

Bruges

A brief historical background

The history of Bruges begins almost 2,000 years ago. At that time there was already a Gallic-Roman settlement on the site of the present-day city. The inhabitants not only lived from agriculture but also traded with England and other regions of Gaul. Around the third century, Germanic tribes attacked the Flemish coastal area. The Romans probably maintained a military fortification in Bruges during this period, which suggests that the area remained inhabited during the transition to the early Middle Ages. Around 650, when Saint Eligius came to spread Christianity in the region, Bruges had already become one of the most important fortifications in the Flemish coastal area.

Around a century later, trade between Bruges and Scandinavia started to develop. The name “Bruges” is believed to originate from the Old Norse word “Bryggja”, meaning “landing stage”. The name Bruges appeared on official documents and coins from the middle of the ninth century onwards. At that time, the city already possessed a strong citadel known as the Burg. Unlike many surrounding settlements, Bruges was not destroyed by Viking invasions, and overseas trade with Scandinavia continued to expand.

Bruges therefore developed a long tradition of international port activity. The earliest port area remained accessible from the sea until around 1050. During the 11th century, Bruges expanded rapidly and evolved into one of Europe’s most important commercial centres. The city continued to grow around the present-day Steenstraat and Oude Burg. The Church of Our Lady and St Saviour’s Cathedral, both dating back to the ninth century, were situated on the edge of this early urban district.



Although the natural connection between Bruges and the sea gradually started to silt up, a storm flood in 1134 created a new tidal inlet known as the Zwin, reconnecting Bruges to the sea through Damme and Sluis. This development allowed Bruges to become the leading trade centre of north-west Europe during the Middle Ages. Flemish cloth and other luxury products were exported throughout Europe, while merchants from northern and southern Europe gathered in Bruges for trade, banking and commerce.

By the 14th century, Bruges had become a wealthy and internationally orientated port city with between 40,000 and 45,000 inhabitants. Besides cloth production, many specialised crafts and financial services flourished in the city. Bruges was one of the

first cities where merchants could make use of advanced banking services, such as money exchange, current accounts and financial transfers.

The Burgundian period began in 1384 and marked a golden age for Bruges. The city remained one of the most important commercial centres north of the Alps for another century. Luxury goods, international trade and the presence of the Burgundian court contributed to economic prosperity and cultural growth. Art and culture flourished, and Bruges became closely associated with the famous Flemish Primitive painters such as Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling.

Following political unrest and the death of Mary of Burgundy in 1482, Bruges gradually lost its dominant commercial position to Antwerp. Nevertheless, the city remained an important regional centre with strong artistic and international connections. By the 17th and 18th centuries, Bruges had become a quieter provincial city, although international trade continued through connections with England, Spain and overseas territories.



During the 19th century, Bruges experienced economic difficulties but gradually gained international recognition as a city of art, history and tourism. The publication of the novel *Bruges-la-Morte* by Georges Rodenbach in 1892 further strengthened the city's romantic image throughout Europe. The development of the port of Zeebrugge and the preservation of Bruges' historic cityscape helped establish Bruges as an important cultural and tourist destination.

Today, Bruges is internationally known for its well-preserved mediaeval architecture, canals, museums and unique atmosphere. Millions of visitors come to the city every year to experience its cultural heritage and historic charm. The historic city centre of Bruges is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and remains one of the best-preserved mediaeval cities in Europe.



Museums of Bruges

One of Bruges' greatest cultural strengths is the diversity of its museums and historical collections. Visitors can discover everything from Flemish Primitive art and archaeology to folklore, literature, silverware and local history. Bruges offers a wide variety of museums and cultural attractions for every interest.

The Groeninge Museum and Arents House present fine arts from the 15th century to the present day, while the Concertgebouw regularly hosts exhibitions dedicated to contemporary art.

Groeninge Museum

The Groeninge Museum is internationally renowned for its exceptional collection of Flemish Primitive art. The museum displays masterpieces by famous artists such as Jan van Eyck, Hugo van der Goes, Hans Memling and Gerard David. In addition to these works, the museum also presents paintings and sculptures from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Expressionist periods.



Opening hours (winter season)

Tuesday – Sunday: 9:30 - 17:00.

Closed on Mondays

Arents House

Arents House hosts temporary exhibitions featuring prints and drawings from the Steinmetz collection, alongside a permanent collection dedicated to the Bruges-born British artist Frank Brangwyn.

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday: 9:30 - 17:00.

Closed on Mondays

Guido Gezelle Museum

The Guido Gezelle Museum is one of the most important literary museums in Flanders. The museum is dedicated to the life and work of the famous Flemish poet Guido Gezelle and offers insight into the literary history of Bruges.

Opening hours (winter season)

Wednesday – Sunday: 9:30 - 17:00.

Closed on Mondays and Tuesdays

The historical museums of Bruges are grouped under the name “Bruggemuseum”, which includes the Gruuthuse Museum, the Church of Our Lady, the Archaeological Museum, the Belfry, the Town Hall and the Liberty of Bruges. Together, these museums preserve an important part of the city’s historical and artistic heritage.

Gruuthuse Museum

The Gruuthuse Museum gives visitors insight into daily life in Bruges between the 15th and 19th centuries through collections of furniture, tapestries, ceramics, silverware and historical objects.

Opening hours

Every day from 9:30 to 17:00.

Closed on Wednesdays



Liberty of Bruges

The former Palace of the Liberty of Bruges once served as the local court of justice and today houses the city archives. One of its highlights is the impressive Renaissance Chamber with its monumental 16th-century fireplace made of wood, marble and alabaster, designed by Lanceloot Blondeel.



Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday: 9:30 - 17:00.

Closed on Mondays

Belfry

The Belfry is one of Bruges’ most iconic landmarks. The mediaeval tower rises 83 metres above the city and offers panoramic views over Bruges and its surroundings. Visitors can also discover the Treasury Room, the historic clock mechanism and the famous carillon with 47 bells.

Opening hours

Monday-Friday: 10:00-18:00

Saturday: 9:00-20:00

Sunday: 10:00-18:00

The city's hospital museums are also important cultural sites, especially St John's Hospital Museum and Our Lady of the Potterie.



St John's Hospital Museum

St John's Hospital is one of the oldest surviving mediaeval hospitals in Europe. The museum recreates everyday hospital life from earlier centuries and is especially known for its collection of works by Hans Memling, including the famous St Ursula Shrine. Visitors can also explore the historical pharmacy and herb garden.



Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday: 9:30 - 17:00.

Closed on Mondays

Our Lady of the Potterie

This historic hospital complex, dating from the 13th to the 17th century, includes a Baroque church and a rich collection of paintings, sculptures, tapestries, stained-glass windows, furniture and silverware.

Opening hours

Friday – Sunday: 9:30-12:30 and from 13:30-17:00.

The picturesque St Anne's district is home to the charming Museum of Folklore as well as the historic windmills on the Kruisvest.

Museum of Folklore

The Museum of Folklore is located in a series of 17th-century almshouses and recreates traditional life in Bruges through thematic reconstructions of workshops and interiors. Visitors can discover a classroom, cobbler's workshop, hatmaker's workshop, confectioner's shop, pharmacy, tailor's workshop and authentic Flemish interiors.



Opening hours

Wednesday – Sunday: 9:30-17:00.

Closed on Mondays and Tuesdays



- 1** Groeninge Museum
- 2** Arents House
- 3** Guido Gezelle Museum
- 4** Gruuthuse
- 5** Belfry

- 6** Liberty of Bruges
- 7** St John's Hospital museum
- 8** Our Lady of the Potterie
- 9** Museum of Folklore

Walking Tour Bruges and Europe

Bruges and Europe (4.2 km)

This walking route explores the former Hanseatic quarter of Bruges, where many foreign merchant houses and consulates were established during the 14th and 15th centuries. The tour highlights Bruges' important role as an international trading centre during the Middle Ages.

The walk starts at Burg Square and continues towards Philipstockstraat and Vlamingstraat.

Royal City Theatre

Vlamingstraat. 29: The Bruges City Theatre, built in 1869, is one of the best-preserved theatre buildings in Europe. Its elegant neo-Renaissance façade hides a richly decorated auditorium and foyer. Today, the theatre is still used for dance performances, concerts and cultural events organised by the Bruges Culture Centre.

House Ter Beurze

Vlamingstraat 35: In front of House Ter Beurze, local and foreign merchants used to gather to conduct business and exchange money. The name of the Van der Beurze family later gave rise to the word "bourse", or stock exchange, which is still used in many languages today.

Burghers' Lodge

Academiestraat 14: The Burghers' Lodge is a 15th-century building that once served as a meeting place for wealthy Bruges citizens and foreign merchants. One of the building's most recognisable features is the Bruges Bear statue overlooking the street.



Jan van Eyckplein

Jan van Eyckplein 2: Jan van Eyckplein is one of Bruges' historic squares and is named after the famous Flemish Primitive painter Jan van Eyck. The square also features the Old Toll House, where taxes were collected on goods arriving from Bruges' outer ports. Nearby locations include Woensdagmarkt, with the statue of Hans Memling, and Oosterlingenplein, once home to the headquarters of the German Hanseatic League.

Potterierei

Along Potterierei, visitors pass the former Cistercian abbey "Ter Duinen" (Potterierei 72) and the former hospital complex of Our Lady of the Potterie (Potterierei 79). The

museum displays paintings, sculptures, furniture, silverware and historical objects created by Bruges artists and craftsmen from the 14th century onwards.

St Giles' Church

St Giles' Church is a 15th-century church containing several remarkable paintings by Bruges painter Jan Garemijn. The church is also known for one of the city's finest historic organs.



Carmelites' Church

Ezelstraat 28: The Carmelites' Church is a Baroque church dating from the late 17th century. Its garden also contains a historic plague house.

Joseph Rylandt Concert Hall

Ezelstraat 3: Named after Bruges composer Joseph Rylandt, this former Anglican church now serves as a concert hall. The façade features an expressive sculpture group representing the art of music.

Donkey's Gate (Ezelpoort)

Sint-Jakobsstraat: The Ezelpoort is one of Bruges' historic city gates and dates back to the 14th century. Although rebuilt several times, it remains an important reminder of Bruges' mediaeval fortifications.

St James' Church

Originally built around 1240 and expanded during the 15th century, St James' Church contains a rich collection of artworks and monuments connected to the Burgundian period.

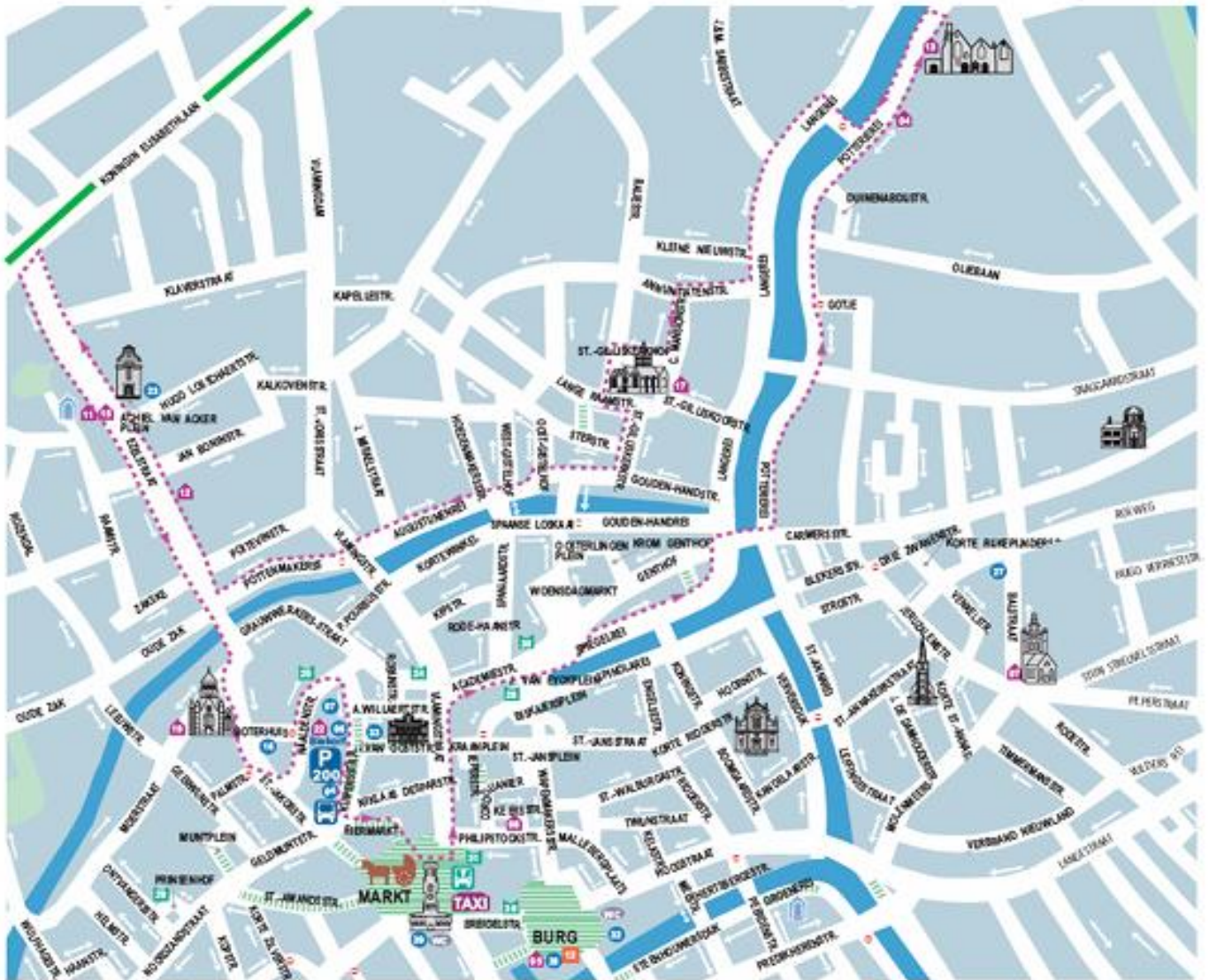


Bladelin Court

Naaldenstraat 19: Bladelin Court was built around 1440 by Pieter Bladelin, treasurer of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The inner courtyard is surrounded by decorative stone medallions portraying former residents.

The walking tour ends near Eiermarkt, Markt and Burg Square, placing visitors back in the historic heart of Bruges.

Map of walking tour Bruges and Europe



Walking Tour Bruges, City of Monuments

Bruges, City of Monuments (5 km)

This walking route explores some of Bruges' most famous historical monuments, churches, canals and cultural landmarks. The tour offers visitors a broad introduction to the city's rich architectural and artistic heritage.

The walk starts at 't Zand Square, near the **Concertgebouw**, one of Bruges' contemporary architectural landmarks and an important cultural centre for music and performing arts.

Take Zuidzandstraat, one of Bruges many pleasant shopping streets.

St Saviour's Cathedral

St Saviour's Cathedral is the oldest parish church in Bruges and dates from the 12th to the 15th century. Inside, visitors can admire Gobelins, choir stalls, paintings, reliquaries and the impressive organ loft. The cathedral museum contains historical paintings, brass tomb plates and religious artefacts.

Simon Stevinplein

This square is named after Simon Stevin, the famous scientist and mathematician born in Bruges in 1548. A statue in the square commemorates his important scientific contributions.

Hof van Watervliet

Oude Burg 27: Hof van Watervliet is a beautifully restored 16th-century residence located near Oude Burg. The building reflects the elegance of Bruges' Renaissance architecture.

Belfry and Market Square

Markt 7: The Belfry is Bruges' most recognisable landmark and dominates the Market Square. The mediaeval bell tower rises above the city and contains the historic treasury room and the famous carillon with 47 bells. From the top of the tower, visitors can enjoy panoramic views over Bruges.

The Market Square is also home to the Provincial Government Palace (Markt 3) and the statue of Jan Breydel and Pieter De Coninck, two local heroes associated with the resistance against French occupation in 1302.

Markt - Breidelstraat – Burg

Basilica of the Holy Blood

Burg 15: Located on Burg Square, the Basilica of the Holy Blood consists of a Romanesque lower chapel and a neo-Gothic upper chapel. The basilica is internationally known for preserving the Relic of the Holy Blood, an important religious artefact in Bruges.



City Hall

Burg 12: Bruges City Hall is one of the oldest Gothic city halls in the Low Countries. The building features the impressive Gothic Hall with its decorated vaulted ceiling and historic wall paintings. The Historic Room contains collections related to Bruges' political and cultural history.

Liberty of Bruges

The former Liberty of Bruges building once housed the regional court of justice. Today, visitors can admire the Renaissance Chamber and its monumental fireplace designed by Lanceloot Blondeel in the 16th century.

Fish Market and Groenerei

The fish market has long been an important commercial location where fresh fish and seafood from the North Sea were sold. Nearby, Groenerei and Steenhoudersdijk offer some of Bruges' most picturesque canal views and historic stone bridges.



Rozenhoedkaai

Rozenhoedkaai is one of the most photographed locations in Bruges and offers a classic view of the city's canals and mediaeval architecture.



Groeninge Museum

The Groeninge Museum presents an important collection of Flemish Primitive art, including masterpieces by Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, as well as later Belgian artworks.



Arents House

Arents House displays works by the Bruges-born British artist Frank Brangwyn and regularly hosts temporary exhibitions.

Gruuthuse Museum

The Gruuthuse Museum, once the residence of the Lords of Gruuthuse, contains collections of furniture, lace, ceramics, silverware, tapestries and historical objects that illustrate everyday life in Bruges through the centuries.

Church of Our Lady

The Church of Our Lady is one of Bruges' most important religious buildings and is famous for its 118-metre-high tower. Inside, visitors can admire Michelangelo's white marble sculpture Madonna and Child, as well as the tombs of Mary of Burgundy and Charles the Bold.



Archaeological Museum

The Archaeological Museum presents the history of Bruges through archaeological discoveries found in and around the city. Interactive exhibits help visitors explore daily life in historic Bruges.

St John's Hospital & Memling Museum

One of the oldest surviving mediaeval hospitals in Europe, St John's Hospital houses six masterpieces by Hans Memling as well as historical hospital collections, furniture and medical objects. The restored buildings are now also used for exhibitions and conventions.



Brewery De Halve Maan

The historic brewery De Halve Maan has been producing Brugse Zot beer since the 16th century. Visitors can learn more about the brewing process and the history of Bruges' beer culture during guided tours.



Beguinage

The Princely Beguinage "Ten Wijngaerde" was founded in 1245 and offers insight into the quiet religious life of the former beguines. Today, the site remains one of Bruges' most peaceful and atmospheric locations.

Minnewater Park

Minnewater Park and the Lake of Love are among Bruges' most romantic locations. Historically, the lake served as a dock for barges travelling between Bruges and Ghent. Nearby stands the Poertoren, a former ammunition tower dating from 1398.

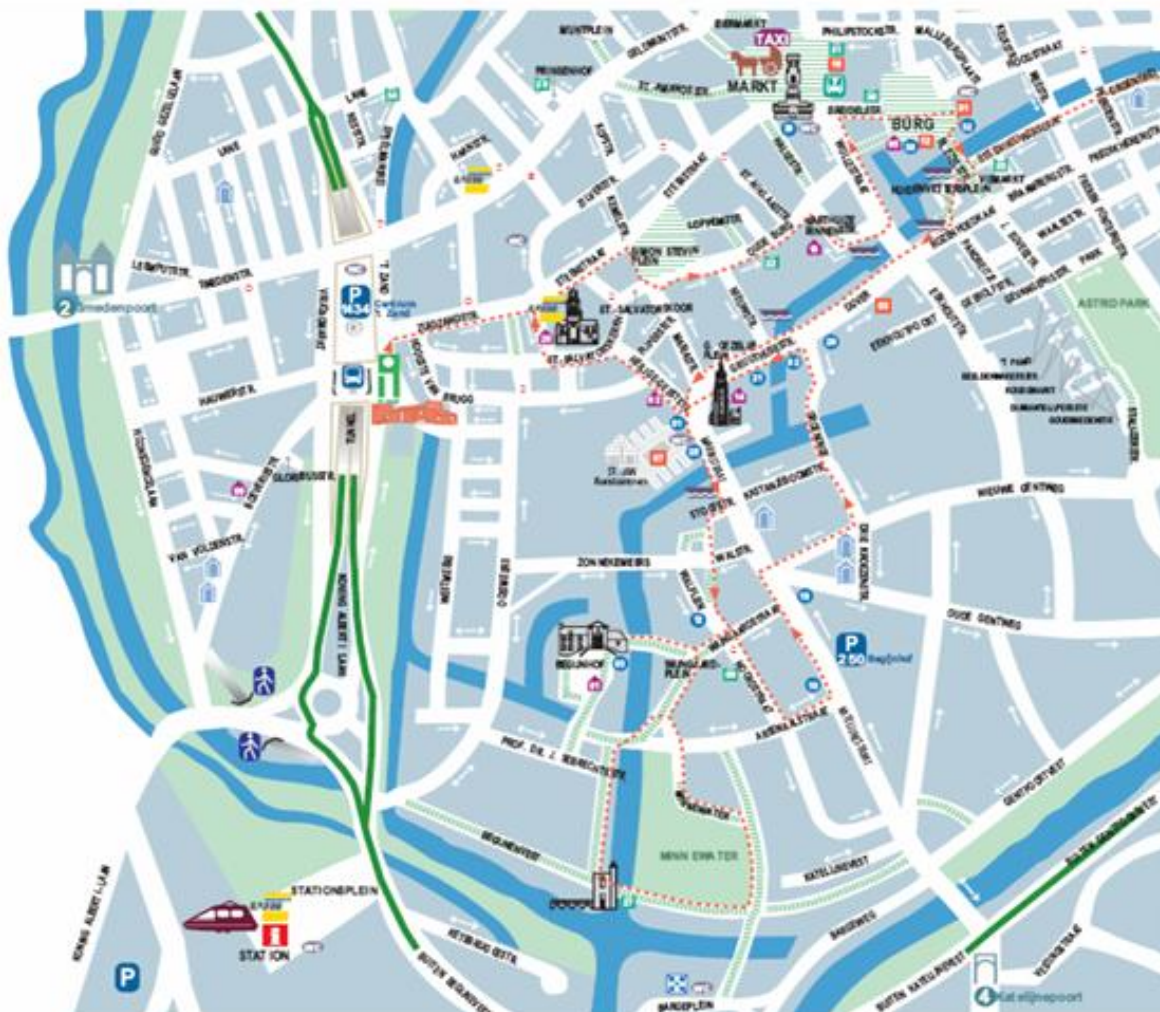
Hof Arents and Bonifacius Bridge

Hof Arents contains sculptures by Rik Poot known as the “Knights of the Apocalypse”. Nearby, the Bonifacius Bridge offers one of Bruges’ most picturesque and romantic views.

The walking tour ends near St Salvator’s Cathedral and ’t Zand Square, returning visitors to the cultural heart of Bruges.



Map of walking tour Walking Tour Bruges, City of Monuments



Surprising Bruges

Surprising Bruges (4 km)

This walking route explores a quieter and less traditional side of Bruges, centred around the Concert Hall district and the western part of the historic city centre. The route combines historical buildings, peaceful streets, green spaces and contemporary cultural landmarks.

The walk starts at Burg Square and continues through Breidelstraat towards Markt and Geldmuntstraat.

Muntplein

Muntplein is a quiet square where visitors can admire the statue “Flandria Nostra”, representing Mary of Burgundy on horseback. The square offers a peaceful atmosphere in the heart of the city centre.

Prinsenhof

On the site of the present-day Prinsenhof building once stood the Bruges residence of the Dukes of Burgundy. This location played an important role during the Burgundian period, when Bruges flourished as an international centre of commerce and culture.

Sebrechts Park

Sebrechts Park is a green oasis in the centre of Bruges. The park offers a quiet break from the busy shopping streets and historical squares nearby.

Speelmanskapel

The Speelmanskapel, or Minstrels’ Chapel, dates back to 1421 and was once the guild chapel of the city’s musicians and minstrels. The chapel reflects Bruges’ long cultural and artistic traditions.

Chapel of Our Lady of the Blind

This 17th-century chapel is known for its unique pulpit and its beautiful, gilded statue of Our Lady of the Blind dating from the 14th century. The adjoining worship complex adds to the peaceful atmosphere of the area.

Smedenpoort (Blacksmith’s Gate)

The Smedenpoort is one of Bruges’ mediaeval city gates and was originally constructed between 1367 and 1368. Over the centuries, the gate was rebuilt and restored several



times. Above the gate hangs a historic bell that once announced the evening closing hour of the city gates.

A bronze skull attached to the gate commemorates the attempted betrayal of the city in 1688, when a citizen of Ghent planned to open the gate for the French troops of Louis XIV.

De Bond

Located just outside the city ramparts, De Bond is a former cotton and wool mill dating from 1861. Today, the building serves as a creative and exhibition space used by the Bruges Culture Centre for contemporary art projects and cultural events.

Bruges City Ramparts

Part of the walking route follows the historic city fortifications of Bruges. These green ramparts provide scenic walking paths and offer a quieter perspective on the city's mediaeval structure.

Waterhuis

The Waterhuis is a 14th-century building that once formed an essential part of Bruges' historical water supply system. It remained in use until the middle of the 18th century.

St Godelieve's Abbey

Founded in the 17th century, St Godelieve's Abbey remains an important religious site in Bruges and reflects the city's monastic heritage.

Dumery Bell

The Dumery Bell, formerly used as a fire alarm bell for the belfry, commemorates the famous Dumery Bell Foundry that was once located in this neighbourhood during the 18th century.

Nearby visitors can also discover several historic almshouses, including Van Campen, Gloribus and Sucx, named after the families who founded them.

Concert Hall Bruges

The Concertgebouw Brugge is one of the city's most recognisable modern landmarks. Designed by architects Robbrecht and Daem, the building combines contemporary architecture with outstanding acoustics and hosts concerts, performances and cultural events throughout the year.



The Concert Hall forms a modern addition to Bruges' historic skyline, alongside the Belfry, the Church of Our Lady and St Saviour's Cathedral.

Fountain Sculptures at 't Zand

Near the Concert Hall, visitors can admire four sculpture groups created by artists Stefaan Depuydt and Livia Canestraro. These artworks symbolise Flemish cities, the Flemish landscape, Bruges' connection with the sea and cycling culture in Belgium.



The walking route continues through Zuidzandstraat and Steenstraat before returning to Markt and Burg Square in the historic centre of Bruges.

Map of Suprising Bruges



Walking Tour Tranquil Bruges

Tranquil Bruges (3.7 km)

This walking route guides visitors through one of the quietest and most picturesque neighbourhoods of Bruges. Along the way, visitors discover historic churches, almshouses, canals, windmills and peaceful streets that reflect the authentic atmosphere of the city.

The walk starts at Burg Square and continues through Burgstraat towards Philipstockstraat.

St Peter's Chapel

St Peter's Chapel, located in Keersstraat, was originally the chapel of the candle-makers' guild. Today, the chapel is shared by the United Protestant Church and the English Church community in Bruges.

Choco-Story Chocolate Museum

Located near St Jansplein, the Choco-Story Museum introduces visitors to the history of chocolate and Belgium's chocolate-making traditions. Demonstrations and exhibitions allow visitors to discover how chocolate is produced and appreciated throughout the world.

St Walburgha's Church

St Walburgha's Church is a magnificent Baroque church built between 1619 and 1642 by the Bruges Jesuit architect Pieter Huyssens. The church is known for its marble communion bench, high altar, pulpit and richly decorated interior.

During the summer months, the church is often illuminated in the evenings, accompanied by music performances that create a unique atmosphere.

Blekerstraat

Blekerstraat is home to what is traditionally considered the oldest pub in Bruges. The street itself forms part of one of the city's quieter and more authentic neighbourhoods.

St Anne's Church

The current St Anne's Church was consecrated in 1624 and replaced an earlier Gothic church destroyed during the late 16th century. The church contains a richly decorated interior with marble details, choir stalls, confessionals and historic chandeliers.



Jerusalem Church

Peperstraat: Jerusalem Church was built during the 15th century following the model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Inside, visitors can admire stained-glass windows and the mausoleums of Anselmus Adornes and his wife, founders of the church.

Lace Centre

Peperstraat 3: The Lace Centre (Kantcentrum) is housed in beautifully restored almshouses founded by the Adornes family. Bruges has a long tradition of lace-making, and visitors can discover demonstrations and exhibitions dedicated to this historic craft.

Folklore Museum

Rolweg 40: The Folklore Museum recreates everyday life in historic Bruges through reconstructed workshops, interiors and collections of historical objects. Visitors can explore traditional shops, classrooms, pharmacies and Flemish interiors that reflect local life in earlier centuries.

English Convent

The English Convent, located in Carmersstraat, is known for its characteristic domed church dating from the 18th century. The convent reflects Bruges' international religious history.

St Sebastian's Archers' Guild

This historic longbow archers' guild preserves valuable paintings, archives and objects connected to centuries of archery traditions in Bruges. The guild also maintains historical links with Belgian and British royal families.

Windmills on the Kruisvest

The Kruisvest area is famous for its historic windmills located along the old city ramparts.

De Nieuwe Papegai

Originally used as an oil mill in Beveren-IJzer, this reconstructed windmill was relocated to Bruges in 1970.

Sint-Janshuysmolen

Dating from 1770, Sint-Janshuysmolen is one of the best-known windmills in Bruges. The mill remained active until 1914 and has been operational again since 1964. During

the summer season, visitors can often see the sails turning and discover the traditional milling process.

Guido Gezelle Museum

Rolweg 64: The Guido Gezelle Museum is located in the birthplace of the famous Flemish poet Guido Gezelle (1830–1899). The museum highlights the poet's life, literary work and importance within Flemish literature.

St George's Archers' Guild

Stijn Streuvelsstraat 59: The crossbow archers of St George's Guild preserve an important collection of historical crossbows, archives and objects related to the city's archery traditions.

Bonne Chiere Windmill

Bonne Chiere is a wooden stilt windmill originally built in Olsene, East Flanders, and reconstructed in Bruges in 1911. The mill remains an important part of Bruges' historic city landscape.



Kruispoort

Kruispoort is one of Bruges' mediaeval fortified city gates and dates back to the early 15th century. Unlike the other remaining gates, it was constructed using white sand-lime bricks. The gate formed part of Bruges' historic defensive walls and has been rebuilt several times throughout history.



The walking route continues through Langestraat, Predikherenstraat, Groenerei and Vismarkt before returning to Burg Square in the historic centre of Bruges.

