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Times+

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CITY BREAKS

## Bologna city guide: the Big Weekend

Italy's tastiest city also serves up a mouthwatering array of art and high culture

Mia Aimagor Ogden

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Italy Aviation

Transport



Bologna has been called a lot of names: *La Rossa* (the red: because of its elegant red-brick buildings), *La Dotta* (the learned: it's home to the oldest university in the western world) and, best of all, *La Grassa* (the fat: a nod to its wonderfully indulgent side). The home of the tastiest food in Italy, it will treat you to a weekend of perfect pasta and parmesan, mouthwatering mortadella and abundant *aperitivi* — with excellent art and architecture thrown in for good measure.

**SATURDAY**

# SUNDAY TIMES

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### Morning

Start on the city's prettiest medieval square, **Piazza Santo Stefano**, home to the church of the same name: it's really a glorious frescoed jumble of seven chapels fused together. The oldest dates from the 5th century and is where the remains of Bologna's patron, San Petronio, once lay. His pilgrims were the tourists of the past (free; [bolognawelcome.com/en](http://bolognawelcome.com/en)).

Continue your walk through the shady porticoes — there are nearly 24 miles of them in the city centre — pausing to admire the grotesque heads of the **Palazzo Salina Amorini Bolognini** before dropping in at **Cremeria La Vecchia Stalla** for some of the best *gelato* in Bologna. We love the coffee with chocolate flakes (from £2; Via Santo Stefano 14a).

You should now feel suitably fortified for the **Torre degli Asinelli**, the tallest leaning medieval tower in the world at almost 320ft — that's 498 stairs to you. Begun in 1109, it was once one of more than 100 in the ancient city; only 20 have survived the ravages of time. The sensational view from the top demonstrates how *La Rossa* got its name (£4; [duetorribologna.com](http://duetorribologna.com)).

### Afternoon

Whet your appetite for lunch with a wander round the old-school delis of the **Quadrilatero**, where the Bolognesi have been shopping for decades: ask for a taster at **Tamburini**, a temple to the humble ham ([tamburini.com](http://tamburini.com)); **Simoni**, with wheel upon wheel of fragrant parmesan ([salumeriasimoni.it](http://salumeriasimoni.it)); and **Atti**, the oldest bakery in town ([paoloatti.com](http://paoloatti.com)).

Lunch is at **Zerocinquantino**, in the middle of the Quadrilatero. Bag a high table outside this buzzing deli and order a *tagliere* (board) of meat and cheese: mortadella, culatello, pecorino, squacquerone and grana padano, served with artichokes, olive paste and tigelle, the local flatbreads, will see you through to *aperitivo* time (from £15 for two; [zerocinquantino.net](http://zerocinquantino.net)).



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Indulge in some gelatoALAMY

Just around the corner is the **Church of Santa Maria della Vita**, where Niccolo dell'Arca's life-size terracotta Lamentation Over the Dead Christ is a heartbreaking depiction of grief (£3.50; [genusbononiae.it](http://genusbononiae.it)). A 15-minute walk takes you to the **Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna**, a classical gallery in a cool modern space, with a superb collection of works by Giotto, El Greco, Raphael and homegrown heroes the Carracci cousins (£5; [pinacotecabologna.beniculturali.it](http://pinacotecabologna.beniculturali.it)).

### Evening

Bologna comes out to play on Saturday night. Head up to the **Mercato delle Erbe**, an elegant market hall with restaurants and bars scattered around the food stalls. If you're lucky, you might catch a bit of live jazz on the street: a pavement table at the chic Bizarre, just outside, is the best vantage point. Order a white negroni: sublime (cocktails from £7; [bizarrebologna.com](http://bizarrebologna.com)).

The current food buzz is all about **Osteria Bartolini**, a courtyard seafood restaurant, 15 minutes' walk away, which is underneath the biggest plane tree you've ever seen. Book a 10pm table and order the *gran fritto di pesce*, a fried-fish extravaganza — but don't add lemon. It makes the batter soggy, and the waiters tut (mains from £7.50; [osteriabartolinibologna.com](http://osteriabartolinibologna.com)).



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End the night with live music at **Bravo Caffè**. It's currently a host venue for the city's jazz festival, while upcoming gigs include the 1980s favourites Swing Out Sister (tickets from £15; [bravocaffe.it](http://bravocaffe.it)).



### SUNDAY

#### Morning

Kick-start your morning with an espresso under the arches at **Aroma** — it was voted the best cafe in Italy last year (from £1; [ilpiaceredelcaffè.it](http://ilpiaceredelcaffè.it)).

From here, you're perfectly placed to check out **Piazza Maggiore**, Bologna's imposing main square, which is lined with flamboyant late-medieval palazzos — **Palazzo d'Accursio** is a must for the wonderful Liberty-style Salaborsa library and the art treasures of the **Collezioni Comunali** — and topped off by the still unfinished 14th-century gothic **Basilica di San Petronio**. Turn up before Mass at 11am, making sure you leave enough time to enjoy the exquisite frescoes by Giovanni da Modena in the Bolognini chapel. Hell has never looked so alarming (free entry, £2 to take photos; [basilicadisantipetronio.org](http://basilicadisantipetronio.org)).



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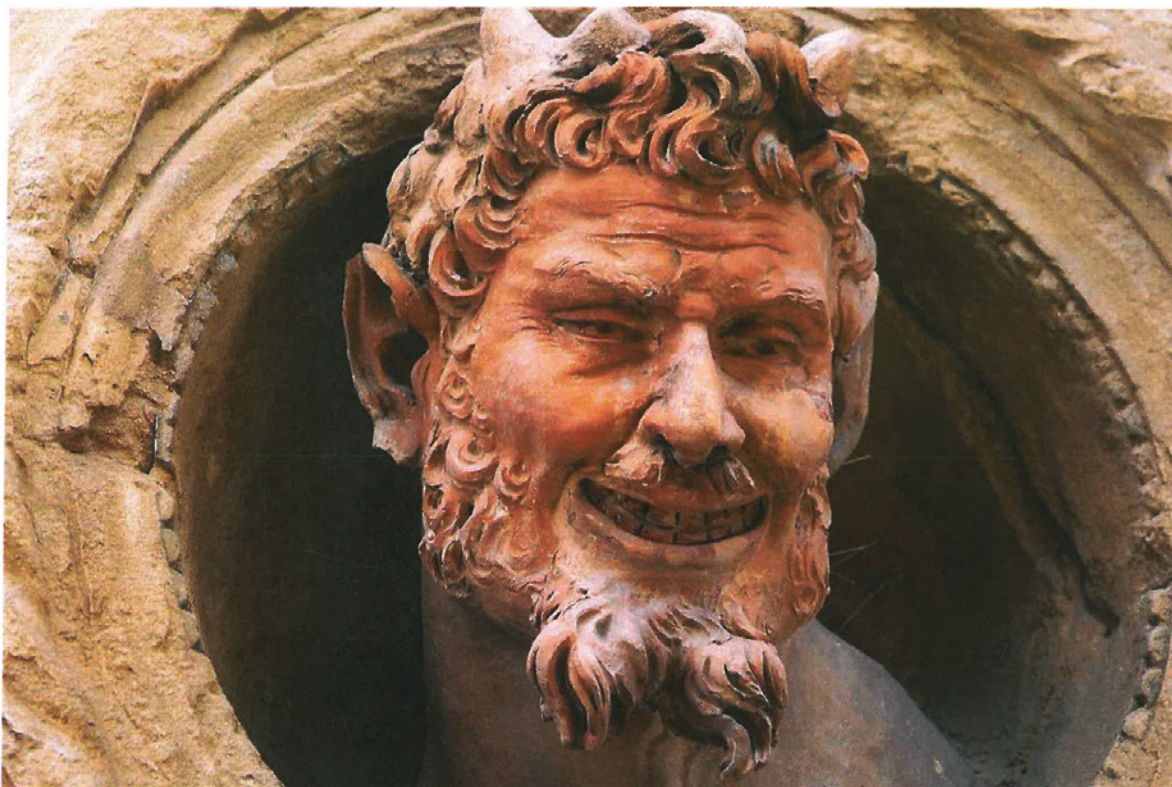
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Before lunch, venture into the **Archiginnasio** to see *La Dotta* at her finest: this is where the university was founded in 1088. The extraordinary 17th-century sculpted-wood Teatro Anatomico, where dissections of human bodies used to take place, is an unlikely masterpiece (£3; [archiginnasio.it](http://archiginnasio.it)).



A satyr leers from the Palazzo Salina Amorini BologniniALAMY

## Afternoon

Wander through the porticoes of the **Palazzo dei Banchi**, which are packed with smart boutiques, to the mass-market **Via dell'Indipendenza** — where shops are open even on Sundays — stopping to eat at **Twinside**, the funky bistro offshoot of one of the city's grandest restaurants. Sit in the shade of the arches and order a light lunch of aubergine "meatballs" with tzatziki (mains from £9; [twinside.net](http://twinside.net)).

Give the rest of the afternoon over to **MAMbo**, the city's museum of modern art. Bypass the permanent collection in this vaulted, airy space and make for the Museo Morandi, a temple to the painter and printmaker Giorgio Morandi, the Bolognese master of still life: the 62 oils and 18 watercolours are things of subtle beauty (£5; [mambo-bologna.org](http://mambo-bologna.org)).

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### Evening

Join the locals on their nightly *passeggiata* back down through Piazza Santo Stefano, pausing for a cocktail at the elegant dark-wood bar of **Camera con Vista**, where the champagne-based Grande Bellezza is a must (from £10; [cameraconvista.it](http://cameraconvista.it)).

A leisurely walk through the **Giardini Margherita** park will bring you to **Le Serre**, a brilliant initiative by the Kilowatt co-operative to bring life back to the derelict municipal greenhouses here. There's live music, an outdoor bar among the vegetable beds and a non-earnest vegan restaurant where the Italian-style falafels are top-notch (mains from £8; [leserre.kilowatt.bo.it](http://leserre.kilowatt.bo.it)).

### Getting there

Airlines flying to Bologna include British Airways, easyJet and Ryanair.

### Where to stay

**Il Convento dei Fiori di Seta** is a sweet 10-room hotel in an old convent on the outskirts of the city centre. You'll have breakfast overlooking a fresco of Christ (doubles from £70, B&B; [ilconventodeifioridiseta.it](http://ilconventodeifioridiseta.it)).

Or try living like a Bolognese in the funky, centrally located **L'8 Boutique Apartments** (doubles from £80; [l8boutiqueapartments.it](http://l8boutiqueapartments.it)).

*Mia Aimaro Ogden was a guest of Emilia Romagna Turismo ([emiliaromagnaturismo.com/en](http://emiliaromagnaturismo.com/en)), Bologna Welcome ([bolognawelcome.com](http://bolognawelcome.com)), Il Convento dei Fiori di Seta and British Airways ([ba.com](http://ba.com))*