

Duotorri Hotels NORTHERN ITALY A GRAND TOUR

Art, architecture and antiquity are three compelling motives for touring northern Italy – there is a fourth, which we'll come to – and Bologna beckons insistently for those reasons. Walking its streets means strolling in and out of the 41 km of porticoes that define the city's public spaces. The porticoes, constructed stone walkways of stone, form part of virtually every building in the historic city centre and they express various architectural influences, from simple wooden colonnades to ornate Baroque arcades.

Looking over Bologna's Piazza Maggiore (with its open-air cinema in the summer) is the church of San Petronio. It took three centuries to build and even then the facade was incomplete: the top half remains bare brick and contrasts strongly with the red and white marble below. A red hue characterises the city as a whole, especially in the maze of streets around the university, founded in the 11th century.

A short drive south from Bologna and you're in lesser-visited Florence, the ancient walled city of Italian Renaissance art. Drowsing with churches, chapels, and palaces (and a new Grand Museum), there is too much to see on one trip. Paintings by Botticelli and Fra Angelico in the Uffizi Gallery and Michelangelo's David in the Accademia will whet your appetite for return visits.

To the north from Bologna (see Firenze and its nearby market square in linked columns and brown-checkered window balconies – though it is another balcony, the one added to the House of Juliet (the real home of Shakespeare's Capulet family), that gathers crowds every day. We too share the stupendous Roman theatre by the two-lined street.

On the coast, Genoa has to be visited for its 16th-century old quarter, with spiralled shops that have been in the same family for generations, and the 19th-century architecture of houses of the nobility in Via Garibaldi.

What also has to be seen in Genoa touches on the fourth reason for a tour of Northern Italy: The British hotel, on the Chiasso Terrace of Genoa, retains the style and period details of its early 20th-century origins and this includes an incredible elliptical staircase in white marble. Bologna's Grand Hotel Waldorf boasts classic Italian decor and attracts the attention, while in Florence, at the Hotel Bristol Palace, one remembers to what was Italy's parliament for two years. Top of the hill, Vernazza's Due Torri hotel has one of the grandest views in Italy (Monte Carlo's shared here) and a rooftop terrace with dazzling views of the historic city.

BY HELEN HERRICK

For details of all four hotels, visit www.duotorrihotels.com

