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This walk is specifically aimed at visitors that want to get to know the city (better) within a few hours up to maximum one day. It has been illustrated with many small clickable photos, that are mainly intended to ease you to follow the tour. The most beautiful views are for you to discover on your visit.

Download this walking tour map [here](#). (this is a detailed map, 2.5 MB)

The tour.

The tour starts at the railway station square for those arriving by train. One can also start the tour at the visitors terminal for those arriving by coach. In that case start at 3B

1. The station square

The station square ("Stationsplein") of Bruges has recently been renovated and one can now enjoy the view on the train stations buildings. On the left side, Bruges central bus stop. On the right side, Bruges largest and cheapest pay parking. Hence, this traffic junction is the ideal meeting and starting place. Across the square, take the large pedestrian crossing at the left side and traverse the water.

2. Begijnenvest

Turn right just over the water, into Begijnenvest. The "vesten", the former earth rampart of Bruges, now gives shape to a green walking and biking area around Bruges city center. This traffic free area breaths the right atmosphere for a medieval walk. These "vesten" are third generation ramparts. A first fortification was located at the "Burg", built by the first counts of Flanders. This protection against the Norsemen attacking from the sea, had an important role offering the security that was necessary to make Bruges a trading center.

At the end of Begijnenvest, we bump into the Poertoren (1396). The tower is a former powder storage facility.

3. Minnewater



Enter the bridge and enjoy this view onto the romantic Minnewater for a while. The Minnewater is a canalized lake. From the bridge (1740) one can enjoy a nice panoramic view over the city. Because of the idyllic surroundings it is mostly referred to as 'the lake of Love', the Dutch word 'Minne' meaning 'love'.

Actually, the origins of the lake are less romantic. It was here that the coastal river 'Reie' entered the city. The river was later canalized and made to continue to the center of town. It is not certain where the name 'Minnewater' comes from. An explanation could be 'water van het gemeen', which could be translated as the 'common water'. The lake was used as a water reservoir, to keep the water of the canals at a constant level.

3b. Minnewaterpark



If you start the tour at the visitors terminal, cross the bridge over the canal and enter the Minnewaterpark. For most visitors the Minnewater and its lovely park are the entrance to the beautiful city of Bruges.

Next to the lake is the Minnewater park, where sometimes in the summertime rock concerts are organized. Enjoy a stroll in this park and take in the beautiful views. Follow the path through the park to the Arsenaalstraat. When you leave the park turn left to the Wijngaardplein and Sashuis.

4. Sashuis and Wijngaardplein



The sluice house ("sashuis", 1895) marks an end to the Minnewater in a most melancholic fashion and brings us to the "Brugse reien", the famous canals of Bruges, and Wijngaardplein, a strangely shaped but lovely square. Head for the swans and the horse carriages.

A little further down the square, one has a wonderful view on the canals of Bruges with the swans and the beguinage in the background.

There is a pleasant legend too about these swans. When the beloved countess Margaretha van Bourgondië died (1482), she was followed by her husband, count Maximiliaan, emperor of Austria. As many counts before him, he tried to restrict the privileges of the rich city of Bruges and increase taxes. During this battle, he was detained by the people of Bruges in the Craeneburg (that we will see later). He was forced to witness there the execution of his counselor, Pieter Lanckhals. When the army of Maximiliaan defeated those from Bruges, he punished them for this murder. Legend has it that Maximilian punished Bruges by obliging the population to keep swans on their lakes and canals till eternity. Most of these legends and romantic interpretations come from the 19th century. Believe them or not : the beautiful 'Minnewater' deserves them.

5. The Beguinage (het Begijnhof)



Take a little time to visit the Beguinage. Turn left at the fountain with the horse heads at the other end of the square. Cross the little bridge (1570), enter the gate and take a little tour around this soothing quadrangle. The beguinage, or by its full name, the "prinselijke begijnhof de Wijngaerde", was established in 1245, but the oldest remaining houses on this square date from the 15th century.

Let us get to know the beguines a little better. Even though the beguinage is currently populated by sisters, the beguines were not really a society of sisters. The rule imposed the duty to pray privately and at least one mass a day. But they had a greater freedom than sisters. As such, they did not give up their status as laywomen and their personal belongings. They were also expected to earn in their own living and hence they worked in all kinds of jobs, like embroidering, lacework, health care and education. Under certain conditions, they could leave the beguinage and were allowed to receive visitors in the daytime. Only at night would the gate lock the city out.

If you desire, more information regarding this subject, it can be obtained in the museum that you can find in one of the little houses.

6. The lace shops of Wijngaardstraat



Return over the bridge of the Beguinage and turn left into Wijngaardstraat. In this short segment of the street, one can admire and buy lace from Bruges. The price tickets on these artworks confirm the connection with the past. For the wealth of the medieval Bruges - and Flanders - was at large extent due to the trade in cloth. The fertile hinterland provided a wide supply of wool and the harbor provided transit. Mainly from the 10th century onwards, Flemish sheets were a well known export product. At the royal court of France, for example, clothes were mainly made out of luxury sheets from Flanders. The wool gave a lot of work to the metiers of the weavers, the skimmers, the sheepshearers and the cloth painters. On top of that, merchants and brokers organized themselves into the international "Hanze". The "German Hanze", the most important one, had its headquarters in Bruges and was headed by law by a citizen from Bruges. Bruges sustained the competition with other Flemish cities like Gent and Leper by focusing on confection and luxury cloth. Because of the increasing production, there was a lack of wool and English wool was imported. This also explains the close connection the count of Flanders had with the English, despite his subordination to the king of France. It is also an important element in the downfall of Bruges, when the English local cloth industry took over in the 16th century

7. Walplein



At the "chocolat shop", turn left and walk into Walplein. On this square, you can find the entrance to the old brewery 'Halve Maan'. The brewery De Halve Maan (*The Half Moon*) is the only family-run brewery still active in the city centre of Bruges. De Halve Maan is situated in the heart of the historic town and offers a warm welcome...

Notice the rather modern piece of art in the middle of the square: a version of the story of Leda and the Swan (aka Zeus)

Remarkable are the little statues of Mother Mary at several street corners. Mother Mary has always been the patron saint of Bruges. We will meet her more often during our walk. Finish off the square till the very end.

8. The little Stooftstraat and Katelijnestraat



Cross Walstraat and proceed until you reach the narrow little walkway on the right side at the very end of this square. You can imagine that there used to be a gate here. The little Stooftstraat leads to the back side of the almshouses of Spanooghe. The almshouses were a kind of social security. They were built by rich families, for use by poor and old people.

When leaving Stooftstraat, turn left into Katelijnestraat. In between the famous chocolate shops, you'll see on your right side the gate of the almshouses of the "Rooms Convent" and on your left side the garden of the almshouses of Spanooghe. The most beautiful almshouses unfortunately are not on our walk.

9. The Memlinc Museum



When crossing the canals, you'll notice the former St. Johns hospital at your left side. After that, you pass the former main gate, nowadays the entrance to the Memlinc museum. The history of the Former St. Johns hospital and the lives and works of the painters are extensively documented and illustrated in there.

Hans Memlinc (1433-1494) was one of the later painters in the row of "Vlaamse Primitieven" (Flemish Primitives). The wealth of Bruges also attracted artists and made Bruges the most praised city of the art of painting in the thirteenth century. Even though none of the big names like Van Eyck, Memlinc, Gerard David were born in Bruges, a innovative style was born here, that still has world fame. Memlinc lived for a long time in the St. Johns hospital and died there.

10. The former St. Johns hospital



Past the gates of the main building (13th century), we take the foot passage to the inner court of the hospital. The little square offers some surprising views. Also enter the leftmost gallery for a quick look. In what used to be the galleries for sick people, built in later stages, you now find some pubs. Take a left at the end, to go back outside through the glass doors. You'll get a beautiful view on the canals and the old brewery.

The St. Johns hospital was founded in the 12th century by the city and the rich middle class. It wasn't the only one in Bruges or Europe, it was one of the first though. Therefore, it served as an example, especially in Germany. Due to its size and large staff, it was also a well known teaching school for young physicians. Even though the staff was spoken of as brothers and sisters, it wasn't a totally religious community in the beginning. There were civilians amongst them. Men and women lived in separate buildings: the sisters in the building on the left of the main building, past the pharmacy, the brothers in the building after the corner on the right side. One cannot think of the hospital as what is currently known as an infirmary. It was not only a shelter for poor sick people, but also for drifters, pilgrims, travelers, the elderly and the homeless.

11. The church of Our Lady and the statue of Guido Gezelle



The brick tower of the church of Our Lady (13th century) is 122 meters tall and is thereby Bruges largest. When you enter through the side door in front of the hospital, turn right and walk to the end of the transept to admire the famous "Madonna with child" (1504) by Michelangelo. It is one of the very few sculptures by the artist that can be found outside Italy.

Leave the church through the same door and turn right. This way you reach the front side of the church. On the left side you can see the statue of the famous Flemish poet Guido Gezelle (1830-1899) on the square that is called after him. He promoted the Flemish dialect and wrote some master pieces that are still studied by every student.

12. Gruuthuse Palace



Gruut was a mandatory element of beer until hop beer was invented in the 14th century. And the lords of Gruuthuse (literally Gruit house) had the monopoly on the popular goody. Their wealth is obvious and therefore the center court of the palace (15th century) used to be surrounded by walls on all sides. When you have a closer look at the castle, you'll find the motto of the lords above the door: "Plus est en vous", "more is in you". The most famous descendant, Lodewijk (1422-1492), also used to be a passionate traveler and collector. A big part of his collections can be found in the museum that is nowadays inside the palace. Unfortunately, the most beautiful treasures have been moved to France a long time ago.

Leave the inner court as you came and make a turn left, in between the church and the palace, through the backyard. You can see there yet another bright sample of the influence of the lords of Gruuthuse. They wished not to have to walk outside, amongst the crowd, in order to join the divine service. So, a little bridge was made between the palace and the church for their purpose. They could follow the service from a balcony.

13. Bonifacius bridge and Hof Arents (Arents Court)



On the romantic little bridge in the backyard, many marriage photos were taken. Next to the bridge, higher in the corner of the palace, you can find the so called "smallest window of Bruges". The meaning of this simple little thing, invariably photographed by tourists, is not clear.

We stride over the bridge and then take a left through a little court yard called Hof Arents. Arentshof (Arent's Court) is a cosy little square near the **Church of Our Lady** and the **Groeninge Museum**.

Arents House is the former Classical manor house belonging to the noble Arents family. It now hosts a large collection of paintings by the British artist Frank Brangwyn, to whom the museum owes its name.

The two massive columns at the centre of Arentshof were once part of the former "Waterhalle" on Market Square.

Interesting are the four sculptures by artist Rik Poot, representing the "Four Apocalyptic Knights".

From the Arent's Court one has a splendid view towards the tower of the Church of Our Lady (122m) and the Gothic façade of the Gruuthuse House, which now houses the collection of the **Gruuthuse Museum**.

14. Dijver



On the road - Dijver - turn right. The most scenic way to walk this street is along the canals (Reien), across the street. From the straight Dijver, it is also clear that the Reien are mainly canals, that have been dug for transport of water and goods in and out of the city. Here and there, you can still clearly recognise the former storehouses. The canals were connected to the estuary of the Zwin into the sea through a fairway. This fairway had come into existence in 1134 due to a bad storm surge. The canal partly used the bed of the river called Reie, hence the name still given to the canals. The newly created Zwin fairway offered possibilities for larger harbors. The first was built under count Filip van den Elzas in Damme. Later others came, amongst which Sluis, nowadays just across the border in the Netherlands, is the most famous. In these seaports, the goods were loaded into smaller ships and taken to Bruges. Bruges took care not to lose its status as mothertown with respect to these seaports, by keeping the privilege of stocking the

supplies. The Zwin silting up and the lock up by the Dutch revolt (the so called eighty years' war), were naturally a second important element in the decline of Bruges.

On the right side of the road one will notice the Groeninge Museum (City Museum of Fine Arts). Admirers of fine arts will certainly want to pay a visit to this museum. This museum offers a rich and fascinating array of (primarily) Belgian artworks. Highlights include the world-famous collection of works by the Flemish Primitives, paintings by various Renaissance and Baroque masters, several interesting pieces from the Neo-classical and Realistic periods of the 18th and 19th centuries, milestones from the Symbolist and Modernist movements, masterpieces by the Flemish Expressionists and a varied selection of Post-1945 modern art.

15. Rozenhoedkaai (Quai of the Rosary)



Cross the first street, Wollestraat, and continue along Rozenhoedkaai.

De **Rozenhoedkaai** (Quai of the Rosary) is probably the most photographed spot in Bruges. It's a must see for all visitors. The canals of Brugge, such as the Rosary dock, are the meeting points of artist, painters and photographers.

The Huidenvettersplein (Tanners' Square) and the Fish Market are just around the corner. Here is one of the departure points for boat trips on the canals. The Belfry and Market Square are only a 3 minutes walk away. The belfry raises masterly over the medieval houses. The prices of the hotel-restaurant on the right that looks over this confirm it as an especially beautiful place

At the little square, there's also a starting point for a touristic boat trip over the canals. During a half-hour boat trip on the canals of Bruges you are treated to some fantastic views of monuments and historical buildings. You are exposed to aspects of Bruges you would never be able to behold when walking. The driver also gives information and tells funny anecdotes or little known facts.

16. Huidevettersplein (Tanners Square)



On the '**Huidevettersplein**' take a close look to the surrounding houses. You can see the guildhall of the 'Huidevetters'. The 'huidenvetters' are the leather workers or tanners. The is a powerful guild and the hall dates back to1630. In the center of the square you can spot a pedestal , pillar. On top there are two little lions holding the coat of arms of the guild. The skimmers used to work out the skins into leather and sold them on markets held on the square. Like the other metiers, they organized themselves into a kind of corporation, called "gilde" This corporation defended their interests with the city and the county. The corporation also arbitrated internal disagreements.

17. The fish market and Steenhoudersdijk



Cross the square and leave it on the other side. The back side of the town hall immediately strikes the eye, but first we walk to the Fish Market ("vismarkt", 1821).

In this complex (1821), fresh seafood from the nearby North Sea, is for sale every day (6.00 am-1.00 pm) from Tuesday through Saturday. The market was originally an important place for trading wheat but now, whilst fish is sold, there's also a lot of craft and curio stalls as well. The stands are covered and the fish is displayed on old stone slabs. There are restaurants and bars around the outside of the market. The "Vismarkt" is open daily between 08h00 and 13h00, except on Sundays and Mondays.

If you are not too tired by now, do walk a little further down the canal to the Steenhoudersdijk.

The Steenhoudersdijk



(stonemason's embankment) reaches the **Groenerei** (green canal) and is flanked by a picturesque almshouse called De Pelikaan, dated 1714 and named after the symbol of Christian charity, the pelican.

Drink in the romantic view of the prettiest stretch of canal in Bruges from this bridge along the Groenerei. Peerdenbrug is on Peerdenstraat, off Hoogstraat, and looks along the canal to the tower of Sint-Saviour's Cathedral.

"Standing in the middle gazing towards the courts of justice and the town hall in the distance is one of the great pleasures of many to be had in Brugges". (Tourist impression)

18. The Blinde Ezelstraat



Return to the bridge over the Canal at the Fish Market and enter the Blinde Ezelstraat (literally, street of the blind donkey) into the former fortified building. In the middle of the little street, you can still find a hinge that still reminds one of a fortified building.

You're standing here at the cradle of Flanders. Boudewijn (Baldwin) with the iron arm kidnapped in 862, not entirely against her will, Judith, daughter of Karel de Kale. This king of France - or rather western Frankenland, that came into existence due to the splitting of Frankenland in 843 - wasn't very pleased with the kidnapping. After the arbitration of the pope, the king agreed to the marriage and gave them the little country of Flanders, formerly the "Pagus Flandrensis". It contained Bruges and surroundings. Baldwin and his sons expanded the fortifications of Burg into a true fortress, that was located somewhat further than the current Burg. There are no remains of this fortress. With similar courage and entrepreneurship, and some vicious politics, the counts managed to expand their territory and wealth. As good investors, they financed their plans with the wealth from the successful city of Bruges.

19. Burg



Facing the city hall on Burg, from your left to right, you see respectively the former court of justice (1727), the old Civil Registry (1537) with a passage to the Blinde-Ezelstraat, the city hall (1420), the basilica of Saint Basilius and the basilica of the Holy Blood (12th eeuw) and, skipping the more recent pubs, all at your back, pass Breidelstraat, the deanery of St. Donaas (1666).

On the location of the former court of justice, nowadays the tourist information center and museum, there used to be the house of the Brugse Vrije (the Municipal Offices, literally: the Free Bruges). Some walls of the former room of the deputy majors have remained. The old Recorders' house was used as a court of justice from 1883 till 1984. So, lady Justitia, dominating the building, has not been misplaced. Lets give a moment of thought to the escutcheon of Bruges that can be found above the door of the recorders' house. The shield of Bruges, a blue lion in a red-gold stripe pattern, is traditionally carried by the Flemish lion and a bear. The bear is also an ode to the count. According to the legend, the first count, Baldwin, would have bumped into a bear, on his return to a trip. The bear was terrorizing the surroundings of Bruges for a while. While his companions ran away, Baldwin "with the iron arm" would have killed the bear.

The city hall is one of the oldest in the region. The slogan SPQB that occurs here and there, a.o in the shield on the recorders' house. The democracy in Bruges was one of variable success. The corporations of the metiers and the middle class chose aldermen and city councilors since 1302, who then choose the city mayor. But in times of commotion, this was undone easily and many times in history, these were still appointed by the count.

The relic of the holy blood, a drop of the blood of Christ, came to Bruges thanks to the crusades in the first half of the 13th century. It was kept in the chapel for the count that was previously built. The counts had a tradition of adding lustre to the city by means of relics. Baldwin I already had the relic of Saint Donaas transferred to Bruges to revalue

his city. The significance of the holy blood in the middle ages should not be underestimated. It was believed to protect against disease and disaster. The yearly procession of the holy blood is still held in May, ever since the 13th century.

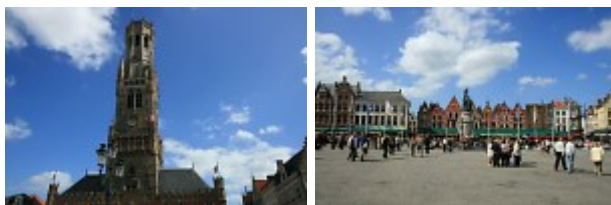
The Dean's house for the Saint Donaaschurch was there since the first counts, even though the current building dates from later ages. Several clerical authorities were represented in Bruges, but the deanery was the most prominent. At times, the dean also was chancellor and tax receiver. Not exactly what you'd call the most popular authority. The church of Saint Donaas is missing aside the deanery, where you see now a big void, concealed by trees and modern construction. Bruges' central church, built by the third count, Arnulf I, in the 10th century, was broken down to level during the anti-clerical reign of the French Revolution (1799). Some foundations and other discoveries can be found in the hotel in the corner. They were discovered during the construction of the hotel and, after consultation and by changing building plan, preserved and covered.

20. Breidelstraat



When you turn your back to the city hall, Breidelstraat is the street on your left. Breidelstraat connects Burg with Markt (Market Square). Have a look at the impressive Belfry tower which leans about 60 cm to the East.

21. Markt (Market Square)



Bruges counts many squares and markets, but this is beyond doubt the Market (Markt). De Belfry, also called the tower to the halls (± 1300), is the allegory of Bruges' freedom and independence. It is a mere urban building, without any clerical assistance, built to the glamour of Bruges' power and wealth. Climbing the 366 steps is a nice variation and also brings you to the fascinating automated carillon and a nice view over the city. By the way, in the old days, the tower was also used as a lookout. The halls that surround the tower were built somewhat later and served mainly as an indoor market.

Left of the belfry, where the governors' offices are now, used to be the Waterhalle (1294 - 1787). The canals that flowed there, were covered entirely by an imposing hall. Sheets and other goods were loaded on and off ships. At the side of the market, there used to be open galleries for trade. Later, the canals were arched over and eventually, the current building (1910), seat of the governor of Western Flanders (West-Vlaanderen) was built.

To the right of the belfry, a few medieval residences are preserved. Such as the houses

on both corners of Sint-Amandsstraat: to the left, the oldest original house of the market, Boechoute (15th century) with the wind-vane on the frontage. And to the right of Sint-Amandsstraat, Craenenbrug, where the Brugeans kept Duke Maximiliaan van Oostenrijk imprisoned.

In the middle of the square, Jan Breydel and Pieter De Coninck remind us of the battle of the Golden Spurs. The Brugeans made a prominent contribution to one of the worse defeats in the French military history. The history of this battle also illustrates well the power games that were practiced all the middle ages. Bruges and Flanders were at that time at the top of their glory and consequently, the king of France was not pleased with the high level of independence of the Flemish count, Gwijde van Dampiere, as he saw a lot of money going into his pocket. The count on the other hand, also tried to snatch large sums from the Brugeans, much to the loss of the middle class and nobility in Bruges. The metiers of Bruges, eventually, had grouped themselves in the 13th century into corporations ("gilden") and aimed at a representation in the city council. At first, the Brugeans choose the side of the French king, hoping for a reduction of the taxes and improving their position. In 1301, King Philip the Fair was received gloriously in Bruges. Bruges was to be envied, for his spouse, Johanna of Navarra shouted "I thought i was the only empress, but I can see them here by hundreds!" Soon it became clear however that the king was only after the wealth of Bruges and the Brugeans at once chose the side of the count, who had been imprisoned by the king. The workers saw their chance to enforce their claim and fought decisively, under the command of Jan Breydel and Pieter De Coninck. On May 18th 1302, the French in Bruges attacked in what's called the "Brugse metten". In the battle that followed on July 11th at Kortrijk, the union of Flemish communities defeated the glorious French army of knights. That the Flemish had defeated an army of elite can be concluded also from the name that was given to this battle. The winners collected a rich amount of golden spurs from the French bodies...

22. Steenstraat



If you're tired or time is up, you can take the bus to the central station from Markt. There is, however, also a nice tour back. Facing the belfry, we leave Market to the right, via Steenstraat, Bruges' most female street. The popular shopping street is not accidently part of the Belgian monopoly-game.

23. Simon Stevinplein



The Simon Stevin Square is very near the main shopping street: Steenstraat. You will find the Simon Stevin Square between 't Zand and the Market Square, just past St.Saviour's Cathedral.

The square is an ideal place to rest for lot's of shoppers who are getting tired of walking up and down the main shopping streets. You can't avoid chocolate in Bruges. Simon Stevinplein is fast becoming the place to go in Bruges to get the widest and best choice of fresh made Belgian chocolats at fair prices. With "The Chocolat Line" and the "Dumon shop" visitors to Bruges need look no further than this central area to find something excellent to take home.

Most of the time the square is crowded with people that are resting on the benches or looking for some good restaurant or bistro. Many restaurants and cafes have open- air terraces overlooking the square. Exotic in Bruges? That's possible at the Simon Stevinplein where restaurant Bhavani serves a wide range of Indian dishes.

24. Sint-Salvatorkathedraal and Zuidzandstraat



A little further is Saint-Saviours cathedral. The cathedral was the first city church of Bruges, built in the middle of the 8th century. The current building is the result of numerous renovations after equally numerous destructions. The substructure of the actual tower dates from 1127, the rest from the 13th century.

Go down the Zuidzandstraat until you arrive at a large square called 't Zand

25. 't Zand



There used to be a train station on this large square. In 1939, the current train station was taken in service and in 1948, the remains of the old train station were scrapped. The first train station of Bruges was finished in 1844, but it was soon found to be too small and was scrapped in 1879 and rebuilt stone by stone in Ronse. It can still be admired there. The train station with iron hall has not been preserved. In the middle of the square, there's now a huge fountain with statues.

Since Bruges 2002, when Bruges was the cultural capital of Europe, Zand is outlined on by a new concert hall (Het Concertgebouw). The large red construction immediately attracts attention. In the summer, you can take the elevator to the terrace café on the roof, with a beautiful view. At the same place, by the way, the bus stop on Zand was extended.

26. King Albert park



From the back side of the Concert Hall, there's a footpath, that leads to the central station through a green border. In the middle of the park, there's a statue of the Belgian king Albert I, loved in Flanders because of the role he played during the first world war.

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