

**theguardian**

# 10 best budget eats in Bologna

Bologna, home to mortadella and ragù, is one of the best places to eat out in Italy, says **John Brunton** – and one of the cheapest

**John Brunton**

guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 22 November 2011 06.00 GMT



Bologna. Photographs: John Brunton

**Bologna** is known as "La Grassa" (the Fat One), and this friendly city can stake a strong claim to being at the heart of Italian cuisine. This is the home of fresh pasta, the famous mortadella sausage, and nearby there are the finest producers of Parma ham, Parmigiano cheese, balsamic vinegar. There is no better place in **Italy** for eating out, and it really is almost impossible here to pay a lot of money for a meal.

## Pizzeria Ristorante La Brace



It can come as a surprise but when the Bolognesi want to go out to eat fish they will invariably choose a pizzeria, first because they are run by supposed seafood experts from Napoli or Sicily, and secondly because they are invariably less expensive than a formal restaurant or trattoria. The Brace is a classic example, cheap and cheerful, with a fun decoration of famous footballers' shirts hanging from the ceiling, and a menu that ranges from Pizza Positano, with cherry tomatoes and mozzarella, to grilled squid and

prawns, sea bass and tuna. A set menu is priced at €12, and pizzas cost from €4-€8.

• 15 Via San Vitale, +39 51 235656, [ristorantelabrace.eu](http://ristorantelabrace.eu)

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## Osteria Dell'Orsa

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Whether you turn up at lunchtime or for dinner, the atmosphere is always buzzing at "The Bear", a Bologna locale that has transformed over the years from an alternative punk hangout into a traditional osteria that also has a shop next door selling their handmade pasta to take away. Great place to meet the locals as everyone sits down at communal tables, and at night you might find yourself listening to a live band, a poetry reading or heated philosophical discussions. Pasta of the day could be artichoke lasagna or gnocchi with courgettes, priced at €6.

• 1 Via Mentana, +39 51 231576, [osteriadellorsa.com](http://osteriadellorsa.com)

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## Trattoria Danio

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It is well worth the five-minute walk out of the town centre to discover this traditional trattoria hidden away beneath one of Bologna's trademark *portici* (arcades). This has to be the best deal for both quality and value, with a set menu that works at night as well as for lunch, where you can feast off a huge plate of steaming tagliatelle smothered with a rich homemade *Bolognese ragù*, followed by tasty grilled sausages, a *contorni* (side dish) of vegetables, plus a *quartino* (small carafe) of house wine, all for €11.50. This is also the place to try another local speciality, *bollito misto*, a half-a-dozen different cuts of boiled meats served with an array of savoury sauces – horseradish, parsley, candied fruits.

• 50 Via San Felice, +39 51 555202

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## Trattoria Anna Maria

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The genial Signora Anna Maria looks and acts like the archetypal Italian mamma and has been serving the finest *tortellini in brodo* (tortellini in broth, €14) in Bologna for 26 years now in her marvellous trattoria. Although prices may be a bit above average – €28 for two hearty courses – you are assured of an unforgettable meal, not just for the delicious food, but the lovingly kitsch interiors, the walls decorated with black and white photos of Mastroianni and Sophia Loren, the ancient waiters in their trademark red waistcoats weaving between the tables, precariously balancing plates piled high with pasta.

• 17 Via delle Belle Arte, +39 51 266894, [trattoriannamaria.com](http://trattoriannamaria.com)

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## Le Stanze

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Le Stanze is right in the heart of the student quarter of the city, and is the one spot that stands out among the dozens of lively bars and cafes that line the surrounding streets. You walk into a stunning lounge that was originally the 16th-century private chapel of the Palazzo Bentivoglio, and the high ceiling is painted with beautiful pastel frescoes. While Le Stanze is a restaurant too (mains around €15), the best deal is to turn up between 6pm and 9pm for the evening *aperitivo*. The long bar is lined with appetising plates of pasta, grilled vegetables, bite-sized *pizzette*, cheeses and prosciutto, and all you pay is an extra €1 added on to the price of drinks, which range from €6 for a glass of wine to €9 for a cocktail.

• 1 Via Borgo di San Pietro, +39 51 228767

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## Osteria Marsalino

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Italians are finally waking up to the effect of carbon footprints on what they eat, and every Saturday morning there is an organic market here organised by local farmers. In the food business the term *kilometro zero* has been coined, and several restaurants highlight regional products on their menu. One of the leaders is this cool, modern osteria, where you can also find lighter, more creative dishes on the menu such as *risotto alle fragole* (strawberry risotto), a "kmzero" caprese salad or a bowl of *farro* – spelt with courgettes, baby shrimps and soy sauce.

• €6 for a pasta or salad, €7 for a main course, 13 Via Marsalino, +39 51 238675, [marsalino.it](http://marsalino.it)

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## La Baita Formaggi

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A tour of Bologna's ancient market that crisscrosses the backstreets behind the landmark Piazza Maggiore is a must for anyone interested in food, from the bustling fruit and vegetable stalls to *salumerie* where the seductive aroma of prosciutto and mortadella wafts out on to the street. La Baita is the most renowned cheese shop, and at lunchtime shoppers can stop off for a proper meal of *affettati* (cold cuts), not just fabulous cheeses like a unique black Parmigiano or succulent fresh ricotta, but also *frittata di verdura*, a light omelette, smoked ham and tasty salami, priced from €10-€15 depending how carried away you get when ordering.

• 3 Via Pescherie Vecchie, +39 51 223940

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## Caffè Zamboni

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This is one of Italy's most important university cities, and with more than 80,000 students living here there is a huge choice for budget eating and drinking. The evening *aperitivo* is a ritual rendezvous, replacing dinner, as each bar vies to offer more to eat in the complimentary buffet. Caffè Zamboni is the hottest spot right now and with the panoply of dishes displayed as you walk by it is no surprise. For €7 the preferred drink is an Aperol Spritz, and while vegetarians will be pleased to see grilled aubergines and zucchini, most people head straight for the huge chunks of mortadella.

• 6 Via Zamboni, +39 51 273102, [caffezamboni.it](http://caffezamboni.it)

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## E' Cucina Bologna

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Cesare Marretti is one of the hottest young chefs in Italy, a regular on the Italian version of Ready Steady Cook and a disciple of Jamie Oliver.

His restaurant on Via Senzanome is a funky, design bistro where the light, creative cuisine revolves around fresh, seasonal produce. The three course set menus at lunch range from €10-€20 and include mineral water, a glass of wine and coffee, while main courses at night are priced at €8. A great place to come for healthy salads or grilled fish after too much tortellini and tagliatelle.

• 42 Via Senzanome, +39 51 2750069, [cesaremarretti.com](http://cesaremarretti.com)

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## Biagi

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The sign outside Biagi says "osteria" but this is actually an elegant restaurant which is definitely the place to reserve for a romantic gourmet dinner that still won't break the bank. While the menu features classic *casalinga* dishes, lovingly prepared in the kitchen by Signora Dina, mother of the friendly owner and maître d', Fabio, there are also surprising recipes like a *galantina di cappone* (stuffed chicken) or a warm *panzanella* salad of beans and plump tomatoes. Excellent choice of local wines, and this is the place to be surprised by the quality of a sparkling red lambrusco. Dinner with wine costs €30-€35.

• 9 Via Savenella, +39 51 4070049, [ristorantebiagi.it](http://ristorantebiagi.it)

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