



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

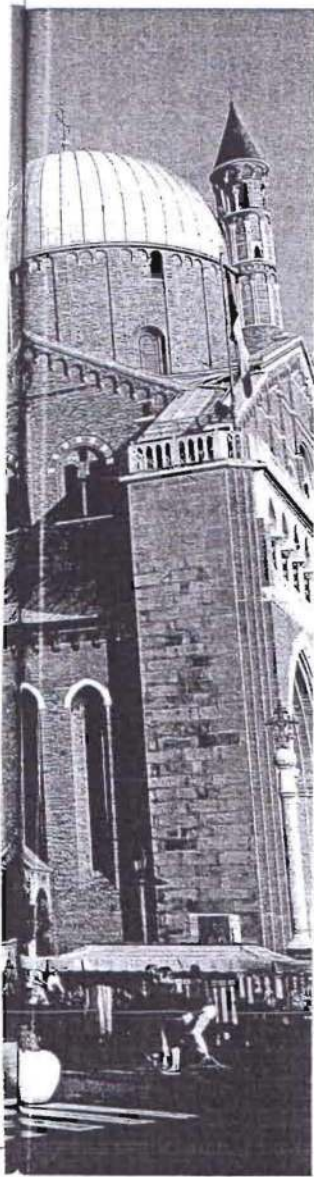


Photo credit: Jane Gifford

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