

1 – BRESCIA

Brixia fidelis reads the municipal coat of arms featuring the rampant lion, but also “Lioness of Italy” in the poems of Aleardi and Carducci, following the 10 days of rebellion against the Austrians in 1849. Brescia also features in recent history with the 1974 Piazza La Loggia massacre: the explosion of a bomb during a demonstration against neo-fascist terrorism caused the deaths of eight people and injured a further 102.

At the mouth of the Val Trompia where it meets the Po Valley, close to the iron mines that sparked its metallurgical tradition, on the road linking Milan and Venice, the Roman Brixia became a Lombard duchy in 650 and then a commune from the 11th century onwards; it was subsequently contested by various ruling houses: the Scaligeri, Visconti and Malatesta families, until the long rule of the Venetian Republic from 1428.

The urban fabric has suffered the ravages of the last century, with the demolition work carried out between 1926 and 1932 to Piacentini’s design in Piazza della Vittoria, which obliterated the ancient quarter of the Lombard curia ducis, followed by the destruction caused by the bombing of the Second World War. However, Piazza del Foro is the civic centre of Roman Brixia, the most significant Roman archaeological site in the region; the Museum Complex of S. Salvatore and S. Giulia, converted into the City Museum following a skilful restoration, houses the Winged Victory – a large bronze statue from the 1st century AD – and important finds from the Ortaglia domus. This complex and the Capitolium archaeological area have been included on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2011.

Art lovers should not miss a visit to the Tosio Martinengo Civic Art Gallery, significant for its collection of Brescian Renaissance paintings, whilst a walk up Cidneo Hill leads to the 14th-century castle, offering sweeping views from the square with the Mirabella Tower. A must for wine tourism enthusiasts is a tour of Franciacorta, renowned not only for its DOCG wines but also for the artisanal production of spirits, liqueurs and bitters.

On 15 February, the Feast of Saints Faustino and Giovita, the city’s patron saints, is celebrated; the streets of the historic centre are filled with numerous stalls selling handicrafts, food, toys, household goods and clothing. The festival is preceded on the preceding Sunday by the ancient medieval tradition of the Galero Rosso: the cardinal’s hat, a symbol of the saints’ protection over the city, is presented in Palazzo Loggia by the parish priest of San Faustino to the Mayor, symbolising the bond between civil and religious authorities.

Situated between the plains and the mountains, the local cuisine draws on and transforms the produce of the surrounding area: hence the Grana Padano PDO; the Nostrano Valtrompia PDO and Bagoss PAT cheeses; extra virgin olive oil from Lake Garda; and “*violino*” ham (also made from goat and sheep) – so called because it is cut by hand as if holding that musical instrument.

And more: Brescian *casoncelli* and *bigoi* – a sort of thick spaghetti served with *pestöm*, a paste of coarsely chopped fresh salami; in the province of Brescia, it is used to dress

pasta, ravioli and *casoncelli*, in place of butter. And more: Brescia-style rabbit; beef in oil; Brescia spit-roast – made up of many varieties of meat; and, last but not least, corn polenta with mountain potatoes. Among the desserts are castagnaccio and *persicata* – a solid peach jam. The province is renowned for its DOC wines: Cellatica, Curtefranca, Franciacorta, Botticino, Capriano del Colle, Garda and Riviera del Garda, San Martino della Battaglia.

Brescia's centuries-old tradition of metalworking can be fully appreciated with a visit to the Musil – "Lodovico Giordani" Iron Museum, featuring a historic forge complete with hearth, hammer, anvil, tools and a charcoal kiln to evoke the atmosphere of this ancient craft.

On the eve of its 100th anniversary, last but not least, the 1000 Miglia represents a powerful symbol of identity for the city, linking it to a passion for motors; this is only counterbalanced by the irony of the saying that petrol flows through the veins of Brescians instead of blood...

2 – PADOVA

Known as "the learned city" for its ancient university, which has been in operation since 1222 following the departure of students and lecturers from the University of Bologna. It is also home to the world's oldest university botanical garden, which retains much of its 16th-century layout; it has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1997.

In 1231, a Portuguese Franciscan, Fernando Martins de Bulhões, died in the city; he is one of the most celebrated and beloved saints of Christianity and a Doctor of the Universal Church: Anthony of Padua. Elected patron saint of the city, he is celebrated on 13 June by pilgrims who flock to the city every year to pray at the Saint's Shrine or in the shade of the cloisters of his convent.

Padua *Urbs picta*, included on the UNESCO World Heritage List for its precious 14th-century fresco cycles, located in four areas of the historic centre, including the famous Scrovegni Chapel. Giotto arrived in Padua in 1302 and revolutionised the artistic language, giving rise to an extraordinary cultural period in the city that continued throughout the 14th century.

Bizarre Padua: the medieval Palazzo della Ragione houses the singular "Stone of Vituperio", upon which insolvent debtors were obliged to strike their buttocks three times after undressing (hence the expression "to be left in one's underwear"...).

But it is also linked to Galileo, with the Specola tower where, according to a false tradition, the Pisan scientist is said to have carried out his research; in reality, the astronomical observatory housed within it was never used by the scientist because the tower was built from 1767 onwards, well after Galileo left Padua to move to the Medici court in Florence.



Padua with a "*Caffè senza porte*": the historic Caffè Pedrocchi which, from its opening in 1831 until 1916, was open day and night; even to penniless university students who could only refresh themselves with a glass of water and a newspaper in the Sala Verde (hence, it seems, the saying "*essere al verde*"). A refined and elegant café, a meeting place for intellectuals, it has seen the likes of Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, Eleonora Duse, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Gabriele D'Annunzio pass through its doors. House specialities, absolutely not to be missed: Pedrocchi mint coffee and Stendhal zabaglione.

The Prato della Valle is a unique spot, surrounded by historic residences and adorned with 78 statues, where the weekly Saturday market and the antiques market take place.

To appreciate the surroundings, try a *burchiello* boat trip to Venice: from March to October, a cruise departs from the historic little port of Porta Portello bound for the Venetian Villas of the Brenta Riviera, masterpieces that bear witness to the golden age of the Serenissima and remind us of the absolute genius of Andrea Palladio.

But Padua is also a city for shopping. In the Via Dante district, craftsmen specialising in leatherwork and shoemaking have been based since the Middle Ages, whilst in the area stretching from the Jewish Ghetto to the Piazzas dei Signori, della Frutta and delle Erbe, you can find historic grocers, watch shops and pharmacies.

The city also boasts three local recipes registered with the Padua Chamber of Commerce: rich Paduan-style risotto – with offal (*rovinassi*) and various types of mixed meat; *cappone alla canevera* (the bamboo cane, locally, which supports the dish during cooking) – stuffed with vegetables; *torta pazientina* – an elaborate dessert alternating sponge cake and Brescia-style pastry, filled with zabaglione and *gianduia* chocolate. To truly appreciate the authentic *genius loci*, every food and wine enthusiast must visit the Mercato Sotto il Salone, the covered market with eight centuries of history, the oldest in Europe. Here, the shops, arranged along two corridors, line the underside of the great suspended hall of the Palazzo della Ragione: a must-visit for a journey through the region's culinary traditions!



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