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1. What is the definition of a walking tour?

Any tour conducted on foot that is offered in an organised manner and is carried out while an explanation or guidance is provided about the city. In combination with the above description, guided tours are considered as a walking tour for tourists that:

- are specifically requested;
- occur at certain announced times and places;
- usually wait for a sufficient number of interested people;
- are part of organised group tours, also when the walking tour is provided by a guide who accompanies the group;
- are part of a specific format or programme;
- take place in exchange for payment, even when participants are only invited to make a voluntary contribution or give a tip.

2. Why are walking tours for tourists regulated in Bruges?

Bruges is a popular tourist destination. This manifests itself in an increasing number of walking tours being offered in a variety of forms. This development is accompanied by several undesired side-effects which cause a disturbance or are an inconvenience to public order, tranquillity, safety and the image of the city. In particular, this involves touting, misleading advertising, excessive noise and non-respectful behaviour. With the bylaw on organised walking tours for tourists the city administration wants to avoid public spaces becoming purely exploitative spaces which affect the quality and experience of life in the city. That is why a number of rules of conduct are being imposed. Read Q&A 4.

3. Who does the bylaw apply to?

The bylaw applies to everyone who organises or guides a walking tour for tourists with the exception of private guided tours (for family, friends or guests) or those offered in an educational context (by teachers to pupils or students). Therefore, the bylaw makes a distinction between an organiser and a guide:

- An organiser is considered to be the person, company, organisation or association that offers the walking tours and arranges and coordinates the guides who provide this. To be able to organise walking tours for tourists in Bruges, you need to have a licence.
- A guide is considered to be the person who escorts, leads or guides the participants on a walking tour, irrespective of whether he or she is the organiser or is acting under the instructions or on behalf of the organiser. To be able to guide walking tours for tourists in Bruges, you need to have a licence.

Read Q&A 8: how to apply for a licence or authorisation?

4. What does the bylaw imply exactly?

The bylaw sets a number of rules of conduct within which walking tours in public spaces can take place. The most important rules of conduct are:

- Touting is prohibited. This means that organisers and guides may not tout or approach potential customers in public spaces. They are also not allowed to engage other persons to tout or approach customers in public spaces.
- A ban on the use of sound amplification in combination with the mandatory use of an audio system with a headset for groups of 25 people and above.
- A ban on stopping on the road to take photographs or to provide or listen to explanations.
- A ban on the use of street furniture (benches, rubbish bins, lamp posts) for addressing participants on the walking tour.
- A ban on placing visual and promotional information on public highways in combination with a restriction on visual and promotional information on other media (clothing, umbrellas, etc.) showing only the logo or company name of the organiser.
- A ban on the use of misleading advertising in promotional information or media, such as the use of the "I" (in this form or a derived form) that refers to official tourist information offices.
- Guidelines on courtesy and traffic.

You can find a full summary of the requirements and prohibitions in articles 5 and 6 of the bylaw (see Q&A 13).

5. Does the bylaw place any restrictions on walking tours?

The bylaw imposes rules of conduct (see Q&A 4) based on a concern for the quality and experience of life (see Q&A 2).

The bylaw does not place any restrictions on the number of walking tours or the number of participants on walking tours.

6. When does the bylaw enter into effect

The bylaw will enter into effect on 1 January 2018. From this date onwards, organisers and guides must hold the required licence or authorisation respectively and must also strictly observe all other provisions of the bylaw.

7. What is the difference between a licence and an authorisation?

The bylaw makes a distinction between a person who organises a walking tour and a person who guides a walking tour. An organiser must hold a licence and a guide must hold an authorisation. Read also Q&A 3.

8. As an organiser how do I apply for a licence?

It is simple to apply for a licence free of charge using the online form on the VisitBruges website. You can find the online form at www.visitbruges.be. Using the search function you can find the right page by searching for 'walking tours for tourists'. You need to enter some information and provide a solemn declaration via the online form. The licence will be automatically delivered to you (via a web link) by VisitBruges. All licence holders are published on the VisitBruges website. In principle, this takes place within 24 hours of registration. Registrations on Fridays and over the weekend will be published at the latest on the next working day.

9. As a guide, how do I apply for an authorisation?

It is simple to apply for an authorisation free of charge using the online form on the VisitBruges website. You can find the online form at www.visitbruges.be. Using the search function you can find the right page by searching for 'walking tours for tourists'. You need to enter some information and provide a solemn declaration via the online form and also upload a photo of yourself. That is why it is best to do the registration yourself. The authorisation will be automatically delivered to you (via a web link) by VisitBruges in the form of a badge.

Please note: as a guide, you can only obtain an authorisation if the person for whom you operate legally, in other words the organiser, is registered and the registration has been activated on the VisitBruges website. In principle, this takes place within 24 hours of registration. Registrations on Fridays and over the weekend will be published at the latest on the next working day.

10. For how long is a licence or authorisation valid?

The licence or authorisation is valid in principle for an unlimited period, except where it has been temporarily or permanently withdrawn.

11. Does the licence or authorisation need to be renewed after a certain period?

No. You only need to apply once for a licence or authorisation.

12. How is the bylaw enforced?

Breaches of the bylaw will be investigated and determined by the police and the competent officials.

13. What are the penalties for breaching the bylaw?

Breaches can be punished by the authorised official with a municipal administrative penalty of up to € 250. The city administration may temporarily suspend or permanently withdraw a licence or authorisation.

14. Where can I consult the complete bylaw?

The complete bylaw is available in six languages: in Dutch, French, German, English, Spanish and Italian on www.visitbruges.be. Using the search function you can find the right page by searching for 'walking tours for tourists'.

15. What happens with my data that I provide to the City of Bruges?

Organisational and personal data is kept in a database. It is only used for communication between you and the City of Bruges and is not made available to third parties. Companies, organisations and associations that have obtained a licence will be named and listed on the website of the City of Bruges.

16. Who can I contact with questions about the bylaw?

This Q&A list (which is regularly updated) contains the most frequently asked questions. Do you have further questions? Contact us by email at: walkingtours@brugge.be or by telephone on: +32 50 44 46 46.