

EUROPE TROTTING- PHASE 1: Turning the 'Bucket' upside down!

The most commonly cited bucket list places to visit have never had much meaning to me as I always believed in going places less travelled — always wanted to see the world at my own pace and to see things that people do not normally consider most desirable must sees!

So, recently, my wife, Nargis Chowdhury, and I made a two-month 'epic' journey which started with witnessing the 2018 World Cup football match between Argentina and Nigeria in St Petersburg, Russia; and saw us visiting Paris — the city of love; paying our fan tribute by locating Jim Morrison's of The Doors fame's final resting place; seeing Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' in Milan; witnessing Roger Waters live in a mind-blowing Pink Floyd open air concert in Rome (by sheer luck); touching Istanbul, the city once ruled by the mighty



Ottomans; and crossing through Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Delft, Brussels and London.

The places we have been to, the things we saw, and the cultures that we experienced, were beyond anything that we had ever expected in just one trip. And, I told my wife after reaching Istanbul, on our way to Dhaka, that if I had believed in the concept of a bucket list, I surely would need a new one, because mine was already full!

After we were done with our Russian adventure (touring Moscow and witnessing the WC 2018 match), we took a flight to Paris. We stayed in the city for over a week, and explored the alleys as much as we could. We also went to the famous café

'Train Bleu' in Gare de Lyon before we headed off to Milan, the fashion capital of Italy!

On the first day, we took the train from Gare de Lyon, Paris in the morning and reached the Milan central station in the afternoon, after nearly 7.5 hours of a silky smooth ride that took us through the 'picture perfect' French Riviera and through the Swiss Alps — what an amazing view of the mountains!

After checking-in at our hotel, we got all the info regarding the must see tourist spots in the city from our 'super friendly' hotel reception/travel desk. After getting a late lunch, we chose to buy two 3-day metro passes and started exploring Milan,



and found the people of the city really friendly.

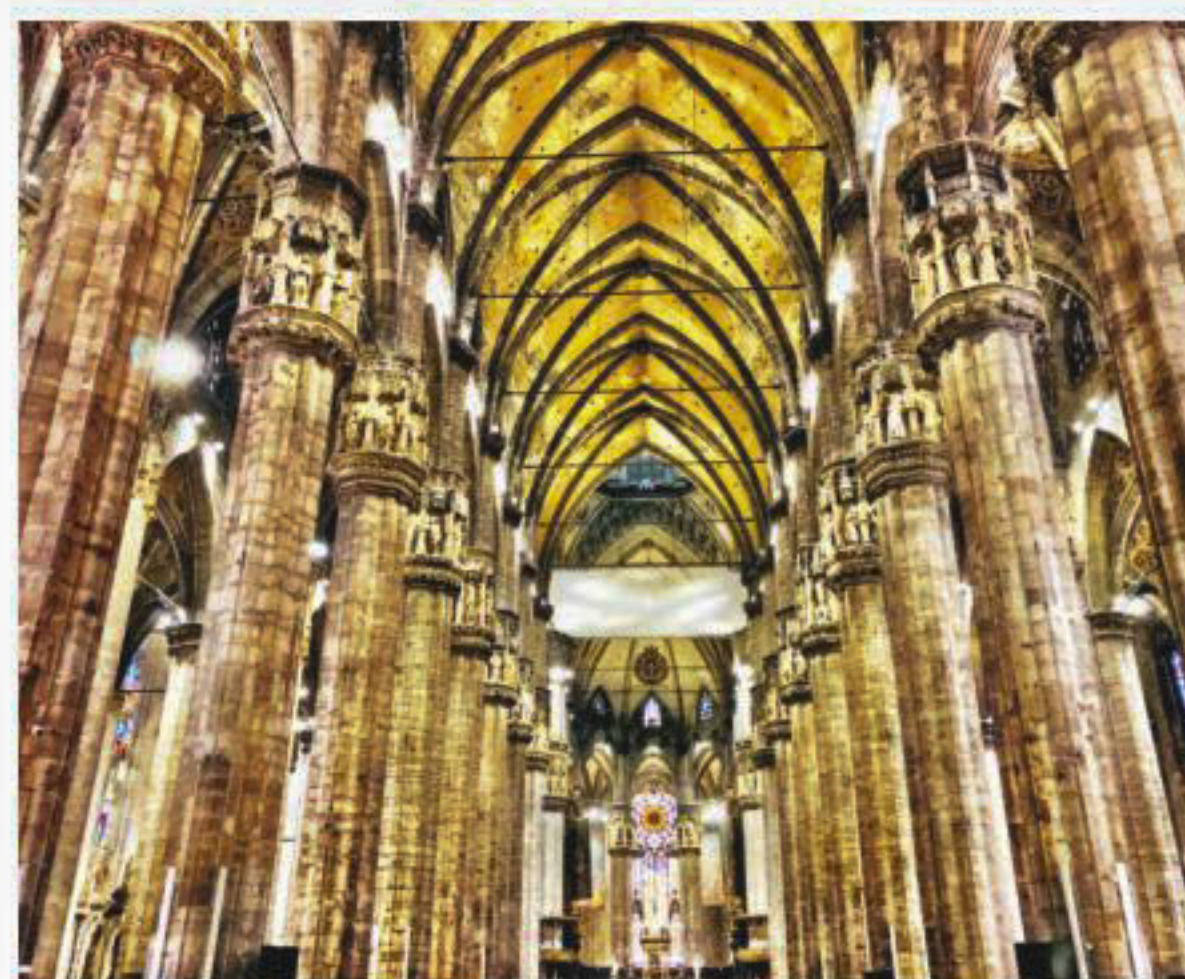
First off, we went to see Duomo di Milano, Milan Cathedral is the cathedral church of Milan, Lombardy, Italy. A quick look at Wikipedia revealed that it took over six centuries to complete!

The masterful workmanship of the Cathedral is breathtakingly beautiful. Our next destination, The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele 2 grand shopping mall, was just beside the Duomo. This is Italy's oldest and one of the world's oldest shopping malls!

There are four murals at the centre of the mall, representing the four continents. Outlets of all the major global brands can be found here, which sure is a treat for the eyes!

Just outside this amazing mall is a statue of Leonardo da Vinci, the greatest genius of the Italian renaissance. We then called it a night as we had to preserve the energy for the mega event that was to make our Milan trip so very special.

Our extra excitement for Milan, even while planning the trip in Bangladesh, was because we had wanted to witness one of

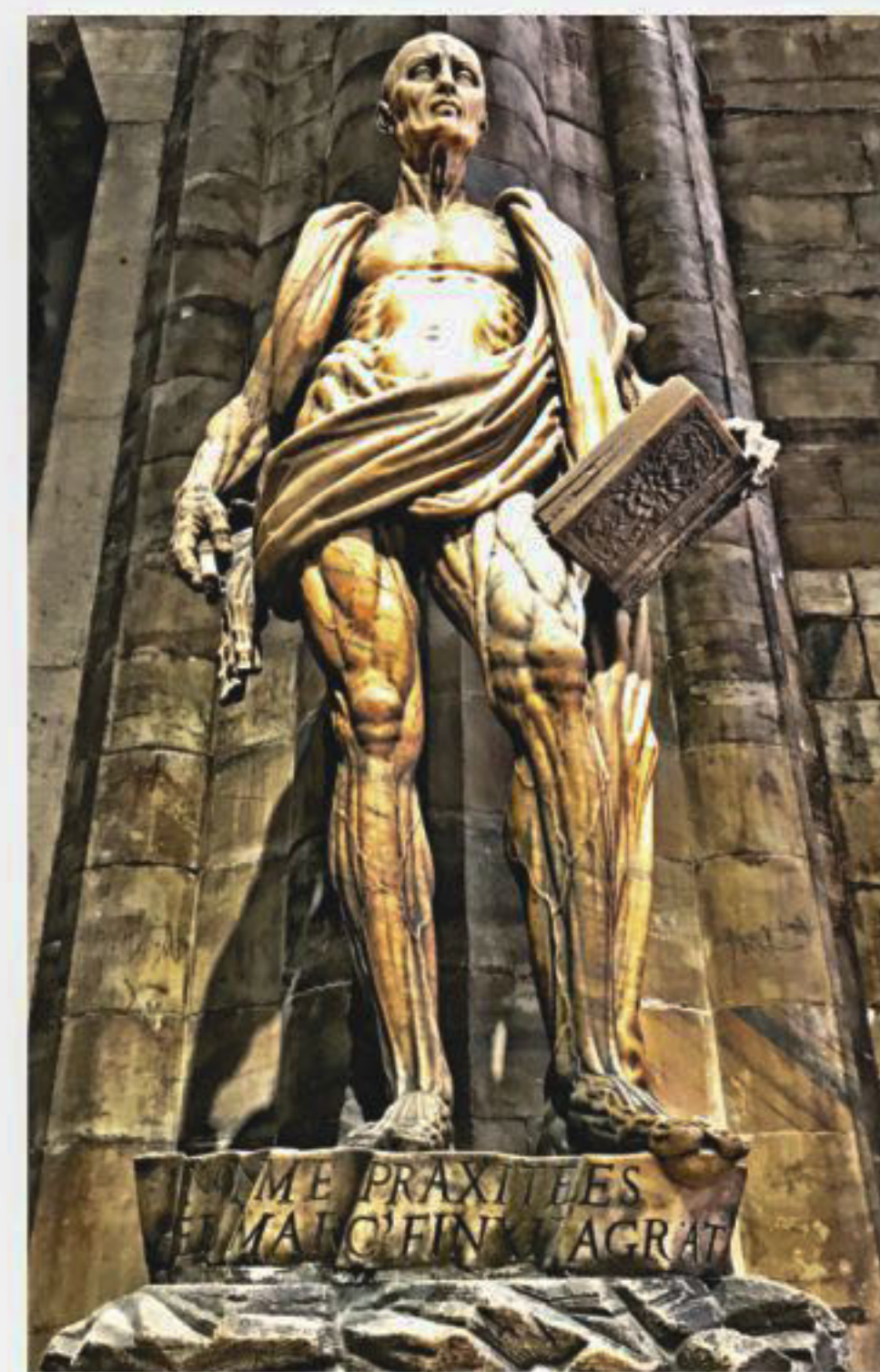


the greatest works of Da Vinci — The Last Supper — in person. For that, one has to book an online ticket for the 15-minute guided tour inside Santa Maria Delle Grazie church where he painted the masterpiece, at least six months to one year prior to the actual trip.

We knew that well and had tried to book our slots since February 2018 for a trip in the second week of July in the same year. We gave up, disheartened after numerous tries, as all of the season slots were filled up much earlier. Disappointment aside, we kept Milan in our itinerary anyway, and this

proved fortunate, as some opportune divine intervention was about to take place!

Just an hour before reaching Milan, I was finalising the places we wanted to visit in the city, and upon a whim, checked the booking site to try our luck one more time. And then magic happened! I got us the



coveted tickets for a half day guided tour, including the 15-minutes inside Santa Maria Delle Grazie church where 'The Last Supper' is preserved, and the Sforza Castle.

Upon meeting the very competent guide Catherine, an old lady from Milan, we told her the story of getting the tour tickets, and she smiled before explaining that our stroke of luck resulted from a group of three people, who had booked six months ago, getting stuck somewhere and having had to cancel at the last moment.

Santa Maria Delle Grazie is simple on the outside, without giving any indication that it holds one of Vinci's greatest masterpieces.