



Basilica di San Vitale

INSIDE:

- The Artistic Village of Dozza 3
- Private Guides in Ravenna 5
- Bicycling Through Ferrara 6
- Where to Stay in Bologna 8

SPECIAL REPORT: EMILIA-ROMAGNA

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Ravenna's Ravishing Mosaics

After 15 centuries, *Ravenna's* luminous mosaics still shine with the golden brilliance of the empires that endowed them. These shimmering sacred images reveal both familiar and unexpected chapters in Italian history while affirming an artistic climate that thrives today.

Ravenna attracted conquerors from the north and east during the fifth through eighth centuries. That period's vibrant blend of Roman, Ostrogoth and Byzantine cultures has drawn the aesthetically-minded to Ravenna ever since. No wonder when *Dante Alighieri* was banished from Florence in 1302, he spent his last years here.

About 56 miles east of Bologna, this eminently walkable city was a stop on the Roman road that still traces a path

across the region of *Emilia-Romagna*. With only a day to explore, I'm grateful that local guide *Verdiana Conti Baioni* promises to weave art and history into every step.

We meet at *San Apollinaire Nuovo* on *Via di Roma*. A soaring basilica, its narrow side aisles open to a broad nave where three tiers of mosaic panels draw my attention. There's majesty in the well-proportioned architecture, but the mosaics are the main event.

Commissioned by *Theodoric the Great*, who reigned in Ravenna from 493 to 526, the church blends the beliefs of that ruler's Arian Christianity with the Catholic theology of Rome. Justinian's rule followed and he added Byzantine influences for a vivid mix of visual

continued on page 4



Mosaic in Basilica di San Apollinaire



Giorgio Benini

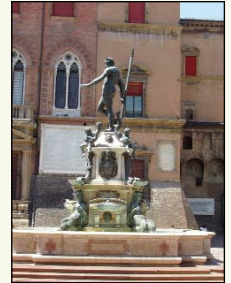
MAMbo

Bologna: City of Art

With its appetite for art, *Bologna's* contributions to the good life are more than gustatory. Though known as the "Red City" for its architecture and politics, I found a brilliant palette of museums, galleries, churches and markets, with mouth-watering visuals for every taste.

City Museums

For a splash of 14th-century sculpture start at the *Fontana del Nettuno* in *Piazza Maggiore*. *Gianbologna's* bronze god —



Fontana Nettuno

locals call him "the giant" — shares the water with dolphins, mermaids and cherubs. Close by, *Palazzo Comunale's* upper floors contain the *Collezioni Comunale d'Arte*, which includes opulent period rooms and works from the 14th through 19th centuries. Put your wallet away. Bologna's city museums are free so you can return to savor paintings such as *Ludivico Carracci's Santa Caterina d'Allesandro* or the full length portrait of a 17th-century aristocrat by *Artemisia Gentileschi* — a Baroque artist who counted the *Medici* family among her patrons. (www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/MuseiCivici/)

On the same floor, the *Museo Morandi* is dedicated to the paintings and prints of this contemporary of *de Chirico*, *Pollack*

continued on page 2

Lord Byron lived in Ravenna between 1819 and 1821.

and *Chagall*. A lifelong Bolognese, *Giorgio Morandi* composed still lifes and landscapes using minimal color, often utilizing simple bottles and pitchers. Subject of a 2009 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Morandi intended his work "to touch the depth, the essence of things." The artist's studio at *Via Fondazza, 36* is slated to open to the public in the fall of 2009. (www.museomorandi.it)

The *Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna*, known as *MAMbo*, rises tall and sleek in a former bakery at *Via Don Minzoni, 14*, a 10-minute walk from Piazza Maggiore. Opened in 2007, the collection is being reorganized with 20th-century works but will continue to focus on Italian art hot off the easel, the video camera, the found-object assemblage and any other media used in 21st-century artwork. This city museum does charge for special exhibitions, but look for free peeks at the intriguing permanent collection. Then browse the bookstore or break bread at *Ex Forno del Pano Café* where local art aficionados gather. (www.mambo-bologna.org)



Matteo Monti

MAMbo

Prefer classic art? The *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna* holds works dating from the 13th century, often drawn from religious communities in the region. Located for the last 200 years on *Via delle Belle Arti, 56*, modern renovations allow visitors to experience the works from many vantage points. The golden age of Bologna is well represented, with works by all three *Carracci* brothers as well as *Guido Reni*. The collection also includes Italian masters *Giotto*, *Raphael*, *Tintoretto* and *Parmigianino*. There is an entry fee, but the museum is well worth the short stroll from Piazza Maggiore along one

of the city's portico-covered streets. (www.pinacotecabologna.it)

Small but airy, the *Villa delle Rose*, an 18th-century private home, sits among gardens above *Via Saragozza, 230*. In 2008, private galleries and MAMbo collaborated to fill the intimate rooms so the tempo changed ever few months.

Even if there's no exhibition at the villa, take bus 20 up *Via Indipendenza* to the covered 17th-century walkway where the fit and the faithful climb under 666 arches to *Santuario della Madonna di San Luca*. Stop along the way at *Villa Spada* to see an extensive textile col-

lection (www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/museotappezzeria/), or just inside the *Porta Saragozza* where the *Beate Vergine di San Luca* includes the artistic history of the Santuario (www.museomadonnasanluca.it) When you reach the top of the hill, you can continue your art sojourn in Bologna's churches.

Holy Art

Home to a celebrated 11th-century icon of the Madonna and Child, as well as exemplary side altars by Bolognese painters, the *Santuario della Madonna di San Luca* is also a wonderful place to survey the city below.

Back in the city center, don't judge *San Petronio* by its unfinished façade. Bologna's largest church, though not its cathedral, fills one side of the Piazza Maggiore. An array of

frescoes, sculptures and stained glass represents four centuries of Emilian art. One controversial scene from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* has incited unsuccessful terrorist plots, so don't plan to carry large bags when you visit.

Step onto the cobbled river stones in the pleasant *Piazza San Domenico* and view the marble and brickwork columns that recall the end of the plague. Inside, the church of San Domenico is the final resting place of its namesake saint. His ornate tomb includes sculptures by a young *Michelangelo*. Other chapels contain works done by an honor roll of Italian artists dating back to the 15th century. Take a trip behind the altar to see the inlaid choir stalls and a small museum.

Sometimes overlooked beside the larger *San Giacomo Maggiore*, the oratory of *San Cecilia* is a simple rectangular space lined with wall paintings of the saint's life. Ten panels rotate counter clockwise in this church on *Via Zamboni, 15* that also hosts musical events.



Gabriele, flickr.com



Il Camo, flickr.com

San Petronio

Each step toward the monastic complex of *Santo Stefano* adds to the enchantment. Clay faces stare from the *Palazzo Bologini* and historic porticos angle toward the stones of the triangular piazza. Finally, step into the interwoven courtyards, gardens and four remaining churches in the ancient maze that hold the treasures of Santo Stefano. A museum displays many objects preserved after a 20th-century restoration and each unique space merges centuries of architecture and worship. Words can't really describe

Each September, Ravenna hosts a

and along both busy and quiet streets, galleries reflect the city's cultural complexion.

this Benedictine marvel. It's a must-see.

Some churches do have entry fees, but there's no charge in the city's private galleries.

Bologna's Galleries

Tucked into shopping arcades and along both busy and quiet streets, Bologna's commercial galleries reflect the city's cultural complexion.

Arte e Arte appears tiny, but this corner space in *Galleria Falcone-Borsellino* (two blocks from Piazza Maggiore) shows important international artists, such as *Jim Dine*, *Clive Barker* and *Christo*. Their top Italian talents include new names, such as *Nanni Valentini* and the better-known *Giorgio Morandi* and *Marino Marini*. (www.arteearte.it)

Galleria Caldaresse, close to the famed *Due Torri* (Two Towers), takes its name from its address at *Via Caldaresse, 1*. The modest nook is filled with antiques, small cityscapes and still lifes by local artists, but the gallery rises on the reputation of master artist *Filippo Albertoni*. His daughter proudly runs the elegantly-eclectic establishment

when she's not doing her own artwork. (<http://hyppo.com/u/caldaresse/>)

Bongiovanni Gallerie fits neatly in the *Galleria Acouaderni*, in a passageway of the old Jewish quarter just off *Via Rizzoli, 36*. Fresh ideas, such as a group show of works done with light, hang on the walls. Interested in emerging artists, the gallery often presents shows and installations that have an architectural component.

(www.galleriabongiovanni.com)

Architecture is also in evidence at *Freak Andò*, though the era is quite different. Note the claustrophobic circular staircase in this former monastery on *Via delle Moline, 14*. Now it's filled with massive Biedermeier, Art Deco and antique furniture of other epochs, as well as wrought iron forged in their workshop. The gallery still has the well where supplicants drew water. (www.freakando.com)

Markets and More

Bologna's markets satisfy thirsts for things old and new. Surrounded by

beauty, *Piazza Santo Stefano* is the perfect location for the *Antiquario Città di Bologna*. On the third weekend of each month, tables laden with art, jewelry, linens and glass goods crowd beside antique furniture brought by European vendors. Check the city's nine regularly-scheduled markets such



Antiquario

as *Kurbis* on *Via del Monte* for handicrafts and *Mercato di Vintage* at *Piazza Verdi* for clothing.

The *Mercato di Mezzo* is artisanal in a culinary way. Stalls line the

Renaissance-era byways near Piazza Maggiore with most open by 7 a.m. every day except Sunday. Colorful

continued on page 8

Art Beyond Bologna

Every two years, the medieval hilltop village of *Dozza* invites contemporary artists to paint murals on the exteriors of the town's homes and show art at the *Biennale Muro Dipinto*. Even if you miss the 2009 exhibition from September 17 to 20, 2009, the 15-mile ride southeast along *Via Emilia* is well worth the journey. Gaze at the incredible paintings from earlier shows, look out over the peaceful



landscape and visit *Rocca Sforzesca*. Find the castle's sometimes bloody history and 21 past Biennales chronicled upstairs. Down below, the restored cellars house the *Enoteca Regionale Emilia-Romagna*. There's no better place to sample local *Albana*, *Sangiovese* and *Lambrusco* wines from more than 150 local vineyards. For more information, visit

www.comune.dozza.bo.it or www.murodipinto.it

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festival honoring Dante Alighieri.

images. At one time both the apse and inner façade were also covered with mosaics indicating the importance of this edifice, originally a royal chapel.

Before I'm swept away by the building's beauty, I need a quick primer on its patrons. Theodoric, the son of a Germanic Ostrogoth ruler, spent his youth as a hostage in Constantinople. His continued alliance with that court is apparent here. When he subdued Ravenna in 493, Theodoric murdered his chief rival, *Odoacer*, but allowed the Roman legal systems to guide locals. At the same time, he maintained Goth principles. Both philosophies exist side-by-side in this unique church.



San Apollinare

At San Apollinare Nuovo the mosaic artistry continues today, and a recently restored section glows with golden brilliance as it recalls the naval fleet that served as an early source of the region's riches. The vigor of the scene feels three dimensional as ships bob in blue-green waves.

Facing the altar, my eyes roam between 26 scenes along the roof line. On the right, I scan Christ's miracles. Back to the left, I see the events that lead to his death. My guidebook notes the balance of the Wedding Feast at Cana on the left with the Last Supper opposite. Shifting my gaze down to the next level, prophets dressed in toga-like garments stare back at me from between the arched windows. The final mosaic cycle skims above the Greek marble pillars in processions of martyrs and saints that conclude with Christ the King and an enthroned

Madonna and Child. Angels flank both figures, but are those celestial hands raised in welcome or warning?

Fortunately, I've brought along opera glasses so as Verdiana introduces me to the saints, martyrs, prophets and angels she calls "My good companions." I can see the myrrh carried by the Magi as well as the crowns in the hands of the wise Virgins. Facial expressions engage me; they're surprisingly distinct. All this is set against a background of gold.

My guide also points to an area where the Byzantine authorities removed Arian characters, the original drawings that remain, she calls a "*sinopia*."

With regret for the brevity of my

visit, we head down *Via Francesco Negri*, stopping for a quick glance into *IMAD Punto Mosaico*, one of Ravenna's 30 mosaic ateliers. The tourist office on *Via Salara* has a complete list of the places to find traditional and contemporary work done by artists who come to study and develop new techniques.

Ravenna, once honey-combed with canals, now flows with narrow streets, but we move briskly to *Via degli Ariani*. We descend curved steps that lead six feet below street level to the small, but splendid, Arian Baptistery. The octagonal space feels cool. My eyes look heavenward to the mosaic

image of a slightly sensuous Jesus standing stripped to the waist in the Jordan River. His animal-skin shirted cousin John reaches out a hand as the Holy Spirit descends as a water-spouting dove.

Verdiana explains that the old man in this tableau is a personification of the Jordan. This pagan deity is similar to the Roman god, Neptune, but he holds not a trident but a bulrush, while the apostles who encircle the dome are separated by palm trees. St. Peter has his keys and St. Paul carries a manuscript while they all celebrate their Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Gold is the backdrop here, too. The Baptistery was also constructed for Theodoric. After 540, as the Byzantines took charge, Justinian gave the small building to the Catholics.

At the gateway to *San Vitale*, Verdiana wisely suggests lunch. Over a plate of local bread called *piadina* and a glass of

Trebbiano wine at *Bar Mosaico* (Via Argentario Giuliano, 26; 39-0544-38655; www.mosaicocaffe.com) she explains the subtle distinctions in religious beliefs.

Briefly, Theodoric professed a Christian faith that did not believe that Jesus was God and preferred not to emphasize the Crucifixion.

Justinian represents the faith as it grew in Greece and Turkey. He's a saint in the Eastern Orthodox canon. The Catholic traditions from Rome embraced a three-person deity and were tied to Roman laws and customs. Whether from tolerance or pragmatism, edifices in Ravenna honoring both Theodoric and Justinian incorpo-



Arian Baptistery

rate multiple points of view. We scrape back our chairs and head for the gate.

Birds sing and a pleasant breeze inhabits the yew trees as we enter the monastic complex of San Vitale. Because time is my taskmaster, we bypass the *Museo Nazionale* where the heritage of Ravenna is on view. Like the Baptistery, the Basilica of San Vitale is octagonal and sunken below ground level. It rises to a monumental 90-foot height with perfectly conceived lines. Again, there's a confluence of styles, perhaps because the church was begun shortly after 526 while Theodoric's daughter, *Amalasantha*, reigned, but completed around 547 with Justinian as ruler.

Also likely is Giuseppe Bovini's statement, "in the same period, artists were living who followed quite different ideals." (*Ravenna: Art and History*) The mosaics echo this, with the sanctuary allied with Greco-Roman traditions and the apse in tune with Byzantine.

In the sanctuary, natural landscapes frame stern stalwarts from the Old Testament. No deadpan faces in view here. A fearful Abraham presents a sacrificial lamb while his pensive wife Sarah awaits the outcome. Isaac, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Moses are expressive as well. Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have a writing table complete with pen and inkstand.

The cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem are set with gleaming jewels. What makes me smile is the menagerie up there: ducks, a tortoise, dolphins, a heron frolic not far from dignified sym-



Foto Archivio di Ravenna

Basilica di San Vitale

bols such as an eagle, bull, lion and lamb. All the biblical figures are rendered with majesty, yet even Christ cannot quite match the power of the noble processions in San Vitale's apse.

Emperor Justinian, to the left of the altar, and his wife, *Empress Theodora*, opposite him, are attended by soldiers, courtiers and clergy. Everyone faces us boldly, looking straight ahead as they bear the cup and plate for the Communion rite of wine and bread.

Fifteen centuries haven't diminished the red, blue, purple and green mosaics and the gold that beams forth.

HOW TO SEE THE MOSAICS

Visit www.turismo.ravenna.it and www.ravennamosaici.it for addresses, opening hours and more.

As Verdiana explains the importance of the people in the panels, I unconsciously

straighten my shoulder, then bow my head slightly. The gesture acknowledges the strength of the imperial retinue and the artistry that sustains their royal presence. Verdiana has seen these figures since her teens, yet she says, "They continue to inspire me."

I agree, but just across the walkway I step into the smallest, darkest and, for me, most inspiring site of the day. Theories and lore vary, but it doesn't matter to me if this oratory was built for, or used as, the *Mausoleum of Empress Galla Placidia*. This is a piece of heaven. As I step through heavy curtains into the 40 x 30-foot cruciform space, I'm spun into a transcendent, midnight-blue sky



Foto Archivio di Ravenna

Galla Placidia

blazing with 570 gold stars.

They swirl me, metaphorically, into the central *cupola*. Like an ethereal compass, they lead me into each corner. Symmetry is the guiding principal, even reducing the number of apostles to eight so each of the four rotunda lunettes is balanced by two figures at each window.

Waiting until I absorb a good measure of the scene, Verdiana points out the Good Shepherd surrounded by attentive sheep and St. Laurence on his way to martyrdom. The vocabulary of symbols, so familiar when these mosaics were created, is refreshed for me when Verdiana notes details such as the flaming gridiron used to torture the saint.

Silent again and aware that we need to move on, I revel in the wealth of blues and golds. Though I know Van Gogh never stepped foot in Ravenna, these intense colors conjure one of my favorite paintings, *Starry Night*.

Verdiana recommends the *Domus dei Tappeti di Pietra* (House of the Stone Carpets) as our last stop. Behind the sanctuary of *San Eufemia* on *Via Barbiani*, steps lead down to a significant 1993 archeological find. Nine feet below the street, walkways and good lighting make it easy to see the well-preserved mosaic floors of a sixth-century villa.

PRIVATE TOUR GUIDE

To contact Verdiana or other guides from the *Associazione Culturale Ad Arte*, visit www.ad-arte.com or e-mail them at info@ad-arte.com. Their fees range from 130 to 200€ for a half-day and from 270 to 350€ for a full day.

A two-year dig at this location also uncovered the first-century paved roadways beneath me. The *Domus* site incorporates several structures and a highlight is the wall decora-

continued on page 8

sts a festival honoring Dante.



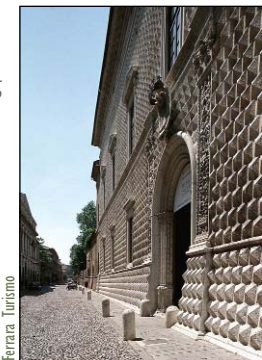
Bicycling Through the Renai

When my guide *Roberta Falchieri* and I picked up our bikes on *Ferrara's* main square, she told me we'd be riding north along the *Corso d'Ercole*. Then we'd turn right at *Porta degli Angeli*, the city's northern gate, and bike along the city walls. Though out of practice and a bit wobbly at first, I soon acclimated because the cobblestone streets were wide and there was little traffic.

"Only residents can drive cars or motorcycles in Ferrara," Roberta informed me. Apparently most residents also favored bicycles, and I soon noticed that the bike riders ranged from seven year olds on their way to school to silver haired men and women with groceries in their front baskets.

A World Heritage Site in *Emilia-Romagna*, this medieval and Renaissance city has excellent food, art and architecture. And music year-round — in fact, Ferrara and its "bigger sister" Bologna, 27 miles to the southwest, are known as northern Italy's "Musical Cities."

"Make sure to come back here," Roberta's voice echoed as she yelled, extended her arm, and made extravagant pointing movements toward a large building on our left. We were passing *Palazzo dei Diamanti* (Palace of Diamonds), perhaps the most photographed structure in Ferrara because of the 8,000 uniform white and pink marble points that protrude from its walls. As we peddled on into the less congested area of the city, we began to see more Renaissance palaces with spacious



Palazzo dei Diamanti

yards, bright green lawns, and colorful gardens.

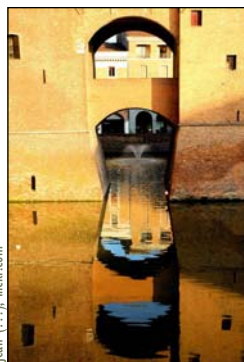
At *Porta degli Angeli*, we exited and began our ride on a wide clay path that covered a former moat alongside the old city walls. Remains of a second city wall and its bastions and bridges occasionally popped up out of the grass on our other side. A wide vista of fields, farms, and small forests stretched out over the flat *Po River Valley* to the horizon. The clay path was smooth most of the way. In fact, the only time we had to hop off our bikes and walk was when we came upon the occasional large puddle or when walkers came by in the opposite direction.

After winding around to the southwest entrance of town, *Porta Paola*, we went back into the city and began the trip back up to the center. Roberta explained that medieval Ferrara began in this section, and that *Lucrezia Borgia*, daughter of the infamous *Pope Alexander*, entered this part of the city in a lavish procession when she came from Rome to marry *Count Alfonso* in 1502.

After annulling her first marriage, and arranging a quiet murder of convenience for her second, her father had then negotiated for a third marriage into the Este family so he could increase his land holdings. When Alfonso's father died, Lucrezia became the Duchess of Ferrara.

Castello Estense, with its drawbridge, moat, decks, and towers, sits right in

the center of the spacious town square. It was built in the late 1300s as a residence for the lords who were sent to Ferrara to provide stability at a time of violent feuds among families and city states. We returned our bikes and entered the castle.



Castello Estense

The Gothic halls, with their oil paintings, embellished ceilings, chapel, game rooms, ducal kitchens and terraces, give a hint of how the noble families lived and how they were isolated from the city itself. Outside the castle, Renaissance Ferrara was a melting pot of north and south, where science, art, poetry, theatre, and music thrived along with industry.

As we entered the vast ducal kitchens where the now-popular pumpkin-stuffed ravioli and other delicacies were invented, the terraces that looked out to the square, and the prison where one brother had put another for 30 years, we got a glimpse of Ferrara five or six centuries ago.



Via delle Volte

"Of course, the earthquake of 1570 greatly altered the castle," said Roberta, "and what we see is a recreation of those rooms in the 17th-century style." Parts of the vast apartment that Alfonso renovated for Lucrezia Borgia can be seen today, although the decorations are from more recent centuries.

A series of frescoes in the castle's art

Renaissance composer *Girolamo*

ssance in Ferrara

museum say even more about every-day life and religion. One entire hallway is devoted to games played by both adults and children. In a painting by *Geronimo*, plump cherubs peek out of the clouds, and one gallery has a carved wooden ceiling from 1155. At the time of our visit, there was an exhibition of paintings by *Garofalo*, known as the “local Raphael,” who lived here in the early 1500s and later went to Rome and Venice.

Across the square from the castle, the lifelike Romanesque sculptures on the front of the main cathedral beckoned. I bought a children’s t-shirt at one of the open stalls that had along the side

of the cathedral since the medieval era. A few small streets and several piazzas later, we started walking along *Via delle Volte*, a long street with periodic overhead vaults and open spaces that appear as a long tunnel with shards of light coming in from above.

“Peek around through the gate and look at the railings on the top of the courtyard. The masonry and wood go back six hundred years,” said Roberta as we entered a wider street. “Look. You can see where the modern plaster has been added to make repairs.” Not far away, at the corner of *Via Savonarola*



strapontins, flickr.com

and *Via Priasolo*, I found a plaque marking the spot where

Lucrezia Borgia would meet a secret lover via an intermediary, the Ferranese poet *Ercole Strozzi*.

On my second and last day in Ferrara, alone and on foot, I discovered streets such as *Via San Romano*. Its porticos served as a market that led down to the Po River before major floods of the 12th century changed the river’s course and made it run to the north as it does now. I searched out paintings that told stories about the Middle Ages and the Renaissance at the Cathedral Museum, traditional masterpieces and modern works at the gallery in Palazzo dei Diamanti, and an elaborate series of frescoes at *Palazzo Shifanoia*.

In the evening I ate elegantly prepared pasta at *Ristorante il Don Giovanni* and attended a modern soprano and violin performance, “Kafka-Fragmente” by György Kurtág, at *Teatro Comunale*, an angular corner building with porticos on both sides. It was built that way in order to protect theatergoers from the rain while they waited for their carriages.

As I walked across the square in the moonlight, I passed the castle with its lights casting shadows across the shimmering moat. The castle terraces, where Renaissance ladies would have come out to look down at performing musicians, actors, and court jesters after a lavish dinner in the ducal kitchens, were empty and quiet.

— Emilie C. Harting

Emilie C. Harting is a Philadelphia author who often writes about exploring cities.

The Details

Where to stay



Hotel Ferrara

Largo Castello, 36
(39) 0532 205048

www.hotelferrara.com

Rates: A double room averages 210€ per night, with breakfast. Check the Web site for discount rates of up to half off.

Right across from the Castello Estense on the main square, the hotel is a former Renaissance palace where cardinals stayed when they visited the city. It offers ultra-modern rooms, delicious breakfasts, helpful staff and free bike rentals.

Where to Eat

Ristorante il Don Giovanni

Corso Ercole I d'Este, 1

(39) 0532 243363

ildongio@tin.it

Open for dinner only; closed Monday.

One block off the main square; very good spaghetti and tortellini dishes and a wine bar for informal and faster service; contemporary art on walls makes a striking contrast to the old building.

Italia da Giovanni Big Night

Largo Castello, 38

(39) 0532 242367

bignight.info@gmail.com

Adjoining Hotel Ferrara, this restaurant features delicacies such as ricotta pie and lavish chocolate cakes. Gets the rays of the castle and moat at night.

Hostaria dei Savonarola

Piazza Savonarola

(39) 0532 208681

Closed Monday

Traditional local and international dishes including *capellacci*, homemade ravioli stuffed with pumpkin. A block from the castle, this is a good place to stop for lunch while touring the city.

Private Tour Guide

Roberta Falchieri

(39) 338 7730203

obi72@libero.it

Bicycle Rentals

If your hotel doesn't offer rentals, there are many places around the city where you can rent a bike by the hour or day.

Frescobaldi was born in Ferrara.

Artful Places to Stay

When you've had your fill and it's time to rest your head, these choices near *Piazza Maggiore* have added art interest.

Coolly modern in a Viennese Secession style building, the *Hotel Novecento's* 25 rooms range from 113 € for off-season singles to suites starting at 237 €. Breakfast and bike rental are included in the room rates and special packages are available online. (Piazza Galileo, 4/3; 39-051-7457311; www.bolognarthotels.it)



Hotel Novecento

rooftop veranda in an apartment building between *Santo Stefano* and *Mercato di Mezzo*. Owner *Patrizia Ramponi* comes from the fashion world so she can direct visitors to museums, shopping and galleries. Single rooms range from 100 to 120€ per night, while doubles are 140 to 170€, some with en-suite bathrooms. Breakfast and an afternoon aperitif are fresh from the market. Most rooms have views of the historic towers known as *Due Torri*. (Via Caprarie, 7; 39-051-261221; www.cafoscaduetorri.com)

Cá Fosca Due Torri is a bed and breakfast with a

pyramids of fish, flowers and fruit look, smell and taste delightful. Local cheeses, chocolates and a menu of cured meats, such as *mortadella*, hang here, but plan to arrive well before 1 p.m. when shops close. Then everyone, including you, eats. It's probably impossible to get a bad meal in Bologna.

Whether you're hungry for *tortellini* or a plate of *prosciutto* with wine, try these historic spots close to the Mercato:

Grassilli Ristorante at *Via del Luzzo, 3* bows to tradition using a light touch on their four course mid-day meal. Open with crusty bread straddled by wafer-thin ham and cheese. Next *tortellini in brodo* leads to wide pasta noodles in Bolognese sauce. Then the ham, cheese and sauce return nuanced with veal before coffee and dessert finish the feast. Poets, politicians and friends stir, slice and sip surrounded by photos of the musicians who frequently dine here. (39-051-222961)

Two dozen years before Columbus sailed to the Americas, *Osteria del Sole*

on *Vicolo Ranocchi, 1D* was a welcoming wine bar and a place to lunch on market purchases. Join all the locals who still do.

One of the city's famed butcher shops, *Tamburini* at *Via Caprarie, 1* rolls out wine barrels and high stools for street-side sampling of *vino* and *culatello* combined with people watching. Roam the pork



Gabriele, flickr.com

Mercato di Mezzo

product packed counters first, then relax over your choices as housewives bustle in to buy regional cheese and pastas. (39- 051- 234726)

Il Ristorante Da Carlo under an open-air portico at *Via Marchesana, 6* has fresh seafood dishes by the tail. Broiled mussels topped with *Parmigiano*, small shrimp amid buttery white beans and squid in a tomato sauce all tempt on the first round but surrender to the entrée of thick ropey spaghetti with a twist (called *strozzapreti*, which means "to strangle the priest"). Piled with clams, mussels and shrimp all doused lightly with a white wine sauce, this dish won't incite homicide but it tastes worth killing for a plate-full. Impeccable wine selections seal the deal here. (39-051 -233227; www.ristorantedacarlo.it)

— Barbara Wysocki

Barbara Wysocki combines her interests in art, literature and spirituality while writing for National Geographic Traveler, Art & Antiques and Christian Science Monitor.

1 € = \$1.41 at press time

Ravenna *continued from page 5*

tion called *Dance of the Gods of the Seasons*. While it's subdued in color, the scene is lively with movement.

"This is very rare for that time," says Verdiana, as she notes the use of human figures to represent the yearly cycle. Details are telling. Each figure is suitably crowned: summer sports corn, autumn has a harvest headpiece, winter wears bulrushes and spring is festooned with a ringlet of roses. I wish

their hands could part so I might join their merry circle, but it's time to go.

The night is fully dark as Verdiana and I pause at Dante's Tomb on the street that bears his name. I'm no Dante scholar but I do remember a line from *The Divine Comedy*. "*L'esperienza de questa dolce vita*." My day in Ravenna is certainly, as he says, "the experience of this sweet life."

— Barbara Wysocki

Bluone.com offers cooking tours of Bologna.