

# TasteItalia

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**48**  
INSPIRING  
ITALIAN  
RECIPES

*Buona Pasqua!*  
**Happy Easter**

Mascarpone &  
raspberry cake, p4



Easter  
family feast

**14** Delicious Italian  
mains for veggies

Authentic flavours from Lazio

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the scenes of Sicily's oranges

## SEASONAL FAVOURITES



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with April's broccoli



✿ Succulent lamb  
stuffed with spinach

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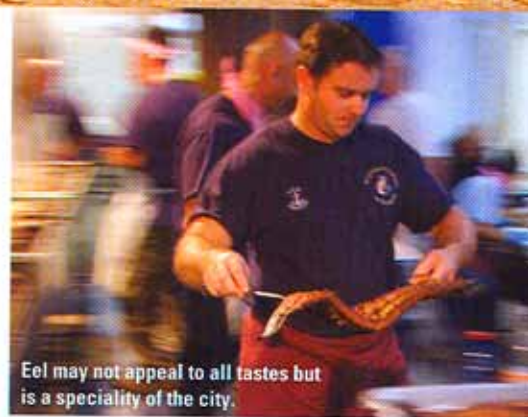
# Gourmet guide to FERRARA

**Sarah Lane** visits Ferrara in Emilia-Romagna, where she discovers that the Renaissance lives on and the food has a few intriguing, centuries-old flavours in store for her



Wandering through the cobbled streets that surround central Ferrara's wonderfully majestic red-brick castle with its wide moat and drawbridge, it is easy to imagine being transported back several centuries to the Renaissance period during Ferrara's golden age. The town, which swarms with bicycles – a practical way to get around the hill-free town – has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site for the past 14 years, thanks to its centre, which has remained unaltered since Renaissance times. It is a similar story in the kitchens too – many of today's popular local dishes were first made hundreds of years ago under the Este dynasty. Flavours are strong and often surprising, frequently combining sweet and savoury, while the local wines are genuine and sincere, reflecting the friendly yet frank, open character of the local residents.

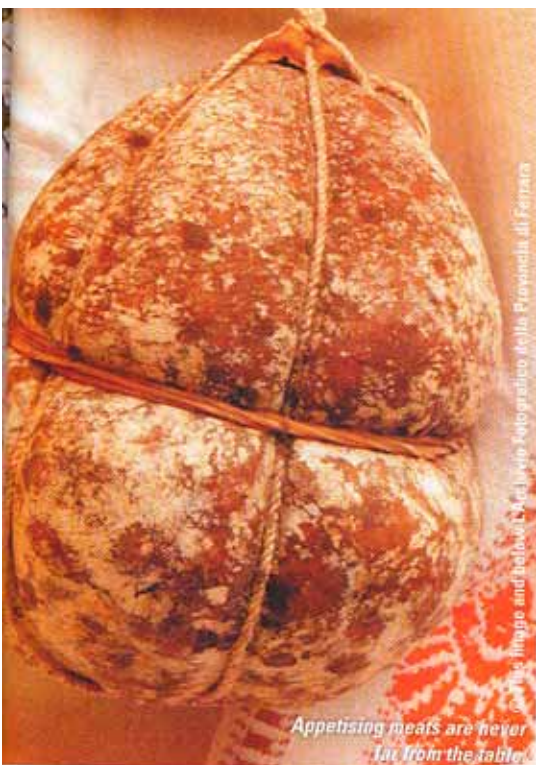
The Este family were in a position of power in the mid-12th century when the area was under control of the church, but it wasn't until 1471 when Pope Paul II bestowed the title of Duke to the leader of the time, Borso d'Este, that they actually took charge. In a period of just over 120 years, until a lack of male heirs caused Ferrara to return to church rule in 1597, the Este dukes managed to change the face of the town. They made it a strong political and military force, but also the Este court was a leading cultural centre and a magnet for the best artists and poets of the time. There were sumptuous banquets that went on all night, courses interspersed with music, dancing and



Eel may not appeal to all tastes but is a speciality of the city.

plays. The chefs were just as inspired in their art as painters like Titian and Piero della Francesca and poets such as Petrarch and Ludovico Ariosto, all of whom spent time at the Este court.

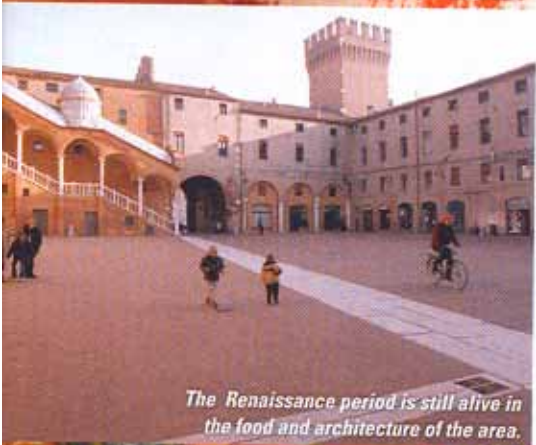
*Salama da sugo* (cooked salami), *cappellacci di zucca* (pasta with a pumpkin filling) and *pasticcio di maccheroni* (maccheroni pie) – all highlights of the local cuisine today – were invented during that period of Renaissance splendour. Plenty of detail is known about the banquets thanks to the writings of Cristoforo Messisbugo. Cristoforo was administrator and master of ceremonies at court, and his book *Banquets, Composition of Food and General Utensils*, which was written in 1539, contains a valuable account of over 300 recipes served at the banquets. Dedicated foodies should go on a pilgrimage to the place where Messisbugo was buried in Ferrara – Sant'Antonio in Polesine.



Appetising meats are never far from the table.



Peruse the city's markets where you will get to sample freshly cooked polenta.



The Renaissance period is still alive in the food and architecture of the area.

Since the church's restoration, his memorial plaque hangs outside near the entrance, but for an unusual experience ring the doorbell and wait for one of the nuns who reside here to open the door and show you around the interior, frescoed by artists of the Giotto and Ferrarese schools.

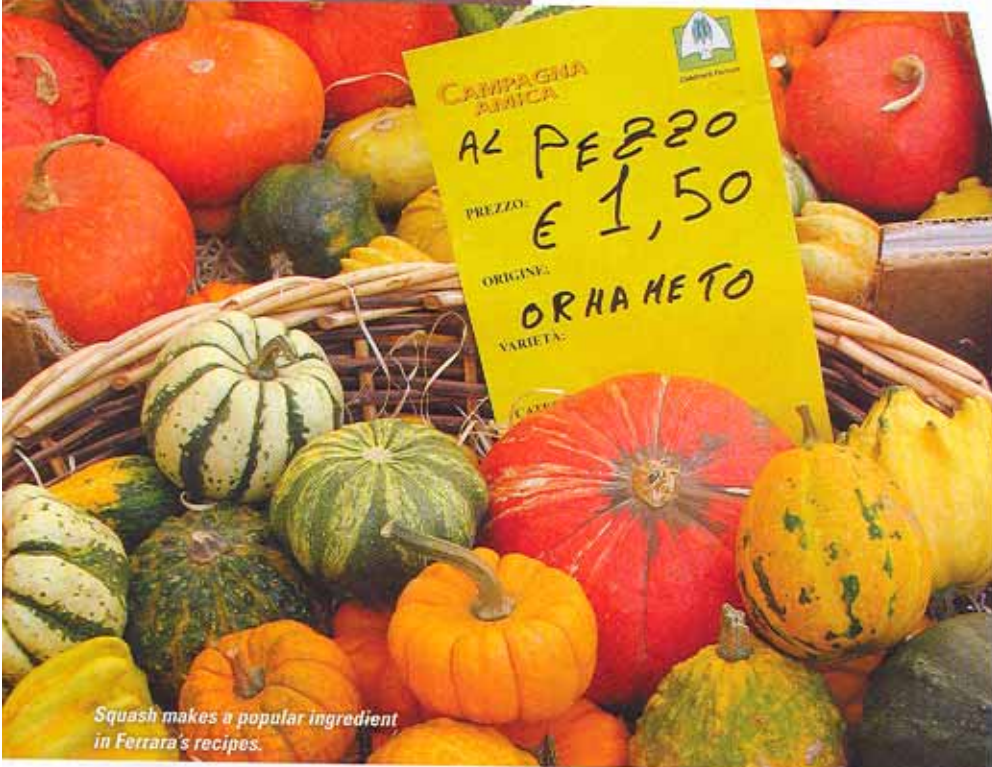
Having belonged for many years to the Papal States, monasteries and convents abound in and around Ferrara. The most important is undoubtedly Pomposa Abbey near the coast and the delta of the River Po. Over 1,000 years old, its input was fundamental to local development, the economy and the well-being of the territory. The Benedictine monks based here in the Middle Ages performed near miracles in land reclamation, gaining acres of terrain for agriculture. Pumping systems are still essential and while the sandiest, most difficult parts of the coastal terrain are adorned only by

the vines that thrive around the holm oaks of the Bosco Eliceo forest, the unusual properties of the land have led to all kinds of outstanding produce being grown. Quite surprisingly given the humid conditions of the delta, rice cultivation is a relatively recent innovation but it is proving highly successful and is useful in cleansing the land of excess saltiness. The local varieties of Altedo asparagus has IGP (Protected Geographical Indication) status, the Voghiera garlic – large, aromatic and long-living – boasts the even more prestigious DOP (Protected Denomination of Origin) status, and the ubiquitous butternut squash is a very well-established crop.

*Zucca violina*, usually referred to as pumpkin but far more similar to butternut squash, owes its name to its elongated curvy shape reminiscent of a violin. Hollowed out, they used to be handy containers used by farm-hands to carry drinking water or soup and were even used to store gunpowder. Butternut squash is a vital ingredient in one of the town's signature dishes, *cappellacci di zucca*. Already popular at the time of the Este banquets, it is delicious fried or puréed and served with rice, and you can find it on the menus of the many welcoming trattorias and restaurants of the town. Perhaps due to its tendency to fog, Ferrara has an exceptional number of cosy eating places – ideal for holing up in on a chilly evening.

Another of Ferrara's unusual foods is the eel. Even today experts are unable to explain their behaviour fully – probably born in a section of the North Atlantic known as the Sargasso Sea, not far from Bermuda, the young set out on a mammoth voyage for the Po Delta, which can take up to three years. Here they live in the fresh water until the age of 12 when, having reached sexual maturity, it seems that they follow their instincts and head back to the ocean. Unfortunately for them, many never leave the delta, becoming trapped in the eel-fishermen's nets instead.

With its strong flavour and oily texture, eel isn't everybody's favourite, though. The *salama da sugo*, on the other hand, is always well-received on the tables of Ferrara and has



Squash makes a popular ingredient in Ferrara's recipes.

CAMPAGNA AMICA  
AL PEZZO  
PREZZO: € 1,50  
ORIGINE:  
ORHARETO  
VARIETA:



A panoramic view of Ferrara

→ been since Renaissance times. Famous personalities throughout history, including Gabriele D'Annunzio and Greta Garbo have declared their love of the strong but elegantly flavoured sausage, which is sometimes attributed with aphrodisiac properties. Sexual imagery has been attached to Ferrara's famous bread too, the *coppietta ferrarese*. With its soft, rounded central body and elongated sections it is said to combine both male and female genital symbols. Although the Statuta Ferrariae governed the bread's ingredients from 1287, the characteristic shape wasn't introduced until 1536 when the innovation was first presented at a carnival banquet held at the Este court.

It is not only the sensual aspects of Ferrara's Renaissance cuisine that have survived, however – *pasticcio di maccheroni* and the *pampapato* cake were both first made in the 17th century in local convents and the shapes were apparently inspired by clerical headgear. More recently, in the early 20th century, one of Ferrara's other favourite cakes, the sublimely chocolatey *torta tenerina* also had a noble inspiration – it was made in honour of Elena Petrovich, wife of the Italian king of the time, Vittorio Emanuele III.

Today's Ferrara is firmly rooted in its glorious past but that doesn't mean it has been left behind or forgotten by progress. Far from it – the town is careful to uphold the timeless values developed during the rule of the Este dynasty and adapt them to the 21st century. The arts continue to thrive, particularly with world-class exhibitions held periodically at Palazzo dei Diamanti, while May sees the Palio di San Giorgio, an event which dates from the mid-13th century involving the town's eight *contradas* competing in a lively costume horse race in Piazza Ariostea (31 May 2009). Most of all, what is very much alive in Ferrara, in restaurants, trattorias and private homes, is the culinary prowess that was initiated by the Renaissance chefs of the Este court.

# WHERE TO EAT

## in ferrara

### Il Don Giovanni

Corso Ercole I° d'Este, 1

☎ +39 0532 243363, [www.ildongiovanni.com](http://www.ildongiovanni.com)

🌿 Lunch for two about €130

Proud bearer of a Michelin star for the past eight years, Il Don Giovanni is Ferrara's top restaurant and co-founders Pier Luigi Di Diego and Marco Merighi share a passion for food that is apparent in their work. Pier Luigi is a creative genius in the kitchen, while front-of-house Marco's enthusiasm transfers easily to diners. The menu varies daily according to availability of ingredients – much of the produce is provided by the restaurant's own out-of-town vegetable garden. Eight varieties of bread are baked each day and the wine cellar counts over 600 labels, Italian and overseas.

Classic Ferrarese dishes including *cappellacci di zucca* (€15) are available but many of the choices are less traditional, such as *tortelli con faraona* (pasta filled with guinea fowl, €20). Other dishes, like *petto di fischione* (breast of widgeon stuffed with eel, €32), combine local ingredients in inspired ways. The tiny restaurant, which counts just seven tables, is close to Ferrara's castle and Il Don Giovanni also runs the adjacent La Borsa wine-bar. Winner of Wine-bar of the Year 2008, La Borsa is more informal and less expensive – great for an *aperitivo* but Pier Luigi also provides a selection of dishes of the day too.

## Pumpkin pudding with pumpkin chips

### *Budino di zucca con chips di zucca*

1 pumpkin

220g single cream

1 free-range egg plus 2 yolks

oil, for frying

30ml balsamic vinegar

salt

butter, for greasing

Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas Mark 7. Cut the pumpkin in four and put one quarter aside. Put the other three quarters onto a baking tray and bake in the oven for 2 hours.

Lower the oven to 160°C/Gas Mark 3. Remove the cooked pumpkin flesh from the rind and put in a saucepan over a low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon until you get a dense purée. Leave to cool.

Mix 200g pumpkin purée with the cream, eggs and salt. Grease four moulds with butter and fill with the mixture. Place the moulds in a baking tray, half fill around the moulds with water and cook in the oven for 50 minutes. Leave to set.

To make the chips, remove the rind from the raw pumpkin quarter, then slice the flesh into thin crescent shapes and fry in hot oil. Drain carefully and dry on kitchen paper.

Turn the puddings out of the moulds onto plates. Scatter the chips around the puddings and drizzle balsamic vinegar over the top.





## Al Brindisi

Via Adelardi, 11

☎ +39 0532 209142, [www.albrindisi.com](http://www.albrindisi.com)

🌻 Meal for two about €55

Dating back to at least 1435, this atmospheric hostelry claims to be the oldest in the world. Titian was a customer and Copernicus lived upstairs while studying at the university here. It is right in the centre of town, tucked down a narrow lane by the cathedral and serves good local food as well as operating as a wine-bar offering a range of Italian wines. The *piatto yiddish* (goose breast, chicken liver paté and unleavened bread, €10), is inspired by Ferrara's strong Jewish history, while *pasticcio di maccheroni* (€7), and *cappellacci di zucca* (with butter and sage or ragù, €8), make good choices for the pasta course. For the main course you can't go wrong with *salama da sugo* (served with mashed potato, €10), and a piece of *pampapato* (€4) is a must for dessert.

“Dating back to at least 1435, this atmospheric hostelry claims to be the oldest in the world.”

AL BRINDISI

## Antica Trattoria Volano

Viale Volano, 20

☎ +39 0532 761421, [www.anticatrattoriavolano.it](http://www.anticatrattoriavolano.it)

🌻 Meal for two about €65

Set in an attractive historic building on the banks of the Po di Volano river, this 200-year-old trattoria is a great place to go for an authentic taste of Ferrara. The menu is a roll-call of traditional Ferrarese fare starting with the antipasti, which includes *salame all'aglio ferrarese* (garlicky sausage served with pinzini, €7), and continuing through a wide variety of pasta dishes to the substantial mains. Choose *salama da sugo* with polenta or mashed potato (€13), *misto di bolliti con salse alla ferrarese* (mixed boiled meats with ferrarese sauces, €18), or be adventurous and go for *anguilla a becco d'asino* (eel cooked with onions and vinegar, €18). A bottle of the local Fortana red wine (€9) makes an ideal accompaniment and to round off, try a slice of Ferrara's chocolate cake, *torta tenerina* (€4).

## Trattoria Borgomatto

Via Concia, 2

☎ +39 0532 240554, [www.borgomatto.it](http://www.borgomatto.it)

🌻 Meal for two about €75

Located on a narrow street in the old part of town, very close to Ferrara's covered market, Trattoria Borgomatto, with its predominantly wooden décor and two small rooms, creates an intimate but informal atmosphere and if one of the paintings on display catches your eye you can even buy it. The dishes are artistically presented too. The menu changes to reflect the season's produce but antipasti may include *cestino di polenta fritta* (fried polenta basket with porcini mushrooms and speck in a cheese sauce, €10), and traditional local favourites are reinterpreted with skill and style for dishes such as *ravioli ripieni di salama da sugo e ricotta in salsa di topinambur* (ravioli filled with *salama da sugo* and ricotta in a Jerusalem artichoke sauce, €10).

## Trattoria Marina

Via Spronello, 21 ☎ +39 0532 790399

🌻 Meal for two about €40

It would be easy to pass the entrance of this small family-run trattoria without noticing. Set in a quiet position, opposite the grassy bank of the Baluardo San Lorenzo section of the town walls, it is just a short stroll from Ferrara's bustling centre. Inside, the décor is as un-startling as the exterior but a cosy, homely feel has been created thanks to the friendliness of the proprietor. The dishes manage to convey this warm family atmosphere too, as if lovingly prepared by a grandmother for her grandchildren. Don't miss the house speciality, *fagottini ripieni* (pasta parcels filled with radicchio and ricotta, €6.50) – the perfect combination of textures and flavours. Main courses include *cinghiale con polenta* (wild boar with polenta, €6.70), hearty and satisfying, but leave room for one of Marina's tempting homemade desserts (€3).



# SALUTE!

Such rich food deserves a full-bodied accompaniment, which is exactly what Ferrara's wines have to offer.

The Vini DOC del Bosco Eliceo are Ferrara province's only locally made wines. They are also known as Vini della Sabbia (wines of the sand) due to the fact that the vines are grown exclusively in a sandy area near the Adriatic coast, in and around the Bosco Eliceo forest. Four varieties are produced – two reds, Fortana and Merlot, and two whites, Sauvignon and Bianco del Bosco. They received DOC status in 1989.

Vines have been grown in the area since Etruscan times. The ancient Romans continued the tradition but it was the Benedictine monks from

almost salty taste, due to the terrain and climate, and can be either still or slightly sparkling. It makes an ideal accompaniment to the strong-flavoured local cuisine.

The local Merlot is a softer-flavoured, more rounded red, while the Sauvignon and Bianco del Bosco are delicate whites more suited to accompany *cappellacci* pasta and other butternut squash or pumpkin dishes.

Mariotti ([www.boscoeliceo.net](http://www.boscoeliceo.net) ☎ +39 0532 804134) is one of the best Bosco Eliceo wine producers – ring ahead to visit the vineyard. Corte

Fortana is an ideal accompaniment to the strong-flavoured local cuisine.

Pomposa Abbey on the coast who really expanded farming and wine-making. During the 10-11th centuries the monks worked hard to reclaim marshy land and put it to agricultural use.

Although the Fortana vine is native to the area, a popular legend tells that Renata, daughter of Louis XII of France, who married Ercole II d'Este of the great Ferrarese Este dynasty in 1528, brought 17 vines from the French Côte d'Or as part of her dowry and planted them on the coast. This explains why Fortana, the most representative of the Vini del Bosco wines, is often referred to as Uva d'Oro. It is a medium-bodied wine with a characteristic,

Madonnina ([www.cortemadonnina.it](http://www.cortemadonnina.it), Pomposa) is also worth a visit. You can buy standard or 5-litre bottles of the Corte Madonnina wines filled up from the huge barrels, which dominate the shop area. A wide variety of other local produce is available and there is also an informal restaurant.

In Ferrara, numerous delis and wine stores sell Bosco Eliceo wines as do plenty of wine bars including Enotria (Via Saraceno, 39A/41). The Capponcelli family promote natural biodynamic wines that don't contain sulphites and seek out lesser-known wines, as well as quality cheeses and meats to serve at its small wine bar.



## WHERE TO SHOP *in ferrara*

→ Tracking down good-quality local produce in Ferrara presents no problems at all – the town centre is full of excellent bakers, delis and cake shops where you can stock up with traditional foods.

### BAKED DELIGHTS

The historic family-run bakery, **Perdonati** (Via San Romano, 108), is one of the best places to get *coppia ferrarese* bread. It is made on the premises in the busy kitchens along with savoury and sweet versions of the curious *pasticcio di maccheroni*, baked *pinzini*, a wide variety of focaccia and quiches, and all the cakes you could wish for.

**Cappelli** (Via Ripagrande, 4/6), is another well-established bakery in central Ferrara. Originally just selling bread and cakes, in 2003 it branched out and now has a deli section with a forest of *salama da sugo* hanging from the ceiling and an army of bottles of local wine lined up on all available surfaces. Cappelli has also expanded into the corner premises adjacent to its shop and here it has made a bar where quick but delicious local dishes are available at lunchtimes.

### SOMETHING MORE MEATY

Many of the town's oldest and best food shops are grouped together on a small street just off the cathedral square – Via Cortevecchia. The busy **Orsatti** (Via Cortevecchia, 33), dates from 1860 and, now managed by the fifth generation, has always been family run. The shop is divided into departments with the house speciality *pampapato* and other cakes on display at the front, fragrant local bread in the bakery section at the back and a well-stocked deli section between the two.

Right next door is **Antica Salumeria Marchetti** (Via Cortevecchia, 35/37), a relative newcomer having been established a mere 90 or so years ago! Exactly when it was founded remains a mystery even to the owners – after having printed cards, signs and uniforms citing 1938 as the year of foundation, an official document was discovered referring to the shop a whole decade earlier and it seems that it actually first opened well before that. Marchetti, which also has a second premises (Via Mazzini, 103), is the place to go for *salama da sugo*, *salame all'aglio* and other traditional sausages and meats but it also has a great selection of cheeses and a wide range of other local specialities on offer.



Le Delizie Ferraresi is a great place to buy pasta filled with butternut squash.



Ferrara's unusual coppietta ferrarese bread.

If you are self-catering or just plain curious about the different types of meat available in Ferrara, have a look at **Macelleria Paltrinieri** (Via Cortevicchia, 45/A), a few doors down. This long-standing butcher's shop specialises in game, selling wild boar and venison as well as wild duck, widgeon and teal from the nearby Po Delta.

#### OPTING FOR EEL

Eels are the delta's most famous produce and while you can find them in most of Ferrara's delis, either marinated in tins or fresh during the autumn, the best place to get to know them is Comacchio, where they are caught fresh.

Take the bus from Ferrara and head for Comacchio's fish market near the picturesque Trepponti bridge to see bucketfuls of writhing eels on sale or you can even visit the **Manifattura dei Marinati** (Via Mazzini, 200, Comacchio), a fascinating working museum in a former eel marinating factory. Open all year round, in the autumn you can watch the eels being cooked over huge fires and follow the rest of the marinating process – don't leave without buying a tin or two of marinated eels, which have been prepared on the premises. A good time to visit Comacchio – a pretty place laced with canals – is during the Sagra dell'anguilla, the eel festival held over two weekends in early October. It is a jovial affair with a huge restaurant marquee serving mainly eel-based dishes and a host of market stalls piled high with all sorts of typical produce.

#### A SWEETER TASTE

While pungent, oily eel may not be everyone's cup of tea, most will agree on what is one of Ferrara's most prestigious dishes – *cappellacci di zucca*. A good place to buy some of the fresh pasta shapes filled with butternut squash, as well as other varieties of fresh pasta to take home and cook, is **Le Delizie Ferraresi** (Via Carlo Mayr, 34/A). The melt-in-the-mouth local chocolate cake, *torta tenerina* is also made here.

On the subject of cakes, what better way to round off a shopping tour of Ferrara than with a

stop at one of the town's historic bars/cake shops. **Bida** (Via Mazzini, 20), is a tiny place on the busy pedestrianised shopping street that used to be central to Ferrara's medieval ghetto area. Bida's *pampepato* comes in all shapes and sizes – the tiny bite-sized ones are ideal to take home as mini souvenirs. **Caffé Europa** (Corso Giovecca, 51A/53), adjacent to the Hotel Europa (see Get there, Stay there), also sells its own *pampepato* and this is where 19th century intellectuals, including Gabriele d'Annunzio, used to meet and set the world to rights.

For an even more inspiring setting, grab a terrace table outside the **Leon d'Oro** (Piazza Cattedrale, 2-10), order a cup of coffee and a selection of the delicious cakes, or perhaps a *pasticcio di maccheroni*, and take in the stunning views of the decorated 12th-century cathedral or just sit back, enjoy the flavours and watch the world go by. **T**



A tour of the city's food shops is a good way to spend a couple of hours.



#### GET THERE, STAY THERE

Ferrara's nearest airport is 45km away in Bologna. Ryanair ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) flies here from Birmingham, Stansted and Dublin, and British Airways ([www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com)) runs several flights a day from Gatwick. From the airport take the Aerobus shuttle to Bologna station and then a train to Ferrara, which will take around 30 minutes.

Book a room at the historic and centrally located Hotel Europa, just down the road from Ferrara's castle. Rooms are spacious and many have frescoed ceilings. There's a long list of illustrious guests who have stayed here, including Napoleon in 1866 and composer Giuseppe Verdi in 1872 – the suite he used still has the original furnishings and terracotta floor. Ask to see the historic visitors' book for more famous names. The adjacent Caffé Europa is under the same management and at breakfast hotel guests can benefit from the delicious cakes and pastries made here. Double rooms cost from €92. Hotel Europa (Corso Giovecca, 49), ☎ +39 0532 205456, [www.hoteleuropaferrara.com](http://www.hoteleuropaferrara.com)