

*Oooh!*  
Bruges

Discover four attractive walking routes along breathtaking and surprising places in Bruges.

- ~ The **Amazing World Heritage** walk introduces you to the city's most impressive highlights. Monuments, squares or churches that you simply must see. Your ultimate quick start guide to the best of Bruges in the city centre.
- ~ The **Burgundian Splendour** walk focuses on the heyday of the 15th century. You follow in the footsteps of the flamboyant Burgundian court, powerful nobles and clever merchants. And, of course, we mustn't forget the Flemish primitives. Ideal for those who like to spend a while dreaming of the glorious past.
- ~ The **Silent Nostalgia** walk immerses you in the hushed atmosphere of hidden monuments, cosy little alleys and intimate green spaces. You leave the beaten track in search of the lesser-known Bruges. A must for romantics and those seeking peace and quiet.
- ~ Thanks to the **Contemporary Hotspots** walk, you view the city in a different light. The streets along which you walk take you past architectural urban renewal projects and contemporary art in the public space. For those who just can't get enough of Bruges.

There is a long version and two short versions of each walk.



B R U  
G G E

VISIT  
BRUGES

*Oooh!* Discover Bruges through four walking routes



Discover Bruges through  
four walking routes

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## History in a nutshell

### *Walk 1*

**Must-sees:** Amazing World Heritage

### *Walk 2*

**Luxury and bling-bling:** Burgundian Splendour

### *Walk 3*

**Calm and collected:** Silent Nostalgia

### *Walk 4*

**Surprisingly now:** Contemporary Hotspots

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City map

# Must-sees: Amazing World Heritage



## *Walk 1*



4 km  
± 2.30 hours



This walk takes you through the tourist centre of Bruges. It's an absolute must for anyone visiting the city for the first time. In just a few hours, you will walk past all the highlights of the city centre's rich world heritage. Past stunning city palaces, towering churches and centuries-old squares. A solid chunk of history and amusing anecdotes will keep you company on the way. Some quality time for those enjoying life!

## Walk 1

- 1 Burg (Burg Square)
- 2 Vismarkt (Fish Market)
- 3 Huidenvettersplein (Tanners Square)
- 4 Rozenhoedkaai (Rosary Quay)
- 5 Dijver
- 6 Hof Arents
- 7 Gruuthusemuseum en O.L.V.-kerk (Gruuthuse Museum and Church of Our Lady)
- 8 Sint-Janshospitaal (St John's Hospital)
- 9 Walplein
- 10 Begijnhof (Beguinage)
- 11 Minnewater (Lake of Love)
- 12 Vesten en Poertoren (City Ramparts and Gunpowder Tower)
- 13 Koning Albert I-park (King Albert I Park)
- 14 Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall)
- 15 't Zand ('t Zand Square)
- 16 Sint-Salvatorskathedraal (St Saviour's Cathedral)
- 17 Simon Stevinplein (Simon Stevin Square)
- 18 Markt (Market Square)

*Good to know: there is a long version and two short versions of this walk. Consult the map (•••) to decide the most convenient route for you.*





## 1 BURG SQUARE

*Birthplace of the city*

From the 9th century onwards, Bruges grew out of Burg Square, which has served as the city's administrative centre for centuries. The Counts of Flanders had their residence here, and today the City Hall is home to Bruges' city council. The majestic buildings, some of which you can visit, emphasise Burg Square's role as a centre of power.

In the middle stands the 14th-century Gothic City Hall, one of the oldest in the Low Countries and a model for the city halls of Leuven and Brussels, among others. The innovative use of façade sculptures was particularly admired at the time. The impressive Gothic Hall is an absolute must-see. Bruges couples still get married here and it is where the city council meets.



### *Burg Square and Market Square, then and now*

Walk into the City Hall and view the paintings of Burg Square and Market Square in the foyer. They show how the squares looked in the 17th century. The painting of Burg Square (see page 45) features the lost St Donatian's Cathedral, and you can also see that the Liberty of Bruges Manor looked quite different too.

The painting of Market Square (see page 4) shows the Water Halls, which were demolished in the 18th century, and on top of the Belfry there is a wooden spire. It burned down twice, after which the city decided not to rebuild it again.

To the right of the City Hall you can make out the Basilica of the Holy Blood. Wander around the lower chapel (the only well-preserved Romanesque church building in West Flanders) and marvel at the neo-Gothic upper chapel. The relic of the Holy Blood has been kept here since the 13th century (see page 90).

To the left of the City Hall is the former Civil Registry with its Renaissance façade. The building is connected to the City Hall from above, as clerks from the city council worked here as early as the 16th century.

Next to it is the Liberty of Bruges Manor. Since the 18th century, the countryside around Bruges had the status of a separate area and was governed from this classicist

complex. The Liberty of Bruges had previously occupied several locations on Burg Square and was abolished by the French in 1795.

Both the Civil Registry and the Liberty of Bruges Manor now house the city services. Anyone who visits the Liberty of Bruges will be blown away by the monumental fireplace dating back to 1528, designed by Renaissance artist Lanceloot Blondeel.



*Oooh!*

### *Did you know that... a bear is the city's oldest resident?*

It's the mid-9th century, imagine a winter landscape. Baldwin I, first Count of Flanders, arrives in the vicinity of Burg Square. The first 'resident' he meets is a large brown bear, covered in snow. After a fierce fight, he manages to kill the animal and, as a tribute, proclaims it a symbol of the city. From the 16th century onwards, the bear appears in the Bruges city coat of arms, such as above the door of the Civil Registry.



## 2 FISH MARKET

### *Oldest fish market in Belgium*

Fresh North Sea fish used to be a delicacy for the rich, and was originally sold on Market Square. However, in the 18th century, because of the unpleasant smell, the fishmongers were banished to this square, which has since been called Fish Market. Originally, the fish was sold from wooden stalls in the open air. Until city architect Jean-Robert Calloigne was commissioned to design a colonnade to provide shelter in 1820. This building is now the oldest preserved fish market in Belgium.



The classicist building rests on 126 Tuscan columns, recognisable by their smooth shafts. Due to its sober and severe appearance, this type of column often appears in functional architecture such as warehouses, barracks or market halls.

In the courtyard there is a water pump with an Egyptian-looking obelisk, a fashionable trend at the time. On the north side, you will

notice a small square courtyard with a railing. In the past, the fish were displayed and auctioned here after they arrived.



*Fancy some fish?*

You can still buy seafood and fish preparations at the Fish Market (every morning from Wednesday to Saturday inclusive). Vendors of handmade goods also happily display their wares here. The weekly market selling food products can be found on Market Square every Wednesday. On Dijver, there is an antique and bric-a-brac market at the weekend and on public holidays.

## 3 TANNERS SQUARE

### *From skin to leather*

While the Fish Market served the rich, the poor of the 19th century bought cheap freshwater fish on Tanners Square, referred to locally as 'the little Fish Market'. Originally, however, the square was the domain of the tanners. Did the distinctive pole in the middle once hold the scales for weighing skins (and later fish)? Nobody knows for sure. The column that stands there now



only dates from 1925; two lions are holding the tanners' coat of arms. Now look at the large building with the almost windowless wall on the top floor. It is the guild house of the tanners, restored according to the 17th century model. This is where they stored and sold their animal skins that had been processed into leather. The adjacent building on the right was named 'De Groote Hollander' after the breed of cow with the same name. The cow is depicted above the door and scenes of leather processing adorn the façade. This was the inn where the

tanners liked to relax. Traditional leather processing involved different working methods, depending on whether the end product was a wallet, shoe or something else. The entire process could take up to a few years and due to the unhealthy air in which they worked, tanners often died at a young age. The dirty-looking little man on the corner of the guild house thus rightly turns his nose up.

## 4 ROSARY QUAY

### *A postcard from Bruges*

If you want to make an impression on Instagram, you should definitely take some photos on Rosary Quay. Until the end of the 18th century, this place was called Salt Dike, because this is where the ships moored to unload salt. They did so in vast quantities, because salt was the gold of the Middle Ages.







You could store food in it and use it to season dishes. Words like 'salaris', 'salaire' and 'salary', which come from the Latin word for salt 'sal', indicate the product's value. Even Roman soldiers were paid in salt. But how do we make the leap from Salt Quay to Rosary Quay? Well, the quay was also the place to be if you wanted to buy a rosary. Nowadays, you won't find any stalls selling rosaries here, but the street name (Rozenhoedkaai) refers to an abbreviated version of a 'rosary'. The believer usually works his or her way around the prayer beads three times and says a prayer at each bead. With the abbreviated 'rosary' (a 'rozenhoedje'), a single round applies. The fancier rosaries at the time contained precious African ivory or amber from the Baltic shores. Until the end of the 15th century, Bruges and Lübeck in Germany were the only two European cities that were permitted to work amber. A privilege

that certainly did not do the rosary makers of Bruges any harm.

#### 5 DIJVER

*From holy water  
to the College of Europe*

Due to the absence of quay walls, Dijver is the only place in the city where the Reie has, to a certain extent, preserved its natural appearance. Yet this canal is not

## Oooh!

*Did you know that... there is a good reason why Pandreitje is so wide?*


Pandreitje is situated perpendicular to Rosary Quay. Until the end of the 18th century, there was a street and a small canal here. At some point, the canal was filled in, which explains why the street is so wide. However, it would take 24 years to complete the job, as the city council wanted builders to dump their rubble in it. The trees were planted a good century later and are among the oldest plane trees in the city. Curious about the gatehouse at the end of the street? If so, turn to 10.



called 'rei' as is the case almost everywhere else, but Dijver, which means 'holy water' in Celtic. It is possibly the oldest place name in the city. Due to the presence of a forest of oak trees - sacred to the Celts - they most likely considered this spot along the water as a sacred cult site. While this place once served as a cult site, today culture and education are the dominant forces, as the Groeninge Museum and the College of Europe are located here. The Groeninge Museum is Bruges' most renowned museum with world-famous works by the Flemish primitives (read more at 3). The idea of the College of Europe (see also 5) was born shortly after the Second World War. At the time, a number of political leaders, including Winston Churchill, met in The Hague. They dreamed of an independent institute where students of different nationalities would study and live together. European cooperation and integration on a limited scale, so to speak, a fine exercise for the 'real' Europe. A group of enthusiastic Bruges citizens made an effort to establish this institute in Bruges, and the rest is history. The College of Europe can proudly call itself the very first European postgraduate college in the world. Its headquarters and administration is located on Dijver, but the institute has teaching and accommodation facilities throughout the city centre.



### Sailing on the canals

A boat trip on the canals of Bruges is an absolute must. For half an hour, you will experience Bruges from a surprising perspective. Towers and palaces seem doubly impressive! Rocking on the swell, you pass under century-old bridges or feel like a guest in one of the romantic waterfront gardens. And a boat trip is becoming even more enjoyable as the shipping companies are gradually switching to a sustainable electric fleet. You can jump on at one of the five jetties in the centre, indicated on the map by . All the boats follow the same route and sailings are guaranteed from March to mid-November.



## 6 HOF ARENTS

*Intimate city park  
with a museum*

Hof Arents was once the private garden of the manor house you see on the bridge to the nearby Gruuthuse domain. At the beginning of the 20th century, the city decided to purchase the classicist building with its 18th-century coach house and garden. The house and garden were named after the last owner, Aquilin Arents de Beertegem. The garden was turned into an intimate city park with an artistic touch.

Take the time to stop by the group of bronze sculptures in the middle. These are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse by Belgian artist Rik Poot, a chilling evocation of revolution, war, hunger and death (read more at 12). The stone columns also stand out.



They are the only remnants of the Water Halls, a large covered hall that once stood on Market Square (see also 6).

A museum housing the oeuvre of the British-Bruges artist Frank Brangwyn was created in the elegant manor house. He was a multi-talented artist who moved effortlessly between paintings, watercolours, drawings, furniture, carpets and pottery. He donated a significant part of his collection to the city. The ground floor of the House Arents offers space for temporary presentations from the collections of the Groeninge Museum and the municipal Print Room. Since 2002, the former coach house has been home to Musea Brugge's main museum shop. Be sure to pop in to buy a stylish memento or gift.

## 7 GRUUTHUSE MUSEUM AND CHURCH OF OUR LADY

*Burgundian grandeur*

The adorable little Boniface Bridge offers a great view of two absolute stunners. On the right, you can see the Gruuthuse Museum, which focuses on three important periods of Bruges' history: its Burgundian heyday, the lesser-known 17th and 18th centuries, and the historical rediscovery of Bruges in the 19th century. Each era comes to life thanks to a magnificent collection of ancient objects.

The interior is just as worthy of a visit; the lavish 15th-century city palace of the Lords of Gruuthuse houses the museum. During your visit it is possible to access the romantic balcony with a view of the photogenic surroundings. However, the ultimate eye-catcher is the authentic, medieval oratory, which overlooks the Gothic choir of the Church of Our Lady. Here the Gruuthuse family attended mass in private, without having to mingle with the masses. The oratory was the ultimate embodiment of their power and wealth. They had their private chapel built against the church and so it literally became part of the church building itself. What a nerve! During a visit to the museum, you automatically pass the oratory, which you can see from the outside as a roof over the narrow passage between the palace and the church. Just stand there for a moment and shift your gaze upwards



### Oooh!

*Did you know that... the  
Gruuthuses had a tiny window?*

A small Gothic window in the façade of the Gruuthuse Palace overlooks the water near Boniface Bridge. In times when electricity did not yet exist, such windows provided lighting and ventilation and were usually located in a corner at the rear. You could also look through it to peer outside, but of course you could not see very much. Bruges has a total of five such windows. Try and find them. If you follow all the walks in this guide you will discover three more windows.





to take in the monumental Church of Our Lady. The tower is about 115.5 metres high. Bruges builders worked for no fewer than 200 years on what eventually became the second highest brick church tower in the world. The construction of the present church started in the early 13th century, but there was a modest church on this site already in the 9th century.

The showpiece of the amazing collection is the white marble 'Madonna and Child' by Michelangelo himself, the only sculpture that left Italy during his lifetime.

Curious? At **1** and **13** you can read more about the Gruuthuse Palace and the Church of Our Lady.



## 8 ST JOHN'S HOSPITAL

### *Eight centuries of healthcare history*

St John's Hospital (12th century) is one of the oldest hospital buildings in Europe. At the time, Bruges was experiencing a growth spurt and the city council decided to provide shelter and care for those who needed it. Mind you, a hospital in those days was more of a refuge; the first concern was not to heal the body, but to care for the soul. St John's Hospital welcomed the poor and the sick, as well as travellers and pilgrims, because it was located along one of the most important approach roads just inside the first city walls.

At that time, the immense domain included not only the infirmary with the church, but also a cemetery, monastery buildings for the brothers and the nuns, a brewery, bakery, pharmacy with herb garden and an orchard. In the 19th century,

much of it was lost to make way for a new hospital. It was conceived as a central corridor with the wards positioned at right angles. This building still occupies a central location on the site and serves as a conference and events venue. Finally, in the 1970s, AZ Sint-Jan Hospital was built outside the city and continues Bruges' centuries-old medical tradition to this day. The medieval building complex currently houses an impressive collection of medical instruments, as well as a rich treasure trove of artworks. The seven works by the Flemish primitive Hans Memling are the ultimate crowd pleaser (see also **11**). The paintings, furniture, sculptures, pewter and silverware and much more bear silent witness to more than 800 years of caring for the sick and the soul. The monumental oak truss of the Diksmuide Attic, one of the oldest in Europe, is also unique.

## Tip

### *The hospital pharmacy*

Time seems to have stood still in the 17th century, almost authentically preserved hospital pharmacy. It is easy to imagine how the nuns in their rustling black and white robes processed the herbs into medicines. The room served as a pharmacy, a laboratory and a nursing room, as a painting at the site reveals. Another interesting item is the 'Winckel Bouck', which is kept in the pharmacy; it is an 18th-century recipe book for a number of commonly made medicines. The plants found in the book, such as aniseed, dog rose, fennel or liquorice root, grow in the herb beds near the entrance.



## 9 WALPLEIN

*Where beer flows underground*

Walplein is the home of the official Bruges city beer 'Brugse Zot' (Bruges' Fool). Ale has been brewed here since the 16th century, but real fame came about thanks to Brewery De Halve Maan. This authentic and also oldest city brewery still operating is a family affair and six generations of brewers have successively run the business since 1856.

The name 'Brugse Zot' refers to the nickname that Maximilian of Austria gave to the people of Bruges. The story goes that at some point, an exuberant procession of motley revellers and fools passed through the streets. When the inhabitants later asked Maximilian to fund a new 'zothuis' (lunatic asylum), his answer was brief but firm: 'I have only seen fools here. Just close the city gates, and Bruges is one big

lunatic asylum.' Since 2016, a three-kilometre underground beer pipeline has connected the brewery to the bottling plant outside the city centre. It is definitely a sustainable solution for the city centre, as transport by



lorry up to three times a day used to be a burden on people and the environment. Feel free to walk through the gate of the brewery and fix your gaze on the ground to glimpse this now world-famous and highly innovative solution.

Opposite the brewery on the square is a group of sculptures by Jef Claerhout, depicting figures from Greek mythology. The artwork is a tribute to Bruges coachmen and their horses, who also visit Walplein during their ride through the city.



*Beer addresses*

Want to brush up on your brewing knowledge while enjoying a refreshing pint? Head to Brewery Bourgogne des Flandres (Kartuizerinnenstraat 6). You can experience the brewing process there or pull a digital glass yourself. You can gather even more beer knowledge in the interactive Bruges Beer Experience (Breidelstraat 3) with its bar overlooking Market Square. Just outside the centre is the Fort Lapin craft brewery, a small-scale enterprise that enthusiastically produces beers according to its own recipes.



## 10 BEGUINAGE

*Deafening silence*

In 1998, the Bruges Beguinage, along with twelve other Flemish beguinages, was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. On entering the Beguinage, one is immediately impressed by this tranquil oasis of white-painted houses and the charming courtyard garden. The Princely Beguinage 'Ten Wijngaarde' was founded in around 1245 as a closed community of beguines. The single women, who did not take eternal vows and led a freer and more independent life than we might think, each had their own reason for living in a beguinage. They lived under the all-seeing eye of the grand mistress, whose house you can still recognise from the ornate Baroque façade in the south-west corner. Anyone entering the church with its Baroque interior will discover the oldest statue of Mary in

