

DEPARTURES

— Travel —

24 Hours in Bologna, Italy



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This gem of a destination offers something for every type of traveler.

By Emily Cappiello on June 27, 2018

Bologna isn't on the typical Italian travel itinerary. Nestled in the [Emilia-Romagna region](#), those who venture off the beaten tourist path can find a beautiful city filled with hidden gems, stunning nods to Renaissance art, food that belongs on any must-experience list, and a rich history of education, art, and literature. Called Italy's "Red City" due to the vibrant color of its buildings, the lively, captivating Bologna is conveniently located by car or train, making it the perfect stopover between Venice and Florence (but without the crowds).

While you may not have a ton of time to spend wandering, even one full day can lend a new perspective to this off-the-beaten-track destination.

Accommodations

If you have limited time, staying close to the Piazza is a must. This puts you right in the heart of the energetic city center and allows you to walk instead of taking public transportation. The [Art Hotel Novecento](#), located in the Old Town Center, is not only a great place to soak up the city's liveliness but is luxuriously stunning with a modern feel. Gold and marble accents throughout the rooms and a grand walk-in shower make this not only a great location but a wonderful place to relax after a long day of sightseeing.

Also located nearby is the [Hotel Orologio](#), which sits across from the Orologio clock tower on the corner of the Piazza Maggiore, and also boasts modern design and amenities worth booking a trip for.



Must-See Attractions

Most main attractions are open to the public and don't require a tour, allowing visitors to spend as much or as little time at each stop. However, if pressed, here are some must-see spots to catch before you head out.

If you want to shop, Via dell'Indipendenza is lined with both Italian brands and international chain stores. Covered by porticos, enjoy shopping no matter what the weather.

In the middle of the Piazza di Porta Ravegnana there sits the city's most recognizable landmark, the [Two Towers](#). Built to be twins, they are now incongruous, as one is leaning and has sunk into the ground. (You can still climb the other if you wish, the view is worth it.)

In the city center, the [Basilica di San Petronio](#) is not only a grand sight but has a grand story. The church was created by private families to act as a civic center and housed several different chapels, each designed to a particular family's specifications. Built throughout several architectural periods, there are distinguishable differences.

However, the building remains unfinished and also boasts the longest indoor meridian line in the world.

Bologna is a city dedicated to learning, housing one of the world's first universities, The [University of Bologna](#). (La Dotta—the learned—is also another name for the city.) Students from all over the world used to attend the university, either studying arts or law. Dubbed "The Palace", it was the seat of the university until 1838, when it became the municipal library. Bombed during World War II, the damage is still visible today. However, it still houses some of the oldest books in the world—all of which were moved into the mountains during the war to ensure they remained unharmed.

Can't-Miss Food Spots

It's no surprise the city is a foodie hub; some of Italy's most famous delicacies—including Parmigiano Reggiano, balsamic vinegar, prosciutto di parma and the region's famed sparkling wine, pignoletto—come from this region.

[Al Mercato delle Erbe](#), designed in 1910 as a city center, has seen a recent revival. Full of vendors selling fresh cheeses, meats, fruits and vegetables, Al Mercato delle Erbe is also home to many rustic Italian restaurants, including Polpette e Crescentine. Known for its fried tortellini (which is small and bite-sized in Emilia-Romagna), Polpette e Crescentine serves fresh, local cheeses and meats, including the region's calling card, Mortadella. Cap it off with a shared plate of tortelloni for a meal that is authentic Bologna.

Take a stroll down the Piazza Maggiore and you'll find restaurants and food stands dotting every corner. Pop into popular bakery [Atti & Figli](#), which has seasonal treats as well as regional ones, or grab a drink in one of the city's oldest osterias, [Osteria del Sole](#).

Witness pasta being made by hand at [Bottega Portici](#), and grab fistfuls in a to-go cup to walk the Piazza Maggiore (the takeaway restaurant is said to have revolutionized street food in Italy).

If you're looking for a dinner experience that is authentically Italian but still upscale, head to [A Balùs](#). The restaurant, which doesn't provide English menus, has two different types of cuisine choices—authentic Italian food prepared traditionally from the mountainous areas of the region, or from the farming areas. This includes tagliatelle al ragù as well as pasta with truffles, tortellini en brood, and wild boar, all specialties to Emilia-Romagna prepared the classical way.

TRAVELER TIP: Build in extra time for coffee. Unlike other Italian cities (and definitely unlike the U.S.), Emilia-Romagna's coffee culture is one of gathering and slow drinking. You'll be hard pressed find a "walkie" cup in the region, but building in some time to stop for an amazing cappuccino or espresso is worth it.



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Have A Little More Time?

If you can spare a few more days in Emilia-Romagna, locals recommend visiting the nearby city of Ravenna. Closer to the coast, it's walkable, historical, beautiful and fashion-forward, and known among the local women in Bologna as the place to shop for new clothes. The [Basilica of San Vitale](#) is also a must, even if churches aren't your thing, as the mosaics and artwork are breathtaking.

Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna, as well, is a bustling city near the coast, further from Bologna but well worth the stop. Home to "rolled pizza," the town is also rich in history—the oldest family-owned fabric press in the country is there. [The Marchi family](#) still makes the stunning printed textiles by hand and gives an interactive tour of the facility.

Other attractions close to Bologna include Parma, where you can see the process of making authentic Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Also stop by [FICO Italy World](#), which consists of a number of food companies from around the region coming together under one roof to educate people about the products and processes (also, go hungry because from the mortadella to the cannoli, everything is on point). If you have a moment, we also recommend the official [Ferrari factory](#), because who doesn't love a fancy car.