

## EMILIA ROMAGNA ITALY

I wonder why I waited so long to visit the Italian region of Emilia Romagna. I just returned from 5 days in the area and discovered many reasons to go back again and tell all my friends and clients. I explored Bologna, Ferrara and Varenna with the help of excellent guides.

**Emilia Romagna** is an administrative region of Northern Italy, comprising the historical regions of Emilia and Romagna. Its capital is Bologna. It has an area of 8,666 sq. miles and about 4.4 million inhabitants.

It is one of the wealthiest and most developed regions in Europe, with the third highest GDP per capita in Italy. Bologna, its capital, has one of the Italy's highest quality of life indices and advanced social services. Emilia-Romagna is also a cultural and tourist center, being the home of the University of Bologna, the oldest university in the world, containing Romanesque and renaissance cities such as Modena, Parma and Ferrara. It is also a center for food and automobiles (Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, and Ducati).

Emilia Romagna is known for its egg and filled pasta made with soft wheat flour. Bologna offers pasta dishes such as Tortellini, lasagna, tagliatelle. Polenta is common in both Emilia and Romagna. Balsamic vinegar is made only in the cities of Modena and Reggio Emilia. Parmigiano reggiano (parmesan cheese) is produced in Reggio Emilia, Parma, Modena and Bologna and is much used in cooking. Although the Adriatic coast is a major fishing area (well known for its eels and clams), the region is more famous for its meat products, especially pork-based, that include: Parma's [prosciutto](#), [culatello](#) and [Felino salami](#), Piacenza's [pancetta](#), [coppa](#) and salami, Bologna's [mortadella](#) and [salame rosa](#), Modena's [zampone](#), [cotechino](#) and [capello di prete](#) and Ferrara's [salama da sugo](#). [Reggio Emilia](#) is famous for its fresh egg-made pasta [cappelletti](#) (similar to Bologna's tortellini but differing in size), the typical [erbazzone](#) a spinach and [Parmigiano Reggiano](#) salted cake and its [Gnocco Fritto](#) some kind of mixed flour stripes fried in boiling oil, enjoyed in combination with ham or salami. Piacenza and Ferrara are also known for some dishes prepared with horse and donkey meat. Regional desserts include [zuppa inglese](#) (custard-based dessert made with sponge cake and [Alchermes](#) liqueur) and [panpepato](#) (Christmas cake made with pepper, chocolate, spices, and almonds). An exhaustive list of the most important regional wines should include [Sangiovese](#) from Romagna, [Lambrusco](#) from [Reggio Emilia](#) or [Modena](#), [Cagnina di Romagna](#), [Colli Piacentini](#) and [Trebiano](#) from [Piacenza](#).

The heart of Bologna is small and every place of interest is within walking distance. I spent the morning visiting Bologna “the learned” and the afternoon visiting Bologna “the fat”. The Learned refers to Bologna's history and its beautiful buildings such as the library, the Sala Borsa, the Piazza Maggiore, the Fountain of Neptune, the Palazzo d'Accursio (headquarter of Bologna Town Hall) and the Basilica of San Petronio which houses the largest sundial in the world. The University of Bologna was founded in 1088 and is the oldest one in Europe. The “fat” refers to the food and excellent cooking of Bologna. The Quadrilatero is the Old city market neighbourhood. Its small narrow streets are filled with all

kinds of food products, from seasonal fruit to fresh fish from the nearby Adriatic Sea, from tortellini and that speciality of Bologna, mortadella, to various sweets. In the evening, just before dinner, these streets are transformed and shops give way to bars and drinking places, where people of Bologna can enjoy an aperitif at the end of the day.

The next day I took a 1h15 train ride to Ferrara where I not only had the pleasure to visit the town, but also to attend the Palio and visit a marvellous Matisse exhibit held in a palace at night after hours. A real treat. Most people know about the famous Palio held in Siena. The Palio was made official in 1279 and rapidly transformed into the symbol of a glorious and fascinating Renaissance.

Since then rituals and dates have only changed slightly, and the celebration in the town has not been altered. A month of celebrations, parades, races and competitions between the eight Contrade [neighborhoods connected to the parish] to win the precious banner dedicated to Saint George, the patron saint of Ferrara. Flag-waving competitions, historical parade and horse race in typical costumes of the 15th Century.

In Ferrara it is held the last Sunday of May and the whole town is part of it. You can follow the procession which starts from the castle located in the centre of town and ends in the large piazza where the races (men and horses) are happening. Ferrara is like Amsterdam. Every resident is on a bicycle from children to parents to grandparents. Lying in the middle of the Po Valley, Ferrara still has the atmosphere of the past, which blends in harmoniously with the lively atmosphere of the present. Ferrara's most famous image is certainly that of its grand **Renaissance**, the age of splendor of the Estense court, which has left indelible signs everywhere: in the colossal *Addizione Ercolea* project, in the impressive pictorial cycles belonging to the Quattrocento and Cinquecento and in the *Last Judgement* by Bastianino. From 1995 on, **UNESCO** has included the historical center of Ferrara in the list of World Cultural Heritage as a *wonderful example of a town planned in the **Renaissance** and still keeping its historical center intact.*

The next day I took a 1h15 train ride to Ravenna. Ravenna is only a 90-minute detour from the main Venice–Florence train line and worth the effort for those interested in old mosaics. The peaceful charm of this "untouristy" and classy town makes it a pleasant daily excursion from Bologna as well. The **Basilica di San Vitale**, at 1,400 years old, is impressive enough on its own. But to see its brilliant mosaics (the best-in-the west Byzantine mosaics) is definitely worth it. The oldest and most impressive are in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia. If you want to blend with the locals, rent a bicycle and go about your business. The town center is bustling.

If you have not visited Emilia Romagna, you have missed two very important treasures of Italy: art and food. A delicious recipe for a pleasant journey!

## WHERE TO STAY

### BOLOGNA

I Portici Hotel (part of Small Leading hotels of the World)

[www.iporticihotel.com](http://www.iporticihotel.com)

Art Hotel Novecento

Located in the heart of the old town. Rooms under the roof and with balcony are fabulous.  
Very modern

<http://www.bolognarthotels.it/>

RAVENNA

M Club

[www.m-club.it](http://www.m-club.it)

located in the heart of Varenna.

Amazing place with only 6 suites

FERRARA

Duchessa Isabella

[www.duchessaisabella.it](http://www.duchessaisabella.it)

Splendid 16<sup>th</sup> century private mansion

Principessa Leonora

[www.principessaleonora.it](http://www.principessaleonora.it)

Palace located in the historic center of Ferrara

Hotel Annunziata

[www.annunziata.it](http://www.annunziata.it)

Modern



## Murielle Blanchard, Travel Consultant



D: 801.483.6533 F: 801.483.6570

515 South 700 East, Suite 1B, Salt Lake City, UT 84102

[www.blackpearlservices.com](http://www.blackpearlservices.com)

*I travel for the excitement, the learning experience, the emotion and the possibility to make a better world.*