



48 HOURS IN

# *Bologna*

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TASTE · DISCOVER · LINGER

## EUROPEAN SERIES

# Welcome to Bologna.

Bologna gets called “La Dotta, La Grassa, La Rossa” — the learned, the fat, the red — and all three nicknames are load-bearing. Learned, because it's home to the oldest university in the Western world, founded in 1088, and the 80,000-strong student population keeps the streets lively well past midnight. Fat, because this is the undisputed culinary capital of Italy, the birthplace of tortellini, tagliatelle al ragù, and mortadella, in a country that does not hand out that title lightly. Red, for the terracotta rooftops and brick facades that color the entire historic center.

What Bologna has that no other city on this itinerary has: nearly 40 kilometers of UNESCO-listed porticoes, covered arcades that let you walk almost the entire city sheltered from rain or sun; the Two Towers, medieval symbols of the city (though note the taller Torre Garisenda has been closed to climbers since 2023 over structural safety concerns — verify current status before planning around it); a university-town energy that makes solo dining, solo walking, and striking up conversation with strangers feel completely normal; and food that rivals anywhere in the country at a fraction of the tourist-trap prices you'd pay in Florence or Rome.

Bologna rewards solo travelers who eat constantly and walk without hurrying. Start in Piazza Maggiore before the crowds. Climb the Asinelli Tower for the view. Get lost under the porticoes toward San Luca. Eat tortellini in brodo somewhere with no English menu. This is the itinerary.

## DAY ONE

# Day One — Piazza Maggiore · The Two Towers · Quadrilatero

Day One covers Bologna's historic heart on foot — the main square, the medieval towers, and the market district that defines the city's food culture.

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## MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

### Piazza Maggiore & Basilica di San Petronio

The heart of Bologna. Basilica entry free; terrace access ~€3–5. Morning light is the best time to see the historic facades, before the square fills up. Inside San Petronio, a precise 17th-century meridian line designed by astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini turns the floor into a solar clock.

9:45 AM

### Breakfast: Caffè Terzi

High-quality coffee and pastries, a genuine local favorite for starting the day properly. €5–10.

10:30 AM

### Sala Borsa & Fountain of Neptune

Right next to Piazza Maggiore. Sala Borsa is a former stock exchange turned public library, with a striking glass floor revealing Roman ruins beneath. The Fountain of Neptune, designed by Giambologna, is one of the city's defining symbols.

11:30 AM

### The Two Towers (Le Due Torri)

Piazza di Porta Ravegnana. Torre degli Asinelli climb ~€5–6, roughly 498 steps, open ~9am–7pm (longer in summer). The taller of the two towers, rewarding the climb with views stretching to the Adriatic on a clear day.

#### INSIDER TIP

*Torre Garisenda, the shorter, more dramatically leaning tower, has been closed to climbers since 2023 due to structural safety concerns — check current status before planning around it, but it's still striking to view from the base.*

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## AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM

1:00 PM

### Lunch: Quadrilatero Market District

Just east of Piazza Maggiore. Bologna's historic market quarter — Tamburini for cured meats and cheese to go, paired with a glass of Lambrusco at Osteria del Sole, one of the city's oldest taverns, which serves only wine and lets you bring your own food.

2:30 PM

### Archiginnasio & Anatomical Theatre

The former main building of the University of Bologna, now home to a striking 17th-century Anatomical Theatre carved entirely in wood. A short, essential cultural stop.

3:30 PM

### Piazza Santo Stefano & the Seven Churches

A medieval religious complex of interlinked churches — Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, Church of the Crucifix, and a peaceful medieval cloister. Free entry; closes for a couple of hours around midday, so this afternoon slot works well.

5:00 PM

### Aperitivo near Piazza Maggiore

Bar Zanarini is a well-loved spot for a pre-dinner drink and people-watching, with a beautiful historic interior.

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#### EVENING · 7:30 PM – LATE

7:30 PM

### Dinner: Osteria dell'Orsa

A cozy, friendly atmosphere near the university where solo travelers routinely find themselves seated among locals and students. Authentic Bolognese cooking. €20–35.

9:30 PM

### University District Nightlife

Via Zamboni and Piazza Verdi — Bologna's student quarter, alive with cheap bars and a genuine local crowd well past midnight.

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## DAY TWO

## Day Two — Porticoes to San Luca · Quadrilatero Deep Dive · Giardini Margherita

Day Two covers the city's most famous portico walk and its green spaces, with room for a slower, more personal pace.

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### MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

#### Breakfast & Start the Portico Walk

Coffee near Piazza Maggiore or Porta Saragozza, then start the walk to the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca — the longest portico in the world, roughly 4km with more than 600 arches, considered a near-spiritual walk by locals.

##### INSIDER TIP

*Start early, especially in summer — the climb gets genuinely hot by midday. Alternatively, bus line 20 from the centre (~€1.50) covers the same route if you'd rather save your legs.*

10:30 AM

#### Santuario della Madonna di San Luca

Piazzale della Basilica, 1. Free entry, open ~7am–7pm. Perched on Colle della Guardia, the basilica caps the portico walk with sweeping views back over the city and the surrounding hills.

12:00 PM

#### Descend & Wander

Take your time coming back down — the view changes with every switchback, and there's no need to retrace your exact route.

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### AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM

1:00 PM

#### Lunch: Trattoria in the Quadrilatero

Return to the market district for tagliatelle al ragù or tortellini in brodo at a trattoria without an English menu — a good sign, not a barrier.

2:30 PM

#### Via Piella & the Finestra sul Canale

A small unmarked window at Via Piella 16 reveals “Little Venice” — a hidden canal view most visitors walk right past.

3:30 PM

#### Giardini Margherita

Bologna's largest park, just outside the city walls on the southeast side. Read, people-watch, or stop by Le Serre dei Giardini, a good café/work spot inside the park.

5:00 PM

#### Gelato: Cremeria Vecchia Stalla

A few steps from Piazza Maggiore, widely considered among the city's finest handmade gelato — a well-earned reward after two days of walking.

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**EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE****7:00 PM****Dinner: Bottega dei Portici**

Modern eatery serving traditional Bolognese dishes with a contemporary twist, right under the shadow of the Two Towers — a fitting farewell meal. €25–40.

**9:00 PM****Final Night: Piazza Maggiore**

Close the trip where it began — a slow evening lap of the square, now lit and quieter, with musicians and street performers often still going.

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WHERE TO EAT

Bologna's Table

| RESTAURANT                   | NEIGHBOURHOOD        | PRICE         |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Osteria dell'Orsa            | University District  | €20–35        |
| Drogheria della Rosa         | Via Cartoleria       | €25–50        |
| Tamburini & Osteria del Sole | Quadrilatero         | €10–20        |
| Bottega dei Portici          | Near the Two Towers  | €25–40        |
| Vicolo Colombina             | Quadrilatero         | €20–35        |
| Caffè Terzi                  | Near Piazza Maggiore | €5–10         |
| Cremeria Vecchia Stalla      | Near Piazza Maggiore | €3–6 (gelato) |

GETTING AROUND

Navigating Bologna

| MODE                               | COST                                       | NOTES                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Walking                            | Free                                       | The historic centre is fully walkable end-to-end in about 30 minutes, largely under cover of the porticoes. |
| TPER Bus                           | €1.50 single / €6 24hr tourist pass        | No metro system; buses cover everything outside the walkable core.                                          |
| Bologna Welcome Card               | Varies                                     | Unlimited transport plus free/reduced entry to many attractions.                                            |
| Marconi Express (airport monorail) | €11.50                                     | Bologna Centrale to BLQ airport in 7 minutes, runs every 7 min.                                             |
| Taxi                               | Fixed rates ~€3.40 day / €6.10 night start | COTABO and CAT RadioTaxi are the main licensed operators.                                                   |

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## Before You Go

| TOPIC         | DETAILS                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Getting There | Bologna Guglielmo Marconi Airport (BLQ). Marconi Express monorail to Bologna Centrale, 7 min, €11.50.                                                            |
| Best Time     | Spring (April–May) and early autumn: mild, fewer crowds. Summer: hot and humid, up to 35°C. Avoid trade fair weeks (Cosmoprof, Cersaie) when hotel prices spike. |
| Solo Dining   | Outstanding — the huge student population normalizes solo dining completely; counter and communal seating are everywhere.                                        |
| Language      | Italian; English spoken less consistently than in Rome, Venice, or Florence, but patience and basic phrases go a long way.                                       |
| Useful Apps   | Google Maps (offline download), TPER (local bus), Trenitalia/Italo (regional trains for day trips).                                                              |

*Bologna awaits.*

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE

## Final Checklist

- Verify current status of Torre Garisenda before planning around it — closed to climbers since 2023
- Start the San Luca portico walk early, especially in summer heat
- Skip spaghetti bolognese on the menu — it doesn't exist here; order tagliatelle al ragù instead
- Book dinner for 8–10pm — locals eat late, and 7pm reservations feel distinctly tourist
- Keep bags zipped and in front at Piazza Maggiore, the Two Towers, and on crowded buses
- Avoid the narrow lanes directly behind the central market (Via dei Giudei, Via Orefici) after 11pm
- Download offline maps before arrival

**Your interactive map is one scan away.**

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

[goingsolo.life/maps/bologna](https://goingsolo.life/maps/bologna)

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