TOP 10 ATTRACTIONS



THE BEGIJNHOF

A peaceful retreat in the heart of the city. See page 39.



ONZE-LIEVE-VROUWEKERK

One of Bruges's finest churches. See page 36.



CANALS

Cruising the waterways is a relaxing way to enjoy the historic sights. See page 122.



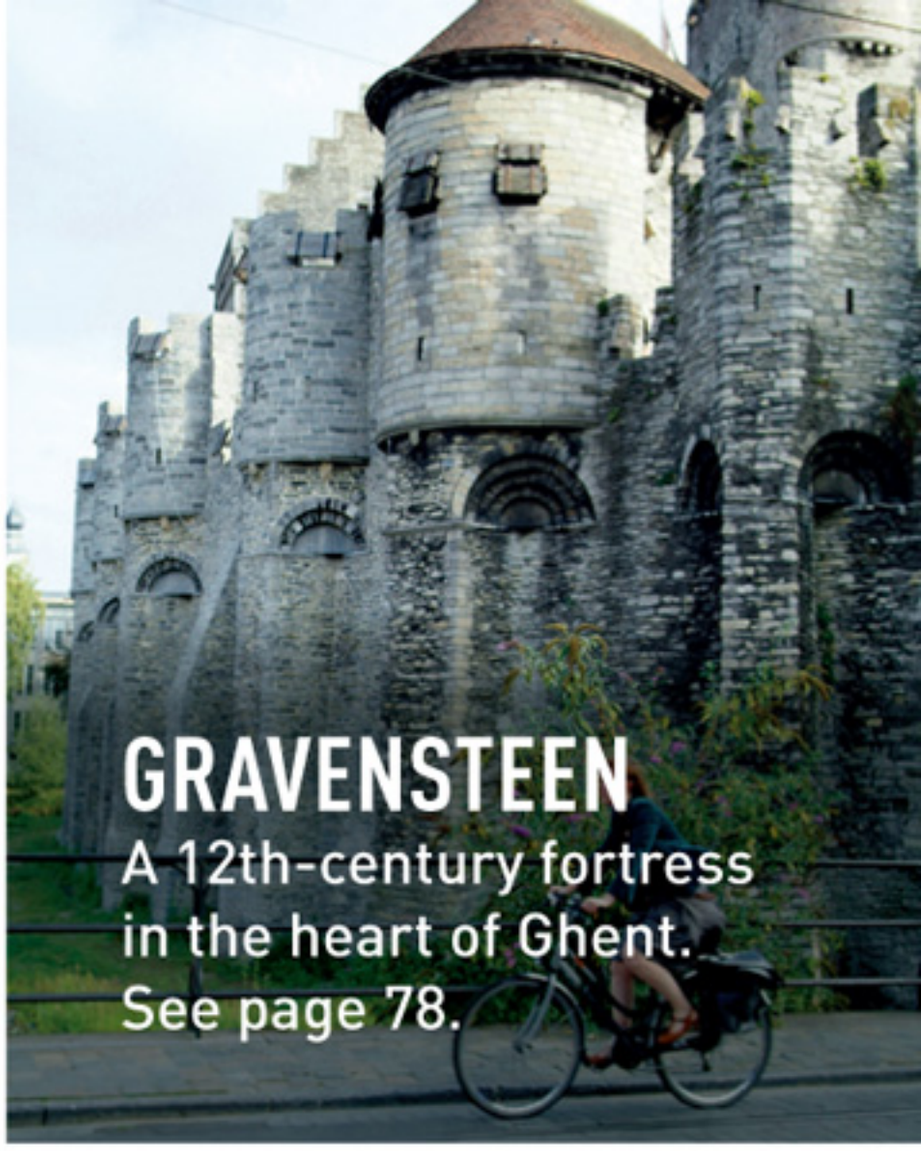
BELL TOWER

The 13th-century structure looms over the city. See page 27.



GROENINGEMUSEUM

Works by Flemish masters. See page 34.



GRAVENSTEEN

A 12th-century fortress in the heart of Ghent. See page 78.



HUIS TER BEURZE

An elegant 15th-century mansion. See page 53.



STADHUIS

The gilded Gothic Town Hall. See page 29.



SINT-JANSHOSPITAAL

Discover masterpieces by the painter Hans Memling in the old hospital's church. See page 37.



BASILICA OF THE HOLY BLOOD

Stands guard over the holiest relic in Bruges. See page 30.

A PERFECT DAY





9.00am

Breakfast

For breakfast in a splendid setting, go to the Art Nouveau De Medici Sorbetière at Geldmuntstraat 9.

10.00am

The Markt

Stroll into the nearby Markt for a turn around the magnificent market square. Take in the Belfort and medieval buildings, then discover what 13th-century Bruges was like, inside the Historium.

11.00am

The Burg

The historic square contains the Romanesque Basiliek van het Heilig-Bloed, the lovely Gothic Stadhuis and the Baroque Proosdij.

12.30pm

Lunch

Breydel-De Coninc (tel: 050-33 97 46; see page 104) in Breidelstraat is a good traditional restaurant. For something more sophisticated, go down Blinde-Ezelstraat and cross the canal to the Vismarkt (Fish Market) for the highly regarded seafood restaurant De Visscherie (tel: 050-33 02 12; see page 105).

2.00pm

Groeninge

Head along the canal on photogenic Rozenhoedkaai and tree-shaded Dijver, then turn left into Groeninge. If you visit only one museum in Bruges, this should be it. The collection of paintings by medieval Flemish Primitives is world-class, including Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, Rogier van der Weyden and Gerard David, among others.

IN BRUGES





3.00pm

Culture fix

If you fancy more culture, or you missed out on the Groeninge, cross the pretty little Boniface Bridge and continue to the Gothic Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady). The church is worth visiting for its *Madonna and Child* sculpture by Michelangelo. The church's 122m (400-ft) -tall brick tower is the second-tallest of its kind in the world, and once served as an inland lighthouse for ships on their way to Bruges.

4.30pm

Towards the Begijnhof

Across the street is Sint-Janshospitaal, whose old church houses works by Hans Memling. By way of the Halve Maan brewery, you arrive at the pretty courtyard of the Unesco-listed Begijnhof.

8.00pm

Dinner

If you want to dine in this area, off the north end of the Minnewater you will find the traditional Flemish restaurant Maximiliaan van Oost-enrijk (tel: 050-33 47 23; see page 106). Alternatively, return to the Vismarkt for dinner at Huidevettershuis (tel: 050-33 95 06; see page 106), which is set within a medieval guild house.

6.00pm

The Lake of Love

Just south of the Begijnhof, the Minnewater lake can be imaginatively translated as the 'Lake of Love', though it probably takes its name from Bruges' medieval Binnen Water (Inner Harbour). On its east bank is a handsome park and the Kasteel Minnewater château. Take a stroll around here and the neighbourhood by the lake's eastern shore.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 10

A BRIEF HISTORY 12

WHERE TO GO 25

South from the Markt 27
The Burg 28, Around Vismarkt 32, The Groeninge Museum 34, The Arentshuis 35, The Gruuthuse Museum 35, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk 36, Sint-Janshospitaal 37, Around Mariastraat 39, The Begijnhof 39, Minnewater 41, Katelijnestraat 41

West from the Markt 43
Around 't Zand Square 44

North from the Markt 48
Jan van Eyckplein 48, East of Jan van Eyckplein 49, West of Jan van Eyckplein 53, North of Jan van Eyckplein 55

Excursions 57
Damme 57, Dudzele 59, Lissewege 59, Zeebrugge 60, De Haan 60, Oostende (Ostend) 62, Veurne 64, Ypres and Flanders Fields 66, The War Cemeteries 68, Sint-Andries 69, Tillegembos 69, Kasteel Loppem 70

Ghent 71
Sint-Baafskathedraal 71, The Belfort and Lakenhalle 73, Botermarkt and Hoogpoort 74, Korenlei and Graslei 76, North of Korenlei 77, Gravensteen 78, From Kraanlei to Vrijdagmarkt 78, Around Veldstraat 80, Fine Arts Museums 81, Sint-Pietersplein 83

WHAT TO DO 85

Shopping 85
Entertainment 89
Sports 92
Activities for children 93

EATING OUT 95

A–Z TRAVEL TIPS 110

RECOMMENDED HOTELS 135

INDEX 142

FEATURES

Easy to explore 10
Trade centre 16
Literary revival 18
Historical landmarks 23
Lacemaking 51
The coast tram 61
Tours of remembrance 66
Who painted the alterpiece? 70
How Flanders influenced art 82
Calendar of events 94
Belgian beers 102

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years Belgium has been coveted, invaded and fought over by Europe's great powers. Steeped in history and legend, the country was the site of numerous bloody battles, particularly in the northern region of Flanders. Once ignored in favour of other holiday destinations, Belgium's charm is no longer a secret and its historic towns, first-class museums, hearty food, rich beers and ancient architecture are well-known. Most beautiful of all these attractions is Bruges, Europe's best-preserved medieval city and the capital of West Flanders, one of Belgium's 11 provinces.

Bruges' historic centre is contained by a 7km (4.3-mile) 'ring canal', which traces the route of the former defensive outer ramparts. A ring road follows this perimeter boundary keeping traffic away from the centre which is full of gabled houses, meandering canals, and narrow pedestrianized cobblestone streets.

The city's history is evident everywhere; in its streets and buildings, its art, culture and festivals. It has an effortless charm thanks to its compact geography and can easily be

EASY TO EXPLORE

Belgium is a compact country (less than 280km/174 miles across at its widest point), so nowhere is very far away. Most of the excursions in this guide are within a few miles of Bruges or Ghent, themselves connected by a reliable half-hour train journey. Those a little farther away are still easily accessible, thanks to the country's superb railways. In 1835 Belgium ran the first train in continental Europe, and standards are still high.

explored on foot, by bike, or even on the water.

Water forms an important part of the landscape and economy of Bruges. Canals link the city to the coast and important industrial centres in Belgium and around Europe.

Most of Belgium's population is Roman Catholic, and the virtues of community cohesion in work and play make up much of what it means to be Flemish. Tradition and family life are important, and people take their work and pleasures seriously, which explains why Belgium produces more than 450 different beers.



View from Rozenhoedkaai, where boat tours depart

Museums figure prominently in Belgium; the Belgians, at least in their civic life, have a passion for collecting and recording. Bruges shares this national characteristic, with some superb museums and galleries. It also has a rich calendar of events (see page 94), including the spectacular Procession of the Holy Blood.

Eating and drinking are mostly hearty events and form an important part of life. Belgian cuisine is justly famous throughout the world, both for its quality and its quantity; there are plenty of fine restaurants in Bruges. An intrinsic part of everyday eating is the Belgian French fry *(friet)*, which is available everywhere, and often eaten with mayonnaise. Equally ubiquitous are the exquisite Belgian chocolates you will see in mouth-watering shop displays.