

36 Hours in Bologna

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VIBRANT, independent and home to one of [Europe](#)'s oldest universities, [Bologna](#) is a dynamic counterpoint to more popular, touristy cities like Rome and [Florence](#). About 50 miles north of Florence, the city is as famous for its cuisine as it is for its fiery left-leaning politics. Market stalls brimming with asparagus and fava beans, specialty shops selling cured meats, and osterias serving fresh pasta with the city's signature ragù (known as Bolognese in the rest of the world) offer compelling reasons to linger. And then there are architectural masterpieces like the church of [Santo Stefano](#) and the iconic Due Torri (Two Towers). Grittier than in most of its northern counterparts, Bologna's politics — the last mayor, Flavio Delbono, resigned when it was alleged that he was using public money on his mistress, and now residents are waiting to see if the new mayor, Virginio Merola, will make good on his promise to spruce up the city center — somehow only adds to the excitement of a visit here.



Friday

4 p.m.

1) UPWARD SPIRAL

Bologna is known for its miles of portici, or covered terracotta arcades, and the 666 arches that lead to the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca (www.sanlucabo.org), a basilica that sits perched above the metropolis, are a great introduction to a city icon. Start at the Meloncello gateway and wind up the hill — the half-hour trek is like a StairMaster session (a good activity before a weekend of eating) with views of the rolling countryside as well as the sprawling new part of the city with its office towers and burgeoning suburbs. At the top the payoff is the Unesco-heritage designated basilica with its painting of St. Mary, allegedly by Luke the Evangelist and, said by some to have been brought to Bologna from the Middle East in the 12th century.

6 p.m.

2) INSPIRED INTERIORS

The contemporary [art](#) scene in the Saragozza neighborhood is especially notable for the inspired refurbishment of the spaces that galleries have taken over. The Gallery Otto (Via D'Azeglio 55; 39-051-644-9845; otto-gallery.it), for example, has reinvented a part of the Collegio di San Luigi dei Barnabiti (a school dating back to the 1700s) with airy, light-filled rooms perfect for displaying contemporary works by artists like the Italian abstract expressionist Luigi Carboni and the Norwegian photographer Per Barclay, known for his evocative installations. Nearby Galleria Marabini (Vicolo della Neve 5; 39-051-644-7482; galleriamarabini.it) has temporary exhibitions that juxtapose beautifully with the original walls and frescoes of a former church dating from 1661. Among the artists on its roster is the photographer James Casebere, whose exhibition “Tunnels” focuses on Bologna’s underground canals that date from the medieval period.

8 p.m.

3) TIME TO DISH

A classic Bologna dish is tortellini in brodo, delicate parcels of pasta filled with a pinch of minced pork and swimming in a fragrant chicken broth. A culinary temple devoted to this staple and other traditional dishes is All'Osteria Bottega (Via Santa Caterina 51; 39-051-585-111), a cozy space with wood floors and painted furniture overseen by its jovial owner, Daniele Minarelli. Plates of mortadella and [cheese](#) are followed by dishes like freshly made tagliatelle con culatello (considered the most delicate part of a pork haunch), eggplant Parmesan and house specialties like grilled pigeon. Entrees from 13 euros, about \$18 at \$1.40 to the euro.

Saturday

10 a.m.

4) EATING TOUR

Consider the area around the Mercato di Mezzo a gastronomic must. In addition to the storefronts devoted to all manner of food, there is a new outpost of Eataly (Via degli Orefici, 19; 39-051-095-2820; www.eataly.it), with its emporium of books and Italian gourmet products, plus a wine bar and restaurant; Tamburini (Via Caprarie 1; 39-051-234-726 ; tamburini.com) a deli that also serves

more than 200 [wines](#) by the glass, Atti Panificio (Via Drapperie 6; 39-051-233-349; [paoloatti.com](#)), a bakery that dates from 1880; and Simoni (Via Drapperie 5/2a; 39-051-231-880), a salumeria.

Noon

5) SNACK IN THE MIDDLE

Just off the charming Via Pescherie Vecchie is Osteria del Sole (Vicolo Ranocchi, 1D; 39-347-968-0171; [osteriadelsole.it](#)), which looks like an old social club with its wooden bar and faded framed photos. The place doesn't serve food, just wines by the glass, so pick up your own gems from the market and create an impromptu picnic on one of the long tables. It is not unusual to see a group of elderly men at the bar snacking on fava beans or a carton of fresh strawberries while catching up on gossip. A glass of Pignoletto costs 2 euros.

3 p.m.

6) SPILL THE BEANS

At Terzi (via Oberdan 10/D; 39-051-236-470; [caffeterzi.it](#)), coffee making is an art, and the owner, Manuel Terzi, is a master in making the perfect cup. Among the exotic beans on offer are a wild grown Kopi Luwak from [Indonesia](#) (7.50 euros for an espresso), Sigri from [Papua New Guinea](#) (3 euros for an espresso) or a Congo "robusta" (1.30 euros). One can stand at the bar, or sit at one of the four tables in the small candy-striped back room.

4 p.m.

7) RETAIL PATH

Once part of the Jewish ghetto, the bustling neighborhood around Via Oberdan is home to some of the city's most charming shops. Calling Hoffmann (Via Altabella 23; 39-051-223-066; [hoffmann.it](#)) a toy store doesn't do justice to the inventiveness of the space with its installation-like windows and custom-made toys that include wooden rocking horses and elephant lamps. Across the street Jacqueline (Via Altabella 14/E; 39-051-268-190) has pretty dresses, bikinis and flats (not to mention great lingerie), while around the corner, 3 Terre (Via Oberdan, 8AB; 39-051-236-028) has lanterns and other furniture from [India](#), [Indonesia](#) and [China](#). And even if you aren't in the market for a whole prosciutto, don't miss Bruno e Franco (Via Oberdan, 16; 39-051-233-692; [la-salumeria.it](#)), a deli where men in red bow ties cut cured meats into paper-thin slices. The spot also includes a fresh pasta station. If you are lucky you might be invited to the laboratory on an upper floor across the street where ladies in pressed uniforms roll out the dough.

6 p.m.

8) ITALIAN HAPPY HOUR

At S-wine bar (Via A. Righi 24A; 39-051-232-631) students and fashionable types convene for an Aperol spritz (orange liqueur, prosecco and a splash of soda) and buffet (7 euros) in the snug wood-beamed space in winter or at an outdoor table in balmy months. After work, businessmen and neighborhood insiders stop by Enoteca Italiana (Via Marsala 2/b; 39-051-235-989; [enotecaitaliana.it](#)), for a glass of sparkling Franciacorta or Gaja accompanied by a plate of meat and cheese. Serving only 28 people a night, Serghei (Via Piella 12; 39-051-233-533) is one of the most sought after reservations in town, excelling in the "mamma-style" honest cooking Bologna is known for. In fact, Diana Fasotti, the owner's mother, makes all of the excellent fresh pasta like ravioli filled with arugula and topped with Gorgonzola, and pasta with a classic ragù. The entrees are also simple and traditional, like veal meatballs with ricotta and zucchini. Entrees start at 13 euros.

Sunday

11 a.m.

9) ART BREAK

Giorgio Morandi, who died in 1964, was one of the city's most famous contemporary painters, and a museum (Piazza Maggiore 6; museomorandi.it; admission 6 euros) on the top floor of the 14th-century Palazzo d'Accursio (Bologna's town hall) celebrates his fame. His standouts were his still lifes — objects like bottles and jugs are transformed into the beautifully impressionistic visions.

Noon

10) CHURCH GAZING

On your way to the exquisite Santo Stefano church (a conjoined series of churches, cloisters and courtyards that date from the fifth, eighth and 12th centuries) stop in at the new Colazione da Bianca (Via Santo Stefano 1; 39-051-588-4425; colazionedabianca.it) which opened last October. With cornetti and cappuccino, along with lunch fare, it makes a good stop before church gazing.

IF YOU GO

One of the city's new boutique hotels, the hotel **Metropolitan** (Via Dell'Orso 6; 39-051-229-393; hotelmetropolitan.com; doubles from 100 euros) has a great central location and reasonable prices.

Housed in a 19th-century palazzo that exemplifies the city's Liberty style — [Italy](#)'s answer to Art Deco — **I Portici** (Via Indipendenza, 69; 39-051-421-85; iporticihotel.com; rates from 89 euros) often runs special room rates and has an excellent restaurant on site.

Not far from [Santo Stefano](#), **Il Convento dei Fiori di Seta** (Via Orfeo 34/4; 39-051-272-039; silkflowersnunnery.com) has 10 restored rooms in a convent dating back to the 15th century, along with free Wi-Fi and friendly service. Doubles start at 140 euros.

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