



BOLOGNA: CITY OF SUPERSTITION

Find out why the students of Bologna give some parts of the city a wide berth!

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STUDENTS IN BOLOGNA, the capital of Northern Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, although friendly, welcoming and helpful in general, will always stop short of total hospitality. Beg, plead or bribe, there are certain things they will simply never do, however accommodating they may seem. The reason for this reticence? A superstition stronger than the traditional Italian goodwill to guests and pride in their country. Three of the city's most famous and beautiful attractions are no-go areas for students, as it is said that if you break certain geographical taboos you will never graduate. A year of living and studying in Bologna and I met not one Italian student who had thrown caution to the wind. More fool them for missing out on the city's best.

LE DUE TORRI

The first superstition concerns Le Due Torri, the Two Towers whose Leaning Tower of Pisa-esque outlines cover almost all of Bologna's

tourist merchandise and marketing material. The Asinelli and Garisenda towers (which stand at 97.2m and 48m respectively, each with a considerable overhang due to centuries-long subsidence) are named after the families who built them in the early 12th century. In its heyday in the 12th and 13th centuries, Bologna boasted around 100 towers, of which fewer than 20 now remain. The towers stand at the intersection of five roads that lead out of the eastern side of the city. Despite its proximity to the university – one of the five roads is the Via Zamboni, where the majority of the University of Bologna's buildings are located – and the stunning views to be seen from the top of the Asinelli (the Garisenda is not open to the




PIAZZA MAGGIORE

The third and final superstition concerns the city's main square, *Piazza Maggiore*. In the enormous square stands the Basilica di San Petronio, a building that at its conception in 1390 was intended to dwarf St. Peter's in Rome. It was scaled down during construction after a jealousy-inspired mandate by Pope Pius IX, but remains the fifth largest church in the world. Each July, *Piazza Maggiore* plays host to a 5000-seat open-air cinema as part of the Bologna film festival, *Il Cinema Ritrovato* (Cinema Rediscovered), screening

films old and new for free on sultry summer evenings. This part of the superstition is a bit of a cheat as students are actually allowed in the piazza, as long as they don't cross it diagonally. Not too limiting unless you're in a particular hurry, which Italian students very rarely are.

TAKE YOUR OWN WAY

There is no historical explanation for this trio of superstitions, but for as long as the *bolognesi* can remember, they have existed, barring students from the best views and most tranquil spots in the city. So the next time you're there, leave the students to their superstitions and explore *Le Due Torri*, *Il Santuario di San Luca* and *Piazza Maggiore* for yourself. You might spoil your chances of ever graduating from the University of Bologna, but you'll have a lovely time while you're at it. 

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Opposite, upper:
Basilica di San Petronio in
Piazza Maggiore, taken from
the top of the *Asinelli* tower

Opposite, lower:
Le Due Torri

This image and above:
Il Santuario di San Luca atop
the horizon, with the city of
Bologna laid out below

