



4 Reasons to Visit Italy's Often-Overlooked Emilia Romagna

September 7, 2016 by Juhie Bhatia

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When you dream of an Italian getaway, perhaps you imagine drinking wine in Tuscany, lazing on the Amalfi Coast, or carbo-loading in Rome. But there's an often overlooked, lesser-known part of Italy that also deserves some consideration.

Emilia Romagna, in the country's north between the Po River, the Adriatic Sea, and the Apennine mountains, offers plenty to see and do. Whether you're in search of renowned cuisine, fine wines, rich history, or your choice of beaches, it's all here. The best part? You can usually soak in the sights at more affordable prices than in neighboring regions, and without the hordes of tourists. Lovers of Italian cars and motorcycles can also visit a [number of museums](#) across Emilia Romagna. The area has even been called "Motor Valley," since it's home to luxury car companies like Ferrari and Lamborghini.

Kick off your discovery of the region in lively, beautiful Bologna, Emilia Romagna's largest city. Wander Bologna's streets and porticoes, marvel at its still-standing medieval towers, indulge in its rich food legacy, and unwind in the central square, Piazza Maggiore. Bologna is also famous for having the Western world's oldest university, dating back to 1088.

Still not convinced? Here are four more reasons to add Emilia Romagna to your Italy travel itinerary.

1. The Food



One of the main motivations for many heading to Italy is its unforgettable cuisine. A food lover's paradise, Emilia Romagna is often considered the gastronomic heart of Italy. Its capital, Bologna, is the home of Bolognese sauce (known as ragù), mortadella, and egg-made pastas like tortellini and tagliatelle. There's also the dry-cured ham, prosciutto, from the town of Parma; Parmigiano Reggiano cheese; the street food flatbread piadina; and traditional balsamic vinegar from the town of Modena. Wine lovers can sample the region's *vino*, including Lambrusco, Pignoletto, Sangiovese, and Ablana.

2. The Wellness Valley



After all that eating, some exercise may be welcome. In 2002, a portion of Emilia Romagna, southeast of Bologna, was dubbed the Wellness Valley by local businessman and fitness entrepreneur Nerio Alessandri. Since then, his vision has expanded to include a tourism initiative that lets visitors take advantage of the region's spas, physical activities, and healthy food options. The Wellness Valley website has hotel-and-activity packages you can book under the themes of [move](#), [discover](#), and [taste](#). Some include personal training sessions, guided bike tours, meals, and cooking classes, and rates start at \$375 (€335) per person for three nights. You can also customize your own wellness experience. Pick from one of the available wellness-minded hotels, like the [Relais Villa Abbondanzi](#) in the town of Faenza, which offers a spa, a pool, and a fitness center, and then add on activities.

3. The History



Mosaics in Ravenna, Italy/Stock

If history and architecture are your thing, head to the city of Ravenna, once the western capital of the Roman Empire and now home to eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, recognized for their Byzantine mosaics. The mosaics in the Basilica di San Vitale are the most popular, and a definite must-see. The tomb of poet Dante Alighieri is also in Ravenna and is worth a visit. In the town of Cesena, you'll find the Malatestiana Library, Europe's first civic (as opposed to religious or private) library. Finished in the 1450s, the space is perfectly preserved; you can see original manuscripts still chained to the reading desks.

4. The Beach



While much of Italy's coastline is rocky or shell-covered, Emilia Romagna offers miles of sandy beaches along the Adriatic coast. One of the most popular towns on the "Romagna Riviera" is Rimini, known also for its nightlife, and for being the hometown of director Federico Fellini. When you need a break from sun and sand, walk or bike to Rimini's historic center and check out its Roman ruins and the charming old neighborhood of Borgo San Giuliano, with its fishermen's houses and murals of scenes from Fellini's films. If you're up for a splurge, stay in the stunning [Grand Hotel Rimini](#) (rooms from \$255 per night) by the sea. Relax on the luxury hotel's terrace overlooking the grounds, take advantage of private beach access, or book a treatment in one of the hotel's two spas.