

# Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



## Flavours of Italy

Bologna is proud of its culinary heritage, evident at every turn in the historic city. But a new foodie theme park is dividing opinion, finds **Laura Millar**

Never, never ask for spaghetti Bolognese in a restaurant here!" laughs Catia Aliberti, who's taking me on a food tour of the city on a crisp but sunny wintry morning. "So many people think it's a dish invented in Bologna, and want to order it, but it doesn't actually exist." What people actually mean when they think of a dish with long strands of pasta with a rich, tomato and minced beef and/or pork sauce is tagliatelle al ragu. Any Italian worth his or her salt knows that you simply can't serve spaghetti with a hearty meat sauce – you need a thicker pasta that will make the sauce cling to it, otherwise it will just slide off.

Misconception corrected, Catia goes on to list the other dishes Bologna is best known for. There are tortellini, small, stuffed knots of fresh pasta made with flour and eggs, filled with meat and usually eaten in a light broth; tortelloni, which are bigger, often filled with ricotta and eaten with either butter or Parmesan or a tomato sauce; pazzatelli, small,

short pasta strings made with bread and egg; lasagna, made here with layers of green, spinach pasta (white pasta sheets hail from Rome – this, it seems, is an important distinction); and cotoletta alla Bolognese, a pork cutlet fried in breadcrumbs and topped with a layer of Parma ham and Parmesan. And that's before we even get onto dessert, which includes zuppa inglese (a light, thin custard), torta di riso, a rice-pudding type flan, or torta di adobbi, decorated with hundreds and thousands....

It's only ten in the morning, but already Catia's catalogue of Bologna's culinary delights is making my mouth water. I have a feeling that on my return from this long weekend, I'll have earned myself the same nickname the city has: La Grossa, or 'the fat one'. Bologna actually has

*Here, pasta is made by hand, balsamic vinegar is barrel-aged, and Parmesan cheese is stored in giant wheels*



**Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, main; a street in the Quadrilatero district, above**

three nicknames, which all refer to its history. La Grossa nods, of course, to its abundance of food. We're in one of the most fertile and productive regions of the whole country; wheat and maize grow abundantly in its lowlands, to become the flour used in pasta dough and the grain for polenta, while pigs are reared by the thousand to provide plentiful Parma ham, coppa, and mortadella. Here, pasta is made by hand, balsamic vinegar is barrel-aged, and Parmesan cheese is stored in giant wheels. And boy, do its residents love to eat; currently, the city has over 900 restaurants.

Its second nickname, La Dotta, or 'the learned one', refers to Bologna's university, the oldest in Western Europe. It was founded in 1088, and to this day, one fifth of the city's

population of half a million are students. Finally, it's known as La Rossa, or 'the red one', which can be attributed either to its traditionally left-leaning, former Communist politics, or the colour of its buildings, made largely from terracotta. Catia and I pass plenty of these on our way to the Quadrilatero, the district which used to be home to the old, medieval market. Today it's still the city's centre of commerce, where silk sellers rub shoulders with salumerie, and shrunken but feisty nonne barter with fruit and vegetable sellers over the plumpest melanzala, or the ripest zucchini. It's a fascinating, atmospheric, chaotic network of interwoven streets, such as via Drapperie, the main artery (named after the drapers who sold fabrics here) and via Pescherie Vecchie (or the 'street of the old fishmongers').

I want to dart into every store, and start with bakery Atti, which has been here since 1868. They make all kinds of cakes, pastries and panettone on site, as well as fresh tortellini, which you can buy by the kilo, and is packaged up for you in a smart cardboard box bearing the shop's original, vintage logo. The smell of sugar permeates the air, as the women behind the counter – some of whom are still from the same family –

Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

smilingly serve loyal local customers.

A few doors down is Tamburini, a former butcher's which has also been here for decades; huge hocks of Parma ham dangle from the ceiling, stamped with that all-important crown which means they are DOC approved, or have 'controlled destination of origin' status, meaning they have been made according to the strictest procedures and are allowed to claim they're from this region. Fridges and shelves are filled with everything from mortadella to mozzarella, chickens turn on a rotisserie, and elderly couples pick out salumi for that day's lunch.

At the end of the via Pescherie Vecchie, the street opens out onto Bologna's magnificent main square, the Piazza Maggiore, lined on one side with the City Hall, which bears a statue of Pope Gregory XIII, who studied law here, and invented the Gregorian calendar which we still use today. To the left is the unusual 14th century church of San Petronio; unusual, as it appears two-tone, its lower half clad in elaborate marble stonework, its upper half left unadorned. Apparently, the story goes that the then-pope in Rome was worried this church would turn out to be more impressive than St Peter's, so cut off the money supply.

We wander towards the Mercato dell Herbe, the old fruit and vegetable market, along streets covered by Bologna's famous porticos, or arcades; the city has over 25 miles of them, which keep residents cool and dry when it's too hot, or – less often – raining. Today, the Mercato dell Herbe is a vast, modernised hall with stalls selling ripe, glossy produce, from plump, polished-looking tomatoes, to dark purple plums, as well as spiky-looking artichokes, and geometrically-shaped Romanesco broccoli. There are small restaurants and cafes here too, and we sit down and devour a plate of salumi and cheese with soft, pillowy crescentine, square shapes of fried dough.

Later that day, I head out of the city centre to visit what has divided opinion in the Quadrilatero and beyond: FICO Eataly World. This revolutionary, grand-scale, food-focused project opened on 15 November last year, and is the

brainchild of Italian entrepreneur Oscar Farinetti, who launched the Eataly chain of high-end supermarkets in 2004. Now he's taken his Whole-Foods-like ethos a massive step further, and this park aims to bring a transparent overview of Italian food production – from farm to fork – to the world.

That translates to 20 acres of restaurants, food stalls, and bars, as well as 'farming factories' – areas featuring different producers showcasing how they make their product from scratch, whether it's coppa, or cannoli – and five acres of outdoor space planted with olive groves, wheat, orchards and vegetable patches. You can eat anything from a Michelin-starred meal to a ham piadina, sample freshly-brewed craft beer, take cooking classes and workshops, watch puppies sniff out pre-planted truffles, and stock up on those essentials (from a Bianchi bike to a Fiat-shaped Smeg fridge) in the shopping area. There's a strong focus on sustainability, too – at least 70 per cent of the food produced on site will be used in the restaurants.

When I visit, the park – which looks like a slick cross between Ikea and an airport – is busy enough, mainly with local families, and a handful of tourists. But not everyone is in favour of this €120 million project. Back in the Quadrilatero, at an artisan coffee shop run by locals Cristina and her husband, Alessandro, Cristina expresses her disapproval at what she believes will take away business from small enterprises like hers, and will send a message of inauthenticity to visitors. I don't think she needs to worry, however. Go to FICO to learn about the life cycle of the honeybee, or how to make perfect pizza dough; but then come back to the city to steep yourself in centuries of culinary tradition. ■

**Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies directly from Edinburgh to Bologna from around £40 return.**

**Double rooms at the Corona d'Oro start from £142, book via hco.it/en. Entrance to FICO Eataly World is free, visit eatalyworld.it/en; for more information on Bologna, visit bolognawelcome.com/en.**



Outside the €120 million FICO Eataly World in Bologna

SHORT HAUL



Photographs: Rex/Shutterstock; Sean Pavone; Fotokris

# The cherry on top

Excellent seafood and divine pastries make Lisbon a gourmet's dream, writes Neil Geraghty

Tinned sardines have never looked so good. I'm browsing the shelves of Loja das Conservas, a shop in central Lisbon that showcases the best of the Portuguese tinned fish industry. Once a staple of post war European cuisine, the humble tin of sardines has long been relegated to the supermarket bottom shelf but in Portugal it is enjoying a new lease of life. The secret is in the packaging. Many of the older firms have resurrected colourful vintage labels featuring old salts on the high seas, while others have opted for a more contemporary look commissioning artists to draw abstract fish in intricate designs. The results are miniature works of art which have become popular presents amongst locals and tourists alike.

Seafood permeates Lisbon's culinary traditions and a few doors along from Loja das Conservas an acrid aroma of bacalhau, salted dried cod wafts out of a traditional delicatessen. A popular delicacy dating back centuries, bacalhau tastes a lot better than it smells. In the arcades surrounding Lisbon's palatial riverside square, the Praça de Comércio I stop for a late lunch at Café Martinho da Arcada, one of Lisbon's oldest restaurants. The plain

white interior decorated with brass chandeliers is typical of Lisbon's traditional restaurants where the ambience is enlivened by lightening quick friendly waiters and vast portions of delicious, simple cuisine. Within seconds of being seated a waiter scurries up and places a big basket of white bread and a plate of creamy sheep's cheese on my table, essential accompaniments to any Portuguese meal. Bacalhau is always on the menu in traditional restaurants and for a main course I order the ultimate in Portuguese comfort food, bacalhau a bras. A hearty mixture of shredded potato, caramelised onion, scrambled egg and bacalhau, the balance between the saltiness of the cod and sweet earthiness of the egg and potatoes is exquisite. It's a meal that fills you up for the rest of the day and later in the evening, having skipped dinner I stop at a ginjinha bar for a night cap.

Ginjinha, a sweet liquor made from soaking morello cherries in cinnamon infused aguardiente is one of Lisbon's favourite digestifs and tiny stand-up bars were once a common feature on Lisbon's streets. The few that remain are perennially popular with locals and at A Ginjinha, on Central Lisbon's beautiful São Domingos Square I

join a queue of theatre goers from the nearby National Theatre. It's a chilly winter's night and the fruity liquor sends cascades of warmth through my body. When I've finished, two cherries remain in the glass which I surreptitiously pop into my mouth. In the morning I stroll down to the riverside to visit Mercado de Ribeira, Lisbon's premier fresh produce market. Following years of decline, Lisbon's food markets are enjoying a surge of popularity thanks to the addition of new food courts which are attracting a younger generation of diners. At Manteigaria I stop to watch some hipster chefs roll out wafer thin filo pastry layers to make

*The fruity liquor sends cascades of warmth through my body*

Lisbon's world famous pastéis de nata (custard tarts). No matter how well intentioned you might be, fresh pastéis de nata are irresistible and without hesitating I buy a couple, grab a galão (café latte) and wander over to the promenade to enjoy the sublime warm winter sunshine sparkling on the Tagus Estuary. The weather is so good that I hop onto a suburban train to Sintra, the historic summer retreat of the Portuguese nobility. It's a magical

**Clockwise from main: a view of Lisbon cathedral; a plate of pastéis de nata; Mercado de Ribeira**

town of fairytale palaces and ornate villas. Fresh pine scented air drifts down from the nearby mountain slopes but is replaced in the centre of town by an intoxicating sweet buttery aroma. The smell emanates from Café Piriquita, a small cafe that specialises in travesseiro da Sintra (Sintra pillows), a cake that is arguably even more moreish than the world famous pastel de nata. I take a seat and a waiter brings one over. Served warm, the travesseiro resembles a sugar coated sausage roll and as I bite into it flakes of filo pastry cascade down onto the table top and a warm almond paste oozes out of the centre. When I leave the cafe a horse and carriage pass by and when the horse gets wind of the sweet aroma he turns his head to sniff the air, a sure sign of a darned good cake. ■

**Neil stayed at the LX Boutique Hotel in the centrally located Baixa district. Rooms start at €76.50 per night and in the afternoons, guests can enjoy complimentary pastéis de nata and ginjinha in reception, www.lxboutiquehotel.com. TAP Air Portugal (www.flytap.com) and British Airways (www.ba.com) fly to Lisbon from Edinburgh via London. Fares start from £154 each way; www.visitlisboa.com**

48 HOURS IN

## Cowal Peninsula

**Friday, midday**  
Check into Portavadie (www.portavadie.com, double rooms from £85), an impressive marina, restaurant and spa escape which also offers accommodation overlooking Loch Fyne.

**1pm**  
Enjoy lunch at Portavadie's spa complex. Choose from pizzas, sandwiches laden with local produce or healthy bento boxes.

**2pm**  
Time to hit the spa. Enjoy the swimming pool and sauna inside, but the highlight awaits outside with hot tubs and a spectacular heated infinity pool on the shores of Loch Fyne.

**4pm**  
Break north of Portavadie, where a walking trail eases along the banks of Loch Fyne. Look out for deer, otters on the shoreline and porpoises and dolphins in the waters.

**7pm**  
Dine at Portavadie's Marina Restaurant. With executive chef Liam Murphy at the helm it earned 2 AA Rosettes at the end of 2017. Enjoy local shellfish or the glorious lamb from Ormisdale in Cowal.

**Saturday, 10am**  
Embark on a section of the Cowal Way, a trail that starts at Portavadie. The six-mile hike across the hills to Tighnabruich offers a delicious slice of Cowal scenery with a remote loch and ruined castle en route.

**1pm**  
Reward your efforts with lunch

BARGAIN BREAKS

**Hit the West End**  
Experience Disney's *The Lion King* at the Lyceum Theatre in London's West End with Super Break, who are offering top price evening tickets to this hit musical, as well as one night at the Royal National Hotel in nearby Bloomsbury, all from £136pp. Valid for arrival on 27 February. **Call 0800 042 0288 or see www.superbreak.com**

**Art of a great holiday**  
Explore Buda Castle, home to Hungary's national art collection, during a package holiday break with Jet2CityBreaks, who are offering three nights' B&B at the three star Atlas City Hotel in Budapest and



Photographs: Robin McKelvie

at the An Lochan at the Royal Hotel in Tighnabruich (www.theroyalanlochan.co.uk), where boat fresh seafood is on the menu, including Bute langoustines and hand-dived scallops.

**3pm**  
Hack round the Kyles of Bute Golf Course, walk back on the Cowal Way or just catch the bus/taxi back to chill out at Portavadie.

**7pm**  
Enjoy a relaxed dinner at Portavadie's Lodge Kitchen and Bar. On the menu are the likes of gammon steak from Bute and smoked fish from Dunoon on Cowal.

**Sunday, 9am**  
Indulge at Portavadie's spa. The best treatments use cult Scottish brand Ishga's products. Allow time to enjoy the whirlpool, sauna and recliner beds on the adults-only second spa floor. ■

Robin McKelvie

**Taking your own car is the best option with CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk), offering a scenic two ferry route via the Isle of Bute.**

flights from Edinburgh on 22 March, all from £329pp based on two sharing. **Call 0800 408 5594 or see www.jet2holidays.com**

**Park and ride in Orlando**  
Prices start from just £749pp (was £899), based on a family of four, for a 14 night holiday in Orlando with Ocean Florida. This includes return flights from Glasgow departing on 14 August and room-only accommodation at the Holiday Inn Resort Orlando – Lake Buena Vista, which is located just outside Downtown Disney. **Call 020 3816 0977 or see www.ocean-florida.co.uk**