

Bologna most important churches and monuments

Starting at the west end, la **Chiesa di San Francesco (Piazza San Francesco, 14)** is a beautiful building architecturally. It was finished in the 13th century and probably is the most unique looking church in Bologna. It features very interesting French Gothic architecture (really neat looking wings on the north side). Outside on the church grounds, are the white tombs of the law professors of the University, dating back hundreds of years. The interior of the church is not quite as stunning as the exterior, but deserves a few minutes of musing.



Moving down to via Ugo Bassi, one walks under the porticos past some nice clothing shops. At the end of the via, to the right, is **Piazza Del Nettuno (Piazza del Nettuno)**, which houses the beautiful fountain in the center. A unique statue of Neptune rises above the fountain, and has an interesting story behind it. The sculptor of the statue, Giambologna (a Frenchman!), carved a Neptune that was rather.. well endowed. The Pope at the time was not thrilled by this, and ordered him to change it. Well Giambologna did, but managed to get around this by using an interesting angle: if you stand just in the right spot, the outstretched finger of Neptune appears to be his erect penis. I guess the Pope never caught on to that one.



On the left side of the piazza is the **Palazzo Comunale (Piazza Maggiore, 6)**.

It's quite a long building, housing the public library and a couple museums (one devoted to the Bologna painter Morandi). The building dominates the western side of Piazza del Nettuno and Piazza Maggiore. Go inside briefly to see the wide staircase that leads to the second story: the Pope had the stairs built with wooden planks at set intervals so that a horse drawn carriage (presumably his) could ride up to the second floor. It's really more of a very wide stone ramp with wooden planks set every yard or so. An interesting feature of the library is the entrance area: the floor is made of clear plexiglass, allowing you to view the Etruscan ruins lying beneath. Tours are done but not on a regular basis.



Piazza Del Nettuno opens up into the largest piazza of the city, **Piazza Maggiore**. Really a display of the city's wealth, the expansive piazza features a grid square white and pink stone center. At the south side looms the giant **Basilica di San Petronio**, the 5th largest church in the world. The building of the church commenced in 1392, but was never finished: a fact that is glaringly obvious to the eye. What could have been one of the most beautiful churches in all of Italy instead became one that could be described, at best, as having "character". The base of the church is constructed in beautiful white and pink marble, but the vast majority of it is left unfinished (the Bolognese ran out of money), with brown stone studding the facade. To me, it's a shame. However, I suppose it does make the church unique: I cannot think of any other church of its magnitude that has been allowed to sit unfinished for centuries.



Originally designed to be bigger than St. Peter's in Rome (the Bolognese thought big), the Pope at the time decreed this to be prohibited. To enforce this decree, he built university buildings across from the eastern flank of the church, in essence blocking the designed extension of the building. One of these buildings is the Archiginnasio (see below). One can see where the construction on this wing was abruptly halted: the edge of the flank was left rather rough, with two large half windows and a giant pipe sticking out of the middle of the wall. Definitely worth a glance and a chuckle as you do your walk.

Inside the basilica you get a feeling of how cavernous it really is. A largely undecorated affair, it is kind of reminiscent of the duomo in Florence. There are a few frescoes, and some interesting stained glass. My favorite part is the sundial, on the eastern side of the church. It's odd to see such a scientific item be included in a place of worship, especially considering the Church's past history with such things. However, the sundial was built in the middle of the 17th century, so I suppose at the time the rules were more relaxed.

Moving down to the east, past Piazza Maggiore onto via Rizzoli, you find at the end the symbol of Bologna, **Le Due Torri (Piazza di Porta Ravennana)**. These two towers lean quite precariously, especially the smaller of the pair (entrance not allowed). The much larger tower on the right (Torre degli Asinelli) is climbable however. At 98 metres high (321 feet), the ascent can wind the unfit (for reference, the bell tower next to the duomo in Florence is only 82 metres). 498 steps! The top of the tower gives you an amazing view of the city, and really shows you one reason why Bologna is nicknamed "the Red" ... its red rooftops. You can also see the 20 remaining medieval towers.



Now nearing the end of the line of sites, from the towers one continues south east, to the via Santo Stefano. About two minutes walk from the towers lies the **Piazza Santo Stefano**, a triangular piazza many find to be the prettiest in the city. As you enter the piazza, look up at the tops of the porticos and you will notice various statuettes set into the stone. There's even a statuette of the devil, which is ironic given that at the wide end of the piazza sits Bologna's oldest church. And perhaps the most sacred church to the Bolognese.

The church, actually churches, are called today the **Santo Stefano Church Complex (Via Santo Stefano, 24)**, or in Italian, *le Sette Chiese*. Originally there were seven churches, all

connected as new ones were built onto the original. Today only four of the original seven are still around, and situated around them are a few courtyards, a cloister, and a crypt. The four remaining churches are called la Chiesa del Crocifisso, Chiesa del S.Sepolcro, Basilica dei Santi Vitale, and Chiesa del Calvario. The site dates back to pre-Christ times, when it was used as pagan site of worship, and you get a feeling of deep antiquity when walking inside of it. The churches you see new were constructed between the 5th and 12th centuries. They are quite spectacular in their understated beauty. You'll find no great works of art, instead an aura of silence and tranquility. On display are the bones of San Petronio, Bologna's humble patron saint, inside the Chiesa del Crocifisso.