

ITALIA!

Issue 36 November 2007 £3.75

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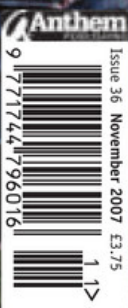
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DISCOVER ITALIA!



Clockwise, from top left: A market in Piazza delle Erbe, with Palazzo della Ragione as a backdrop; A cactus in the old Botanical Gardens; Statues surround Prato della Vale; Food for sale at Piazza delle Erbe; Piazza dei Signori overlooked by the tower of Palazzo del Capitano; The imposing St Anthony's Basilica; Caffé della Piazzetta in the old Jewish quarter; A pretty backstreet canal





48 HOURS IN...

Padua

Padua is world famous for its medieval art, yet it is also a vibrant, contemporary mix of busy markets, pilgrimage and freethinking. **Jane Gifford** explores the heart of the town

When I first stepped out inside Padua's city walls it was raining. Even so the place was buzzing. The city has an air of excitement, no doubt supplemented by the large number of students here and, happily, in Padua rain doesn't mean you have to get wet. Arched porticoes line almost every street, keeping you dry in wet weather and offering cooling shade in sunny weather. From a bridge, I watched the River Bacchiglione circling the old town. Tall houses, some with balconies, line the river, the health of which was indicated by a man sat in his armchair fishing from his balcony.

Padua's old town is designed for pedestrians and is compact enough to be easily covered on foot. Street life flourishes day and night, and walking is a pleasure. Padua's centre mostly escaped the bombs of the world wars and has kept its original medieval street plan. I quickly fell in love with the backstreets. They are safe, clean and have remained unchanged for hundreds of years. Unsurprisingly, the friendly and welcoming Paduans are proud of their inheritance. Their city is often over-shadowed by neighbouring Venice and they are keen to show the world just how much they have to offer. The Tourist Information Centre has an amazing amount of beautifully produced literature to introduce you to the city. You can sample a little of what Padua has to offer in 48 hours and then you will want to come back for more.

Liberal thinking has been Padua's business since declaring itself a Republic in 1164 and students have been essential to the economy for nearly 800 ➤



Photography - Jane Gifford

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DISCOVER ITALIA!

WHERE TO STAY

METHIS HOTEL 1

Riviera Paleocapa, 70
 ☎ +39 049 872 5555
 www.methishotel.com

My hotel was in a quiet spot on the river close to La Specola (a very high tower built in 1242). It was easy to reach by car and all of the centre is within pleasant walking distance. The hotel opened in 2003 and is beautifully designed with four themed floors – earth, air, fire and water. The staff are young and friendly and the breakfasts fantastic. A guest commented that the hotel had clearly been ‘feng shuied’ in every corner.
 Double room €100-€400

MAJESTIC HOTEL TOSCANELLI 2

Via dell'Arco, 2
 ☎ +39 049 663244
 www.toscanelli.com

This is a small, traditional hotel in an 18th-century building in the centre of town, in the old ghetto, close to Piazza delle Erbe, the university and Caffè Pedrocchi. Unusually, it has an entire floor set aside for smokers.
 Double room from €130

HOTEL DONATELLO 3

Via del Sant, 102/104
 ☎ +39 049 875 0634
 www.hoteldonatello.net

Situated across from the Basilica of St Anthony, the Hotel Donatello has pleasant rooms, some with a great view of the domes and Gattamelata. There is a summer terrace for candle-lit dining *al fresco*. Small pets are allowed.
 Double room from €165

HOTEL VERDI 4

Via Dondi dall'Orologio, 7
 ☎ +39 049 836 4163
 www.albergoverdipadova.it

Small, modern and beautiful, this stylish little hotel has recently been refurbished and is very reasonably priced. Just a short walk from Piazza dei Signori, the university and the Teatro Verdi, Hotel Verdi offers a peaceful stay despite its central location.

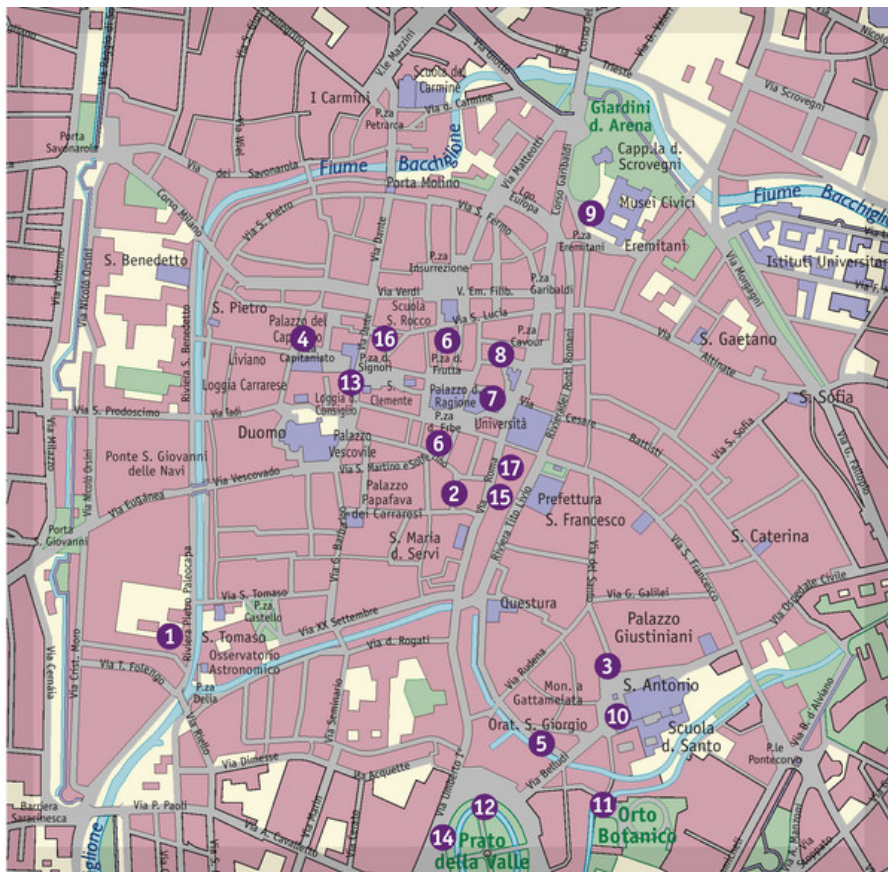
Double room from €40-€200, depending on the season, including breakfast

AL FAGIANO 5

Via Antonio Locatelli, 45
 ☎ +39 049 875 0073
 www.alfagiano.com

This friendly hotel is close to Prato della Valle and just 100m from St Anthony's Basilica. For visitors travelling on foot, the connections from the train station are direct and quick. This hotel offers a warm and inviting atmosphere.

Double room from €70



DON'T MISS

BASILICA OF ST ANTHONY
 The shrine is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua and is visited by more than 5 million pilgrims every year. On 13 June the city enjoys the Feast & Celebration of St Anthony, with uninterrupted religious celebrations at the basilica and a holy procession. For details go to www.basilica.delsanto.org

➤ years. The link between learning and commercial and social freedom has made the city strong.

AN ENLIGHTENED CITY

The university here was founded in 1222, making it the second oldest in Italy – Bologna was the earliest. Enlightened Padua was, however, first to accept female students, with Elena Lucrezia Piscopia graduating over 300 years ago in the summer of 1678. Modern medicine was also pioneered at Padua University. Its anatomical theatre, dating back to 1594, is the oldest in the world. Galileo Galilei was teaching his revolutionary astronomical theories here (1592-16) at the same time as the theatre was being built. Today, the Department of Astronomy is housed in La Specola, a medieval castle tower topped with an 18th-century observatory.

But it's the Scrovegni Chapel that is the jewel in Padua's crown. Built by the Jewish Scrovegni family, they commissioned Giotto to paint a cycle of frescoes inside, depicting the lives of Mary and Jesus, the Passion and the Last Judgement. Giotto's work is now considered to be the greatest masterpiece of European 14th-century art. The work is so valuable, visitor numbers have to be regulated.

After sitting in an atmospherically controlled room for 15 minutes you are then only allowed another 15 minutes inside. You need ten to take in the amazing blue of the domed starry ceiling, which must have cost a fortune in lapis lazuli alone. I was left with just five minutes to follow the frescoes around the walls. There's not enough time to do them justice. I came out dazed but glad to have had a glimpse of Giotto's genius. Next door, in the Eremitani City Museum, 14th-century Guariento's hierarchy of the angels stole the show, painted predominantly in red and gold.

Back on the streets the 9.11 memorial, 'Memory and Light', came as a surprise. Designed by Daniel Libeskind in glass and steel around a girder from the towers, it was donated to Padua by New York City in thanks for money raised for the victims. This poignant reminder brought me back to the modern world with a bump and I decided to head for the calm of the narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter, now a chic and popular place with locals. Sitting outside under broad umbrellas, *l'antico ghetto* proved the perfect place to eat before taking on the neighbouring market squares.

Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza della Frutta have been the site of a daily





A water lily in the 500-year-old Botanical Gardens, near St Anthony's Basilica



Palazzo della Ragione offers culture on the top floor and trade on the bottom – here a thriving butcher's shop



A portico on Via Saccorso, one of the many covered walk ways in the city

market for 800 years and they teem with activity. I lingered for a while by the fountain in Piazza delle Erbe, a popular meeting place. "This is one of the best views in Padua," a man nearby commented. I had to agree.

GRAND DESIGNS

Piazza delle Erbe and della Frutta are dominated by a medieval masterpiece, the Palazzo della Ragione (Palace of

Giotto's work is considered to be the great masterpiece of European 14th-century art

Reason), which comprises two tiers of arched porticoes topped by a massive roof. It was built in 1218 to house the Court of Justice in a vast hall on the upper floor, with shops below that still thrive. The hall, Il Salone, has the largest hanging wooden ceiling in the world, like the keel of a giant's boat.

The walls of the hall are covered in 15th-century frescoes depicting the signs of the zodiac and the qualities of those born under them, following the astrological theories of scientist, Pietro d'Abano. Threatened by the Inquisition, he was eventually saved by the Pope and went on to teach at Padua University in the 14th century.

The hall itself is dimly lit to protect the frescoes and your eyes take a while to adjust, but you can't miss the enormous wooden horse made for a fête in 1466. Only when you stand next to it do you realise how big it is, dwarfed in the vastness of Il Salone.

The market theme continues in Piazza dei Signori with clothing and household goods. This smaller square has a strong Venetian influence,

due to their invasion in the 15th century – they built the city walls. Gleaming white, the Renaissance Palazzo del Capitano looks on, topped by the Torre dell'Orologio, a tower adapted in 1532 to house a pale blue astronomical clock, made in 1344, and thought to be the oldest in Italy.

Close to Piazza dei Signori is Piazza del Duomo. The baptistery next to the cathedral dates back to the 12th century and contains another series of must-see 14th-century frescoes by Giusto de' Menabuoi. The dome is a vision of Paradise, with Christ encircled by hundreds of saints and scenes from Genesis. ➤

WHAT TO SEE

A FEAST OF MARKETS 6

There have been daily food markets in Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza della Frutta for the past 800 years. The food is local, seasonal and high quality. In Piazza dei Signori stall holders specialise in clothing and household goods. There is a huge general market every Saturday on Prato della Valle, with an antiques market on the last Sunday in the month.

PALAZZO DELLA RAGIONE 7

A wonderful 13th-century building dominating the market squares of Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza della Frutta, which once housed Padua's Court of Justice. This unique medieval hall has the largest hanging wooden ceiling in the world. Frescoes from the 15th-century depicting the signs of the zodiac and the qualities of those born under them cover the walls.

CAFFÈ PEDROCCHI & THE UNIVERSITY 8

Enjoy coffee and cakes in this famous meeting place, a small museum dedicated to the 1848 uprising and ornate rooms to explore upstairs. The university's Palazzo del Bo is opposite, where you'll find the oldest anatomical theatre in the world where modern medicine was pioneered.

GIOTTO IN THE SCROVEGNI CHAPEL 9

Giotto's fabulous frescoes, acknowledged to be the most important pieces of 14th-century European medieval art, are housed in this unassuming little chapel. It's hugely popular so book in advance for your 15-minute tour (€1). For a longer look at frescoes, try the baptistery next to the cathedral, the Basilica del Carmine, the Basilica of St Giustina and the Basilica of St Anthony.

ST ANTHONY'S BASILICA 10

This fabulous building offers you an uplifting experience surrounded by breathtaking sacred art. As well as the Basilica itself, there are four cloisters, the Antoniano Museum, St George's Oratory and the Scuola del Santo to explore.

BOTANICAL GARDENS 11

The oldest garden of its kind in the world, this peaceful oasis of cool shade and exotic plants dates back nearly 500 years and is tucked away behind St Anthony's Basilica. In 1786 Goethe made a careful study of the palm tree planted in 1585, growing in a glasshouse to this day.

PRATO DELLA VALLE 12

Visit the largest public square in Europe, surrounded by 87 statues, palaces and grand houses, then relax on the green. It is closed to traffic during the day, and popular for picnics, jogging and guitar playing. There is a market every Saturday.

DON'T MISS

ALL THE INFORMATION
Visit the Tourist Information Office on Vicolo Pedrocchi (tucked behind the famous Pedrocchi Café) for a fantastic amount of free information to help guide you around the city and its sights and make your visit more interesting and informed. For more details check out the website www.turismopadova.it



The world-renowned Caffè Pedrocchi, a sought-after spectacle in Padua for over 170 years

➤ You could spend 48 hours in Padua just looking at frescoes, but admiring so much artwork had given me a crick in the neck. Help was at hand. The Piazza dei Signori beckoned as the market had now gone, chairs and tables had taken the place of the stalls and they were rapidly filling with drinkers taking part in Padua's favourite dusk ritual, the Spritz. The cocktail is made up of white wine, Campari (red) or Aperol (orange and slightly less bitter), and fizzy water. Buskers arrived and to the sound of their music I joined in. The story was

...it houses such a vast array of sacred art and sculpture that it really is breathtaking

the same all over town as lively groups of young and old went out to enjoy a drink. Paduans eat late and there is an enormous amount of choice.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The next day I made my way to the 16th-century Palazzo del Bo, the main seat of the university. The old courtyard is covered in the badges of the nobility who sponsored the lecturers. You can take a guided tour of its treasures. Outside is the setting for the strange rituals, beloved of students everywhere. Graduates dress up in ridiculous costumes and are fêted in mad ways by their friends.

Caffè Pedrocchi is across the square from the university, world famous as a meeting place for scholars in the mid-19th century when it was open 24 hours a day. It was the scene of a student uprising in 1848. Now anybody can sit at tables in the Green Room – you don't even have to buy a drink. I had coffee in the Yellow Room instead, where a bullet hole is framed in the wall to commemorate the revolt. Upstairs on the Piano Nobile is a small Museum of the *Risorgimento* (upsurge) and ornate rooms are used for functions.

Fully refreshed, I decided to head for my favourite building in Padua, the Basilica of St Anthony, known affectionately by locals as 'Il Santo'. Under eight massive domes, crowned with minarets inspired by the East, it houses such a vast array of fantastic, sacred art and sculpture that it really is breathtaking. Steeped in incense and prayer, the atmosphere inside is deeply moving. The basilica was built for the Franciscan Order in the 13th century to house St Anthony's body. Outside Il Santo, Gattamelata, a butcher's boy who became governor of Padua in 1437, looks down from his prancing horse cast in bronze ➤

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

CAFFÈ DELLA PIAZZETTA 18

Via Santi Martino e Solferino, 49
☎ +39 049 657057

Eat under broad umbrellas in a quiet street off the beaten track. Excellent for lunch before shopping in the nearby market squares of Piazza delle Erbe, Piazza della Frutta and Piazza dei Signori. The salads are wonderful. It's popular with the locals so always busy and you might have to wait for a table.

Lunch and drinks about €12

ALCHIMIA LOUNGE BAR 19

Prato della Valle, 117
☎ +39 049 654 088

www.alchimia.pd.it

A restaurant and a bar with cocktails on the menu, including many of the usuals plus the moreish Godfather (Scotch whisky, Amaretto di Saronno) and Godmother (vodka, Amaretto di Saronno). This is a great place for enjoying a drink while watching life go by on one of the largest and most imaginative public squares in Europe. Enjoy sitting in the shade under the portico with one of the enticing cocktails. The restaurant specialises in Paduan cuisine and game.

Meal around €20-€30

GROM 20

Via Roma, 101
www.grom.it

The first Grom establishment opened in Torino in 2003, and the delicious ice creams can now be found in 12 cities across Italy, including Padua. You'll find the best *gelati* in town, hand-made from top quality ingredients, with no preservatives or additives. The ice creams are a bit pricey, but well worth it, however, remember that the gelateria is always busy, so be prepared to queue.

BAKARA ART CAFFÈ 21

Piazza dei Signori, 9
☎ +39 049 8756465

Enjoy sampling Padua's favourite cocktail and the local speciality drink, a lively evening Spritz, on this beautiful Venetian-style square. Street life is vibrant in the centre of town. There will be buskers and crowds of happy drinkers so drink in the atmosphere too.

Small Spritz and snacks €2.50

OSTERIA L'ANFORA 22

Via dei Soncin, 13
(close to Piazza del Duomo)
☎ +39 049 656629

Venetian and vegetarian cooking. This is an excellent place to eat with a traditional atmosphere, great character and wonderful food, particularly for vegetarians.

Meal around €20-€30

DON'T MISS

ON THE CHEAP
Buy a Padovacard for €14, valid for 48 hours or the whole weekend if bought on Friday, for one adult (plus child under 12 free) to Scrovegni Chapel, Eremitani Museum, Palazzo della Ragione, Botanical Gardens, St John's Baptistery and more. Also includes free parking at Prato della Valle, the station and APS bus journeys.



Piazza dei Signori where a customer enjoys a Spritz, the city's favourite cocktail resplendent in vibrant red

► by Donatello. Gattamelata's tomb is inside as, of course, is St Anthony's. There are more bronzes and statues as masterworks fill the basilica and surrounding buildings.

GREEN OASIS

After the cool of Il Santo I escaped the heat by visiting the nearby Botanical Gardens, a secret green oasis full of unusual plants that is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The garden was conceived by the university in 1545 to grow medicinal plants, and it has been enriched over the centuries by collections of plants from all over the world. It is still a centre of scientific research and teaching, playing an important part in the preservation and reintroduction of rare species globally. A palm tree planted in 1585 still flourishes in the glasshouse. Beneath tall protective trees roses, cacti, cycads and water lilies flower. I sat under a tall Oriental plane tree from 1680. Lightning had long ago left its trunk hollow and charred, but the crown was still a mass of life. Towards evening, I wandered on to Prato della Valle.

Beloved of the Paduans, Prato della Valle is one of the largest squares in Europe and the site of many festivals and public events. A really imaginative place, it was designed as a public space at the end of the 18th century by Andrea Memmo, and built by Domenico Cerato, Professor of Architecture at the university. Eighty-

seven statues of prominent Paduans line both banks of an ellipsoidal canal full of fish and spanned by four ornate bridges. There is a huge green space in the middle with a fountain ringed by stone benches in its centre.

The road around Prato della Valle is closed to traffic during the day, taken over by joggers, roller-skaters, dog walkers and cyclists. On Saturdays it is the venue for a huge general market, with an antiques market on the last Sunday of every month. The statues are a meeting place for lovers and the grass is popular with young people playing and picnicking. The surroundings are grand, the whole square lined by palaces and great houses. Loggia Amulea, with its ornate porticoes and statues of Dante and Giotto, is especially lovely. I watched the sun go down at the feet of a spectacular statue.

As for evening entertainment, in the Botanical Gardens a woman called Laura had asked me to photograph her. She was married to saxophonist Gatto Barbieri, who was performing as part of the Veneto Jazz Festival at Sala Petrarca in town that night. I spent my last evening as her guest at a fabulous gig listening to truly awesome musicians. Padua is full of surprises. Go see for yourself. ■

COMING SOON Spend 48 hours in L'Aquila and the National Park's imposing Grand Sasso mountain region in Abruzzo



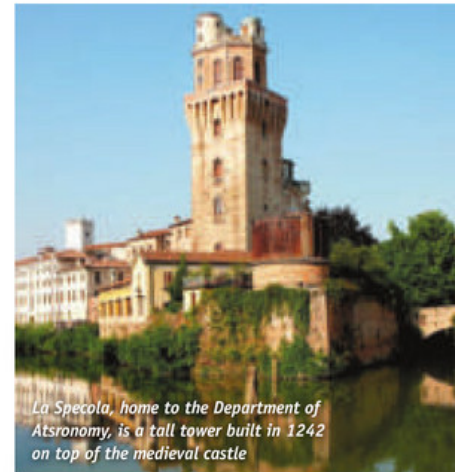
Basilica of St Giustina faces the great square of Prato della Valle, the most popular meeting place in Padua



The 16th-century courtyard of the university's Palazzo del Bo, home to the oldest anatomical theatre in the world

DON'T MISS

FESTIVAL FUN
Prato della Valle host many events and Christmas markets (8 Dec-5 Jan). Watch out for St Anthony's Marathon, a 42km run, with events for children and easy routes for novices (22 April). On 7 July is La Notta Bianca – shops, restaurants and museums open, dusk til dawn, in the city centre.



La Specola, home to the Department of Astronomy, is a tall tower built in 1242 on top of the medieval castle

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

Venice Marco Polo is the nearest international airport. EasyJet flies from Bristol, Gatwick and East Midlands. A taxi to Padua from the airport costs around €25 and there is also a regular bus. The journey takes around an hour.

► BY TRAIN

Padua is on the Turin-Trieste line. You can catch a train from the airport to Venice Mestre and pick up a connection every half hour. It takes 20 minutes on the mainline to Padua. It's only two hours on the train from Milan to Padua.

► BY CAR

A4 Venice-Milan (exit Padova Est from Venice, Padova Ovest from Milan), A13 Bologna-Padova (exit Padova Sud).