Welcome to the World Heritage City of Bruges

There are places that somehow manage to get under your skin, even though you don’t really know them all that well. Bruges is that kind of place. A warm and friendly place, a place made for people. A city whose history made it great, resulting in a well-deserved classification as a Unesco World Heritage site.

In this guide you will discover Bruges’ different facets. There are five separate chapters.

In chapter 1 you will find everything you need to prepare your trip to Bruges. You will read about the ten must sees, get a brief summary of the city’s history and discover lots of practical information. Further in this chapter, the lovers of good food and drink will find a list of the best restaurants, while the shopaholics will receive tips for the most authentic and top-quality shopping addresses.

The three inspiring walking routes included in chapter 2 will take you to all the most beautiful spots in town. The detailed city plan – which you can simply fold out of the back cover of this guide – will make sure that you don’t lose your way.

Chapter 3 provides a summary of the many different possibilities for exploring Bruges and gives details of everything the city has to offer in cultural terms: a calendar of the most important events and a complete summary of the Bruges museums, attractions and other sites of interest, including historical, cultural and religious buildings and locations. Bruges’ beautiful squares and enchanting canals are the regular backdrop for topclass cultural events. And few cities have such a rich and diverse variety of museums, which contain gems ranging from the Flemish primitives and beautiful lace work to the finest modern art of today.

In Bruges you can dine at a different star-rated restaurant each day, or perhaps you would prefer lunch at a trendy bistro before wandering through the winding cobbled streets of the city? Or maybe you just want to take in a pleasant pub or one of the many magnificent terraces with a view? These are the places, full of charm and character, which you can read about in chapter 4. Five ‘new arrivals’ to the city will also tell you about their favourite places in town.

Staying a bit longer in the region? Chapter 5 suggests a number of excursions to the other Flemish historical cities, the Bruges Wetlands and Woodlands, the coast, the Westhoek, the Lys valley, the Meetjesland (Creek Country) and the Flemish Ardennes. The choice is yours!
Highlights of Bruges
The 10 ‘classics’ you don’t want to miss

Markt: an absolute must
The vibrant centre of the city has been dominated for centuries by the 83-metre high Belfry. Today, you can climb right to the top of this impressive tower. You will be rewarded with a spectacular view of Bruges and the surrounding countryside. The Markt (Market Square) is also home to the Historium, a top attraction that takes you back in time to the city’s medieval past. Ringed with colourful houses, the Market Square is also the regular standing place for the famous horse-drawn carriages. (Read more on pages 76 and 84-85)

Rozenhoedkaai and the Bruges canals, a typical city view
The Rozenhoedkaai (Rosary Quay) links the Belfry with the city’s network of canals, the true ‘veins’ of Bruges, and offers a unique and picturesque panoramic view. Hardly surprising, then, that the Rozenhoedkaai is the most popular photographic hot-spot in town! You can discover many more special places and hidden pearls during a boat trip on the canals. From the water, Bruges is even more enchanting. A classic that you really don’t want to miss.
Medieval splendour on the Burg

The Burg is the beating heart of the city. From the 14th century town hall, which is the oldest in the Low Countries, Bruges has been governed for more than 600 years. This majestic architectural square also contains the Palace of the Liberty of Bruges, the former Civil Registry and the Basilica of the Holy Blood. No other location in Bruges bears greater testimony to the city’s former wealth. [Read more on pages 75, 79 and 92]

Strolling through the old Hansa Quarter

From the 13th to the 15th century, Bruges was the most important trading centre in North-West Europe. Spanish merchants settled along the Spaanse Loskaai (Spanish Quay) and in the Spanjaardstraat. The Germans or Easterners – ‘oosterlingen’ in Dutch – took up residence in the Oosterlingenplein. In this old Hansa Quarter you can admire the mansions of the wealthy international merchants and the great trading nations of the day. You can almost still smell the atmosphere of the Middle Ages.

The Flemish primitives: timeless beauty

In Bruges’ Golden Age – the 15th century – art was king. Leading artists of the day, like Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, came to live and work in the city. Today, you can marvel at the masterpieces of the world-famous Flemish primitives in the Groeninge Museum and the St. John’s Hospital. Here you can come face to face with the great paintings that were created in the city all those centuries ago. [Read more on pages 84 and 90]
Accessibility

If you see the symbol 🚶 in this guide, this means that provision has been made for people with disabilities. Further details about the level of accessibility can be found at the tourist information offices.

Bicycle rental points

» 🤖 Bike Rental

LOCATION > Langestraat 145
PRICE > 3 hours: € 6.00; full day: € 10.00
OPEN > Daily, 8.00 a.m.-9.00 p.m. (bikes must be returned by 9.00 p.m.)
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 34 10 93, www.bauhaus.be/services/bike-rental

» 🍺 B-Bike Concertgebouw

LOCATION > Concertgebouw, ’t Zand
PRICE > 1 hour: € 4.00; 5 hours: € 8.00; full day: € 12.00. Tandem, 5 hours: € 14.00;
full day: € 22.00. Electric bike, full day: € 20.00
OPEN > During the period 1/3 to 1/12: daily, 10.00 a.m.-7.00 p.m.
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)479 97 12 80, info@b-bike.be

» 🏄 Bruges Bike Rental

LOCATION > Niklaas Desparsstraat 17
PRICE > 1 hour: € 4.00; 2 hours: € 7.00; 4 hours: € 10.00; full day: € 13.00, students [on display of a valid student card]: € 10.00. Tandem, 1 hour: € 10.00; 2 hours: € 15.00; 4 hours: € 20.00; full day: € 25.00, students [on display of a valid student card]: € 22.00
OPEN > During the period 1/2 to 31/12: daily, 10.00 a.m.-8.00 p.m.
ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES >
1/1 and 25/12
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 61 61 08, www.brugesbikerental.be
De Ketting
LOCATION > Gentpoortstraat 23
PRICE > Full day: € 7.00. Electric bike, full day: € 20.00
OPEN > During the period 1/4 to 15/10: Monday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m.-6.00 p.m. and Sunday, 10.30 a.m.-6.00 p.m.; during the period 16/10 to 31/3: Monday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m.-6.00 p.m.
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 34 41 96, www.deketting.be

Electric Scooters
Rental of electric bikes.
LOCATION > Gentpoortstraat 55 en 62
PRICE > 2 hours: € 10.00; 4 hours: € 18.00; full day: € 30.00
OPEN > During the period 1/4 to 31/10: Wednesday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m.-6.00 p.m.
EXTRA > Rental of electric scooters [see pages 20-21]
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)474 09 19 18, www.electric-scooters.be

Eric Popelier
LOCATION > Mariastraat 26
PRICE > 1 hour: € 5.00; 4 hours: € 10.00; full day: € 15.00. Electric bike or tandem, 1 hour: € 10.00; 4 hours: € 20.00; full day: € 30.00
OPEN > During the period 15/3 to 15/10: daily, 9.00 a.m.-7.00 p.m.; during the period 16/10 to 14/3: daily, 10.00 a.m.-6.00 p.m.
ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES > 1/1, 25/5 and 25/12, closed on Monday in January and December
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 34 32 62, www.fietsenpopelier.be

Fietspunt Station
LOCATION > Hendrik Brugmansstraat 3 (Stationsplein)
PRICE > 1 hour: € 6.00; 4 hours: € 10.00; full day: € 15.00. Electric bike, 4 hours: € 20.00; full day: € 30.00
OPEN > Monday to Friday, 7.00 a.m.-7.00 p.m.; during the period 1/5 to 30/9: also during weekends and on holidays, 9.00 a.m.-8.00 p.m.
ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES > 1/1 to 3/1 and 25/12 to 31/12
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 39 68 26 fietspunt.brugge@groepintro.be

Koffieboontje
LOCATION > Hallestraat 4
PRICE > 1 hour: € 5.00; 4 hours: € 10.00; full day: € 15.00, students (on display of a valid student card): € 11.25. Tandem, 1 hour: € 10.00; 4 hours: € 20.00; full day: € 30.00, students (on display of a valid student card): € 22.50
OPEN > Daily, 9.00 a.m.-10.00 p.m.
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 33 31 33, www.bikerentalkoffieboontje.be

Snuffel Hostel
LOCATION > Ezelstraat 42
PRICE > Full day: € 8.00
OPEN > Daily, 8.00 a.m.-8.00 p.m. (bikes have to be returned by 8.00 p.m.)
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)50 33 31 33, www.snuffel.be

Steershop
LOCATION > Havenstraat 3
PRICE > City bike, full day: € 10.00. Racing or touring bike, full day: € 25.00; per extra day: € 15.00. Bikes must be reserved online.
OPEN > Tuesday to Saturday, 2.00 p.m.-7.00 p.m. (collecting bikes between 8.00 a.m. and 12.00 p.m. is possible following reservation online)
EXTRA > Guided tours [see pages 155-156]
INFO > Tel. +32 (0)474 40 84 01, www.steershop.be

Most of the bicycle rental points ask for the payment of a guarantee.

Bike taxi
A bike taxi will bring you to your destination in an ecological way.
Bruges has lots of shops to offer you something special: authentic places that surprise you again and again with their clever and original products. The city is rightly famous for its harmonious mix of creative and trendy newcomers, vintage addresses where nostalgia rules, and classic establishments that have been run with success for decades by the same family.
**Where to shop?**

Because Bruges is pedestrian-friendly and the main streets are all close to each other, a day’s shopping here is much more relaxing than in many other cities. You will find all the major national and international chains, as well as trendy local boutiques. And if you leave the beaten shopping paths you will certainly make plenty of interesting new discoveries. The most important shopping streets (indicated in yellow on the removable city map) run between the Market Square and the old city gates: Steenstraat, Simon Stevinplein, Mariaplaats, Zuidzandstraat, Sint-Jakobsstraat, Sint-Amandsstraat, Geldmuntstraat, Noordzandstraat, Sint-Jakobsstraat, Sint-Amandsstraat, Geldmuntstraat, Noordzandstraat, Sint-Jakobsstraat, Sint-Amandsstraat, Geldmuntstraat, Noordzandstraat. There is also a small but elegant shopping centre, the Zilverpand, hidden between Noordzandstraat and Zuidzandstraat. Each neighbourhood has its own unique atmosphere. In Steenstraat, for example, you will find the famous brand names, whereas Langestraat boasts many little secondhand and bric-à-brac shops. The large hypermarkets are located just outside the city centre.

**When to shop?**

Most shops operate from Monday to Saturday, opening at 10.00 a.m. and closing at either 6.00 or 6.30 p.m. But this does not mean that you need to go home empty-handed if you come to Bruges on a Sunday. Many specialist stores are open on Sunday as well. And on ‘Shopping Sundays’ – the first Sunday of the month, except on public holidays, from 1.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. – they are joined by the majority of the other shops. To make your shopping experience more pleasant, there is restricted access for traffic on Saturdays and ‘Shopping Sundays’ in the following shopping streets: Zuidzandstraat, Steenstraat, Geldmuntstraat and Noordzandstraat (from 1.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.).

**Bruges’ craftspersons and specialty stores**

Creativity is built into the DNA of the people of Bruges; so it should come as no surprise to anyone that nowadays the city is teeming with innovative entrepreneurs. In the charming craft shops you are guaranteed to find an original, handmade gift to surprise your family and friends back home. Surf to www.handmadeinbrugge.be and discover dozens of fun addresses and inspiring stories. Also check out the official city app Xplore Bruges, which will take you to all the
Bruges, proud World Heritage City

Bruges may be, quite rightly, very proud of her World Heritage status, but the city is happily embracing the future too! This walk takes you along world-famous panoramic views, sky-high monuments and centuries-old squares invigorated by contemporary constructions. One foot planted in the Middle Ages, the other one firmly planted in the present. This walk is an absolute must for first-time visitors who would like to explore the very heart of the city straight away. Keep your camera at the ready!
WALK 1

» START
1 Concertgebouw, 't Zand

» DISTANCE
3 km

» FINISH
Saint John’s Hospital

Alternative route
From ’t Zand to Simon Stevinplein

This walk starts at the tourist office ’t Zand (Concertgebouw). ’t Zand is dominated by the Concert Hall, one of Bruges’ most talked-about buildings. Clear-cut proof that this World Heritage city isn’t afraid of the future. As of September 2017 the Concert Hall – Open House will take you behind the scenes and right to the very top of this magnificent building, where you can find an interactive space for sound art. You can also enjoy the wonderful view over the Bruges skyline. Don’t forget to drop in at the tourist office ’t Zand (Concertgebouw) on the ground floor: here you will find all the necessary tourist information as well as expert advice on all cultural events.

Leave ’t Zand (Concertgebouw) behind you, walk along the square and turn into Zuidzandstraat, the first street on the right. Saint Saviour’s Cathedral looms up ahead on your right after three hundred metres. Bruges’ oldest parish church is located on a lower level than the present Zuidzandstraat, which is situated on an old sand ridge. What’s more, in the Middle Ages people simply threw their refuse out onto the street where it was then flattened by passing carts and coaches. This raised the street level even further. Inside Saint Saviour’s, the church tower’s wooden rafters can be lit. The cathedral treasury displays interesting copper memorial plaques, fine examples of gold and silver and paintings by Dieric Bouts, Hugo van der Goes and Pieter Pourbus.

Continue past the cathedral and walk down Sint-Salvatorskerkhof immediately on the right. Turn left
into Sint-Salvatorskoorstraat. The Simon Stevinplein opens up at the end of this street.

This attractive square, lined with cosy restaurant terraces in summertime, is named after Simon Stevin, a well-known Flemish-Dutch scientist. His gracious statue naturally takes centre stage.

**Markt and Burg**

Continue down Oude Burg, a street in the right-hand corner of the square. Before long you will see the Cloth Halls on your left. These belong to the Belfry. You’re allowed to cross the halls’ imposing inner court between 8.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. during the week, and between 9.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. on Saturday. The Markt is at the other end of the yard. If the gate is closed, turn back and walk down Hallestraat, which runs parallel to the Halls. Walk 2 [see pages 45-47] comments more extensively on Markt.

Return to the Belfry and walk down Breidelstraat, a traffic-free alley on the corner at the left. Continue to the Burg square.

Along the way on your right you will notice De Garre, a narrow alley. This may be the narrowest street in Bruges (try walking side by side here!), it nevertheless boasts a fair number of cosy cafés. The Burg is the most majestic square in the city, so take your time to admire its grandeur. The main character in this medieval story is the City Hall (1376-1420), one of the oldest city halls in the Netherlands and a Gothic example for all its brothers and sisters that were built later, from Louvain to Audenarde and Brussels. Having admired its exterior, enter the impressive Gothic Hall and gaze in admiration at the polychrome floating ribs of the vaulted ceiling. Hiding on the right-hand side of this Gothic monument is the Basilica of the Holy Blood. It was originally dedicated to both Our Lady and Saint

**BURG SQUARE: AN ARCHITECTURAL SYNOPSIS**

Art lovers have already noticed that the Burg projects a wonderful cross-section of stunning architectural styles. It is, indeed, a summing-up in one place of all the styles that have caught our imagination throughout the various centuries. From Romanesque (Saint Basil’s Church) and Gothic (City Hall) by way of Renaissance (Civil Registry) and Baroque (Deanery) to Classicism (Mansion of the Liberty of Bruges). There’s no need to go and dash all around Bruges to see it all!
01 Adornesdomein – Jeruzalemkapel (Adornes Estate – Jerusalem Chapel)

The Adornes domain consists of the 15th-century Jerusalem Chapel (a jewel of medieval architecture built by this rich merchant family), the Adornes mansion and a series of adjacent almshouses. In the multimedia museum, you can follow in the footsteps of Anselm Adornes and learn all about the world in which he lived. You will go on a pilgrimage, take part in a joust and meet many notable persons of the time, such as the King of Scotland, the Lords of Gruuthuse and the Dukes of Burgundy.

OPEN > Tuesday to Sunday, 9.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. - 5.00 p.m., last admission: 12.00 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. (open on Easter Monday and Whit Monday)
ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES > 1/1, 25/5 (1.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.) and 25/12
PRICE > € 7.00; 65+: € 5.00; youngsters aged 7 to 25: € 3.50; children under 7: free
INFO > Peperstraat 3A, tel. +32 (0)50 33 88 83, www.adornes.org

02 Archeologiemuseum (Archaeological Museum)

This museum presents the unwritten history of Bruges. Its motto: feel your past beneath your feet. Discover the history of the city through different kinds of search and hands-on activities. A fascinating mix of archaeological finds, riddles, replicas and reconstructions shed light on daily life in times gone by, from the home to the workplace and from birth till death.

OPEN > Monday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.
ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES > All (Belgian) public holidays
PRICE > € 4.00; 65+ and youngsters aged 12 to 25: € 3.00; children under 12: free
INFO > Mariastraat 36A, tel. +32 (0)50 44 87 43, www.museabrugge.be

03 Arentshuis

In this elegant 17th-century mansion with its picturesque garden, the work of the versatile British artist Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956) is on display on the top floor. Brangwyn was both a graphic artist and a painter, as well as a designer of carpets, furniture and ceramics. The ground floor is the setting for temporary plastic art exhibitions.
**MUSEUMS, PLACES OF INTEREST AND ATTRACTIONS**

**OPEN** > Tuesday to Sunday, 9.30 a.m.-5.00 p.m., last admission: 4.30 p.m. (open on Easter Monday and Whit Monday)

**ADDITIONAL CLOSING DATES** >
- 1/1, 25/5 (1.00 p.m.-5.00 p.m.) and 25/12

**PRICE** > € 4.00; 65+ and youngsters aged 12 to 25: € 3.00; children under 12: free; combination ticket with Groeninge Museum possible [see page 84]

**INFO** > Dijver 16, tel. +32 (0)50 44 87 43, www.museabrugge.be

---

**01 Basiliek van het Heilig Bloed (Basilica of the Holy Blood)**

The double church, dedicated to Our Lady and Saint Basil in the 12th century and a basilica since 1923, consists of a lower church that has maintained its Romanesque character and a neo-Gothic upper church, in which the relic of the Holy Blood is preserved. The treasury, with numerous valuable works of art, is also worth a visit.

**OPEN** > Daily, 9.30 a.m.-12.00 p.m. and 2.00 p.m.-5.00 p.m.; during the period 16/11 to 31/3 closed on Wednesday afternoon. Veneration of the relic: daily, 11.30 a.m.-12.00 p.m. and 2.00 p.m.-4.00 p.m.

**PRICE** > Double church: free; treasury: € 2.50; children under 13: free

**INFO** > Burg 13, tel. +32 (0)50 33 67 92, www.holyblood.com

---

**Begijnhof (Beguinage)**

The ‘Princely Beguinage Ten Wijngaarde’ with its white-coloured house fronts, tranquil convent garden and beguinage museum was founded in 1245. This little piece of world heritage was once the home of the beguines, emancipated lay-women who nevertheless led a pious and celibate life. Today the beguinage is inhabited by nuns of the Order of St. Benedict and several Bruges women who have decided to remain unmarried. In the Beguine’s house, you can still get a good idea of what day-to-day life was like in the 17th century.

**OPEN** > Beguinage: daily, 6.30 a.m.-6.30 p.m.; Beguine’s house: Monday to Saturday, 10.00 a.m.-5.00 p.m.; Sunday 2.30 p.m.-5.00 p.m.

**PRICE** > Beguinage: free; Beguine’s house: € 2.00; 65+: € 1.50; children aged 8 to 12 and students (on display of a valid student card): € 1.00
What’s on the programme in 2017?

The list below shows some of the most important events taking place in Bruges. You can also find the same details in the monthly event calendar that you can pick up free of charge from the tourist information offices on the Markt (Historium), ‘t Zand (Concertgebouw) and in the Railway station. And, of course, for a detailed events calendar you can always consult the website at www.visitbruges.be.

**Bach Academie**  
17/1/2017 – 22/1/2017  
Bach learned his music at his mother’s knee, but in 1705 he set off on foot to Lübeck to become an apprentice of Buxtehude, whose flawless piano technique and *Abendmusiken* concerts were without a doubt an enormous source of inspiration to the young Bach. The seventh Bruges Bach Academy explores the musical richness of the Protestant Reformation, with a focus on choral works.  
INFO > [www.concertgebouw.be](http://www.concertgebouw.be) (You can read more about Bach and early music in the interview with Albert Edelman on pages 120-123)

**Wintervonken (Winter Sparks)**  
10/2/2017 and 11/2/2017  
Winter Sparks brings warmth and conviviality to the Burg square. The fourth edition of this winter festival once again guarantees scintillating street theatre, atmospheric concerts and heart-warming fire installations.  
INFO > [www.wintervonken.be](http://www.wintervonken.be)

**Brugs Bierfestival**  
(Bruges Beer Festival)  
4/2/2017 and 5/2/2017  
For a whole weekend the courtyard of the Belfry, the city halls and the Market Square are the place to be for anyone who wants to learn more about Belgian beers, old and new! The festival brings together more than 80 Belgian breweries, which account for the production of more than 360 different beers.  
INFO > [www.brugsbierfestival.be](http://www.brugsbierfestival.be)

**B Major!**  
1/3/2017 – 5/3/2017  
B Major! is a new biannual music festival in which all the professional musical actors in Bruges join forces. The result is an exciting five-day programme, specially made in the city for the city.  
INFO > [www.bmajor.be](http://www.bmajor.be)

**More Music!**  
12/4/2017 – 15/4/2017  
The Bruges Concert Hall and the Cactus Music Centre once again join forces to make More Music!, an exciting encounter between diverse and contrasting musical worlds. The result is an intriguing total concept that takes the visitor on an adventurous four-day voyage of musical discovery.  
INFO > [www.moremusicfestival.be](http://www.moremusicfestival.be)
Mooov filmfestival
19/4/2017 – 27/4/2017
This film festival, screened in Cinema Lumière and Cinema Liberty, shows the best new films from Africa, Asia and South America. The programme covers both artistically innovative movies and films with a social conscience.
INFO > www.mooov.be

BruTaal
5/5/2017 – 14/5/2017
A new biannual literary festival that invites international writers to offer their own views of Bruges in words. You can discover the resulting stories, manifestos and ‘urban legends’ by following a special route that leads through the heart of the city.
INFO > www.brutaalbrugge.be

Meifoor (May Fair)
5/5/2017 – 28/5/2017
For three fun-filled weeks some 90 fairground attractions ‘take over’ ‘t Zand, the Beursplein, the Koning Albertpark and the Simon Stevinplein.

Memling in Context
A fresh look at Hans Memling’s paintings of the Saint John’s Hospital
11/5/2017 – 8/10/2017
The best way to learn about the masterpieces of Hans Memling, one of the greatest of the Flemish primitives, is to view them within the context of the wider collection of the St. John’s Hospital. This new presentation sheds new light on his remarkably rich oeuvre.
INFO > www.museabrugge.be

Dwars door Brugge
(Running through Bruges)
May 2017
About 7,000 runners set off on a 15 km route through the city. This unique running event through the historic centre of Bruges is no longer just popular with local people, but now attracts competitors from all over the world. For the lesser gods, there is a 5 km course and a Kids Run is organized for children up to 12 years of age.
INFO > www.brugge.be

Budapest Festival
18/5/2017 – 20/5/2017
A three-day festival of music with concerts by the renowned Budapest Festival Orchestra, conducted by Iván Fischer.
During the week, the Italian Sonia Papili studies the North Sea with academic sobriety; during the weekend she guides her fellow countrymen with great passion around her adopted city. A passion that began gradually some eleven years ago, but now burns more brightly than ever.
Two geologists – him attached to the University of Ghent, her attached to the University of Rome – who met on a ship in Istanbul to discuss climate change: there are worse ways to start a long-distance relationship. For three years, the pair commuted back and forth between Italy and Belgium, before finally deciding to settle in Bruges. ‘I had only been in Bruges once before,’ says Sonia. ‘I was much more familiar with Ghent, but my husband thought that Bruges better suited my personality and temperament. And he was right: Bruges really is my city!’ In the meantime, Sonia learnt Dutch and started work here as a geologist. During her citizenship programme, she became more and more curious about the history of her new home town. ‘During the language course they told us a little bit about the history of the place. This intrigued me and so I decided to follow a three-year course to become an official guide in Bruges.’

‘I was much more familiar with Ghent, but my husband thought that Bruges better suited my personality and temperament. And he was right: Bruges really is my city!’

WHY BRUGES IS A WORLD HERITAGE CITY

In 1998, the Bruges Beguinage was recognized as a World Heritage site. A year later, the Belfry received similar recognition. In 2000, this was extended to cover the entire city centre. Since 2009, the Holy Blood Procession has been listed as an item of immaterial World Heritage. Bruges also has a valuable and impressive architectural patrimony and is a fine example of an architecturally harmonious city. In particular, Bruges is famed for its Gothic style buildings in brick. In addition, its authentic and organically developed medieval urban fabric has been perfectly preserved and it is also the ‘birthplace’ of the Flemish primitives. In other words, reasons enough for UNESCO to label Bruges as a ‘World Heritage city’.

ID-KIT

Name: Sonia Papili
Nationality: Italian
Date of birth: 17 May 1972
Living in Bruges since 2006. Sonia is a geologist with the Ministry of Defence and a tourist guide in Bruges.
The other Flemish historical cities

Antwerp (Antwerpen) 82 km
It is hard to describe Antwerp in a single word. This historic city has so much to offer: a beautiful cathedral and numerous imposing churches, a magnificent Central Station, the ground-breaking Museum on the River (MAS), the tranquil Rubens House, a delightful sculpture garden (Middelheim), a zoo with a history and so much more. Antwerp is also Belgium’s fashion capital, home to many internationally renowned designers. That is why in the Scheldt city you will find dozens of exclusive boutiques, rubbing shoulders with fun bric-a-brac shops where you can browse for hours: it’s every fashionista’s dream! Not surprisingly, the local ‘Antwerpenaars’ – who are fairly loud by nature – are extremely proud of their city.
INFO  www.visitantwerpen.be; there is a direct train connection between Bruges and Antwerp (journey time: ca. 1.30 hours; www.belgianrail.be).

Brussels (Brussel) 88 km
The whole world comes together in Brussels, with a different continent around every corner. It is a city bursting with life, from the exotic Matonge quarter to the stately elegance of the European institutions. The capital of Belgium has a vibrancy like no other and the formality of its ‘hard’ metropolitan structure is softened by the authentic, working-class ambiance of its more popular districts. In the shadow of the majestic Market Square, Manneken-Pis is permanently peeing. And this diverse city even knows how to reconcile the chic sophistication of the Zavel with the folksy informality of the Vossenplein. Royalty watchers rush eagerly to the Paleizenplein, art lovers can do their thing at one of the more than
hundred museums and galleries, such as the Magritte Museum, the BOZAR (Museum of Fine Arts) or the Horta Museum, foodies hurry to the numerous food temples, and vintage-lovers climb to the top of the Atomium. And in the city where both Tintin and the Smurfs were born, comic lovers will have their every wish fulfilled, with more than 50 comic-strip walls and a renowned Comics Museum.

INFO > visit.brussels; there is a direct train connection between Bruges and Bruxelles-Central (Brussels-Central, journey time: ca. 1.00 - 1.15 hours; www.belgianrail.be).

Damme 6 km
To the north-east of Bruges lies the charming town of Damme. Until the silt ing up of the tidal inlet Zwin, Damme was the transhipment port of Bruges. To reach the literary home of Tijl Uilenspiegel (Owlglass), you drive straight along the banks of the Damse Vaart (Damme Canal), which is without doubt one of the most beautiful pieces of nature in all Belgium. The canal is lined with magnificent poplars, some of which are over 100 years old. Their wind-twisted trunks add to the charm of the setting. You can also experience their beauty from the water. The nostalgic paddle steamer Lamme Goedzak travels leisurely and in style to and fro between the small medieval town and Bruges’ Noorweegse Kaai (Norwegian Quay). And every second Sunday of the month, Damme is transformed into a book centre, as booksellers from near and far come together to display their wares!

INFO > www.toerismedamme.be; scheduled bus no. 43 (not on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays, see www.delijn.be for the time schedule), bus stop: Damme Plaats; or by the paddle steamer Lamme Goedzak, www.bootdamme-brugge.be (For more information see page 67). You can also easily cycle to Damme (for bicycle rental points see pages 12-13) or hire a scooter to ride there (see pages 20-21 for scooter rental points).

Ghent (Gent) 39 km
No other people are as stubborn and as self-willed as the people of Ghent – or the Gentenaars, as they are known. It is built into their genes. In the Middle Ages, the ‘Gentenaars’ revolted against Emperor