



Treasures of Turin



TREASURES OF TURIN

ONCE ITALY'S CAPITAL CITY, TODAY TURIN IS STAKING A CLAIM TO BE A WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL.

STORY AND PICTURES BY CHRISTINA PFEIFFER

If you've had enough of Venice's flashy charms, Rome's glamour or Florence's Renaissance wonders, pack your bags and head for Turin. Italy's first capital has all the hallmarks you'd expect of a great city – striking culture, art, architecture and museums, stylish shopping and wonderful food. But there's more: an air of renewal fills Turin. 2008 saw the city make its mark as the first World Design Capital.

Chosen by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, a global not-for-profit association representing 150,000 designers from 50 countries, Turin's creative minds set to work to come up with innovative designs ranging from fashion to furniture. Today, the city's Baroque piazzas glitter with avant-garde decorations including large luminous cellophane balls hanging from wires overhead. Outdoor photography and art exhibitions bring atmosphere to the city's historic piazzas.

It's a different scene altogether from late 19th-century Turin when society visitors might have had the good fortune to rub shoulders with dashing dukes and lavishly dressed court ladies of Italy's royal family. These days, luxury travellers are more likely to rub shoulders with the city's high society in the ski resorts of the nearby Italian Alps, or dine in a Michelin-star restaurant patronised by the kings of the industrial era, the mega-rich dynastic families such as Agnelli, Lavazza and Ferrero who produce Fiat cars, coffee and chocolate for the world. Coffee aficionados will be pleased to know that the northern city is still home to the world-renowned Lavazza coffee brand. It's also the birthplace of vermouth, and it is the place where grissini breadsticks were created for a Duke of Savoy.

And once every two years, in October, gourmands will love the internationally acclaimed Slow Food movement festival Salone Internazionale del Gusto.

Spurred on by preparations for the 2006 Winter Olympics, the city's rejuvenation began when Fiat factories gave way to designer precincts. Around two million square metres of abandoned industrial areas were reinvented as contemporary public spaces. The 1920s Fiat Lingotto factory was transformed by Renzo Piano's design into a contemporary multi-functional space with an international convention centre, concert halls, theatres, the Gallery 8 shopping mall and hotel. Guest rooms at the four-star Le Meridien Lingotto hotel still have the original Fiat factory glass walls (not to be confused with the five-star Le Meridien Art + Tech in a converted former Fiat plant nearby). You can fly to the rooftop restaurant, La Pista by helicopter and explore the test track where Michael Caine's team raced around in Minis in the film *The Italian Job*.

Even though the city is regenerating at Ferrari speed, there's no better way to soak in its soul than to stroll around the historic city centre. As I amble beneath kilometres of sheltered porticos admiring majestic architecture, I'm struck by the grandeur of it all.

When Emmanuel Philibert, the Duke of Savoy, moved his capital here in 1562, he began building grand architectural palazzos in colossal dimensions that unashamedly ignored space and cost. The architectural legacy left by the Savoy family is a vast network of historic royal buildings now listed as ►



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Piazza San Carlo



UNESCO World Heritage, worthy of an afternoon of exploration.

I start at the main palace, Palazzo Reale, once the official residence of Italy's kings, and then make my way to the Palazzo Madama, where I walk on the glass floor above Roman ruins. One of my indulgent Turin moments was sipping *bicerin*, the city's signature drink of hot coffee, chocolate and cream, while soaking up the majestic mood of Turin's historic cafes like Caffé San Carlo, once the favourite haunt of writer Alexandre Dumas, or Caffé Fiorio, where statesmen Cavour and Garibaldi plotted the future of Italy. Decked out in gold and crimson, with ornate marble tops, chandeliers, frescoes and mirrors, these grand cafes were the heart of Turin's social, political, and literary activity.

Turin's museums are an indicator of the city's affluence. The Museo Egizio has the largest number of Egyptian artifacts in the world outside of Cairo. The museum's halls are filled with giant sphinxes, statues of Egyptian kings, mummies and ancient papyrus scrolls. =

DETAILS

Etihad Airways flies from Sydney and Brisbane to Milan, with a stopover in Abu Dhabi. Turin is located around 110 km from Milan. The airline also began flights from Melbourne in March 2009.

Details, 1800 998 995, www.etihadairways.com.

FIVE-STAR STAYS

- **Golden Palace** is a sophisticated hotel located in Palazzo Toro that dates back to World War II. Details, +39 011 5512111, www.goldenpalace.thi.it
- **Le Meridien Turin Art + Tech** has 143 loft-style guest rooms with furniture designed by Philippe Starck. Details, +39 011 6642000, www.lemeridien.com
- **Principi di Piemonte** is a luxurious 99-room hotel decked out with marble and Murano glass. Details, +39 011 55151, www.atahotels.it
- **Kempinski Prigelato Village** has five-star chalets in the Italian Alps, only an hour-and-a-half's drive from Turin. Details, +39 0122 740011, www.kempinski-prigelato.com

For more information contact Italian Government Tourist Office on (02) 9262 1666, or visit www.enit.it.