

# BUON APPETITO

Milan's aperitivo bars are a stylish way to dine like a king for the price of a drink. **John Brunton** selects ten of the best

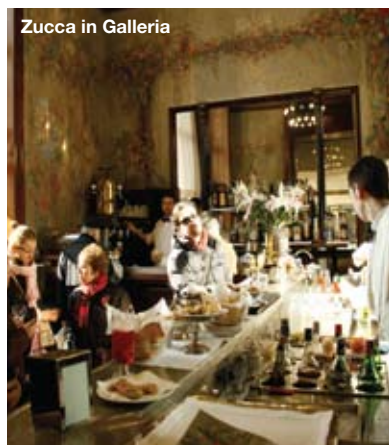
The Milanese have made an art out of the early evening aperitif, transforming it into an after-work essential and a stylish alternative to going out for dinner.

Order a drink and feast off a sumptuous gourmet buffet for free, sampling pasta and pizza, risotto and salad, prosciutto and mozzarella, *parmiggiano* and tiramisù.

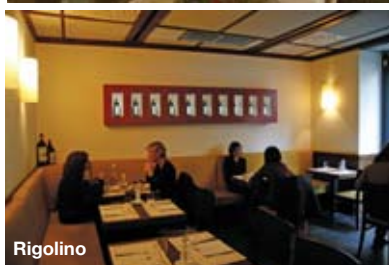
Part chic and trendy, part ultra-conservative, the city's split personality is reflected in the wide choice of aperitivo options. Below is a top-ten mix of timeless classics and hot newcomers.



H Club Diana



Zucca in Galleria



Rigolino



Nottingham Forest

## ZUCCA IN GALLERIA

Everyone visiting Milan walks past its landmark cathedral, the *duomo*, and the ultimate rendezvous is this legendary corner bar, where Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II emerges into Piazza del Duomo. Known to locals as "Camparini", because Gaspare Campari launched his bitter alcoholic infusion of herbs here in the 1860s, the décor is beautiful art nouveau, and everyone bustles to get a place at the bar, where a tempting array of free snacks is laid out all day. While regulars invariably order a Campari and soda, it is also worth trying the house special, Zucca, a rhubarb-based aperitif.

■ Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II; tel +39 028 646 4435; [caffemiani.it](http://caffemiani.it)

■ Aperitivo hours: all day. Drinks €3-5.

## RIGOLINO

Rigolino is a smart, elegant locale that offers a different take on the classic aperitivo – here, the emphasis is on wine rather than cocktails. The friendly owner, Renato Simoncini, has installed a high-tech Enomatic wine case that automatically seals the bottle, meaning classic vintages such as Sassicaia, Tignanello, Amarone and Brunello di Montalcino are now available by the glass. The buffet is a feast of salamis and prosciutti, *farinata* and pizza, baby octopi on creamy polenta, and sometimes even oysters.

■ 50 Via della Moscova; tel +39 022 906 2926; [rigolino.it](http://rigolino.it)

■ Aperitivo hours: daily 7pm-9pm. Wine costs €4-16 per glass.

## NOTTINGHAM FOREST

The name hardly sounds like a chic address, but Nottingham Forest actually refers to a type of rum from the Caribbean island of Antigua, and the kitsch tropical décor is a riot. The affable owner, Dario Comini, is as well known for his molecular cocktails as Spanish chef Ferran Adria is for his molecular cuisine. The free finger food served during the aperitivo hour is minimalist, but this is still the best time to visit as later in the evening there is always a long line waiting outside.

■ 1 Viale Piave; tel +39 279 8311;

[nottingham-forest.com](http://nottingham-forest.com)

■ Aperitivo hours: daily 6.30pm-9pm. Drinks €6-8.

### LE BANQUE

In the heart of the city's financial district, just behind La Scala opera house, Le Banque is one of the hottest addresses in town. Although essentially a late-night club, where footballers from Inter and AC Milan mingle with celebrities, models and designers, Le Banque is also a chic early-evening meeting place for aperitivi. Sample the sumptuous buffet while admiring the rococo Louis XVI furnishings, the fabulous futuristic cocktail bar and the imposing baroque architecture of the original banking hall.

■ 6 Via Bassano Porrone; tel +39 286 996 565; lebanque.it

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 6pm-10pm. Drinks €10.

### VIA CASALE 3

The picturesque canals of the neighbourhood known as Navigli are lined with dozens of bars, restaurants and clubs, and the area is invaded every night by crowds of partygoers. Via Casale 3 is one of the smarter addresses, and the design here is bright and modern. It attracts a funky clientele that drinks *caipirinhas* and *mojitos*, while the food stacked up on the bar is copious and delicious. From here, move on to the bars along the Naviglio Grande, or carry on to Naviglio Pavese, where bigger clubs, such as Spazio Movida and Le Scimmie, have DJs and live bands.

■ 3 Via Casale; tel +39 338 1907 079; viacasale3.com

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 6pm-9pm. Drinks €7.

### NOBU/ARMANI

Every fashion designer in Milan seems to have opened their own glamorous café – Roberto Cavalli, Dolce and Gabbana, Trussardi – but the undisputed king of Montenaполеone, the ultra-chic fashion quarter, is Giorgio Armani. In collaboration with Japanese fine-dining chef Nobu, he has opened an exclusive restaurant, but the real movers and shakers gather every evening in the vast low-lit orange bar, nibbling sushi and sipping cocktails. If all this seems a bit too precious, Montenaполеone boasts two of Milan's oldest *pasticerie*, officially cake shops but unofficially the place to be seen for aperitivi. Cova (8 Via Montenaполеone) is the most famous, but that means lots of tourists, and a better bet is the elegant Sant' Ambroeus (7 Corso Matteotti).

■ 1 Via Pisoni; tel +39 262 312 645; armaninobu.it

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 7.30pm-9pm. Drinks €15.

### IL GATTOPARDO CAFE

The smartest aperitivo addresses, such as Living, Deseo, Jazz Café and Casta Diva, are clustered around Piazza and Corso Sempione, but those in the know head for the nearby side road of Via Piero della Francesca. Il Gattopardo should not be missed. A 200-year-old deconsecrated chapel with a soaring cupola, it has been converted



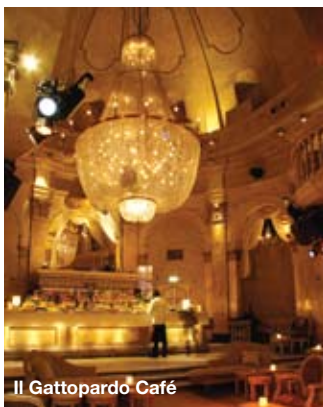
Le Banque



Mercanti Caffè



H Club Diana



Il Gattopardo Café



Nobu/Armani



Via Casale 3

into an exclusive venue. During aperitivo time, the long cocktail bar is filled with ever-changing dishes, but come 10pm, the atmosphere becomes more lively, with a DJ or live band. A few doors along is Roialto, a vast converted food market that has the biggest buffet imaginable and is decorated in elegant 1940s style.

■ 47 Via Piero della Francesca; tel +39 234 537 699; ilgattopardocafe.it

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 6pm-10pm. Drinks €8-10.

### H CLUB DIANA BAR

Nothing on the Milan aperitivo scene can compare with the exclusive H Club, set in the historic Sheraton Diana Majestic hotel. Walk through the thick curtain separating the lobby from the bar and you'll find yourself in an exotic world of sumptuous Dali-like sofas and armchairs. A DJ plays mesmerising lounge music from the bar's own CD series, while waiters flit between fashionistas and sharp-suited businessmen, balancing trays of lethal cocktails. In the summer, crowds spill out into the bar's gorgeous gardens.

■ 42 Viale Piave; tel +39 220 582 081; starwoodhotels.com

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 7pm-10pm. Drinks €10-12.

### MERCANTI CAFFÈ

On Via Manzoni, there is Romantic Café and Caffè dell' Opera, while a more fashionable crowd heads across to Café Trussardi, on the ground floor of La Scala. Via dei Mercanti has the Martini Bar, Caffè Aperol, and the best choice, the plush Mercanti Caffè, where the buffet is served under lustrous Murano chandeliers. The owner is an avid fan of both AC Milan football club and Silvio Berlusconi, so expect much of the conversation to centre on sport and politics.

■ 21 Via Dei Mercanti; tel +39 272 080 394

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 5.30pm-8pm. Drinks €6-10.

### FASHION CAFE

The Zona Brera resembles London's Kensington, with grand museums and churches, antique shops, fashion outlets and gourmet restaurants. But the ambiance along Via Brera and Via San Marco is much livelier, with a host of aperitivo locales to choose from. The hottest spot is undoubtedly Radetzky (5 Largo la Foppa), where the "doorman" is more a bouncer keeping an eye on who comes in, while Jamaica (32 Via Brera) is a wonderful old bohemian artists' haunt. However, the spot that combines the best of Brera is Fashion Café, where sleek modern interior design meets award-winning cocktails. It's great in the summer, when crowds camp out on the pavement terrace.

■ 1 Piazza San Marco; tel +39 265 720 21; fashioncafe.it

■ Aperitivi hours: daily 5.30pm-9.30pm. Drinks €7.