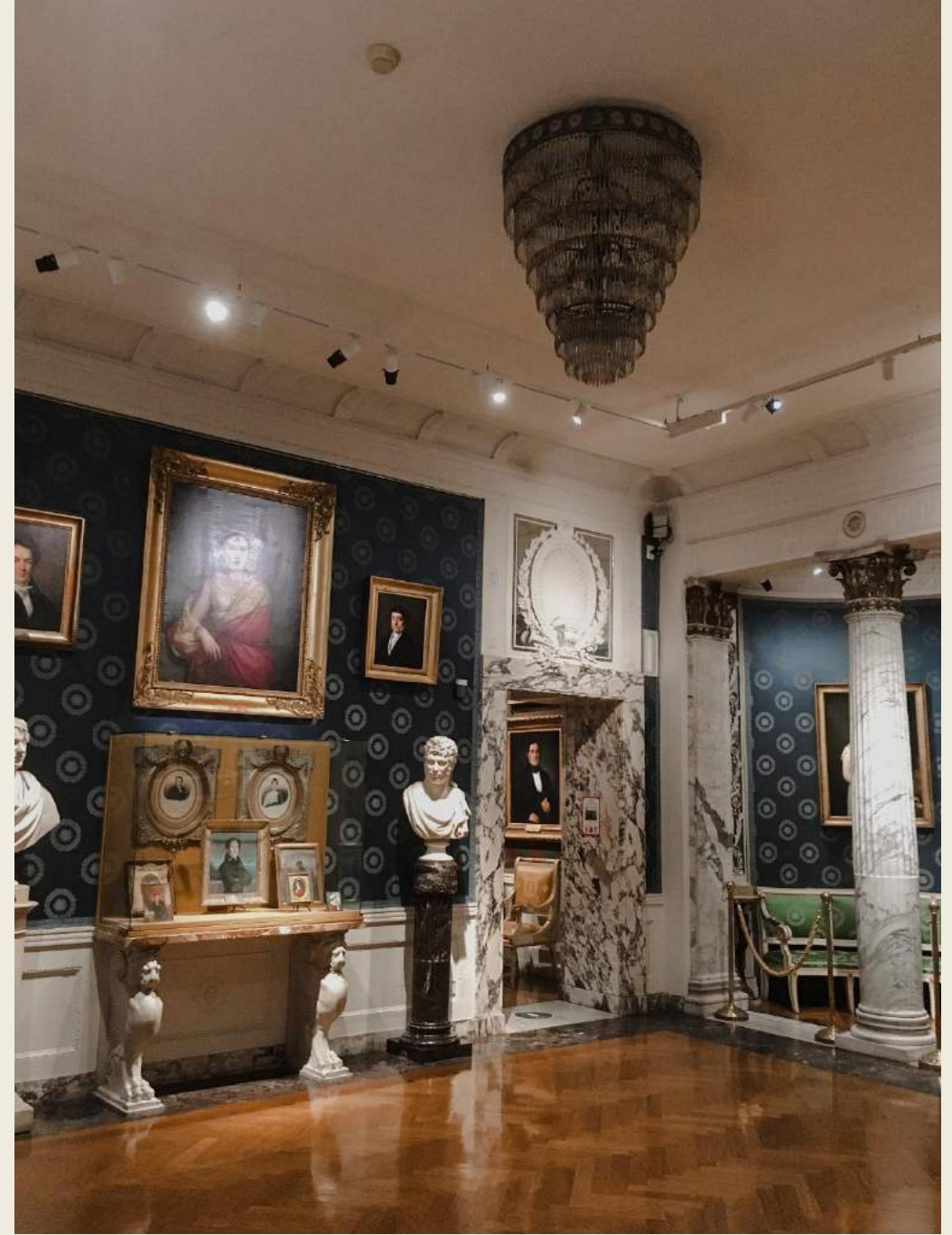
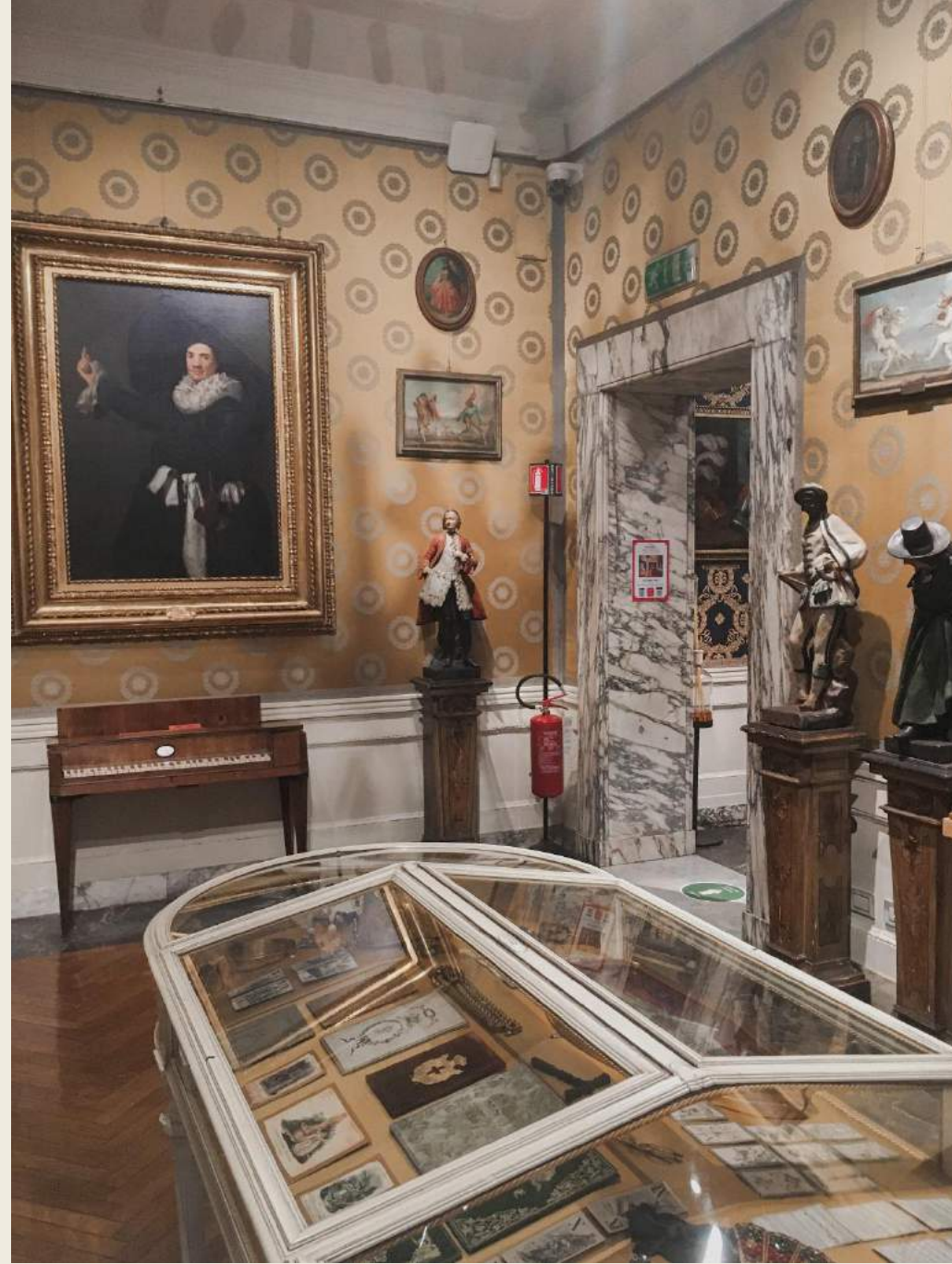


Leonardo da Vinci statue at Piazza della Scala



La Scala Opera House









Zona Magenta





The Last Supper

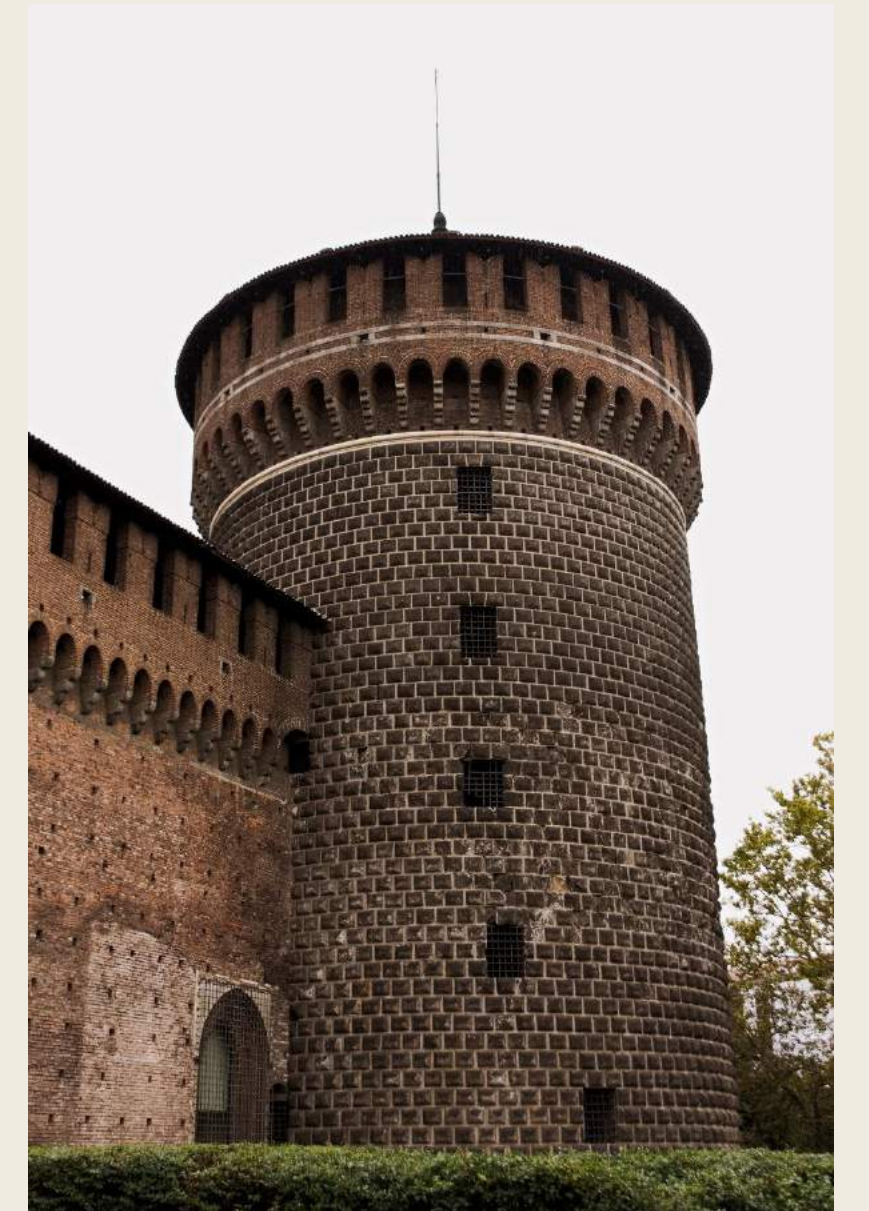
We were fortunate to have purchased tickets to see da Vinci's "The Last Supper" before we left for our trip. When we were exchanging our printed tickets for actual tickets, we overheard other visitors being turned away because the next available tickets were for the following week.

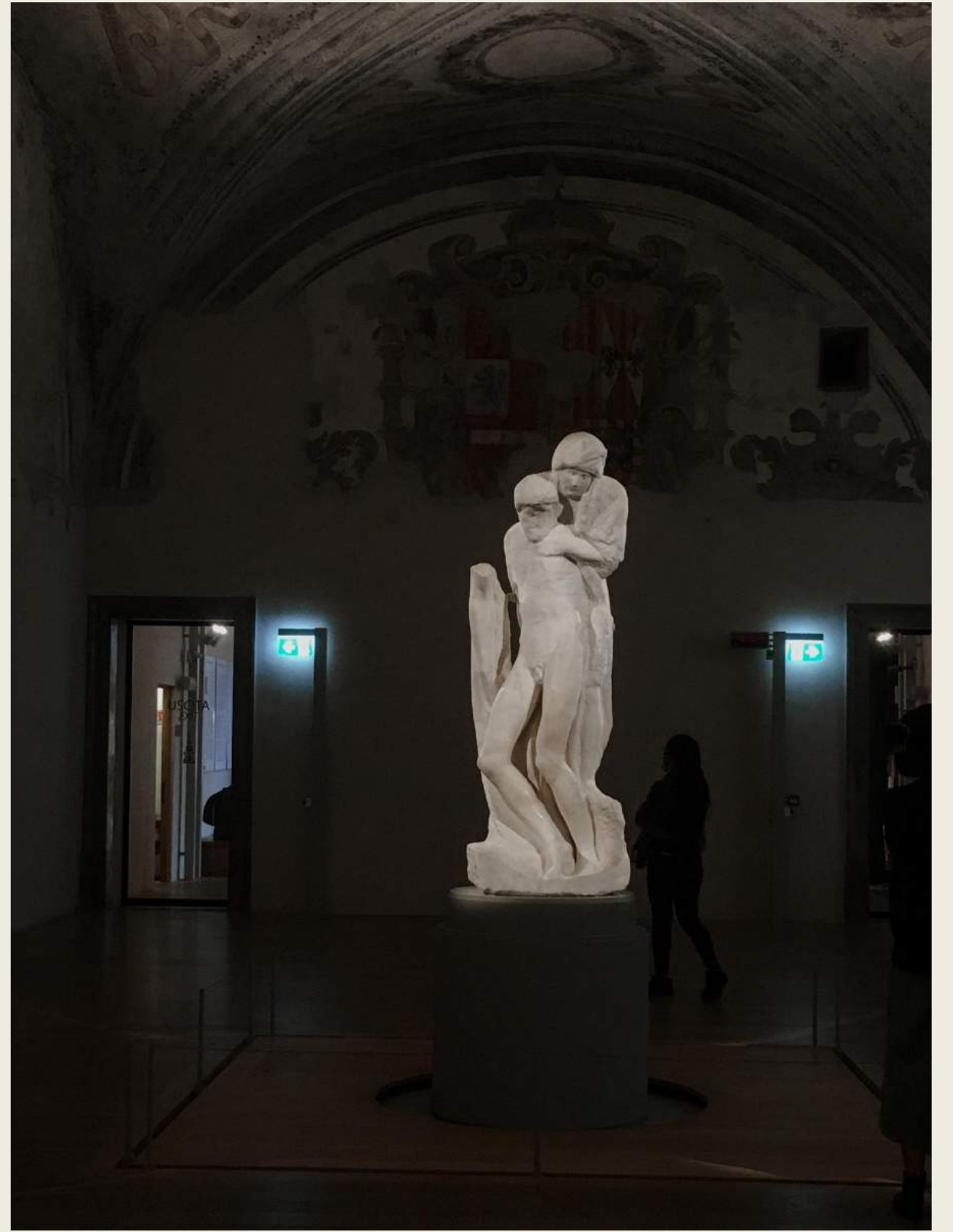


Castello Sforzesco in Parco Sempione







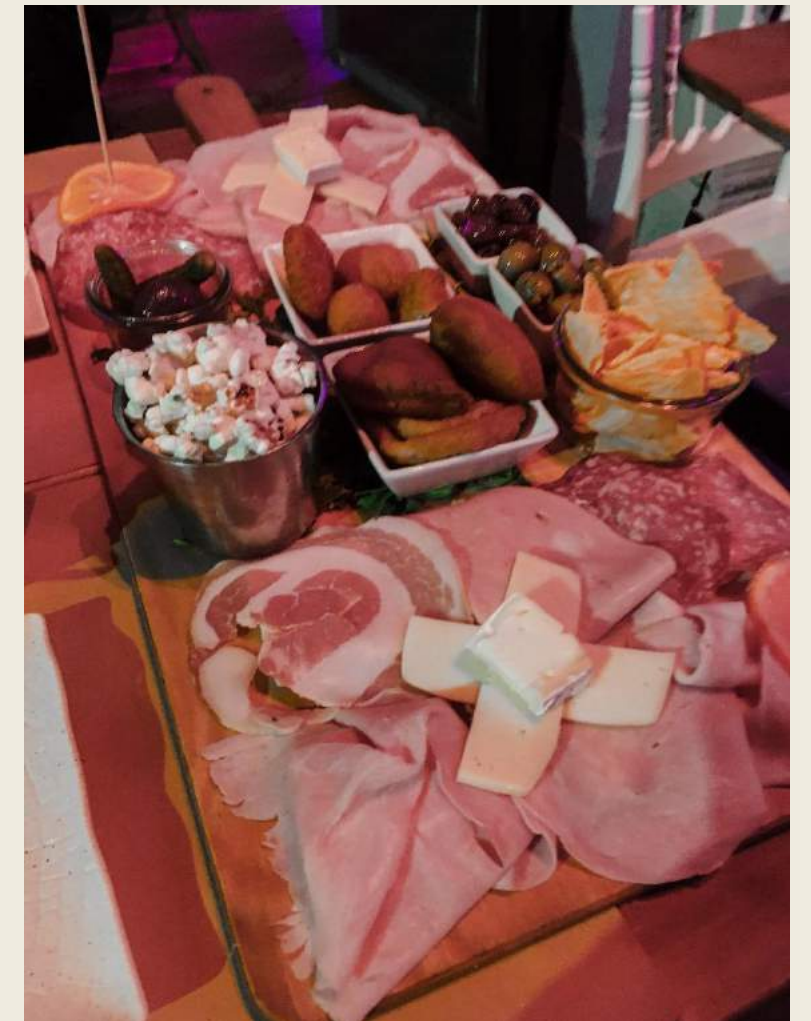
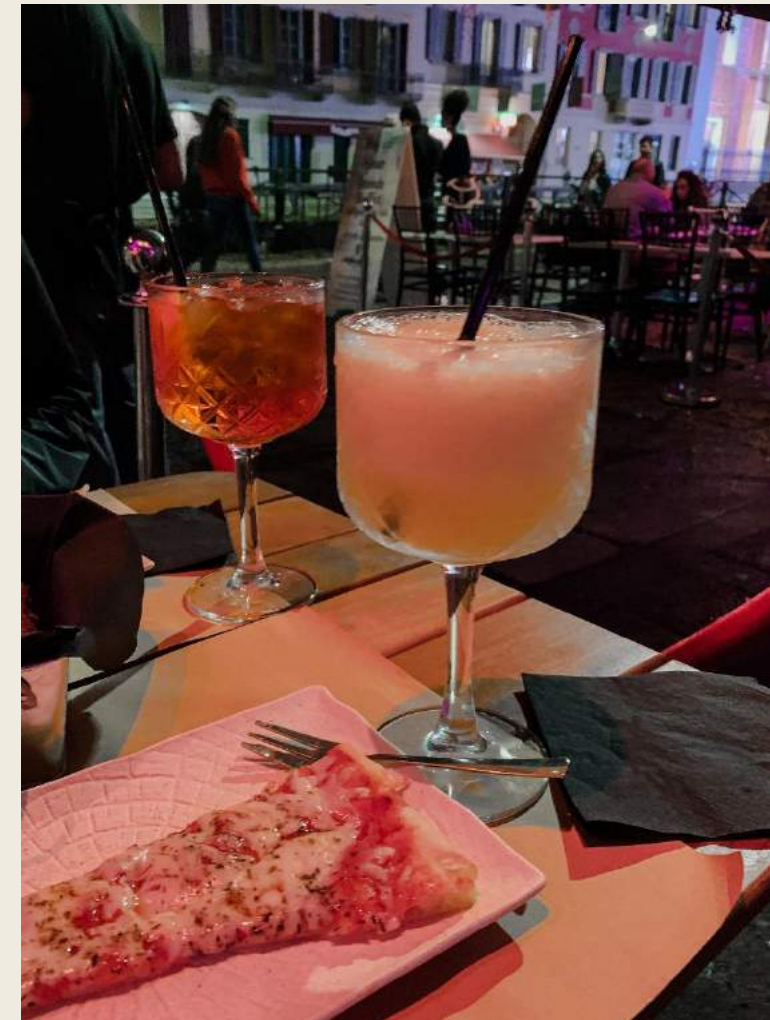




Punto Navigli

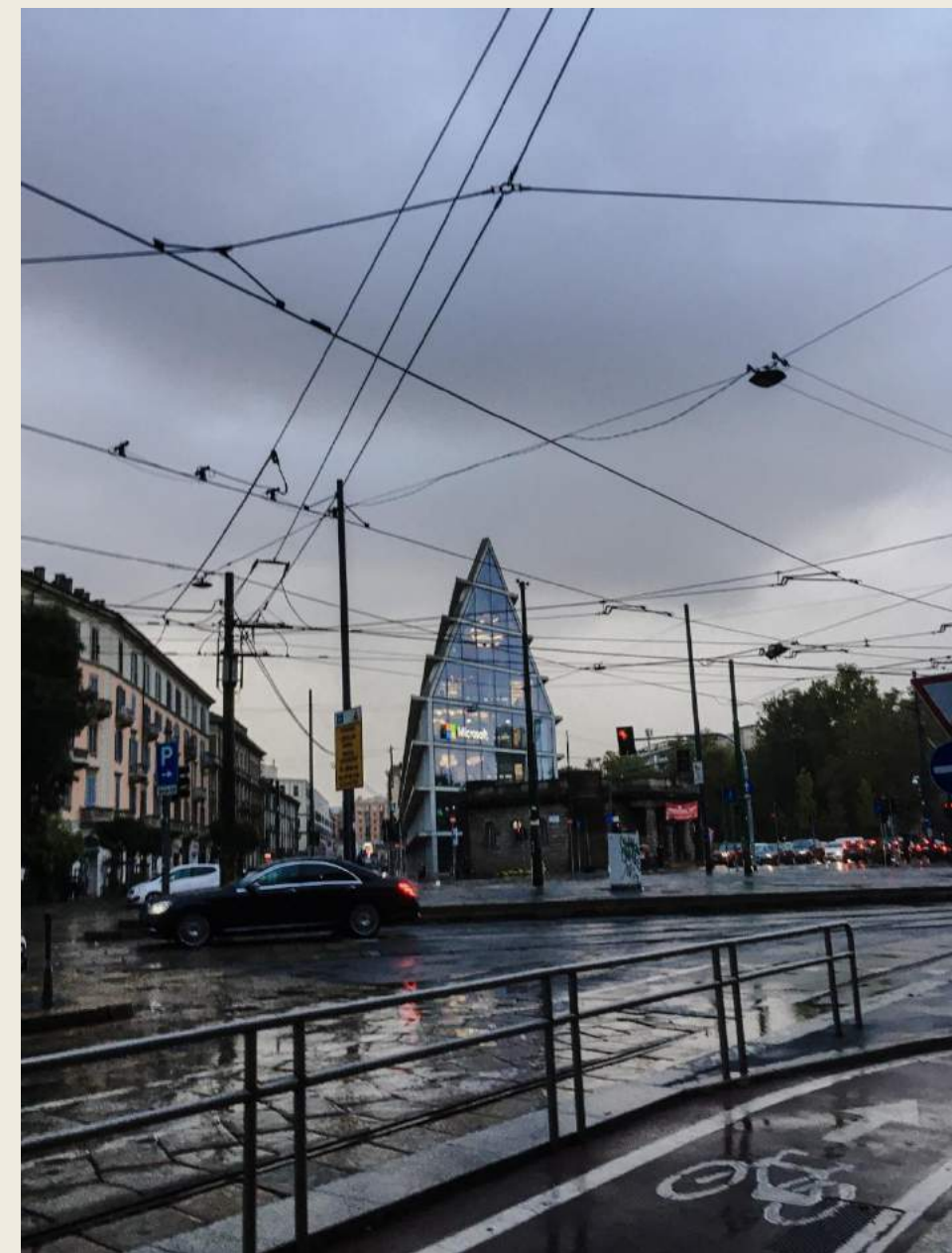


12€ aperitivo at Cartoccio Milano



Day 3

When traveling, I'm adamant about eating outside of my family's comfort zone when possible. I echoed this reminder vociferously as we walked down a posh looking and very clean Chinatown for coffee and pastries amongst locals at Berni Pannettonni. The staff didn't seem to be familiar with our white U.S. COVID vaccination cards; while they were accepted as equivalents to the European Green Pass at all other restaurants and museums we visited, the café staff didn't allow us to sit indoors. We took the tram back to our hotel and grabbed our belongings. Our metro pass had been put to good use, and we took it again to Milano Centrale to grab a bite to takeaway from Mercato Centrale, a food market reminiscent of Chelsea Market, Mercado de San Miguel, and Torvehallerne. Though our experience with local Italians had been all over the map, the folks who dished up our grab'n'go orders were all so kind! With hands full, we navigated ourselves to the platform display where I realized I had booked the wrong train at home. We had been flip-flopping between train companies, and in the process, I had overlooked that I selected the wrong destination: Verona, not Venice. D'oh! Mistakes happen, and there was no better time to roll with the punches. Fortunately, Verona was on our way to Venice, and we were able to get an add-on ticket for free. After disembarking the regional train, we hopped onto a new frecciarossa to Venice. (More to come on our time in Venice.)



(Left to right) Microsoft Building, Milanese architecture, little students waiting to enter school for the day, rainy Milan

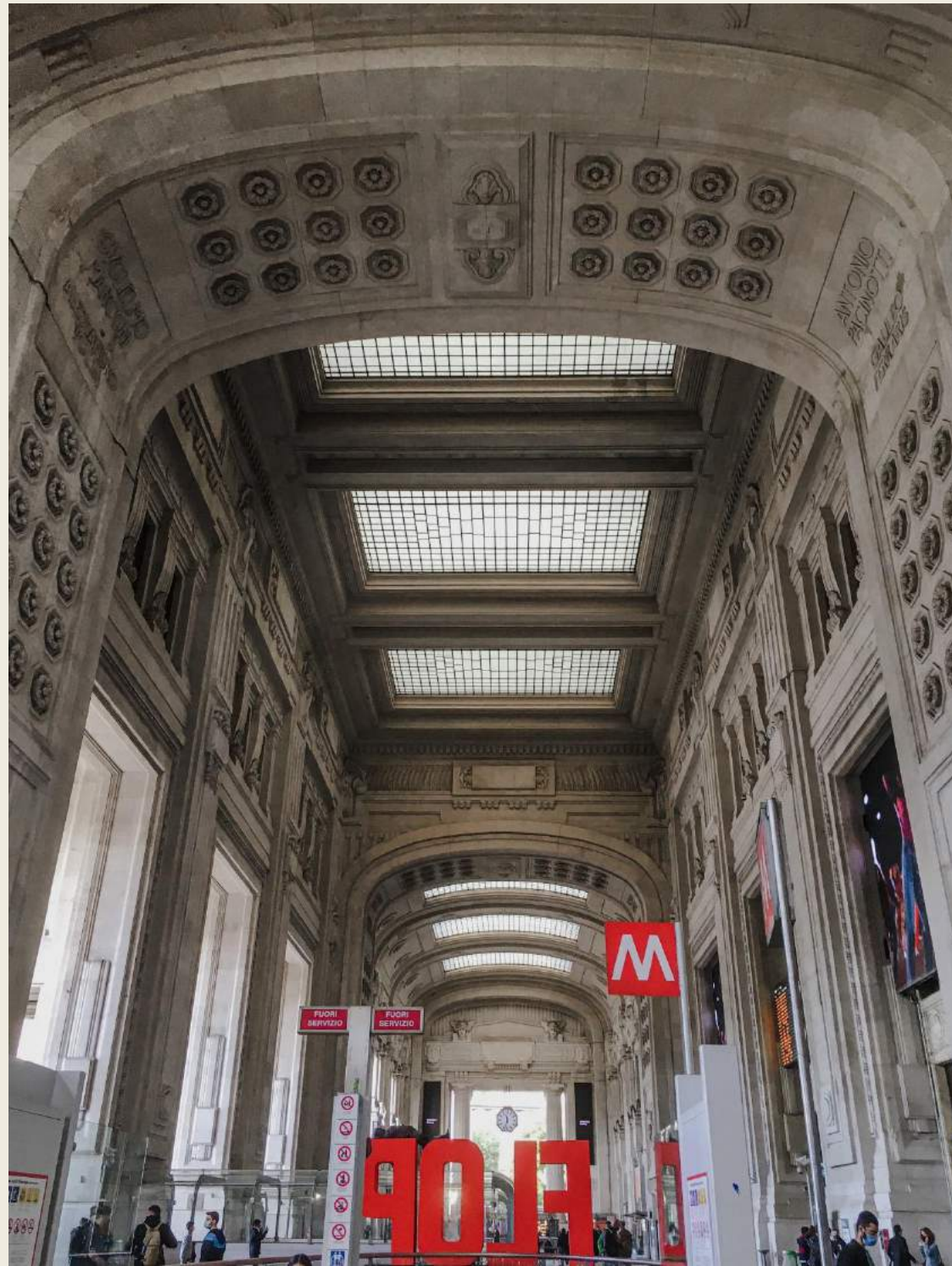


Breakfast at Berni Pannettonni in Chinatown



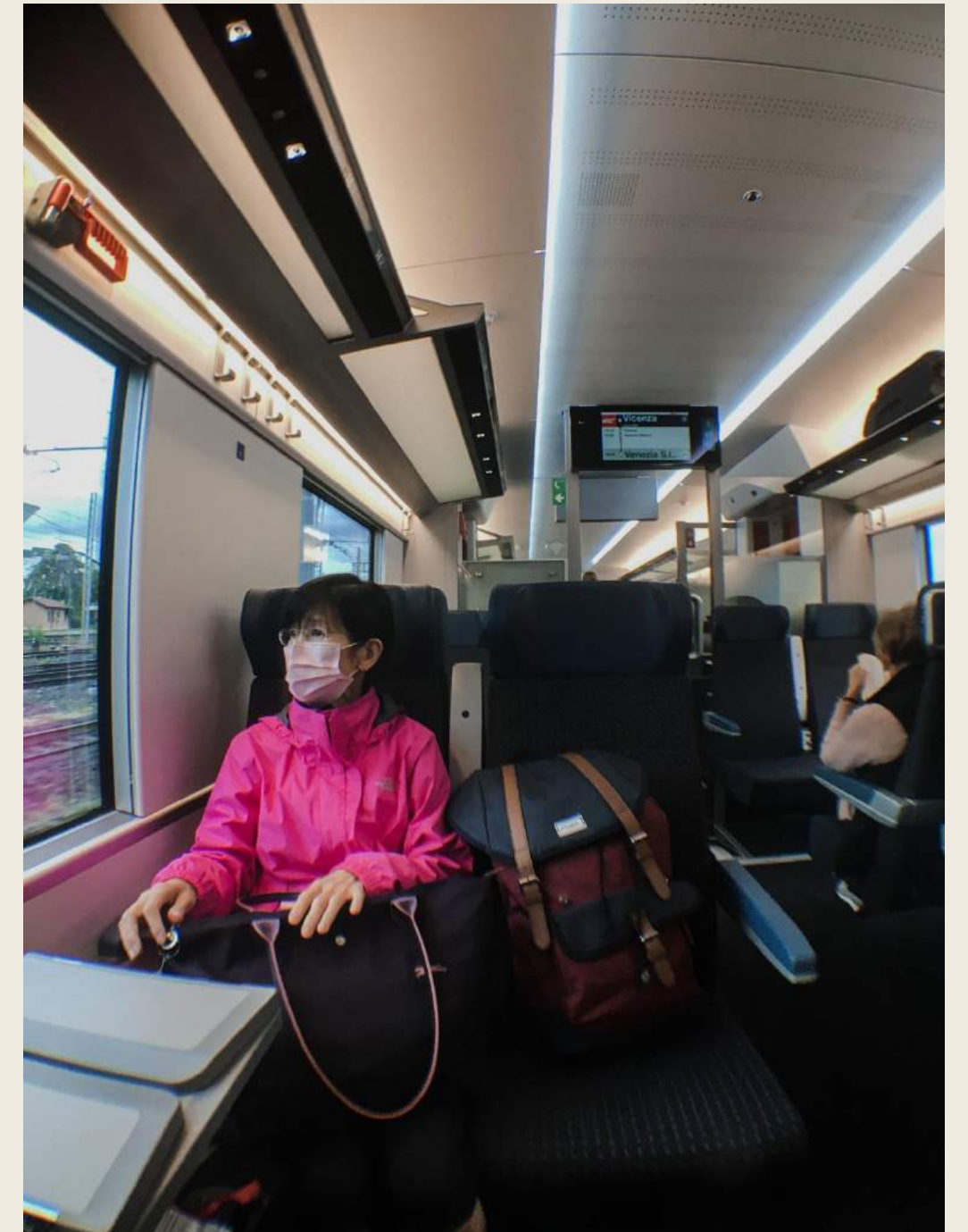


Milan's Chinatown: very clean, residential, quiet.



Milano Centrale

Mercato Centrale



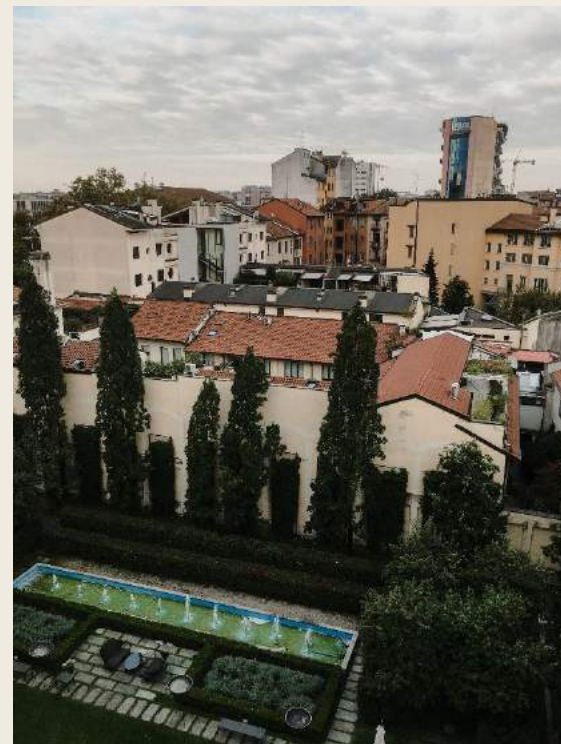
On the frecciarossa to Venice

Day 6

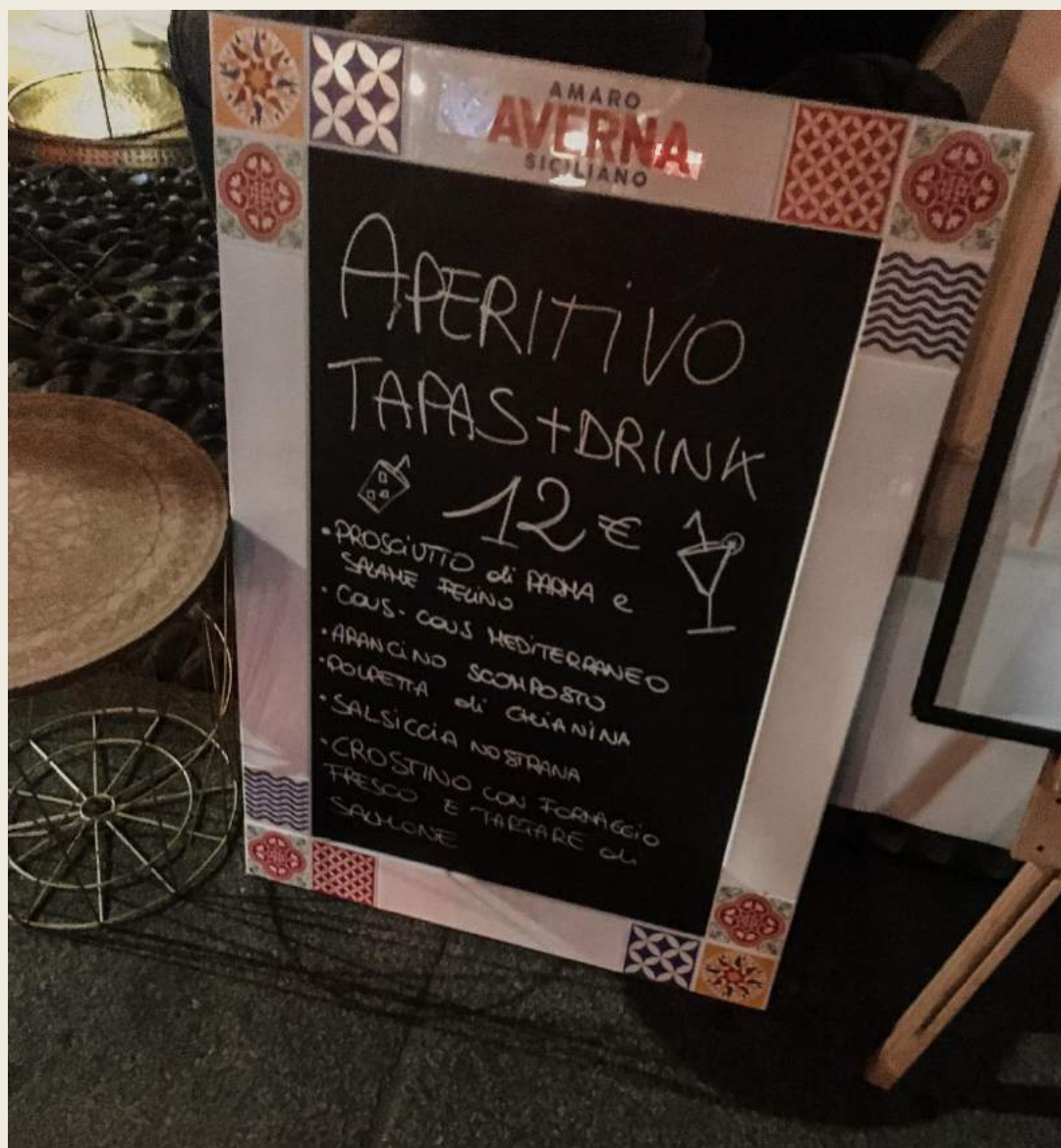
Our busy pace from Milan traveled with us to Venice, and by the time we returned to Milan, we were pretty tired and thrilled to receive a free upgrade to the executive suite at Grand Visconti Palace. It was the resort environment and good sleep we needed after an active week. Since our first aperitivo experience left more to be desired, we took 3 trains over 30 minutes to a happening Punto Navigli. The weekend energy was a stark contrast to our weekday memory of the neighborhood. At Abbracci, we were treated to great service, strong drinks, and a food-focused experience. Once again, it was all for 12€. Unlike the first experience, nobody was standing outside by the menu to lure people in. Bellies content but not quite full, we stepped next door for dessert. By this point in our trip, we had tried plenty of gelato, but the pistachio and almond with fig and pear at Gelateria Orso Bianco was by far the best. (More to come on our last day, a quick trip to Lago di Como).



View from Grand Visconti Palace. Look at that architecture!



I'm still dreaming about the hotel's apple cake.



Punto Navigli round ii, with a successful aperitivo experience for 12€ at Abbracci.



Thanks for following along!

hannahclaudia.blogspot.com