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**Bruges Tourist Information**

**By Meredith Booney**

General summary of city:

Bruges, Belgium, from the Norse word 'Bryggja' meaning "mooring place," is one of the three regions and the capital of Flanders. Bruges has a population of over 100,000 and covers an area of approximately 138 km. This historic city, with its natural link to the sea, became a commercial center for European trade in early medieval times, as the harbor filled with ships carrying wool, grain, and wine. In a short while, the door opened for trade with countries on the Mediterranean Sea and the first fleet of ships arrived from Genoa, Italy. With the increase in international trade and the influx of capital, Bruges soon became an extremely wealthy city and a worldwide banking market. Over time, however, internal revolts between the prosperous tradesmen and the common people of Bruges led to the subsequent decline of the city as an important center for trade. As silt began to form and fill the waterway, Bruges was replaced as a major seaport by the more accessible city of Antwerp. After its separation from the Netherlands near the end of the medieval period, Bruges today is no longer known for its maritime prowess, but for its preservation as a provincial city with a wealth of culture and history.

Places of interest:

Bruges, often called the Venice of the North, is actually much further inland, amid different arms from the sea, waterways created by repeated flooding from the North Sea. After constant dredging, the Reie River was turned into a network of canals, the Water Halls of the Market. The Court of the Market (Grote Markt), the Castle, and the small towns of Damma and Suis are visited by tourists in Bruges on riverboats owned by five families. The Market has a belfry tower from which you have a spectacular view of the city and the Provincial Court, on the east side of the square where the original water halls existed, is a wonderful example of neo-Gothic architecture. The statues of Jan Breydel and Pieter de Coninck, national heroes, are located in the middle of the market square. Within the museum adjacent to the Castle, The Shrine of the Sacred Blood houses the vessel that is carried in a procession every year on Ascension Day. The southern area of modern reconstructed medieval houses still reflects the original architecture of Bruges. In addition, there are several wonderful museums in the city such as the archaeological museum, with historical exhibits from the Stone Age and beyond. Another place of interest is the Groeninge Museum, which houses a magnificent collection of fine art, containing works by Flemish masters such as Van Eyck, Hugo van der Goes, Jacob van Oost, and the more recent

## Bruges Tourist Information

expressionist masterpieces.

### Things to do:

Walking through and around the ramparts that enclose this delightful, small city is one of the best ways to discover its charm. Carriages can be hired and scooters can be rented for an hour or a day of sightseeing, as well. Day trips by buses (fares are extremely reasonable) can be arranged to Sint-Trudo Abbey Male, former castle of the Counts of Flanders, and the Boudewijnpark and Dolphinarium, a theme park and panoramic aquarena. Take time for a stop at the Lace Center to watch the local artisans at work and the Antique and Flea Market where arts and crafts are featured. Exploring a bit further in the area around Bruges, you'll enjoy the beaches at Zeebrugge, a small seaside resort, and the quaint village of Lissewege located between the city and the coast. Zeebrugge

lies within 8 miles from Bruges, connected by a canal, and boat trips and visits to the exhibitions of the sea are popular things to do. There is no end to great shopping in Bruges, largely between the Market square and the old city gates. A number of small specialty shops are situated in the center such as De Kaarsengieterij, the oldest and only candle shop in Bruges. Here, you can find garden and interior candles, candle holders, and t-lights, or if staying in the city a while, take the opportunity to order hand-painted candles for gifts and special occasions.

### Food & Drink:

Bruges is known for excellent food and restaurants, featuring French and Flemish cuisine. Mussels, steamed in beer or wine, are a favorite of the people in Bruges and are often served with a side order of French fries with mayonnaise. Waterzooi is a type of soup with cream, vegetables, chicken, or fish, and paling in't groen consists of eels with vegetables and herbs. Popular selections for dining out, as might be expected, are in the variety of seafood that is available, from fresh salted herring to North Sea shrimp. Chocolate is a must for dessert or for purchase in the many shops or patisseries that surround the city and the Cote d'Or, with an inexpensive selection of chocolate bars. Wine is served in most places; however, with over 100 breweries in Belgium and 400 varieties, beer is the national drink in Bruges. There are three types of beer, lager or dark, white, and the lambic homebrewed beer, often flavoured with fruit. Beer is relatively expensive, but much stronger than beer from other countries. There are a number of restaurants and pubs such as De Garre that have great atmosphere and serve over 100 different varieties of beer.

### Hotels & Accommodation:

Hotel Prinsenhof Sofitel Brugge Portinari Patritius Best Western Premier Hotel Navarra Small Luxury Hotel The Pand Relais Oud Huis Amsterdam Minotel Azalea Hotel De Tuilerieen Die Swaene Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce Crowne Plaza Hotel Brugge Walburg Hotel \*\*\*\*Restaurant Hotel de Orangerie Hotel De Castillion Brugsche Suites Graaf Van Vlaanderen Hotel Asiris Hotel Ibis Brugge Centrum Hotel Cordoanier Hotel Botaniek Hotel Koffieboontje Hotel Jacobs Scandic Brugge Novotel Brugge Zuid Hotel Groeninghe Hotel 't Voermanshuys Hotel de Pauw Hotel Goezeput Campanile Brugge / Bruges Hotel Malleberg Hotel Gulden Vlies De Tassche Entertainment:

## Bruges Tourist Information

Bruges is a fun-filled city, if you're looking for some friendly nightlife. The nightclubs are small, but filled with lively conversation, drinking, and dancing. The Grand Café du Theatre features music from the 60's through the 90's, a large selection of beer, and snacks from 6 to 8 p.m. nightly. If you enjoy sports, the Snooker Palace is equipped with nine snooker tables, three dart boards, and a pool table. Backpackers in Bruges will enjoy the Snuffels Sleep-In Bar, where plenty of beer is available and free concerts are held every two weeks. Another favorite nightspot is Kant, a sophisticated club with a great dance floor, serving the best champagnes and a variety of local beer and wine. Bars and pubs are popular, as well, such as Celtic Ireland on Burg Square and De Versteende nacht, for Wednesday night jazz. Larger nightspots are nearby in Antwerp and Ghent. Evening strolls to the market square of beautifully illuminated historic buildings, the tranquil parks, or lovers' lake, are enjoyable pastimes while in the delightful city of Bruges.

Website:

<http://www.belgiumcities.info>

Meredith Booney is a freelance travel writer with over 20 years

of experience writing for travel journals, newspapers and magazines. Belgium Tourist Information

### **10 Must-Dos When In Bruges**

**By Steven Cronin**

A timeless spectacle, Bruges is a charming city full of medieval flavour. Its architectural treasures lure the eye, revealing a city of rich history. Serene canals and tight cobbled streets seize your imagination, enticing you to explore more and more.

1. Markt Square Watch the world go by in one of the Markt Square's multitude of cafes and restaurants. A vibrant open area, relax with a coffee as the rat race scuttles around you.
2. Basilica of the Holy Blood Upon homecoming from the Crusades, the count of Flanders returned with what was believed to be the blood of Christ. Unopened to this day, the relic remains in this 12th century chapel.
3. Groeningen Museum Bruges is blessed with many fine art museums, in particular the Groeningen, with Belgian and Dutch paintings including the works of Jan Van Eyck and Hieronymous Bosch.
4. Church of Our Lady Believed to be the only sculpture to have left Italy in his lifetime, Michelangelo's Madonna is a beautiful marble figure brought to Bruges in 1506 and housed ever since in the Church of Our Lady.
5. Memling Museum Originally built as a medieval hospital, the Memling Museum offers a fascinating insight into Bruges ancient history. Today, the museum is part of the St John's Hospital complex.

## Bruges Tourist Information

6. Zand Feasts July, August and September are host to these ever popular flea markets. Crowds flock to inspect the arts, crafts and souvenirs on offer at the lively bazaars.

7. The Belfry One of the great landmarks of the city, the 83 meter high Belfry tower dominates the main city square. Dating back to 1240, the original tower was destroyed by fire and subsequently rebuilt. Climb the 366 steps for a magnificent view of the city.

8. The Canals Sometimes referred to as 'The Venice of the North', Bruges is a myriad of canal networks. Originally an important trade route, nowadays the canals are used solely for tourism and are a great way of seeing the town from a different perspective.

9. The Minnewater Known locally as 'The Lake of Love', this enchanting lake stands at the entrance to the city. Elegant swans adorn the lake which affords commanding panoramic views across the city. During the summer, pop concerts play in the adjacent park, luring the crowds from near and afar.

10. The Beguinage If the busy and overcrowded city centre streets become too much, tranquillity can be yours in the garden of the Beguinage, a monastery for the Benedictine sisters who still live there today.

Steven Cronin owns the City Breaks website featuring city break special offers from luxury hotels to budget accommodations. For more information please visit

<http://www.sargas.co.uk>



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