



Culture
is Bologna

Discover

The Porticoes of Bologna



LASCIA O' PASSEGGIERE DI SCRIVERE
IN ALTRO MODO IMBRUTTARE QUESTE
COLONNE E QUESTE MURA
SE SPREZZI LI BANDI SE NON TEMI LE PENE
IN ESSI MINACCIATE,
PAUENTA ALMENO PER IL DISPIACERE
CHE PORTI A MARIA SSMA DI CUI SONO
QUESTI ARCHI, E QUESTE MURA






Nominated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021, the porticoes represent in all their impressive length (62 km in total, 42 km of which stretching in the oldtown) a distinctive element of the city's urban fabric. These covered spaces, which were and still are privately owned but intended for public use, have been playing a crucial social and community role from the very beginning and, also for this reason, have been repropoed as a defining part of the city's design from the 12th century to the present day, creating an extraordinary catalogue of architectural forms. Take a walk through eight centuries of the city's history.

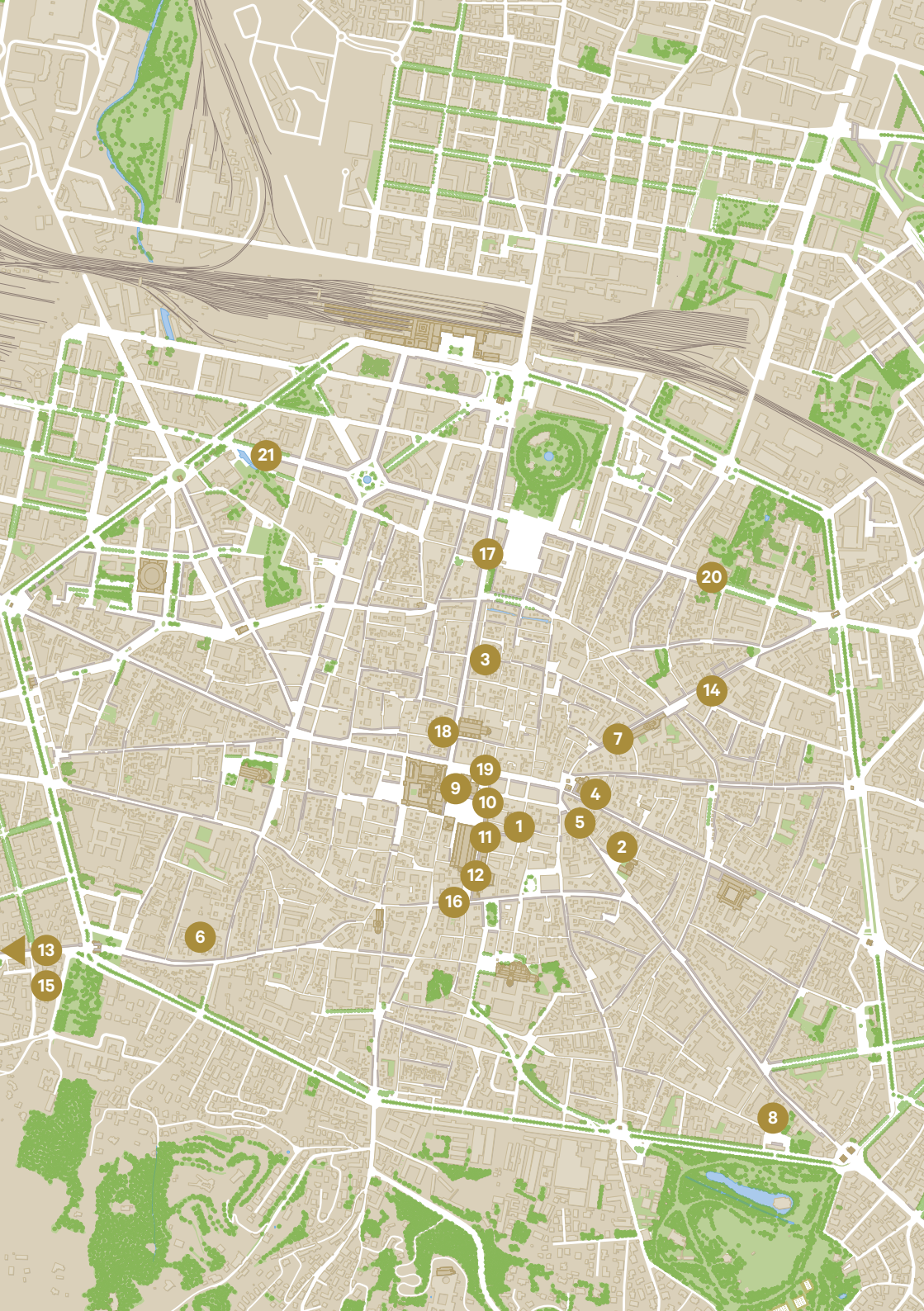


How to find us

Bologna is within easy reach using the main means of transport.

Bologna

-  Bologna G. Marconi Airport
-  Bologna Central Station
-  Motorways (A1-A13-A14)



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The medieval porticoes

The porticoes originated in the early Middle Ages as an illegal projection of private buildings on public land in order to increase the internal space. Initially, simple wooden *overhanging structures* were built, sometimes supported by brackets called *beccadelli*: an example of this is the ① Casa Schiavina in via Clavature. Later, to avoid collapses, it was necessary to add support columns from below: this is how the porticoes originated. As a shelter from the weather and the sun, this architectural expedient allowed the expansion of commercial activities and made the ground floors more habitable. Its usefulness was also recognised by the Commune, which in a Statute of 1288 made the presence of the portico mandatory in the new houses and required it to be added to the buildings already existing. In the historic centre it is still possible to admire some ancient wooden porticoes, such as those of the thirteenth century of ② Casa Isolani in Strada Maggiore and of ③ Casa Grassi in via Marsala; or those of the ④ Casa Seracchioli, an example of a two-storey Gothic house at the beginning of Via Santo Stefano. Not far away, the large cross vaults of the ⑤ Loggia della Mercanzia stand out, a masterpiece of late Gothic architecture and the hub of trade since the 14th century.

Although the law imposes a height of at least 7 Bolognese feet (2.66 m) for the portico to allow the transit of a man on horseback, it is not uncommon to find, especially in popular areas, porticoes with a simple architraved structure and with significantly lower heights: the residential porticoes of ⑥ via Santa Caterina are an example.

Il Portico delle Tre Frecce

If in front of Casa Isolani you see a passer-by with his /her nose up, do not be surprised: he/she is looking for the famous three arrows stuck between the beams of the portico. According to legend, a jealous husband hired three archers to assassinate his adulterous wife: the beautiful noblewoman, however, appeared naked at the window, and the hired assassins, distracted, missed the target. It is more likely, however, that the arrows were placed "as a joke" during the 1877 restorations.

The She-devil of the Portico dei Bastardini

The Bastardini Hospital, in via d'Azeglio, housed the city's orphanage until 1797. Look for the disturbing statue of the She-devil with a canine face, under the portico bearing the same name of the hospital, where the founding wheel used to stand: the statue was placed there to protect travellers, or perhaps to remember the story of the witch Caterina, who lived in the 15th century in this neighbourhood.



The porticoes in the Renaissance

The most interesting porticoed buildings of the early Bolognese Renaissance date back to the rule of Giovanni II Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna (1463-1506). Among these, the Church of San Giacomo in (7) via Zamboni, whose side portico with 35 bays was conceived by the client as a ceremonial path to his own Domus Magna, now replaced by the Municipal Theatre. We also ought to mention the large arcade of the Baraccano Complex in (8) via Santo Stefano, a meaningful example of perspective in the city design. Finally, Piazza Maggiore is overlooked by the (9) Palazzo del Podestà with its imposing pillars decorated with bas-reliefs and by the spectacular façade of the (10) Portico dei Banchi, renovated by the architect by Vignola in the mid-sixteenth century. Continuing along the Pavaglione Path (term linked to the silkworm market), we must mention the (11) Portico of the Hospital of Death, an ancient late medieval centre for the care of prisoners and those sentenced to death and now home to the Archaeological Civic Museum, as well as the (12) Archiginnasio, seat of the university during the Counter-Reformation, designed by Antonio Terribilia in 1563.



The porticoes in the Baroque period

The famous (13) Portico of San Luca was constructed between the 17th and 18th centuries on a project by Gian Giacomo Monti: a covered devotional path 3796 m long, which, starting from the Bonaccorsi arch in Porta Saragozza, reaches the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin of Saint Luke. The portico, interspersed with 15 pilgrimage stations, is made up of a stretch of a plain (1520 m) and a stretch of a hillside (2276 m) connected by the arch of Meloncello, built by Carlo Francesco Dotti in 1732. The (14) via Zamboni portico, the heart of the university district, also dates back to the eighteenth century, built on ancient models taken up in the construction of the new buildings.

Unity is strength: il Passamano per San Luca

17th October 1677: the construction of the hilly section of the Portico of San Luca begins. Soon, a long human chain of Bolognese citizens spontaneously formed, who came to help in the transport of the materials necessary for its construction. This collective gesture, a symbol of solidarity that allows us to face common obstacles together, is recalled every October since 2003 on the occasion of the festival of the "Passage from hand to hand for San Luca (Passamano per San Luca)".



The porticoes in the nineteenth century

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Certosa became the urban city cemetery: 220 arches of the (15) portico bearing the same name were built to connect it to the Meloncello arch, a portico that was strongly requested (and financed) by the citizens of Bologna. Following the unification of Italy, Bologna went through a season of intense urban transformation. While, on the one hand, the ancient wooden porticoes were restored by architects, such as Rubbiani and Faccioli, who were advocates of the medieval rebirth of the city, on the other hand, the portico continued to be present also in the new buildings, as it was considered suitable to satisfy the taste of the emerging bourgeoisie and was sometimes even decorated with exquisite frescoes, such as those by Lodi in the (16) Portico of the Banca d'Italia in via Farini. Furthermore, with the opening of (17) via Indipendenza in 1888, new large and bright porticoes were established for commercial use.

Record-breaking... porticoes!

Do you know which is the portico...

that is the widest? The four-sided portico of the basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi in Strada Maggiore.

that is the highest? The portico of the archiepiscopal building in via Altabella, with an open gallery that reaches 10 m.

that is the most narrow? The portico of via Senzanome, just 95 cm wide.

And that's not all: the Portico of San Luca, with its 664 arches and 3796 m, is the longest in the world!



The porticoes in the twentieth century

Even in the twentieth century the portico continued to be the main element of urban continuity in the city. In 1908 Augusto Sezanne designed the (18) Palazzina Majani in via Indipendenza, with the portico embellished with Liberty style inserts. A few years later, the industrial brewer Alessandro Ronzani commissioned his new building in via Rizzoli, popularly known as (19) "Palazzo Modernissimo": a reinforced concrete structure with a theatre hall on the ground floor, which would have later become a cinema. The imposing portico of the (20) Zanichelli publishing house in via Irnerio, on the other hand, dates back to the Fascist era (1936), supported by gigantic granite columns. Finally, in via Don Minzoni is located a portico unusually devoid of residential or representative functions, because it is inserted in a specifically productive context: the (21) MAMbo Building, which was born as a public bread oven during the First World War, then became a museum in 2007 on a project by Aldo Rossi

Since when have the Porticoes of Bologna been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List?

The Porticoes of Bologna joined the World Heritage List on 28th July 2021. This exceptional recognition for the city, already named Creative City of Music, is the crowning achievement of a long candidacy work, which began in 2006 and that saw the involvement of various city realities, leading to the choice of 12 components, located in central and peripheral areas and diversified from a historical and architectural point of view.

Why have the Porticoes of Bologna been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site?

Thanks to their irreplaceable social, cultural and architectural function in the city context, as well as to the uniqueness and longevity of this construction type, developed over the centuries in a wide range of materials and styles. The oldest portico in the list dates back to the 12th century, while the most recent as late as 1962.

Which porticoes are included in the World Heritage List?

A series of 12 components have been selected for the World Heritage List, representing the entire portico system of Bologna in its variety and extension over time and space: the ancient domestic porticoes of Santa Caterina and Saragozza; the monumental porticoes of Santo Stefano and Mercanzia; the portico of the conservatory of the Putte del Baraccano; the porticoes of the Palazzi senatori di Galliera; the sequence of porticoes of Piazza Maggiore, Banchi and Pavaglione; the long portico of San Luca, connecting the city centre to the Sanctuary; the porticoes of the University and Accademia, located in Via Zamboni and surrounding areas; the long, rectilinear portico leading to the Certosa cemetery; the porticoes with their bourgeois and aristocratic look from the 19th century in Piazza Cavour, Minghetti and Via Farini; the modern-era portico of the "Treno della Barca"; the 20th-century portico of the MAMbo and surrounding areas, including the Cineteca di Bologna, and lastly the portico of Strada Maggiore, which extends outside the city walls as far as the Alemanni Church.

I'm interested in the Porticoes of Bologna and wish to learn more: are there dedicated guided tours?

Comune.bologna.it/portici is the official website specifically dedicated to the porticoes that gathers all the relevant information. If you happen to walk around Piazza Maggiore, on the other hand, you can visit the Bologna Welcome tourist information point to find out more about guided tours and promotional material.

For further information write to booking@bolognawelcome.it or visit the website bolognawelcome.com.

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