



Parma

A trip to Parma is a blow-out for the senses so work up an appetite for Renaissance treasures, opera and Italy's most revered ham and cheese

The old centre of Parma basks in the warm glow of custard yellow stucco – a charming place where traffic is banished and bicycles rattle along quiet cobbled streets. Bicycles? Quiet streets? In Italy? Yes, incredible as it may seem in a nation that is deeply addicted to its cars, the *parmigiani* (locals) have taken to pedal power and their city is all the better for it. Parma is the perfect place to spend a leisurely short break ambling around a delightfully tranquil and cultured city.

GETTING THERE

Ryanair www.ryanair.com flies direct from London Stansted to Parma. Otherwise flights from UK regional airports fly to Bologna or Milan, from where it's around an hour by train to Parma.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

The Cathedral (Duomo)

Have a couple of euros ready to switch on the lights inside this magnificent building, one of Italy's finest Renaissance treasures built between 1060 and 1073. There are plenty of frescos inside to admire, but the blockbuster is Correggio's Assumption of the Virgin high up in the dome – binoculars will come in handy for a good look.

Open daily 9am-12.30pm, 3pm-7pm (avoid Mass times if you're just going for a look).

The Baptistry

Parma's octagonal baptistry is a jewel of the Renaissance in salmon-pink marble. A mystical frieze of mythological beasts wraps around the outside conveniently at

head height so you can get a good look at the carvings. Inside, the 16-sided chamber is covered top-to-toe with vivid frescos dating from the 12th century. Open daily 9am-12.30pm, 3pm-6pm

Camera di San Paolo

The art-loving abbess of a Dominican convent got superstar fresco artist Correggio in to decorate the ceiling of the refectory in 1519. The results are superb, and not so high that you crick your neck trying to see the cherubs frolicking in hunting scenes that bathe the room in a verdant glow like a forest glade. Open Tue-Sun 8.30am-1.45pm

Galleria Nazionale

The hulking red brick Palazzo Pilotta houses the Galleria Nazionale where there's superb art by the likes of Canaletto, van Dyck and Da Vinci. On the way in you pass through the rebuilt wooden 17th-century Teatro Farnese that was destroyed by Second World War bombs. Open Tue-Sun 8.30am-1.45pm

Museo Glauco Lombardi

www.museolombardi.it

This quirky little museum has an eclectic – and priceless – collection of odds and ends, such as intimate letters and locks of hair, that captures perfectly the era of Marie-Louise (an offshoot of the Hapsburg dynasty) who was married off to Napoleon.

Stock up on Parma's foodie treats

Buy parmesan, prosciutto and fresh pasta dishes – you'll see them heaped in mouth-watering displays in gastronomic temples around town. Parma's delis include: Specialità di Parma (9 Via Farini), Sorelle Picchi (27 Via

Farini), Salumeria Garibaldi (42 Via Garibaldi), and Verdi (69 Via Garibaldi).

Have a night at the opera

Parma's Teatro Regio is one of Italy's top operatic venues with a home audience that has a rather fearsome reputation for voicing its disapproval of performers that aren't up to scratch. Visit the website www.teatroregio.parma.org for the full concert programme, and for more information if you're into the idea of coming when the Verdi festival is on during May and June.

Forget the diet

Food has to be high on the agenda for any visitor to Parma, and local goodies are a weight watcher's nightmare. Parmesan cheese and prosciutto di Parma, the city's legendary wafer-thin ham, are treated with reverence here – and are an integral part of every menu, together with local pasta favourite *tortelli d'erbetta* – ravioli-like parcels of ricotta and spinach, slathered with melted butter and parmesan.

GOOD PLACE TO STAY

Hotel Verdi

www.hotelverdi.it

An elegant Art Nouveau villa in a peaceful location overlooking the Parco Ducale. It's a friendly place and rooms have marble bathrooms. Double £82

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

Cavour Gran Caffè

Via Cavour 30

A classic palatial café that you'll find yourself returning to again and again to sip an espresso under the crystal chandelier

For the full magazine report on Parma,
see p51 of the March 2008 issue of Holiday Which?

indoors. Ponder what to eat for dinner, or sit on the pavement terrace and watch life in Parma unfold.

Enoteca Fontana

Via Farini 24

Either eat standing at the bar, or squeeze elbow-to-elbow onto big tables with locals. A lively place serving snacky fodder such as hearty sandwiches on focaccia bread or plates of ham and sausage. We had a delicious lunch of bresaola with rocket and parmesan and a glass of wine for €12.

Gallo d'Oro

Borgo della Salina 3

www.gallodororistorante.it

Owned by the same people as Trattoria Corrieri, but serving some more unusual dishes such as rabbit with smoked bacon and aubergine, and horse-meat steaks. This is a carnivore's heaven with the meat slicer placed centre stage next to an array of hams and salumi. Most dishes are €6-€7.50.

Il Trovatore

Via Affo 2

www.iltrovatoreristorante.it

Il Trovatore is an understated elegant place just off the main shopping street, Via Garibaldi. Our meal of Parma ham, *tortelli*

d'erbetta and brill with potatoes and black olives was a treat, washed down with blackberry-scented fizzing Lambrusco. Expect to pay around €40-€50 per head.

Trattoria Corrieri

Via Conservatorio 1

www.trattoriacorrieri.it

A simple traditional place in an old postal station that's big with locals at lunchtime. Top-class prosciutto di Parma and *tortelli d'erbetta*. No-nonsense service and great value can be found here – pasta and risotto dishes around €6-€7, and a half-litre jug of Lambrusco will set you back all of €3.50.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Time difference UK +1 hour

International dialling code 0044

Exchange rate £1 = €1.34

When to go Parma is a year-round destination. Summer is hot and humid so travel in Spring and Autumn to avoid the high prices and the tourist crowds which August brings. Winter (when we visited) was cold and misty, but you may have the baptistry and other attractions all to yourself.

Tourist information Via Melloni 1

GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITE



• Cadogan: Bologna & Emilia-Romagna, £14.99 (ISBN 9781860113505)

• www.turismo.comune.parma.it



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