

Bruges

Relatively cosmopolitan and bourgeois given its compact size, **Bruges** (official name in Dutch: *Brugge*, is one of the best preserved pre-motorized cities in Europe and offers the kind of charms rarely available elsewhere. Part of Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium, Brugge is a postcard perfect stop on any tour of Europe.

Get In

By plane

Bruges can easily be reached through the airports of Brussels, Charleroi (Brussels South) and Lille.

A large number of carriers offer direct flights to Brussels. Belgium's main airport has its' own railway station, so getting to Bruges by train is by far the easiest way. Only one change at one of the three main stations is needed and the entire connection takes about 1:20.

Brussels South (Charleroi) is primarily served by Ryanair. Getting to Bruges can either be done by train or by a special shuttle bus that makes the round trip Bruges - Brussels South 4 times a day.

By train

Traveling to Brugge on Belgium's excellent rail system is a natural choice. Trains to and from Brussels leave every 30 minutes during the day, and if you are traveling on the Eurostar that same day, there is no cost. Otherwise, buy a ticket when you get to the station. Luggage lockers are available from 6 am to 9:30pm. For more information on schedules, prices, and services visit the website of the NMBS/SNCB. www.b-rail.be/

By car

If you are planning a bus-tour: be aware buses and camping vehicles are not allowed *intra muros*. There is a perfect parking place for them on the south side of the city with a newly designed gangway bringing you directly into the heart of the town. It is in general a bad idea to venture inside with a car, as parking is limited and finding your way difficult. There are multistory car parks a five minute walk from the city centre. Nice city mini-buses cruise the town with high frequency, and in any case, the historical centre must be traversed on foot, by bicycle, by horse-drawn carriage or by boat to enjoy it.

By ferry

P&O Ferries operate a daily sailing every evening from Hull to Zeebrugge taking 12½ hours for the crossing. The fares also include the bus from the ferry terminal to Brugge railway station. www.poferries.com/

Superfast Ferries operates an overnight service between Rosyth, Scotland (near Edinburgh) and Zeebrugge (near Brugge). They voyage in either direction takes 18 hours. When foot passengers disembark, a bus [approx 5 Euros] is waiting to take them for the 15 minute journey to the Bruges train station. Be advised that as of 14 September 2008 this line will be discontinued until further notice. <http://www.superfast.com/>

Get Around

The historical center is not so big and thus quite walkable. The only mode of public transport inside city is bus. The Flemish public transport company operates buses **De Lijn**. Taxis on the market place and station cost about 10 euro. <http://www.delijn.be/>

Understand

Talk

The official language is Flemish (a dialect of Dutch), but with a little courtesy when asking, everyone can speak English & French.

Weather

Even by Belgian standards, Bruges has a poor reputation for its weather. Compared to other western European cities like London and Paris, the weather in Bruges is colder and damper. Even in July, average daily maximum temperatures struggle to exceed 21c (70F) and rainfall averages 8 inches a month. After October, temperatures drop off quite rapidly and winter months are damp and chilly.

See

Once over the circling canal and inside the city walls, Bruges closes in around you with street after street of charming historic houses and a canal always nearby. In recent years, the city has turned so much towards tourism the locals sometimes complain they are living in Disney-land. The newly cleaned houses should however not confuse you; they are truly centuries old. And if you can get away from the chocolate-shops, you can visit some more quiet areas s.a. St. Anna, and imagine what life in the late middle ages must have been like.

Some highlights:

- **Groeninge Museum**, Dijver 12 | B-8000 Bruges, 7 days 9.30am-5pm. Known as 'The city museum of Fine Arts', it houses a collection of artworks that span

several centuries (14th-20th), focusing mainly on works by painters who lived and worked in Bruges. € 8 / € 6 (audio guide and ticket Arents House and Forum+ included in the entrance). [edit](#)

- **Basilica of the Holy Blood (Heilige Bloed Basiliek)**, Burg 10, April-September 9.30am-11.50am & 2pm-5.50pm, October-March 10am-11.50am & 2pm-3.50pm. A beautiful church on the Burg square. It houses a relic - a vial of blood that is said to be that of Jesus - and was built in the Gothic style. Try and get there early so you can view the chapel when it is quiet and not filled with tourists. And don't forget to visit the chapel underneath, in heavy Romanesque style - a contrast to the lovely light Gothic above.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwkerk**. A fascinating church with architecture from the Romanesque and Gothic periods. In the east end of the church are very fine tombs of Charles the Bold and his daughter Mary of Burgundy - in contrasting Gothic and Renaissance styles, despite their superficial similarity. The church also houses a small but lovely Michelangelo sculpture of the Virgin and Child.
- **Jerusalem church**, In a quiet area of the city, a highly unusual church with octagonal tower built by the Adornes brothers, merchants of Italian extraction. It includes a fine black tournai marble tomb, late Gothic stained glass, and a tiny and rather spooky chapel containing an effigy of the dead Christ. The entrance fee also covers the Lace Museum in the former Adornes mansion.
- **The Begijnhof**, or convent, between the centre of the station and the city, with white painted small houses and fine plane trees, is a quiet place to walk - groups are discouraged.
- **The Hospital of St John**, or Sint-Janshospitaal contains a museum of paintings by Hans Memling, within the early medieval hospital buildings.
- **Choco-Story Museum**, Wijnzakstraat 2 (Sint-Jansplein) 8000 Bruges, 050/61.22.37, 10am- 5pm. This museum is a must see for chocolate enthusiasts as it describes chocolate's transition from cocoa into chocolate. Its low cost tasty exhibits make it well worth the time. Adults: 6 €.
- **Diamanthuis Museum**, Katelijnestraat 43, 8000 Brugge, 050 33 63 26, 10h30 - 17h30. Diamond museum has a large range of exhibits ranging from mining all the way to polishing and all the history in between. Everyday at 12:15 there is a live polishing demonstration. Individuals 6 EUR, Groups 4.5 EUR, Students 3 EUR.

Bruges is visited by a huge number of tourists and it sometimes becomes quite annoying, especially around the Markt and Burg squares. The important thing to remember, however, is that very few tourists venture far away from the main shopping area, so if you want some peace and quiet you should simply explore the many small cobbled streets away from the main squares.

Do

- **Grote Markt** Have beer, climb the clock tower, go to Minnewater Park or Van Eyck Plein, nothing is very far away in Bruges; it's a remarkably compact city.

- **Tour boats** -- It's essential to take a ride on one of the tour boats around the canals - the multilingual guides provide a potted history of the city in just a few minutes - at only a few Euros, it's the best introduction to Bruges. A boat tour will show you places that are otherwise unreachable, as not every canal runs next to a street. In 2008, the adult fare was EUR 6.50 each. Children between 4 and 11: EUR 3,00.
- **Walks and rides** -- everywhere, although there are plenty of horse-drawn tourist buggies and bicycles for hire in the cobbled streets as well. The horse carriage tours are nice but expensive. Bruges is most exciting when complemented by stories of the past.
- **Cycle** -- Rent a bike from any location. There are many rental shops near the main square. A memorable experience for all! Roughly 5 Euro for 2 hours.
- **Snow and Ice sculpture festival**, Every year from the end of November to January you can visit the Snow and Ice sculpture festival on the station-square of Bruges. The festival is built by an international team of 40 professional artists from no less than 300 tons of crystal clear ice and 400,000 kilos of fresh snow in a cooled hall where the temperature remains a constant -6°C. Don't forget to wear warm clothing! The **2008 Snow & Ice** runs from Nov. 21 Jan. 25, 2009.
- **Running** -- If you are a runner, try running the 7km circle around the old center. Walk along the canal and see all of the medieval gates that used to control the traffic in and out of Bruges. Simply stunning!
- Compare the real Bruges to the one depicted in the movie "In Bruges" .

Buy

- **Chocolate shops** -- These are plentiful and the standard is always high, so too are the boutique-style beer shops. Plenty of arts and crafts too, with some excellent local artists. The lacework is risky: if everything sold were produced locally, the entire town would be working in the lace industry! There is a school for lace though, where you can still get "the real thing".
- **Supermarket** -- While the chocolates sold in the chocolate shops are indisputably gorgeous, they are quite expensive. A better deal is to buy chocolate bars from a supermarket - try the Cote d'Or. They are fantastic and much cheaper. The same goes for buying beer - instead of buying from overpriced specialty stores you can buy in the supermarket. They even have gift packs with glasses.
- **Times** -- Most European tourists come for the weekend, so shops are open Tuesday through Sunday, but many shops and museums are closed on Mondays. Be sure to plan ahead.

Eat

Restaurants are not always cheap or wonderful; sad to say that Belgian cuisine is a long way behind French in terms of variety, although mussels and frites or fricadellen, frites with mayonnaise are outstanding here. Stay away from the central market place ("Grote Markt") when eating. Tourists are easy victims here. You will find great food if you wander off the beaten track. Find a street with more locals than tourists and ask somebody. The locals will be glad to help.

A lot of places do not open until 1800hrs.

- **Brasserie Forestière**, Academiestraat. Nice and calm restaurant, good food, not too expensive. Good menu for vegetarians. Meal of the day (soup, main dish, dessert or coffee/tea) costs € 11 although this is the cheapest menu, with little choice.
- **L'estaminet**, at the Astrid Park. Good food, nice terrace, cool bartender. Try the renowned spaghetti for 7 euros or the delicious croque monsieur.
- **La Romagna**, Braambergstraat 8. Excellent family-run Italian restaurant and pizzeria. Inexpensive. Good menu for vegetarians.
- **In't Nieuw Museum**, Hooistraat 42. Belgian grill restaurant, well off the tourist track. Excellent steaks, reasonable prices. Not at all for vegetarians.
- **De Botelier, Ezelstraat** (close to Sint-Jacobsstraat). I live in Bruges and it has always been my favorite restaurant. Very reasonable prices and excellent food.
- **Tom's Diner**, West Gistelhof 23. Fantastic upscale take on satisfying, home cooked food. Prices are reasonable, as well.
- **Kok au Vin**, Ezelstraat 19/21. The Kok au Vin was memorable (both the entrée AND the restaurant); the prices are reasonable for the high quality. Family owned and run. Reservations recommended.

Drink

- **Brewery 'De Halve Maan'**, Walplein 26 8000 Brugge, Belgium, 050 33 26 97, Apr.-Oct. Mon-Fri, Sat 11-4pm and Sun. 11-5pm. Beer museum which offers a tour of the beer making process as well as tasting and a great view of the city from its tower. The tour lasts for 45 minutes and is a good way to get a feel for Belgian beer making. 5 Euro includes beer tasting
- **De Garre**, 1, De Garre, 32 50 34 10 29. Hidden in a backyard, this pub offers a nice atmosphere and about 100 different kinds of beer, including home-brewed

ones. The house beer is called 'Triple de Garre' and is 11% strong, a good way to start the night.

- **'t Brugs Beertje**, Kamelstraat. This excellent pub (recommended in the CAMRA guide to the Benelux region) has hundreds of different beers and an authentic beer-cafe atmosphere. The front bar is crowded; what looks like the door through to the restrooms opens on another bar area. In 2005 it was closed for most of July - this might be an annual occurrence.
- **Curiosa** (just off the main square). A good place for a lunch as well as a beer.
- **Art tavern 'De Kogge'**, Braambergstraat (near the fish market). A wonderful place to stop by for a few drinks. This family-run place is amazingly friendly, and with 6 beers on tap, as well as 20 more on offer, it is a great place to sample some beer along with the local crowd. The building was previously owned by the Guild house of the Cereal-Carriers (the owners will be happy to fill you in on the specifics!)
- **Vlissinghe tavern**, Blekerstrat (on the way to the Jerusalem church). closed Mondays and Tuesdays. One of the less touristy bars, with a nice selection of draught and bottled beers. It's probably the oldest pub in Bruges dating from 1515.

Get out

The most popular day trips from Brugge are to Antwerp, Ghent, Ieper, Oostende, and Damme.

- **Damme** is a small village near Brugge. Some of the riverboats go there on a half-day cruise. It's a very scenic trip, the landscapes are picturesque, and the village of Damme even more so. One can also go there by bike (special route) and by local bus. It takes about 15 minutes by bus and an hour by boat.
- **Ieper** is an important site of Great War battles, cemeteries, monuments and traditions such as the Last Post (every evening). Very popular among old veterans and young boys interested in wars. About one hour by train, and a very scenic ride.
- **Oostende** is the monumental beach resort that king Leopold II (1865-1909) built before his attention turned to destroying inner-city Brussels to build his new capital. The quintessential cosmopolitan 19th century beach resort, full of endearing villas that have been classified as official monuments. About 20 minutes by train.
- Close by, about 10 minutes by tram towards Raversijde, you can find the **Atlantic Wall**, two kilometers of trenches and galleries dating from both World Wars.

- Antwerp and Ghent are great tourist destinations in their own right.

For more info see: www.wikitravel.org

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