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Domenica 9 novembre 2014

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FEATURES

The big weekend: Bologna

It's the medieval city made to make your mouth water, says our writer

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Mia Aïmaro Ogden Published: 9 November 2014

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Street cafes too good to pass (Russell Mountford)

Saturday Morning

Bologna is fat. That's why they call it La Grassa. It's a visual feast of a city that also happens to be home to the most delicious food in Italy — perfect pasta and parmigiano, deep dark chocolate and mouth-watering mortadella.

(...)

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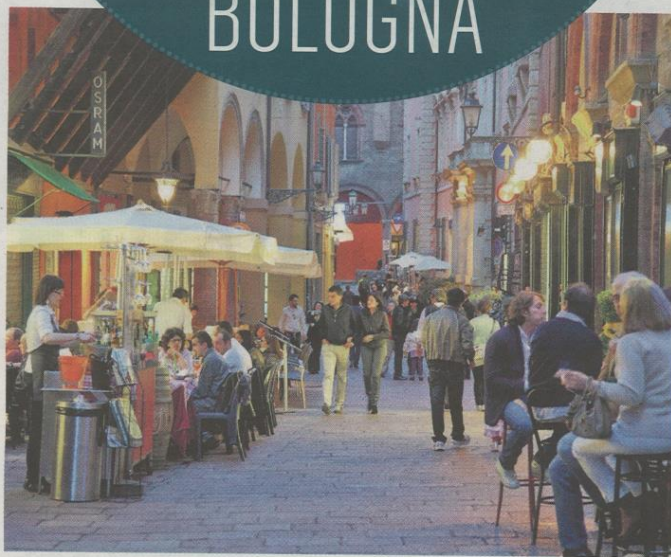
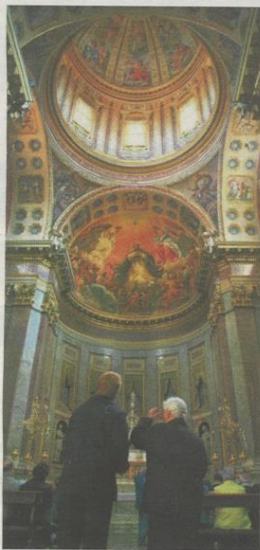
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TRAVEL

THE BIG WEEKEND BOLOGNA

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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It's the medieval city made to make your mouth water, says **Mia Aimaro Ogden**

SATURDAY

Morning

Bologna is fat. That's why they call it La Grassa. It's a visual feast of a city that also happens to be home to the most delicious food in Italy — perfect pasta and parmigiano, deep dark chocolate and mouth-watering mortadella.

Start your gastronomic journey in the streets around the **Mercato di Mezzo**, off Piazza Maggiore, the city's medieval heart. Rickety stalls display the shiniest fruit and veg imaginable, still-wriggling seafood and handmade pasta.

It's the old-school delis in the Quadrilatero that are crying out for your stomach's attention, though: **Tamburini**, a stylish temple to the humble ham (tamburini.com); **Paolo Atti**, the oldest bakery in town (paoloatti.com); and **Roccati**, an artisan chocolatier (roccaticcioccolato.com). All will happily ply you with samples. Make sure you leave time for coffee at **Caffe Terzi**. Stand at the bar for a shot of its finest: a single espresso with chocolate and spices (£1.70; caffeterzibologna.com).

On the way to lunch, pop into the restored **Basilica di San Petronio**, on Piazza Maggiore (£2.50; basilicadisantipetronio.it). The highlight is the Cappella Bolognini, with rosy frescoes by Giovanni di Pietro Falloppi, and a particularly alarming vision of Dante's Lucifer.



Lunch is a snack at the wine-barrel tables of **La Baita**, a wonderfully whiffy cheese shop on Via Pescherie Vecchie, with a huge Murano chandelier, a comedy cow and 200-odd varieties of **formaggio** (vecchiamalganagozi.it).

Afternoon

Time to feed your soul with a visit to **Santo Stefano**, a glorious jumble of seven churches fused together, the oldest dating from the 5th century (free). Here the remains of Bologna's patron, San Petronio, once lay.

Head across to the **Archiginnasio**, the first seat of Bologna's university, founded in 1088 and the oldest in the western hemisphere. The painted staircase and sculpted-wood Teatro Anatomico, where anatomy lessons were held, are works of art in themselves (£2.50; www.archiginnasio.it).

At 5pm, it's off to **Salotto di Penelope**, to learn how the Bolognese classics are made at home. Barbara Zaccagni and Valeria Henseberger are cordon bleu chefs with a humorous approach who will teach you, in English, to prepare the perfect pasta from scratch (£67; www.ilsalottodipenelope.it).

Evening

Stay at the Salotto and eat with your classmates, or head for **Ristorante Biagi**, a formidable local institution with a proprietor to match. Never trust a thin chef, Fabio Biagi will say, before stuffing you with his impeccably executed **tortellini in brodo**, the tiny, delicate pasta shapes modelled on the tummy button of Venus (mains from £10; www.ristorantebiagi.it).

You may be bursting at the seams, but catch a couple of standards at **Cantina Bentivoglio**, a jazz and burlesque bar, before you roll into bed. Your dreams will sound all the sweeter (cantinabentivoglio.it).

SACRED AND URBANE

From left, the Basilica di San Domenico, home to St Dominic's astonishing tomb; street cafes too good to pass; handmade chocolate from Roccati; and perhaps one more helping of pasta? Below, the Fontana di Nettuno, next to Piazza Maggiore

SUNDAY

Morning

Nip into the magnificent **Basilica di San Domenico**, on Piazza San Domenico, to see the exquisitely carved shrine to the saint, which took 500 years to complete — Michelangelo had a hand in it. Then burn off some calories with a climb to the top of the 319ft **Torre degli Asinelli**, the medieval high point of the city and one of 180 such towers in its day. From here, you'll see the spread of terracotta roofs, which explain — along with the city's communist leanings — Bologna's other nickname, La Rossa, or "the red" (£2.50).

Then it's off for coffee at **Zanarini**, the oldest cafe in the city, on the corner of Piazza Galvani and Via Luigi Carlo Farini, and close to all the big-name boutiques. Wander through the arcades to the church of **Santa Maria della Vita** to see Niccolò dell'Arca's startling sculpture of the Lamentation over the Dead Christ (free).

Head back to the Mercato di Mezzo for lunch in the old market hall, now

transformed into an industrial-chic warehouse with designer food stalls. **Maurizio Fini's Pescheria del Pavaglione** sells crispy calamari, perfect with a cold glass of pignoletto (mains from £4).

Afternoon

A brisk walk down Via Zamboni will bring you to the former monastery of Sant'Ignazio, now the **Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna**, a gallery space where you'll find masterpieces by Vasari, Carracci, Raffaello and Perugino (€3; Via delle Belle Arti 56).

Head to **Funivia**, on Piazza Cavour, for a triple-whammy ice cream of almond with macaroons and caramelised nuts, mascarpone with melted chocolate, and creamy coconut (from £2). Eat it on the **passeggiata** up through the arches to the cathedral, where you can catch a free choral concert on Sundays at 4.30pm.

Evening

A little light supper before you go? The **Drogheria della Rosa** is a treat. In a quirky old pharmacy on a quiet street, Emanuele Addone serves up near-perfect dishes of the day: **orecchiette** with lamb ragu, fillet steak with balsamic reduction, and chocolate and hazelnut tart will make your gluttonous Sunday complete (mains from £9.50; drogheriadellarosait).

WHERE TO STAY

Choose the **Novocento** for art-deco glam or the **Corona d'Oro** for classic luxe (doubles from £125, B&B; bolognarhotels.it). Or try the **Hotel Porta San Mamolo** for traditional style on a budget (doubles from £75, B&B; hotel-portasanmamolo.it).

GETTING THERE

Fly to Bologna with BA or easyJet. Mia Aimaro Ogden was a guest of the Corona d'Oro and Emilia Romagna Tourism (emiliaromagnaturismo.com/en).

