



IN BERGAMO

Don't go rushing off to Milan. linger in Bergamo to indulge in rich food and culture, says Emma Ewin Harris

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Get the sweet tooth going with the local marzipan cake

Valentina Ravasio's shop in Bergamo Basso

JET IN TO MILAN (BERGAMO)

Once through the Arrivals doors, most of your fellow passengers will head off to Milan, an hour to the south-west, or to ski resorts such as Clusone to the north-east. They don't know what they're missing. Grab a cab and in just 10 minutes you'll be entering the old city of Bergamo through a triumphal arch and climbing the steep road skirting the ramparts as crooked medieval towers rise above you out of the morning mist.

LAZY BREAKFAST

Stop at La Marianna, one of the old town's most famous patisseries, just outside the ramparts on the small square, Colle Aperto. Choose from ranks of fresh pastries and pick up some *polenta e osei* cakes – sponges encased in yellow marzipan, filled with liqueur cream and topped with tiny chocolate birds. They're designed to look like the once traditional, somewhat un-eco-friendly dish of polenta with roasted wild birds.

If you feel like warming up with a syrupy-thick praline hot chocolate, the quaint gilt-and-mirrored Pasticceria Cavour, on the city's main drag, Via Gombito, is the place.

BEARINGS AND BIKING

Work off breakfast with a gentle wander to get your bearings. Bergamo is a city of two halves: Bergamo Alta, the beautiful old walled town on a

hill, and Bergamo Basso, the commercial centre at its foot. They are joined by a funicular that hares up and down the hillside from morning till midnight.

Wander the city walls and take in the views from the south side overlooking Bergamo Basso. On a very clear day it's said you can see the golden Madonna of Milan cathedral. Behind you, the Orobie mountains, foothills of the Italian Alps, pile up in a collage of greys and mauves.

Cycling or walking between the two levels is a popular option, even with superannuated Bergamaschi. It's not uncommon to see weather-beaten 70-year-olds, sinewy in cycling lycra,

Chocolatic's choice: Pasticceria Cavour

pushing valiantly up gradients worthy of the Tour de France. Make the most of the mountain air and rent a bike or scooter at Bergamo Energia (Via Tasso 8, +39 035 242 564).

INDULGENT AFTERNOON

A foraging ground for celebrity chef Antonio Carluccio, Bergamo has a lot going for it on the food front. Goat's and cow's milk cheeses come from the lush Brembana valley and *bresaola* (air-cured beef) and hams from nearby Valtellina. Come autumn, fresh wild mushrooms appear in boxloads in grocers' windows and vendors toast chestnuts on the streets.

Restaurants, not to mention bakeries, *pasticcerie* and delicatessens, are as two-a-penny in Bergamo as pubs in Dublin, so you won't be stuck for somewhere to eat. Try the copious lunch buffet at De Mimmo (Via Colleoni, +39 035 218 535), where they also do a good line in wood-fired pizzas – Naples meets northern Italy in their cholesterol-tastic buffalo mozzarella, *bresaola* and *scamorza* cheese pizza.

There are local 'DOC wines' – in particular the heady, fruity Valcaleppio Rosso made from Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, and the almond dessert wine, Moscato di Scanzo. You could easily while away an afternoon in the vineyards just to the east of town, on Lake Isèo (Tenuta degli Angeli in Carobbio degli Angeli, +39 035 951 489, or Castello di Grumello in Grumello del Monte, +39 035 442 0817).

SHOP MINI MILAN

With afternoon opening times from around 3pm to 7pm, Italian shopping hours fit in nicely with a long lunch. Take the funicular from Piazza delle Scarpe to Bergamo Basso and make a beeline for Via XX Settembre for a mini-Milan of labels – Massimo Dutti, Stefanel, Marni, Rinaldi, Calvin Klein and butter-soft leather shoes at Fratelli Rossetti.

Don't miss the medieval side-street Via Sant'Alessandro where you'll find Valentina Ravasio who sells her own hand-knits alongside young Milanese designers such as Carla Saibene and Miki Thumt, as well as little luxuries like the Porselli ballet pumps, as worn by La Scala dancers. :-

