

Bologna: How to get there and what's on offer in this beautiful Italian city

Discover terracotta roofs, history and a host of delicious cuisine in this Italian city

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Bologna (Photo: internet creative commonGoldmund100 (Luca Volpi)s)

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Bologna, known as 'La Rossa' for its red terracotta roofs and renowned as the birthplace of spaghetti, is famed for its medieval buildings and porticos, delicious food and welcoming charm.

Must sees for free

Head to Piazza Maggiore on a balmy summer evening. Walk through this well-known square, sip a drink at one of the outdoor cafes, or relax on the steps of the Church of San Petronio or by the Fontana del Nettuno (fountain of Neptune).

Explore the Quadrilatero, a medieval market where stalls and shops sell regional delicacies including handmade pasta, the signature Bolognese sauce, ragù, and local wines such as Lambrusco and Pignoletto.



The Sanctuary of San Luca, Bologna (Photo: Mattana)

Climb to the top of Torre Asinelli, an 11th century tower which is a symbol of Bologna. With 498 steps, it's a perfect way to work up an appetite and the views of the city's red roofs and surrounding hills are worth the climb.

Must sees for a fee

Palazzo Pepoli, Museo della Storia di Bologna, (Museum of the History of Bologna) is a museum dedicated to the history and culture of the city, from the 'Felsina etrusca' to modern times. Entry is €10, €5 to €8 for concessions, free for under-fives

Hike to the top of San Luca to visit the Sanctuary of San Luca, a traditional place of worship which is connected to the city by the longest portico in the world, at 3.8 kilometres long. Take a 90-minute tour of the Sanctuary, which includes a guided walk from Meloncello Arch to the Sanctuary. Tours cost €45 per person for a minimum of four people, available March to October, Monday to Friday, from 5pm to 6.30pm.

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Piazza Maggiore, Bologna (Photo: Michele Ursino)

Getting around

Bologna has an efficient bus system, with information booths located at Bologna Centrale train station and the nearby bus station. Minibus A connects the train station with the city centre. The BLQ Aerobus runs from the train station to Guglielmo Marconi Airport every 11 to 30 minutes from 5am to 11.30pm. Tickets cost €6 and can be bought on board.

Eating out

Bologna and the surrounding Emilia Romagna area are a mecca for food lovers. Parmigiano-Reggiano, prosciutto and balsamic vinegar, all staples of Italian cuisine, hail from the region. While in the city, try specialities such as sage and butter tortelloni, tagliatelle al ragù, soft cheeses such as squacquerone, and local wines. Da Cesari is an intimate, family-run restaurant on Via de'Carbonesi, which serves tasty dishes such as pumpkin ravioli in melted butter. Meanwhile, Trattoria Ginia, on Via henro Beyle Stendhal, has run for more than 50 years. Signature dishes include lasagne Bolognese and tortellini in brodo (broth). Gelato is one of the great indulgences of a visit to Italy. Try Cremeria Funivia, Via Porrettana, where flavours range from tart limone to chocolate rum.



Fontana del Nettuno, Bologna (Photo: Marcok)

Going out

Bologna's student community means it has a vibrant nightlife and there are plenty of clubs and live music venues. Round off a day of sightseeing with an aperitivo at one of the bars in the city centre. Order a 'sprit', a drink made with Prosecco and Aperol. There will often be a buffet of tapas-style snacks available from around 7pm. Osteria del Sole, Vivolo Ranocchi, is an ancient Italian inn which has been operating since the 15th century. For an alternative night out, try Nu Bar, a tiki bar tucked away in Bologna's medieval centre, on Via Dè Musei, with an outdoor patio and a menu of pizzas and pastas. Where it really shines is the cocktail menu, featuring sugars from various islands and a range of rums. Try creations such as the rum, chamomile and matcha tea cocktail with sugar from Guadalupe. Clubbers should head to Link on Via Fantoni for electronic music or Matis, on via Rotta, for hip hop.

Hotels

Luxury: Hotel Corona d'Oro 1890: This romantic city-centre hotel is located just a stroll from all the major attractions and offers breakfast and free use of bicycles. Via Guglielmo Oberdan. From £141 per night.

Mid-range: I Portici Hotel: A hotel with a refined atmosphere, a restaurant, bistros and meeting rooms. Via Dell'Indipendenza. From £110.

Budget: Metropolitan Hotel: This 1950s hotel is located a short walk from the main train station and Piazza Maggiore, on a quiet side street. It offers rooms and apartments. Via Dell'Orso. From £80.

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Fact file

Currency: Euros (€) - £1 = €1.15

Time zone: GMT+1hr

The flight: Ryanair operates direct flights from Manchester to Bologna from the end of March. Flight duration 2hrs 25 mins. From £48 return.

Best time to visit: Avoid Bologna in August, as many locals take their holidays then, so shops and restaurants will often be shut. Summer can get very hot, so a visit in spring or autumn is ideal.

Visas, injections and precautions: None.