

Soak up Italy's la dolce vita

The northern city of Bologna is a mecca for foodies as **LOUISE RODDON** discovers

Edited by Jane Memmler

THE VIBE

Italy's pint-sized capital of the Emilia-Romagna province, Bologna, fully deserves its nickname of "La Grassa" (the fat one) because here is the birthplace of the country's creamy ragu sauces and rich meat dishes.

A wander around its rose-coloured piazzas and sun-dappled arcades uncovers dozens of affordable family-run eateries where hearty meals are delivered with a cheery smile.

Bologna's historic centre is as old as its culinary heritage and just as unchanged.

Its ancient heartbeat is found in the sprawling Piazza Maggiore, where swifts chase around castellated redbrick palaces before coming to a chattering rest on airy Gothic San Petronio, a popular spot with students who gather beneath the piazza's writhing marble nymphs of Fontana di Nettuno to enjoy la dolce vita (the sweet life).

AN EARTHIER VIBE

Cut through those graceful Renaissance porticoes towards the narrow ochre-toned grid of medieval streets and ancient squat-arched kiosks that comprise the market district.

On Via Drapperie and Via Pescherie, bartering housewives and young families stock up on fresh fish, pasta,

local fruits and crumbly hunks of Parmesan for their Sunday lunches before relaxing over a

fortifying espresso and panini.

WHERE TO EAT

The best restaurants are small and family run, but don't expect to find spaghetti bolognese on the menu. In Bologna this tasty meat ragu is served with egg tagliatelle.

Good choices include the all generations favourite

Caminetto d'Oro on Via de Falegami (caminettodoro.it) where you can eat under the porticoes or in a cosy dining room lined with black and white photographs.

The pastas and breads here are made in-house by the octogenarian grandparents while the young family members wait tables.

Expect regional specialties like roasted rabbit with mustard seeds or noodles

with porcini mushrooms and black truffles.

Equally memorable is the affordable Trattoria dal Biassonot, Via Piella (dalbiassanot.it), a cosy wood-beamed and terracotta-tiled establishment where cheery Cristina serves up the city's famous lasagne and veal-based tagliatelle bolognese alongside wild boar with polenta to a chatty mix of university students, business folk and tourists.

Drink the local Pignoletto, Bologna's delightful version of Prosecco.

DON'T MISS

Highlights of the city's

homogenous historical heart include two stunning medieval look-out towers at Piazza Porta Ravegnana.

If you've the energy, climb the 498 oak steps of the shorter Garisenda Tower (one of two) for far-reaching views.

Lovelier still is the relatively unknown International Museum of Music, Palazzo Sanguinetti, Strada Maggiore (museomusicabologna.it) which is set within a charming nobleman's palace.

Admire the labyrinth of tiny salons adorned with bosky

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Ancient piazzas and mini violins

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frescoes and trompe l'oeil ceilings, then peer at ancient cornets, miniature violins, early trumpets and Mozart's first, heavily corrected exam paper.

RETAIL THERAPY

Clothes shopping here is a delight, particularly during the sales season. Head for Via Farini if the likes of designers Gucci, Armani, Prada and La Perla tick your box, or try Via dell'Indipendenza for cutting-edge high-street style.

That said, don't go home without purchasing some foodie items. Simoni, on Via Pescherie Vecchie, is a headily fragrant deli, festooned with cured hams, Bologna's famous mortadella and delicious cheeses. They will even vacuum pack cold cuts, simply ask for "sottovuoto". Neighbouring food store Gilberto, Via Drapperie, sells the city's punchy walnut liqueur, Nocino.

After pounding the streets reward

yourself with a superb ice cream or fruit sorbet at Funivia, in Piazza Cavour.

WHERE TO STAY

A two-minute stroll from Piazza Maggiore finds you at charming four-star Al Cappello Rosso (from the UK: 0039 51 261891/alcappellorosso.it).

One of Bologna's oldest hotels, it was established in the 14th century. Still family owned, Al Cappello Rosso has 33 bedrooms with free wi-fi.

The Elsa Schiaparelli room dedicated to the couturiere is decorated in her signature hot pink while more calming is the American Icon room dedicated to JFK.

THE KNOWLEDGE

[Citalia](http://Citalia.com) (0843 770 4443/citalia.com) offers three nights at Al Cappello Rosso from £485pp (two sharing), B&B. Price includes return flights from Gatwick with easyJet. Bologna Tourism: bolognawelcome.com/en

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MEETING POINT: Piazza Nettuno draws students to admire the Fountain of Neptune and Gothic San Petronio

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Stalls of fresh produce line streets of the old town

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CAFE AL FRESCO: People-watching over an espresso at one of the many trattoria in the beautiful rose-coloured medieval Piazza Maggiore, a favoured meeting place of the Bolognese