



## Sight seeing tour - Flanders



### History

Jacob van Artevelde was from 1340 until 1345 leader in the city of Gent, and de facto ruler of Flanders (Vlaanderen). The count of Flanders, Louis de Nevers, the ruler de jure, sought the protection of Philippe VI de Valois, king of France. Jacob van Artevelde adopted a policy of neutrality between France and England: Flanders was a feudal dependency of France, but it was heavily dependent on England because of the wool it needed for its industry. France didn't want to give up Flanders so easily and this eventually led to the beginning of the Hundred Years War, started by the coronation of Edward III of England as king of France in Ghent.

The area of the county contained roughly the present-day Belgian provinces of West- and East-Flanders. Flanders used a black lion on a golden field as flag, and this flag was already used in the famous battle of 1302 near Kortrijk, where the king of France was defeated. This flag is still in use by the Belgian province of East-Flanders, and was also present on the former flag of West-Flanders. It is also the flag of the Flemish region and community, and in general, is used by the Flemish nationalist movement as its symbol. (Filip van Laenen, 29 January 1997)

## Touring possibilities



Green Flanders: picturesque regions, each with its own character.  
Art Cities: Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp, Ghent, Mechelen, Leuven.  
The Flemish Coast: holiday atmosphere the whole year round.

## Ghent (Gent)



The city of Ghent used at that time a white lion on a black field. The lion had golden nails, a red tongue, a golden crown and a golden collar, with a cross attached to it. It is an armorial banner, and is still used by the city today. (Filip Van Laenen, 29 January 1997)

Around the year 867, Baldwin Iron Arm, the first Count of Flanders, decided to build a castle at the meeting of the Lieve and Leie rivers in order to thwart the raiding Norsemen. A town soon grew up around the castle, and Baldwin adopted it as the seat of his domain. By the 12th century, the castle had been enlarged and strengthened and the town of Ghent was rapidly growing into a prosperous city. The cloth trade flourished here like nowhere else and within a century Ghent had become an industrial city with a population greater than that of any city in Europe. Such prosperity brought the workers and citizens into conflict with the ruling nobility; and the city experienced frequent clashes between the two for the next several centuries.



By the late 15th century, the cloth trade had begun to wane, though Ghent remained prosperous by shifting its economy to the shipping trade along the Leie and Scheldt rivers. In the latter part of the century, however, the closing of the Scheldt brought commercial decline, not to be reversed until the revival of clothworking during the industrial boom of the 19th century.



Today Ghent is a leading industrial center and a major inland port. However, its historic center, including the medieval districts, many fine churches, and the imposing castle of the Counts of Flanders, remain intact. Its Belfry (or Belfort) and Cloth Hall are among the finest monuments of the great era of Flemish clothworking, and within the magnificent Cathedral of Saint Bavo resides one of the greatest works of art ever created "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb" also known simply as the Ghent Altarpiece, by the brothers Van Eyck. This masterful polyptych should not be missed by any visitor to this city.

## **Bruges (Brugge)**

The city of Bruges uses a blue lion, with red nails and a golden tongue. The lion has a golden crown and a golden collar with a cross. The field consists of five red bars on white. This flag is also an armorial banner and is still in use. (Filip Van Laenen, 29 January 1997)



### The history of Bruges

Bruges (Brugge) was founded in the 9th century by Vikings who settled here at the end of the little river 'de Reie'. The name Bruges is probably derived from the old-Scandinavian word 'Bryggia', which means 'harbor, or mooring place'. Because of the proximity of the North Sea, the settlement very quickly became an important international harbor. A sea-arm, called the Zwin, connected Bruges with the North Sea. The young settlement acquired city rights as early as the 12th century. At that time a first protective wall was built around Bruges. Soon, however, the Zwin started to silt up. This would have caused major problems for the city, were it not that Bruges adapted itself to this situation by creating outports in Damme and in Sluis. Moreover, transport of goods over land became more and more usual. In the 14th century Bruges became the starting point of a commercial transport road to the Rhineland (over Brussels and Leuven, cities in Brabant which also started to flourish because of this trade).

Already in the 13th century Bruges was an important international trading center. Traders from all over the, then known, world came to the city to sell their products to each other and to buy Flemish cloth, an internationally acclaimed textile product, produced in different Flemish cities (e.g. Gent). In the early 14th century Bruges was the scene of political unrest between the citizens and the count of Flanders. Because of this unrest the French king tried to annex the county of Flanders, but the population managed to kick out the French garrison on May the 18th 1302. Later the Flemish army beat the French army in the 'Battle of the Golden Spurs' on July the 11th in the Flemish city of Kortrijk.



### The oldest citizen of Bruges

According to legend, a bear was the oldest citizen of Bruges. It started when in 862 Baldwin I, Count of Flanders kidnapped Judith, the daughter of the French king Charles the Bold, from a monastery in Senlis (France). After the kidnapping, Baldwin married Judith, but was not accepted by her father as his new son-in-law. To punish Baldwin, Charles the Bold sent him off to one of his northern territories, the area now known as Flanders.

When Baldwin and his new bride arrived in the forests surrounding the area where you now can find Bruges, he did not see one living soul. Suddenly, a ferocious bear came out of the woods. Baldwin killed the animal with his spear. According to legend, the bear crept out of his skin and took his place in the town weapon of Bruges. Later he received a statue in the Porters' Lodge.

In the 14th century Bruges turned also into an international financial and trading center. It became the warehouse of the North-European Hanza cities. Several countries had their own representation in Bruges: the Italians, the Germans, the Scottish and the Spanish made the city into a true European center where different languages could be heard and where the most exotic products could be found.

The decline of Bruges' wealth started in the 15th century : the unstoppable silting up of the Zwin, the competition with the bigger harbor of Antwerp and the crisis in the cloth industry resulted in less commercial activity. The crisis, however, was not immediately noticeable. Bruges continued to construct splendid late-gothic buildings and churches, and the Flemish painting school (with e.g. the brothers Van Eyck and Hans Memling ) started to flourish as never before.

By the end of the 16th century the former glory was only a memory and Bruges slipped into a wintersleep that took several centuries. New textile industries were introduced in the 19th century, but to no avail. In the middle of the 1800's Brugge was the poorest city in Belgium. The 20th century, however, brought new life. The city was discovered by the international tourism and the medieval heritage turned out to be a new source of wealth for the 'Venice of the North'. Economically and industrially another important evolution took place. The new harbor of Zeebrugge (Seabrugge-at 10 miles outside of the city, at the Belgian coast) brought new developments and new industries to the region.

"The city of Bruges is like a dream, the only difference is that it is real".

The cobblestone streets, canals and 15th and 16th century architecture make this one of the most beautiful cities in Europe and a tourist magnet for Belgium.

The fortunes of Bruges rose and fell with the strength of the Zwin, the river on which the city is built. Although there is evidence that the area was inhabited as far back as Neolithic times, the beginning of Bruges' history, as a pre-eminent commercial and cultural center, is marked by the great Dunkerque Floods of the twelfth century. The wash of the flood waters made the Zwin into an ideal trade river, and Bruges soon prospered. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the city became one of the richest in the world, its trade supplemented by fine cloth manufacturers and excellent banking services.



Its population soared, its port welcomed ships from all over the world, its artisans produced tapestries, sculpture, paintings and lace of unparalleled splendor, and its wealthy citizens patronized the finest artists of the age.

By the middle of the 16th century, all this had changed. The Zwin had begun to silt up, discouraging the passage of commercial shipping. Trade routes shifted and the cloth industry declined. After suffering a series of sieges and attacks over the next few centuries, Bruges had by the 18th century become a ghost of its former self.

At its city center, Bruges remains a medieval city of stunning beauty and charm. It is rich in architectural and artistic treasures, graced by quiet canals and waterways and a favorite to visitors.

The Belfry (13th and 15th century) at the old city center is widely considered Belgium's finest, with a carillon that has rung every quarter hour for nearly seven and a half centuries.

Undoubtedly the most enjoyable way to visit Bruges is to amble along its cobbled streets, glide by boat along its tranquil canals and discover a city that time has forgotten.

Among the city's most notable monuments are the Memling Museum, housed in the church of the medieval Hospital of St. John, the Groeningen Museum, and the Church of Our Lady.

The Memling Museum, as its name suggests, contains as its primary attraction six works by the Flemish painter Hans Memling (c. 1430-1494). The most renowned of these is the Shrine of St. Ursula, a reliquary decorated by several extraordinary paintings illustrating the legend of the saint. Memling set the legend in the Europe of his own time and one of the most fascinating aspects of the panels is their painstakingly accurate portrayal of their contemporary world.

## Antwerp

Antwerp reached its peak after the decline of Bruges and emerged as the most important trading port in the 15th and 16th centuries. Ornate baroque mansions remind us of the opulent merchants who commissioned tapestry, paintings, silverware, and sculpture that can now be found in its churches and museums.



The most beautiful monument is without a doubt the Gothic Cathedral of Our Lady housing two masterpieces, the "Raising of the Cross" and the "Descent from the Cross", by Peter Paul Rubens, the local celebrity. His wonderful Flemish Renaissance house linked by an elegant Italian portico to the Italian Renaissance atelier can be visited. More of his paintings are in the museum together with the works of his pupil Anthony van Dyck, as well as Teniers, Breughel, Jordaens, Matsys, Permeke, Ensor and many more.

The Plantin Moretus Museum will give you an idea of how a 16th century printing plant actually worked. Today it houses priceless bibles, books, prints, as well as the family portraits by Peter Paul Rubens.

Among the city's many other attractions are the Diamond Museum where the entire process of diamond mining and processing can be viewed. Antwerp is the center of the world's diamond industry. More than 70% of the world's diamonds are cut, polished and traded here. Also worth a visit is the Antwerp Zoo. On the grounds of the nearby estate of Middelheim is the open-air Museum of Modern Sculpture, which exhibits works by virtually all major sculptors from Rodin to the present day.

Antwerp has a very lively night life. A famous opera house, concerts, ballets and theatres provide entertainment for the culturally hungry. If you really want to see the local scene, join a group of animated beer-pub crawlers and sample a few of our 400 beers.

## Leuven



The famous university “Alma Mater” exists since 1425. Erasmus founded the Three Language College where Hebrew, Latin and Greek were taught and which served as model for the College de France in Paris. Justus Lipsius, Mercator, Vesalius were all scholars here. It is impossible to walk in the city without immediately noticing the spectacular flamboyant Gothic Town Hall. The ornate sculpted turrets, gables, pinnacles and balustrade make it look like it were made of lace.

Opposite of the Town Hall is St. Peter, the elegant Gothic church which houses the triptych “The last Supper” by Dirk Bouts.

The Great Beguinage was built in the 13th century and sold to the university in 1962. Beautifully restored it is now a residential quarter for students and professors.

Not surprisingly, with a large thirsty student population, Leuven is a great beer town. Stella Artois now called Interbrew is one of the largest breweries in the world and can be visited. A much smaller brewery Domus brews seasonal beers and is linked by pipeline to the tavern taps!

## Mechelen



Mechelen is one of the most richly historic towns and a very easy, very rewarding almost mandatory stop, 30’ from either Brussels or Antwerp.

In the 15th and 16th centuries Mechelen was the capital of the Burgundian Netherlands (present Belgium and Holland). It was the residence of Margareth of Austria, regent of these Netherlands and aunt and tutor of Charles V later to become the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

Fabulous historic buildings reflect Mechelen's glorious past: the gothic Town hall and its Belfry, the Palace of the Grand Council, Margareth of Austria's palace, the Court of Busleyden and the Beguinage. The imposing and magnificent tower of St. Rumbold Cathedral dominates the city, which is also the seat of the Arch bishop of Belgium. National and international carillon (tower bells) players treat the visitors to concerts on Saturdays and Sundays year round. Mechelen is the mecca for carillon musicians who come here from all over the world to study this difficult art. In the "Royal Manufacture of Tapestry Gaspard de Wit" you can follow the evolution of tapestry weaving from the 16th century on.

## Ypres

Best known for its World War I battlefields and the Menin gate.

When entering the Menenstraat (Menin Street), the most important war monument of Ypres can be seen : the Menin Gate. The name 'Menin' is the English and French version of the city which is called in Dutch 'MENEN'.

The Menin Gate was rebuilt as a British War Memorial. It looks like a large triumphal arch in neoclassicist style and was built from 1923 until 1927 on the site of the former city gate. The gate was designed by the British Architect Sir Reginald Bloomfield. Under the roof and against the walls of the monument are the names of 54.896 British and Commonwealth soldiers that were reported missing in the Great War.

Every night, the Ypres Fire Department plays here 'The last Post' at 8 p.m. as a tribute to the fallen soldiers.



The truly gigantic cloth hall overlooks the Market Square, the political and economic heart of Ypres. This most beautiful and imposing medieval cloth hall of Flanders was carefully rebuilt after its destruction in the Great War. In the past the building was used as a covered market hall for the famous cloth of Ypres, the product on which the success of the city's economy was based.

The eastern wing and the belfry tower were built as from 1260, the western wing and the side wing followed in 1286. By 1304 the cloth hall was completed. The main façade is 125 m long. On both ends two slender little towers can be seen. In the middle arises the imposing belfry tower with a height of 70 m and a carillon with 49 bells. From the top, when the weather is nice you can have a beautiful view over the surrounding area.

Several statues decorate the facade of the cloth hall. A lot of the original statues did not survive the war. There are also statues of King Albert I and his wife Queen Elisabeth who opened the reconstructed belfry tower in 1934. In and around the cloth hall a lot of remaining old statues and parts of the original building can be seen. After the destruction of Ypres in the First World War, the town hall was meticulously reconstructed from 1934 until 1958 by the architects Coomans and Pauwels, who followed as closely as possible the original plan. Inside the Cloth Hall is now the Flanders Fields Museum.

## **Kortrijk**

The Town Hall was built in a late gothic-renaissance style. The Aldermen's Chamber, on the ground floor, was used as a court. Upstairs, the Council Hall was the place where laws were made in the old days. Both rooms have a mantelpiece dating back to the 16th century. The sculptors are still unknown. Please take notice of the stained window glasses and the mural paintings. Two topographic maps are to be seen on the walls of the Council Chamber: the left one is a map of the "Kasselrij", the one on the right-hand side represents the city of Kortrijk and its surrounding area (1641). After leaving the Town Hall, we take a look at the facade of the building, decorated with the statues of the Counts of Flanders. Now we are standing on the Market Square, in the middle of which we can see the Belfry.

The Belfry is the only remaining part of the medieval Cloth-Halls. The statue of Mercurius, god of trade, was placed on top of the building during the 18th century. "Marten" and "Kalle" strike the hour on the clock of the Belfry. At its backside, a war memorial has been erected.

The pointed tower of Saint Martin's church. This church dates back to the second half of the 13th century. It was destroyed in 1382 and rebuilt in the beginning of the 15th century. The tower, built in gothic style, was added later on, because the original tower was wrecked in 1682. In the tower, there is a carillon of 49 bells.

Inside the church we can admire several paintings by flemish painters, the Baptistery, the Sacraments tower, the pulpit in Baroque style and the Way of the Cross sculptured in fine Burgundian white stone.



### The beguinage

Past the gate, you will enjoy the cosy atmosphere dominating the Beguinage. The Beguinage consists of about 40 small houses dating back to the 17th century. Nowadays, the last Beguin and a couple of

aged ladies are still living there. In the middle of a lawn rises the statue of Countess Joan of Constantinople, who is considered to be the foundress of the Beguinage.

The house with the stepped gable, in which the Superior Lady lived, is now a small museum that evokes the history of and life in the Beguinage in former times.

The old chapel of 1465, a round stairs tower, the corner of the St-Anne's room, the last novice house or convent at number 17, the picturesque Our Lady of Snow's Chapel.

Our Lady's church. This church is the oldest building in town (13th century). It was part of the town's fortifications, which were built to defend the castle of the Counts, now completely disappeared. The front with the two towers dates back to the second half of the 13th century. The castle and chapel, built by Lodewijk van Maele, in honour of Saint Catherina, about 1370, were destroyed after the battle of Westrozebeke in 1382. The church was rebuilt in the style of the 15th century. In 1578, the iconoclasts destroyed the interior. The church's interior was repaired in baroque style during the 15th century. In the front part on the right, there is the Chapel of the Counts with mural paintings of the "Forestiers" and the Counts of Flanders.

Besides an alabaster statue of Saint Catherina, we also find the late baroque altar and the painting "the Erection of the Cross" by A. Van Dyck. On the lawn outside the church, we notice the statue of Guido Gezelle, Flanders' greatest poet. He was vicar in Our Lady's Church from 1872 and wrote here among other volumes of poems: "Tijdkrans" and "Rijmsnoer". He also produced a marvellous translation of Longfellow's Hiawatha.

In front of us on the left corner on the other side of the street, we can observe the city library, the former "Mountain of Mercy" (institutionalised pawn-shop).

We follow the street along the library, down Guido Gezellestraat to the borders of the Leie-river.

### The Broel towers

These towers date back to the Middle Ages. They are the oldest remaining parts of the city fortifications. The southern tower, called "Speyetooren" (12th century), was part of the ramparts of the Castle. The northern tower, called "Inghelborchtoren", was especially built for the defence by means of primitive artillery. On the bridge, there is the statue of Saint Nepomucenus, patron saint of the drowned people.

At number 6, the Museum of fine art, archeology and decorative art (municipal museum) is situated. The works of art to visit are the lucky of long years of collecting. Besides an important collection of paintings and drawings by the famous painter Roeland Savery, beautiful works of other artists of Kortrijk can be admired as well. The collection of damask (16th - 18th century) is world-famous while the collection of ancient ceramics may be considered as the most important one of our country.