

24 hours in Bologna

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Grassa , rossa , dotta , turrta (fat, red, learned, towered): it's a well-worn but apt description of Bologna, and the ideal day here involves bagging a prime specimen in each category. Fortunately, all key destinations lie within the pedestrian-friendly centre.

9am Zanarini

Breakfast in Bologna is more power play than porridge and this central bar is the best place to witness the city's prime movers in their natural habitat. The café dates from 1924 but was bought by the Segafredo Zanetti empire in 2001, after which it underwent a three-year restoration. The bar is a rare model of Italian efficiency - a chrome-topped horseshoe offering creamy cappuccinos and killer espressos. Don't expect languid chats with the locals, though: business types spend seconds here before hot-footing it to the next multimillion-euro deal.

Piazza Galvani 1, tel: +39 051 275 0041;

caffezanarini.com

11am Il Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio

Nowhere is Bologna's academic legacy writ larger than at this extraordinary 16th-century palazzo. The building was the first permanent seat of the university, built to consolidate disparate faculties at the behest of Pope Pius IV. Though the university moved to Palazzo Poggi in 1803, the pursuit of knowledge continues in this building's library, which contains more than a million books and manuscripts. There is also Antonio Levante's 17th-century Teatro Anatomico, a wood-clad dissection theatre fully restored after Allied bombs blew it to bits in 1944.

Piazza Galvani 1, tel: +39 051 276 811;

www.archiginnasio.it

1pm Ristorante Diana

A local favourite, Diana's white-tuxed waiters and shimmering chandeliers are not the stuff of showy, tourist eateries: this is a proper, working restaurant, where the monied dine daily and families celebrate special occasions. Dishes are traditional and similarly unapologetic: order bollito misto, and a beefy-armed chef will carve chunks of boiled zampone (stuffed pig's trotter) with lentils, beef, tongue and veal before your eyes. Other classics include affettato misto con mortadella (cold meat cuts with the local pork-based sausage).

Via dell'Indipendenza 24, tel: +39 051 231 302

3pm MAMbo

Don't be disheartened by the porticoed exterior, the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna is every inch a modern temple as attested by Loris Cecchini's "Cloudless", a floating, molecular mass, which greets you in the cavernous atrium. The permanent collections aren't extensive but there's a strong commitment to promoting Italian artists. Showstoppers include Patrick Tuttofuoco's "Chinese Theatre", Luca Pancrazzi's "Aperundum" and Davide Bertocchi's "Nucleo".

Via Don Minzoni 14, tel: +39 051 649 6611;

www.mambo-bologna.org

8.30pm Teatro Comunale

Antonio Galli Bibiena's 18th-century opera house is a must-see, even if you don't manage to catch a performance. The auditorium boasts four tiers of ornate boxes, inevitably framed by porticoes, and a stunning ceiling restored in the 1870s. Today, the theatre puts on everything from African music to symphonies by Bologna's own Ottorino Respighi.

Largo Respighi 1, tel: +39 199 107 070; tcbo.it

11pm Le Stanze

As Gothic as any Bram Stoker fantasy, this central bar is probably the most bizarre place to relax and review your day. Formerly a 16th-century chapel, the floor-to ceiling frescoes (pictured) are still intact, creating a ghost-grey backdrop for the eclectic Italian furniture and DJ sets. You can get a decent cocktail at the bar, while the bistro serves typical Italian specialities, including Chianina beef, a chunky beast that dates back to the Roman Empire.

Via Borgo di San Pietro 1, tel: +39 051 228 767,

www.lestanzebar.com

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