



MODENA: CATHEDRAL, TORRE CIVICA AND PIAZZA GRANDE

“The Cathedral of Modena is a book of stone [...] and it is also something more than the Biblia pauperum, i.e. a Bible of the poor, as the Romantics in the 19th century defined it. This is the Bible of a people on which a saga dedicated to the creation of a whole community is written.”

Il tempio degli uomini liberi. Il Duomo di Modena, Dario Fo

Built starting in 1099, the Cathedral of Modena is one of the most astonishing, iconic and decisive buildings ever erected by man: its sculptures catapult you into a parallel world of symbols, allegories and images, that can produce the most fanciful expressions of medieval culture; the history of its construction mixes the exaltation of popular wishes and hagiography, the work of almost mythological figures such as the architect Lanfranco and the sculptor Wiligelmus with the anonymity of the thousands of labourers who for decades lavished huge efforts on the gigantic undertaking; the masterpieces decorating its interior celebrate the triumph of human genius over the centuries. Immediately next to the apses, there is “Ghirlandina”, the very slender bell tower (and civic tower), completed in 1319, which takes its name after the marble balustrades that crown the spire, defined by the people of Modena as “elegant as garlands”, and which unmistakably dominates the city skyline. Lastly, there is the square in which all this stands, “large” not only by its extension, but above all for the elegant grace and harmony in which the different architectures and the seats of religious and civic power are integrated.



CULTURAL HERITAGE
UNESCO DOSSIER: 827
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: NAPLES, ITALY
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CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The cathedral and the civil tower write an essential page in the history of world art, necessary to understand the stylistic evolutions, the figurative language, the culture, the urban society and the relationship between the economy, religion and political life in the 12th and 13th centuries.



“At one moment, I was standing again, before the brown old rugged churches of Modena.”

In *Pictures from Italy*, Charles Dickens describes his dream-like confusion at the sight of the multiple wonders admired during his journey. You will feel this too. Even without the buildings for which it is famous in the world, the Cathedral and the “Ghirlandina”, Modena would still be a destination worth counting among the great Italian cities of art.

To realise this, you only have to visit the **1 Estense Gallery**, which houses a significant part of the artistic heritage of the family that ruled over the area for centuries: it is an exceptional collection, both because of the representativeness of various periods and contexts (from the 14th century to the Ferrara Renaissance, from the Venetian 16th century to the Emilian 17th century) and the presence of absolute masterpieces, such as *St Francis* by Cosmè Tura, almost surrealist in the landscape and in the colours, *Crucifixion* by Guido Reni, with its sublime ideality, and the intense *Portrait of Francis I d'Este* by Velázquez. Then continue along the old Via Emilia until you reach the

2 Church of San Giovanni Battista: ignored by most tourists, it is the ideal place to be initiated into one of the city's excellences: terracotta sculpture between the 15th and the 16th centuries. In this case, you can contemplate the *Lamentation over the dead Christ* by Guido Mazzoni, one of the artist's most dramatic works. You then reach Piazza Grande, to discover the **3 City Hall:** inside, there are sumptuous historic rooms to be seen, including the Chamber of the Confirmed, with the very famous “stolen bucket” (stolen by the Modenese at the gates of Bologna in 1325, during the battle of Zappolino), and the adjacent Hall of the Fire, frescoed in 1546 by Nicolò dell'Abate,

but above all the Municipal Vinegar Factory, to learn more about the production techniques of a genuine gastronomic treasure. Still on the subject of culinary specialities, do not miss a visit to the **4 Albinelli Market**, a splendid covered area, inaugurated in 1931, where you can buy typical products (there are even tortellini to eat as you stroll around) or stop for lunch in one of its restaurants. End your tour at the **5 San Pietro Apostolo Abbey:** here, the “Altar of Statues” is an introduction to the work of the other terracotta sculptor of the city, Antonio Begarelli, and there is also an old spice merchant's shop which sells the typical products of the Benedictine monks.



MAP



A WINE DELIGHT

“Lambrusco, believed to be humble, this way resembles champagne.”

Vino al vino, Mario Soldati

Comparing a popular wine such as Lambrusco, so closely linked to the local peasant tradition, with the most iconic and refined of French wines, may seem sacrilege to most connoisseurs, but in Modena, you will realise that, as well as being a good palate cleanser between a platter of salami, fried *gnocco* and a dish of *tortellini*, and as well as

being an infallible way to make friends with the locals in bars and restaurants, Lambrusco can at times also turn out to be an elegant and complex nectar. Considering then that there are those who compare its effervescence to the exuberance of those mysterious figures sculpted in the metopes of the Cathedral, those who associate its sensory impetuosity with the vertical soaring of the “Ghirlandina”, those who recognise a resemblance between its joviality and cheerfulness which at any time in the day and in all seasons characterises Piazza del Duomo, it is easy to understand why, of all the distinguishing elements of being most authentically Modenese, this wine deserves a leading position.



'THE VIA EMILIA CUT MODENA INTO TWO; THE ROAD WHERE I LIVED, ON ONE SIDE, CROSSED IT, ON THE OTHER SIDE THERE WERE THE VAST FIELDS OF THE OUTSKIRTS. THEY WERE A LITTLE OUR DOMESTIC 'FAR WEST': YOU ONLY [...] HAD TO CROSS A ROAD AND THERE WERE ALREADY COWBOYS AND INDIANS, HORSES AND ARROWS; IN A WORD, THERE WAS

ADVENTURE, TRANSLATED INTO OUR DIALECT FROM FILMS AND COMIC STRIPS.'

This is how, in the liner notes to the live double album *Fra la via Emilia e il West*, the singer and songwriter Francesco Guccini speaks of his Modena, a flat land which in children's imagination became a Far West where their fantasies could run wild. The Far West, toy figures, toy cars... Modena seems to be the city of children – and effectively it is above all the city of Edizioni Panini, where the **1 Museo della Figurina** is not to be missed by all those who, at least once in their lifetime, tried hard

to complete an album. Obviously there are the traditional footballers' trading cards, but the collection hosts above all mementos which document the history of the small prints, created in France in 1867, and then produced with various purposes, from reinforcing cigarette packets to small calendars. Even more immediate is the association between the city and the great car manufacturers, such as Maserati, Stanguellini, Pagani, and, above all, Ferrari. This is why, even only uttering the name of the **2 Enzo Ferrari Museum** will make the hearts of motor racing fans roar: on the one hand, the house with traditional lines where the great entrepreneur was born in 1898; on the other the display gallery, a futuristic aluminium building by Jan Kaplicky shaped like a car bonnet.

Fans will discover all the secrets of the prancing horse, told through pictures, unreleased film sequences, invaluable pieces and the incredible models on display, ranging from the great classics to racing cars.

At the end of the visit, we recommend going to the **3 Novi Ark Archaeological Park**, where there are the finds from a peripheral sector of the ancient Mutina (1st century B.C. – 5th century A.D.): it is a huge space, with smooching students and children playing ball; the stands of the hippodrome, the floodlights from the nearby football ground and the underground car park give it a touch of modern grittiness that never hurts; without forgetting the enormous building of the Foro Boario, a temple which was the seat of the livestock market, that adds monumentality to the picture. Furthermore walking on an ancient Roman road is always impressive.



MODENA in books

Reading suggestions to plunge into the atmosphere of the city.

• **The Rape of the Bucket**, Alessandro Tassoni (1622) This heroic-comic poem tells of the cruel battle of Zappolino (1325). When reaching the gates of Bologna, the Modenese soldiers stole a shabby receptacle from a well which was taken back to the city like the most glorious of trophies. Yet, history narrates that only a few months later, peace was signed, in which the status quo prior to the conflict was re-established. The only consequence of the battle, ultimately, was the kidnapping of the bucket... over 2000 fatalities in vain.

• **Pictures from Italy**, Charles Dickens (1846) It was the middle of the 19th century when the English writer undertook a long journey through the peninsula, visiting various cities, Genoa, La Spezia, Carrara, Bologna, Mantua, Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice. He also went to Modena, under a blue autumn sky, and obviously the cathedral made a great impression on him.

• **Vino al vino**, Mario Soldati (1969) In this milestone of 20th century Italian

literature, in which Soldati skilfully combines the travel genre, habits, food and wine and an elegant writing style, a lot of space is devoted to the Modena area, due to the production of Lambrusco, whose winemaking techniques are described in detail. There is also room for the typical dishes, such as zampone, cooked and stuffed pig's trotter, and *borlenghi*, flatbreads stuffed with herbs.

• **Radici**, Francesco Guccini (1972). The fourth album by Guccini contains some of his most famous songs, such as *La locomotiva* and *Il vecchio e il bambino*. *Piccola città* is dedicated to Modena, the city of his birth and where he spent his adolescence. In *Incontro*, Modena is the backdrop to the dialogue between the singer and an old school friend.

• **Il tempio degli uomini liberi. Il Duomo di Modena**, Dario Fo (2004). A play written by the last Italian winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, which tells the story of the Cathedral of Modena and documents its exceptional nature, as it is the oldest sacred building whose architect is known to us, for the influence that it had on the development of the Romanesque style and medieval art and for the decisive role played by the people in its construction, including

in opposition to the power of the church. Dario Fo goes into the details, describing the iconography of the phantasmagorical scenes carved into the stone of the capitals, the metopes and the bas-reliefs.

• **Un lingotto rosso sangue**, Luca Marchesi (2019). A fine thriller, to plunge into the fascinating lands around Modena, to feel part of the drama of the 2012 earthquake and to shudder, following a dark trail of blood.

• **Il giorno dei morti. La saga dei vampiri**, Claudio Vergnani (2020). Modena has been inhabited for centuries by mysterious creatures and fantastic images which populate the Cathedral. In this novel, though, you will discover that the city is also home to vampires.

Children's books:

• **La battaglia finale: I Tempestari e le streghe della Bassa**, Luca Marchesi (2011). The northern part of the province of Modena is made up of stretches of fields and living traditions, thick fog and pragmatic people; sometimes, as in this case, magicians, mermaids, witches and a huge speaking elm tree.