

Search...

Home > Travel > Destina... > Europe > Italy > Emilia-... > Bologna > Articles

36 Hours in... Bologna



Bologna is the capital of the Emilia-Romagna region CREDIT: FOTOLIA

By **Helen Massy-Beresford**, TRAVEL WRITER

14 OCTOBER 2015 • 10:33AM

It may not be as high profile as other Italian cities, but Bologna rivals most for culture

and cuisine, says Helen Massy-Beresford

Why go now?

Without Venice's gondolas, Rome's ruins and Florence's acres of galleries, Bologna has stayed off Italy's well-beaten tourist track. Even the city's own Leaning Tower has never drawn the hordes that flock to Pisa. But the capital of the Emilia-Romagna region, which many claim is Italy's gastronomic capital, makes the perfect weekend destination.

Bologna's nicknames neatly sum it up: "La Grassa" (The Fat – that rich cuisine), "La Rossa" (The Red – for its traditional political leanings and its ochre roofs) and "La Dotta" (The Learned – its university has a good claim to being the world's oldest).

Bologna's youthful vibrancy means you'll never be stuck for a classical concert, play, gig, club night or exhibition (Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring* is on display until May 25). Bologna is also known for its porticos, with about 25 miles of arcaded streets, so it doesn't even matter if it rains.



Getting there

British Airways (ba.com) flies direct to Bologna from London Heathrow, easyJet (easyjet.com) from London Gatwick. For a longer Italian holiday, the train (trenitalia.com) is a good option. Bologna is approximately an hour and a half from Venice, 40 minutes from Florence and two hours from Rome by train.

Where to stay

Special treat

The five-star Grand Hotel Majestic “già Baglioni” (1) (via dell’Indipendenza, 8; grandhotelmajestic.duetorrihotels.com) has 109 luxurious rooms and suites, including a private terrace with a magnificent view of Bologna’s red roofs and the hills beyond. Double rooms from £214.

Mid-range

Hotel Commercianti (2) (via De’Pignattari, 11; bolognarhotels.it) couldn’t be more conveniently located, as it is just off the main square, Piazza Maggiore. Some of the comfortably furnished rooms feature frescoes or wooden beams, and look out directly on to the Basilica di San Petronio. Doubles from £90, including a hearty breakfast.

Budget

Hotel Panorama (3) (via Livraghi 1; hotelpanorama.bologna.it) is spotlessly clean, just a few minutes from Piazza Maggiore and offers single rooms from €40/£33 a night to quadruples from €120/£98. Some rooms have private bathrooms.

On arrival

7pm

Celebrate with an aperitivo in one of the many bars and cafés on the main square, Piazza Maggiore (4), or in the surrounding streets. Many offer a selection of nibbles to accompany your prosecco. Or try a brachetto – a slightly sweet, sparkling red wine.

9pm

Dine in the heart of the student quarter at a Bologna institution – Trattoria Anna Maria (5) (via delle Belle Arti 17; trattoriannamaria.com). Delectable homemade tortellini en brodo (stuffed pasta in broth), tagliatelle al ragù or grilled meats. Main courses and primi piatti (usually pasta dishes) cost from £11. If you’ve managed to resist pudding, a 15-minute stroll will take you to La Sorbetteria Castiglione (6) (via Castiglione 44; lasorbetteria.it), where the dark chocolate ice-cream is unbeatable.



Day one

9am

Explore the city on foot – the beautifully preserved, medieval centre is compact. Start in Piazza Maggiore and wander inside the Basilica di San Petronio, dedicated to the fifth-century bishop and patron saint of the city, St Petronius. Outside, to the side of this imposing structure, you can see that the transept was never completed.

10am

Head for the **Two Towers (7)** (Piazza di Porta Ravegnana), the city's focal point. You can climb the Torre Asinelli (€3/£2.50) for a fantastic view of the red roofed-streets fanning out below. Legend has it that anyone who climbs the tower before graduating will not get their degree.

11am

Now make for Piazza Santo Stefano (8), an elegant broad square that's perfect for a coffee stop after all those stairs. Well worth a visit is the Basilica Santuario Santo Stefano – a complex of seven churches from different ages founded by Bishop Petronius in the fifth century on the site of the ruins of an ancient temple to the goddess Isis.

1pm

For authentic fast food, grab a piadina (flatbread) filled with cheese, ham or salami and rocket from one of the numerous piadinerie – try via Augusto Righi in the student

quarter.

2pm

From here, you're heading to Palazzo Fava (9), for the Vermeer exhibition. There's something of a Bologna secret along the way, in via Piella. Open the small graffiti-covered hatch in the wall for a view on to the Reno Canal – part of a 37-mile network of canals, most now covered over, that make up Bologna's own "Little Venice".



Palazzo Fava (via Manzoni 2; genusbononiae.it) is just off Bologna's main shopping street. It may be a temporary home to some world-class paintings, but don't overlook the 16th-century frescoes of the life of Jason and Medea and Aeneas on the first floor.

4pm

Time for some shopping. Via dell'Indipendenza (10) is lined with Italian brands and international chain stores. For a more traditional selection of upmarket leather goods manufacturers, clothing retailers and perfumiers, head to via Massimo d'Azeglio off Piazza Maggiore.

7pm

Time for a well-earned aperitivo. Head to Le Stanze (11) (via del Borgo di San Pietro 1), where the faded 16th-century frescoes of the former private chapel of the Palazzo Bentivoglio provide a stunning backdrop for cocktails and nibbles.

9pm

Dinner time. Trattoria Pizzeria Belle Arti (12) (via Belle Arti 14; belleartitrattoriapizzeria.com) in the heart of the student quarter offers vast, delicious pizzas for £6.50.

Day two

9am

Start the day in the tangle of tiny alleys around via Clavature, off Piazza Maggiore. Here you can pick up all the ingredients for a perfect al-fresco lunch – cheese, bread, salami and mortadella sausage.

11am

Now earn your picnic. Take bus 20 (buy a ticket for €1.30 from local newsagents) from the San Pietro bus stop on via dell'Indipendenza heading for Casalecchio di Reno and get off the Meloncello stop. From here, climb a little more than a mile under a porticoed walkway to the hilltop Basilica Santuario di San Luca. It houses the Byzantine icon of the Madonna and Child, thought to date back to the 10th century.

City checklist

1. Find more information on hotels, restaurants, exhibitions, concerts and other activities check out www.bolognawelcome.com or visit the tourist office on Piazza Maggiore.
2. Use the same website if you want to buy a €20 Bologna Welcome card, which offers 48 hours of free access to museums and some other buildings, 24 hours of free public transport or a one-way airport shuttle ticket (normally €6). It also offers free city wi-fi and reductions in some shops and restaurants.
3. The city centre is so compact that you will probably do most of your exploring on foot but to get to and from the start of the walk up to San Luca, individual bus tickets costing €1.30 and valid for 75 minutes can be bought in tabacchi (newsagents).

