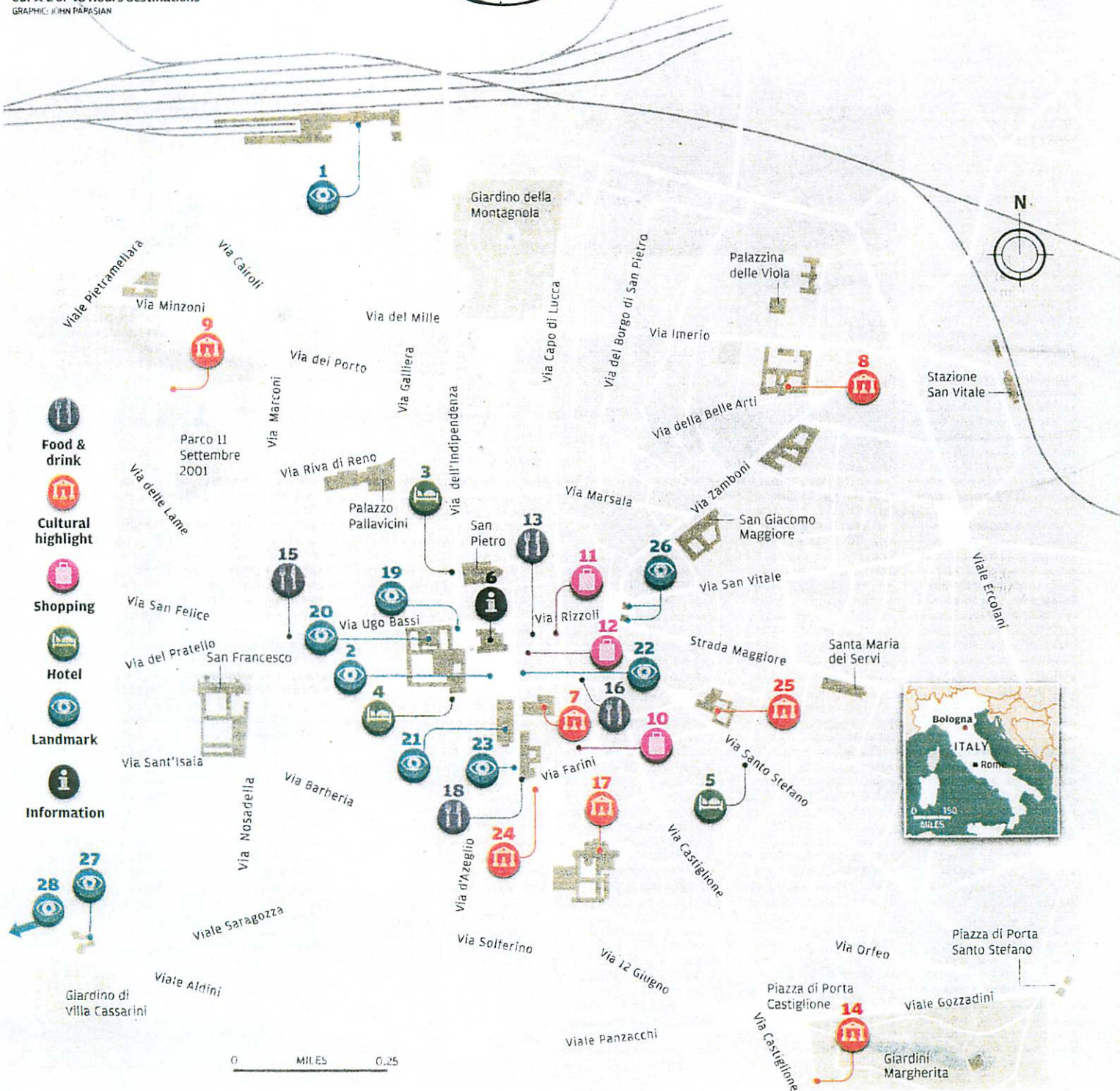


# Bologna

This cosmopolitan city in northern Italy entices with dazzling culture, rich history and - naturally - food. By **Aoife O'Riordain**

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Square route: the medieval Piazza Maggiore at night

## Travel essentials

### Why go now?

Emilia Romagna's alluring capital is more accessible from this week, thanks to the launch of new flights from Gatwick. A city of towers and tortelloni (and the birthplace of Italy's most celebrated sauce), Bologna can lay claim to some of the best cuisine in the country. As home to Europe's oldest university, the city is richly endowed with history and culture. The annual Bologna Festival (00 39 051 649 3397; [bolognafestival.it](http://bolognafestival.it)), now in its 30th year, has just got under way; a programme of classical concerts continues until September.

### Touch down

Bologna has three airlines competing from Gatwick. The new arrival, easyJet (0905 821 0905; [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)), is taking on British Airways (0844 493 0787; [ba.com](http://ba.com)) and Ryanair (0871 246 0000; [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) - the latter also has connections from Stansted and Edinburgh. Guglielmo Marconi airport is just 6km north-west of the city centre. A shuttle bus ([atc.bo.it](http://atc.bo.it); €3 each way) leaves every 15 minutes, stopping at Bologna's main train station (1) to the north of the old centre and Piazza Maggiore (2). A taxi will set you back around €20.

### Check in

With interior frescos by the Carracci brothers, canopied beds and perfectly pressed linen sheets, the recently re-decorated Grand Hotel Majestic (3), at Via Indipendenza 8 (00 39 051 22 54 45; [lhw.com/ghmajesticbaglioni](http://lhw.com/ghmajesticbaglioni)) is the city's most elegant place to stay. Doubles start at €230, including breakfast. The charming Art Hotel

Orologio (4) at Via IV Novembre 10 (00 39 051 745 7411; [art-hotel-orologio.it](http://art-hotel-orologio.it)) is steps from the Piazza Maggiore and has doubles from €144, including breakfast. Antica Casa Zucchini (5), at Via Santo Stefano 36 (00 39 347 911 0731; [anticacasazucchini.it](http://anticacasazucchini.it)), is a small B&B set in a historic 16th-century residence in the heart of the old city. Doubles start at €130, including breakfast.

### Get your bearings

Bologna's *centro storico* is contained within the erstwhile walls of the city, originally entered by 12 gates. It is a picturesque tangle of medieval streets, arcades, churches and imposing Renaissance *palazzi* in an appealing palette of dusky pinks and burnt umber, which give the city the nickname La Rossa.

Bologna's spiritual and geographical heart is the gracious Piazza Maggiore (2), flanked by some of the city's most important landmarks. Two of Bologna's main thoroughfares converge here; Via Indipendenza and Via Ugo Bassi - the decuman, or main entrance, of the Roman city. Bologna is best explored on foot, helped by the fact that traffic is heavily restricted during the day in the historic centre - a perfect excuse for aimless wandering. The main tourist office (6) is in the Palazzo de Podestà, Piazza Maggiore 1 (00 39 051 239 660; [bolognaturismo.info](http://bolognaturismo.info)), but is mid-renovation; a smaller office is open just behind, 9am-7pm daily.



Under cover: the city has 50km of colonnades

## Day one

### Cultural morning

Bologna was home to western Europe's first university, established in 1088. From 1563 until 1803 its first official home was in the Archiginnasio (7), at Piazza Galvani 1 (00 39 051 276 811; [archiginnasio.it](http://archiginnasio.it)), now the main city library. Open 9am-1.45pm Saturdays, to 6.45pm from Monday to Friday, closed Sundays; free. Its beautiful arcades are adorned with more than 7,000 hand-painted coats of arms of former students. The first floor is home to the stunning wooden 1637 Anatomical Theatre.

In the heart of the university quarter, the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna (8), Via Belle Arti 56 (00 39 051 420 9411; [pinacotecabologna.it](http://pinacotecabologna.it)), houses an impressive collection that includes works by Tintoretto, Titian, Giotto and Carracci (9am-7pm daily except Sunday, €4).

Those with more contemporary leanings could also visit the city's newer modern art gallery MAMBO (9) at Via Don Minzoni (00 39 051 649 6611; [mambobologna.org](http://mambobologna.org)), whose permanent and temporary exhibitions are displayed in a former bakery. It opens at noon daily except Monday, closing at 8pm at weekends, 10pm on Thursday and 6pm on other days; €6.

### Window shopping

The Via Farini has all the luxury fashion and accessory brands, and is also where you find the blue-chip boutiques of the Galleria Cavour (10). The shops of Via Indipendenza and Via Ugo Bassi offer less credit-card melting options. Many shops close between 1pm and 4.30pm.

To understand why Bologna is known as La Grassa or "The Fat One", visit the medieval Mercato di Mezzo in the Quadrilatero district, just off the Piazza Maggiore (2). Don't miss hand-made *mortadella* sausage from Simoni (11) at Via Drapperie 5 (00 39 051 231 880), nor and the local Parmesan-like cheese, *sua maesta il nero*, at Vecchia Malga Negozio (12) at Via Pescherie Vecchie (00 39 051 223 940).



Food for thought: don't miss Bologna's delicatessens

### Lunch on the run

Take a picnic from the market to the Osteria del Sole (13), at Vicolo Ranocchi (00 34 8 225 6887; [osteriadelsole.it](http://osteriadelsole.it)), which has been open since 1465. No food is served but you can order a glass of wine for €2 and tuck into your spoils at one of several tables dotted around its two rooms.

### A walk in the park

The Giardini Margherita, named after the same queen as the pizza, is a verdant sprawl of gardens, open since 1879. Stroll the shady avenues of lime, cedar, sycamore and oak where you can also see two reconstructed huts of an Etruscan settlement (14) uncovered during the construction of the gardens. Open 6am-midnight, free.

### An aperitif

Even cocktail hour is an excuse to eat. Order an Aperol spritz (£7.50) at the chic café and bar Gamberini (15), at Via Ugo Bassi 12 (00 39 051 29 60 467; [gamberini1907.com](http://gamberini1907.com)), and you can choose from an array of tasty treats laid out on the bar to accompany it.

### Dining with the locals

Book in advance to secure a table at Da Gianni (16), tucked down a small alleyway close to the Piazza Maggiore at Via Clavature 18 (00 39 051 229 434; closed Mondays). Sample delicious Bolognese fare such as green lasagne, tortellini in *brodo*, veal cutlets and a superior Bolognese ragu - eaten only with tagliatelle, not spaghetti.

## Day two

### Sunday morning: go to church

Domenico, who established the order of Dominican Fathers, founded the Basilica di San Domenico (17) in the early 13th century. He was laid to rest here, and his tomb is adorned with two statues later sculpted by Michelangelo. Mass is celebrated on Sundays at 10.30am, noon and 6pm (00 39 51 581 718; [centrosandomenico.it](http://centrosandomenico.it)).

### Out to brunch

Brunch is still something of a novelty here - most just prefer a coffee and something sweet. Join the Sunday morning buzz at the fashionable Caffè Pasticceria Zanarini (18) on the corner of Piazza Galvani and Via Farini (00 39 51 27 50 041). Order a creamy cappuccino for €1.50 plus a delicious pas-

try such as a crema-filled cornetto or bombolone.

### Take a hike

Start at the north-eastern corner of Piazza del Nettuno (19) and admire the city's most celebrated water feature, the Fountain of Neptune, also known as "The Giant".

The piazza is overlooked by the Palazzo Re Enzo (20), which became the luxurious prison of Enzo, king of Sardinia in 1249. Aim south-west across the square to the adjoining Piazza Maggiore (2), flanked by several of Bologna's most impressive landmarks: the magnificent 13th-century Palazzo del Podestà, the City Halls and the huge Basilica di San Petronio (21), currently undergoing a facelift in time for its 350th anniversary in 2018.

Along its southern edge is the Palazzo dei Banchi (22), built in 1412 to hide the narrow streets of the market behind and named after the banks and moneychangers that once occupied the site. Cross the square and bear right under the Palazzo dei Banchi's portico. This, the Paviglione, is the finest



Lean on me: the Asinelli and Garisenda towers

section of Bologna's 50 kilometres of covered walkways (a Bolognese will never bother taking an umbrella when going out for a walk).

Pass the Piazza Galvani (23) to your right, cross the Via Farini and look up to the ceiling of the portico of the Palazzo della Banca d'Italia (24), with its stunning 19th-century decorations by Gaetano Lodi.

Continue along the upmarket Via Farini until it meets Via Santo Stefano and the Abbey of Santo Stefano (25) - actually a cluster of seven churches and a museum. Head along Via Santo Stefano until

you reach the shadow of the Asinelli and Garisenda towers (26), at Piazza di Porta Ravegnana under the loggia of the Palazzo della Mercanzia.

### Take a view

"Le Due Torri", as these twin towers are known, were among more than 100 feudal towers built by wealthy families for protection and ostentation in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Garisenda tower, which was immortalised by Dante, has a decidedly tipsy slant. Climb the steps of the taller, 97m Torre degli Asinelli (€3, 9am-6pm daily) for views over the city and the rolling green hills beyond.

### The icing on the cake

The most extraordinary of the porticoes is the Portico di San Luca, which connects the Porta Saragozza (27) with the Sanctuary of the Madonna of San Luca (28), which sits atop the Colle della Guardia hill above the city. Reputedly the world's longest stretch of porticoes, this architectural marvel extends for 3.8km and features 666 arches (00 39 51 614 2339; [sanlucabo.org](http://sanlucabo.org)).