

Western Flanders



Belgian *chansonnier* Jacques Brel famously referred to this part of Belgium as *le plat pays* – the flat country. He sang about his reluctant love for all that it stood for, and about its bleakness. Indeed, on cold winter days the scene here can be downright dismal. Winds howl across flat fields and whip through villages, wrapping around church steeples and belfries – monuments that have survived the centuries to become resounding symbols of the region's rich historic past. Many are now World Heritage-listed.

Although the term 'Flanders' now covers all of northern Belgium, it was once associated with this western portion only. The great cities of Bruges, Ghent, Ypres and Kortrijk rose in medieval times on the wealth of cloth and international trade. Other towns – Oudenaarde, famed for its 15th-century tapestries, and Veurne, with its macabre medieval procession – followed. Nowadays Western Flanders is still full of atmospheric, albeit tourist-packed, towns.

Belgians adore their 66km coastline. Look past the unsightly coast-hugging high-rises to find wide, flat beaches. Relive the age-old tradition of shrimp fishing on horseback at Oostduinkerke, or stroll arm-in-arm along broad promenades, passing rows of candy-coloured beach huts. Choose charming De Haan or bustling Ostend as your base; both are engaging towns snuggled into the few remaining coastal dunes.

Flanders' far western corner is where some of WWI's most dreadful battles were fought. The frontline town of Ypres draws visitors young and old from around the globe.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Full-on Festivities** De Gentse Feesten (p165) in Ghent
- **Primitive Passions** Art at Bruges' Groeningemuseum (p125)
- **Salient Reminder** Flanders' WWI battle-fields near Ypres (p153)
- **Cycle City** On ya bike in and around Bruges (p130) or Kortrijk (p160)
- **Art Heaven** *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* in Ghent's cathedral (p161)
- **Beaut Brewery** De Dolle Brouwers (p50) near Diksmuide
- **Sublime Surrealism** Paul Delvaux's surprising St Idesbald home (p148)
- **Coastal Cruise** The Kusttram (Coast Tram; p145) reveals all



■ PROVINCES: WEST-VLAANDEREN (WEST FLANDERS: CAPITAL BRUGES), OOST-VLAANDEREN (EAST FLANDERS: CAPITAL GHENT)

■ LANGUAGE: FLEMISH

BRUGES

pop 117,000

Touristy, overcrowded and a tad fake. Preface any other city with these descriptions and it would be struck off the list. But not Bruges (Brugge in Flemish, Bruges in French). This Flemish city is Belgium's most popular destination and, despite being overrun much of the year, it's not to be missed.

Suspended in time centuries ago, Bruges is now one of Western Europe's most-visited medieval cities. Picturesque market squares, dreamy canals and old whitewashed almshouses all evoke a world long since gone. But its reputation as one of the most perfectly preserved cities is in part fabrication. Bruges has been renovated time and again to retain its medieval appearance. Whereas what you see reflects that of centuries ago, much of the architecture dates only from the 19th and 20th centuries.

To enjoy Bruges, timing is essential. Stay overnight or late on a midsummer evening, when the carillon chimes seep through the cobbled streets, and local boys (illegally) cast fishing rods into willow-lined canals. Visit in spring when daffodils carpet the tranquil *begijnhof* (a walled community once housing a Catholic order of women), or in winter when you can sometimes skate on the canals and have the town almost to yourself. At these times, Bruges readily reveals its age-old beauty. Alternatively, jump on a bike and cycle off for the day. By the time you return, most of the day-trippers will be well on their way.

History

In medieval times the sea flooded the area around present-day Bruges, carving out channels and waterways. Baldwin the Iron Arm, the first count of Flanders, built a castle as protection from Viking raids, and gradually a town grew up. Trade came via the nearby village of Damme and its waterway, the Zwin.

As in other Flemish cities, textiles were Bruges' ticket to prosperity. Much trade was connected to England's wool industry, the source of the finest grade of wool, and by the late 13th century Bruges was a major cloth-trading centre. When Philip the Fair, King of France, visited Bruges in 1301, his wife, Joanna of Navarre, was so surprised by the inhabitants' wealth and luxurious clothes that she purportedly claimed: 'I thought I alone was queen, but I see that I have 600 rivals here'.

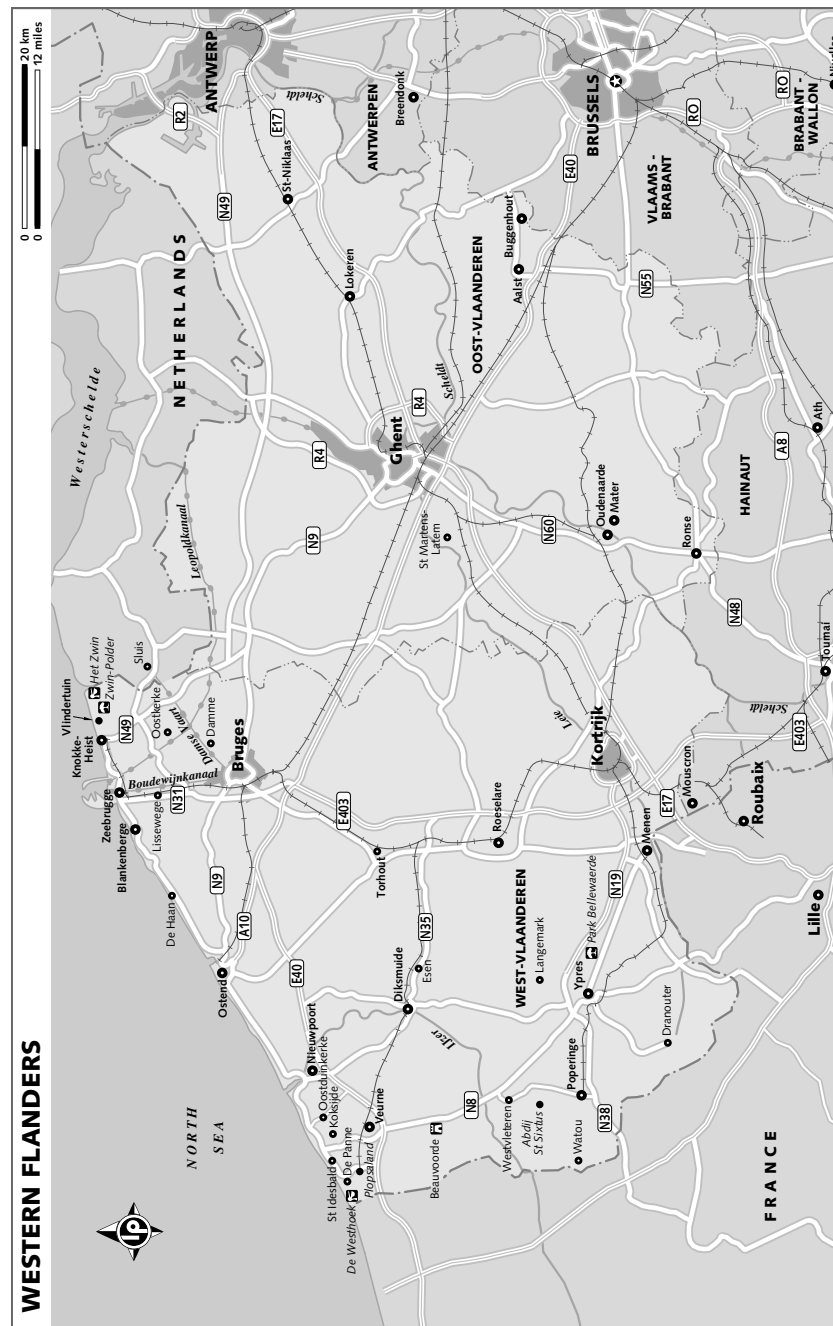
But the city's increased wealth brought political tension and, after guildsmen refused to pay a new round of taxes in 1302, the army was sent in to garrison the town. Pieter De Coninck, Dean of the Guild of Weavers, and Jan Breydel, Dean of the Guild of Butchers, led a revolt against the 2000-strong army that would go down in Flanders' history books as the *Brugse Metten* (Bruges Matins). Early in the morning on 18 May, the guildsmen crept into town and murdered anyone who could not correctly pronounce the Flemish phrase '*schild en vriend*' (shield and friend). This revolt sparked a widespread rebellion and led to the Flemish victory against the French six weeks later at the Battle of the Golden Spurs near Kortrijk (see boxed text, p159). Independence was short-lived, though, and the French soon regained control.

In the 14th century Bruges became a key member of the Hanseatic League of Seventeen Cities, a powerful association of northern European trading cities, and the city reached its economic peak. Italian cities such as Genoa, Florence and Venice built trade houses here, and ships laden with exotic goods from all over Europe and further afield docked at the Minnewater, a small lake to the city's south.

Prosperity continued under the dukes of Burgundy, especially Philip the Good (r 1419–67), who arrived in 1430 to marry Isabella of Portugal. Bruges grew fat and by 1500 the population had ballooned to 200,000, doubling that of London. Flemish art blossomed and the city's artists – known as the Flemish Primitives (see boxed text, p125) – perfected paintings that are still vivid today.

During the 15th century the Zwin, the waterway linking Bruges to the sea, silted up. Despite attempts to build another canal, the city's economic lifeline was gone. When the headquarters of the Hanseatic League moved from Bruges to Antwerp at the end of the 15th century, many merchants followed, leaving abandoned houses, deserted streets and empty canals. Bruges, a former hub of Europe, slept for 400 years.

The city slowly emerged from its slumber in the early 19th century as tourists passed through en route to the Waterloo battlefield near Brussels. In 1892 Belgian writer and poet Georges Rodenbach published *Bruges-la-Morte* (Bruges the Dead), a novel that beguilingly described the town's forlorn air and alerted the well-heeled to its preserved charm. Curious, wealthy visitors brought



much-needed money into Bruges, and sealed its fate as a town frozen in time.

In 1907 the Boudewijnkanaal, a canal linking Bruges to the new port of Zeebrugge, was constructed. Although Zeebrugge suffered extensive damage during both world wars, Bruges escaped unscathed. As the capital of West-Vlaanderen province, it now lives largely off tourism, although it also has a manufacturing centre outside the city that produces glass, electrical goods and chemicals.

Bruges' stint as European City of Culture in 2002 proved that it's more than just a medieval showpiece. A daring red concert hall, the Concertgebouw, was built to celebrate the event, and contemporary came to the historic centre in the form of the Toyo Ito pavilion (p124).

Orientation

Bruges is neatly encased by an oval-shaped moat that follows the city's medieval fortifications; four of the nine gates built around 1300 still stand. At its heart are two squares, the Markt and the Burg. The city is an ambler's ultimate dream, its sights sprinkled within leisurely walking distance of its compact centre. The train station is about 1.5km south of the Markt; buses shuttle regularly between the two.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

De Reyhere (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 34 03; Markt 12) Good all-round bookshop with a separate travel section next door.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance/Fire (☎ 100)

Police (☎ 101)

INTERNET ACCESS

Bauhaus Cybercafé (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 10 93; Langestraat 137; per 15min €1.30; ☎ 10am-midnight)

Town's hippest internet café, at the Bauhaus hostel.

Coffee Link (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 99 73; St Jans-hospitaal building, Mariestraat 38; per 15min/1hr €1.50/5; ☎ 11am-6pm Thu & Sat-Tue, 11am-3pm Fri) Atmospheric café with coffee, cakes and a bank of terminals.

LAUNDRY

Ipsomat (Map p123; Langestraat 151)

Wassalon (Map p126; Ezelstraat 51)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train station lockers (per 24hr €2.60-3.60)

LIBRARY

Openbare Bibliotheek Biekorf (Map p126; ☎ 050 47 24 00; Biekorf Bldg, Kuipersstraat 3; ☎ closed Sun) Main public library.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Akademisch Ziekenhuis St Jan (☎ 050 45 21 11; Ruddershove 10) The city's main hospital, with a 24-hour emergency unit.

Apotheek Dryepondt (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 64 74; Wollestraat 7) Modern pharmacy housed in an antique façade.

Doctors on weekend duty (☎ 050 36 40 10)

Pharmacists on weekend duty (☎ 050 40 61 62)

MONEY

ATM Post office (Map p126, Markt 5); Fortis Bank (Map p126, Simon Stevinplein 3); Europabank (Map p126, Vlamingstraat 13)

Goffin Change (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 04 71; Steenstraat 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun)

ING Bank (Map p126; ☎ 050 44 45 40; Markt 19; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Handles cash, travellers cheques and credit card cash advances.

POST & FAX

Post office (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 14 11; Markt 5)

Varicopy (Map p126; ☎ 050 033 59 43; fax 050 34 61 92; Oude Burg 22a) For sending and receiving faxes.

TOURIST INFORMATION

In&Uit Brugge (Map p126; ☎ 050 44 86 86; www.brugge.be; 't Zand 34; ☎ 10am-6pm Fri-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu) Modern new tourist office and events booking service located in the Concertgebouw.

In&Uit Brugge branch (Map p123; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Tue-Sat) Near the ticket counters.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Airstop (Map p126; ☎ 070 23 31 88; Dweersstraat 2) Offers cheap charter flights.

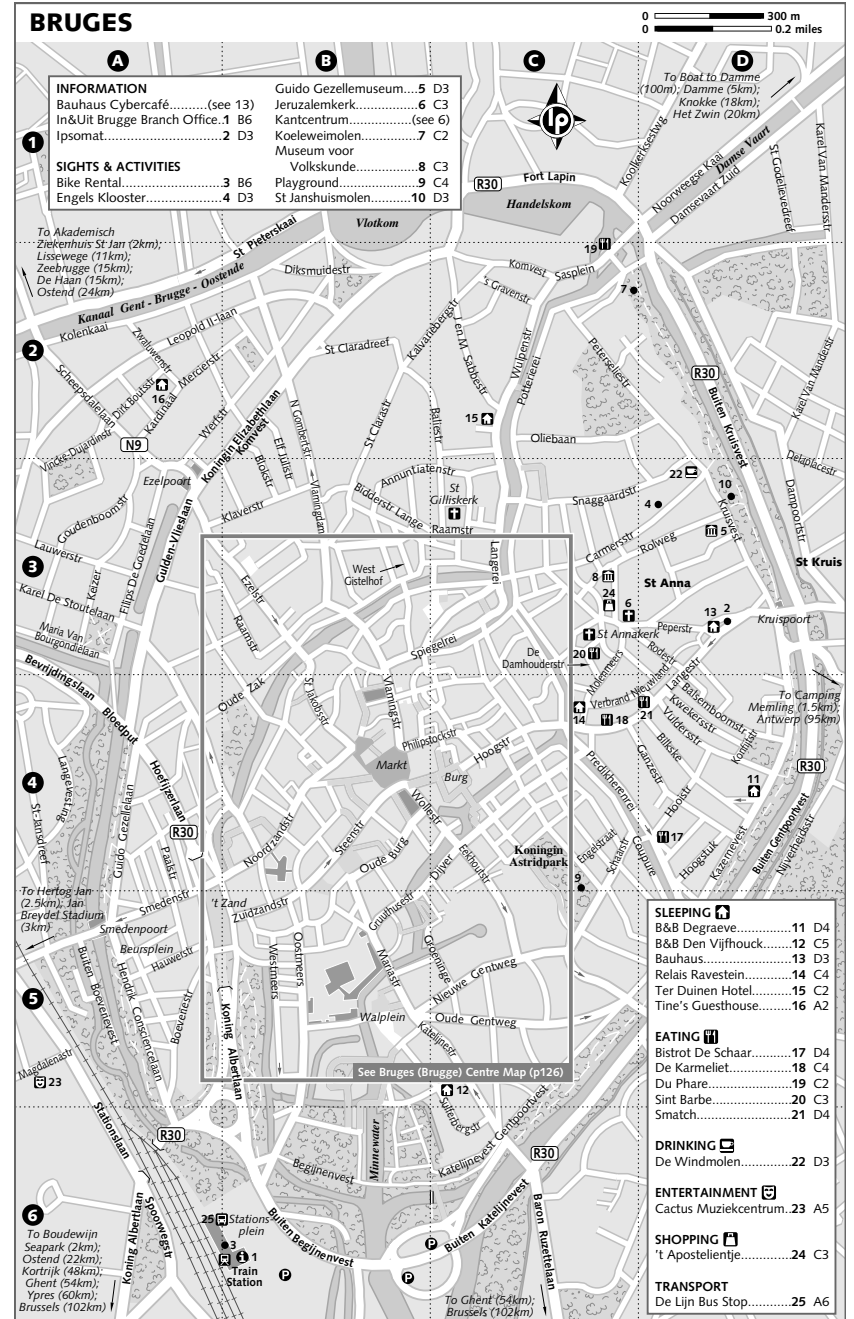
Connections (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 10 11; St Jakobsstraat 30) All-round travel agent.

Reizen Wasteels (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 65 31; Geldmuntstraat 30a) Eurolines agent.

Sights

AROUND MARKT & BURG

Bruges' nerve centre is the historic Markt, a large open square flanked by medieval-style buildings and bustling with horse-drawn carriages, open-air restaurants and camera-clicking tourists. Standing tall at its centre is a **monument** (Map p126) to Pieter De Coninck



and Jan Breydel, the leaders of the Brugse Metten (see p120), and lording over everything is the fabulous belfry (see below).

Most of the gabled guildhalls edging the Markt are not original. Notable at Markt 16 is **Craenenburg café** (Map p126); in this building the Hapsburg heir Maximilian of Austria was imprisoned by the leaders of the city in 1488 after attempting to restrict their privileges. When Maximilian later became emperor, he took revenge by directing trade to Antwerp.

The Markt's eastern side is dominated by the **Provinciaal Hof** (Map p126), a neogothic building home to the post office and a handy ATM.

Smaller but arguably more impressive than the Markt is the adjoining Burg. For more than five centuries the former palace on this majestic site was the seat of the counts of Flanders. The St Donatian Cathedral also stood here until 1799, when religious zealots tore it down. These days the Burg contains the city's most appealing cluster of buildings, plus the contemporary **Toyo Ito pavilion** (Map p126), a geometric bunker that sits in a pool of stagnant water opposite the city hall. To some it creates an image of lightness, progress, transience and evolution; to others it's simply a form that gets the cold shoulder.

Rising 83m above the Markt is Belgium's most famous **Belfort** (Belfry; Map p126; adult/child/concession €5/free/3; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, last tickets sold 4.15pm). Built in the 13th century when Bruges was a bustling centre of trade, it's now on Unesco's World Heritage List (one of 32 Belgian belfries to be listed). The 366 steps to the top are an exhausting and usually squeazy climb but are well worth it, particularly in the afternoon when the view reveals the town's rustic roofs and warm tones. On the way up there's a barred treasury, a triumphal bell, the clock and, further up, the 18th-century *beiaard* (carillon). Its 47 bells are still played manually by **Aimé Lombaert** (☎ 9-10pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 2.15-3pm Sun mid-Jun-Sep, 2.15-3pm Wed, Sat & Sun Oct-mid-Jun). The grand building from which the Belfort soars is the Hallen (Halls), a 13th-century (but frequently restored) former market-place with a massive central courtyard.

The **Heilig-Bloedbasiliek** (Basilica of the Holy Blood; Map p126; Burg 5; ☎ 9.30-11.50am & 2-5.50pm Apr-Sep, 10-11.50am & 2-3.50pm Thu-Tue, 10-11.50am Wed Oct-Mar) takes its name from the relic of Christ's blood brought here after the Crusades, sometime between 1150 and 1200. The church has two distinct and highly contrasting sections: the

DISCOUNT CARDS

Two museum combination tickets (€15 each) are available. One gives entry to five municipal museums and monuments; the other gives access to three municipal museums plus a day's bike hire and a free drink (at the café inside the Museum Voor Volkskunde). Either is worth buying, particularly if you intend visiting the most expensive attractions (such as the Groeninge, St Janshospitaal and Gruuthuse museums, or the belfry). Note that only municipal museums are included in this deal – privately run sights, like Choco-Story, the Diamantmuseum and the De Halve Maan brewery, cannot be visited using these tickets. Discount tickets can be bought at the tourist office or at the sights. For more details see www.brugge.be.

sombre 12th-century lower chapel, built along pure Romanesque lines and almost devoid of decoration, and the much-renovated and lavishly embellished upper chapel, accessed by wide stairs near the lower chapel's entrance. In the upper chapel is the silver tabernacle containing the phial that holds a few drops of the holy blood. This relic is still venerated in one-hour services at 10am and 3pm every Friday. On Ascension Day it is paraded through the city in Bruges' biggest annual event, the Heilig-Bloedprocessie (see p132). Duck into the pint-sized **Museum of the Holy Blood** (adult/child €1.50/free) next door to see the jewel-coated reliquary that holds the phial during the procession.

Bruges boasts Belgium's oldest, and arguably most beautiful, **stadhuis** (city hall; Map p126; Burg 12). Built between 1376 and 1420, its exquisite turreted Gothic stone façade is decorated with replica statues of the counts and countesses of Flanders (the originals were torn down in 1792 by French soldiers). Inside, a few rooms are open to the public but the chief attraction is the 1st-floor **Gotische Zaal** (Gothic Hall; Map p126; adult/child/concession €2.50/free/1.50, admission includes entry to nearby Brugse Vrije; ☎ 9.30am-5pm). The hall's polychromatic ceiling almost drips with medieval carvings, and murals depicting the town's history add to the room's magnificence. Pick up an audio-guide before setting off.

Just one exhibit – an immense 16th-century chimneypiece – draws visitors to the Renaissancezaal (Renaissance Hall) of the **Brugse Vrije** (Liberty of Bruges; Map p126; Burg 11a; adult/child/concession

€2.50/free/1.50, admission includes entry to nearby stadhuis; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm). This hall was the alderman's room of the palace of the Liberty of Bruges, a medieval administrative body. Completed in 1531, the chimney's upper section is a detailed oak carving depicting Emperor Charles V alongside an entourage of relatives; black marble and an alabaster frieze adorn the lower part. All in all it's pretty impressive, even without the men's overblown medieval copieces.

Devoted to all things dark and delicious, **Choco-Story** (Map p126; ☎ 050 61 22 37; www.choco-story.be; Wijnzakstraat 2; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 10am-5pm) is definitely Belgium's best chocolate museum. Wander past exhibits detailing everything from cocoa-growing to the virtues of hot chocolate, before sampling pralines made as you watch.

SOUTH OF MARKT Groeningemuseum

Bruges' prized collection of art dating from the 14th to the 20th century is housed in the small **Groeningemuseum** (Map p126; Dijver 12; adult/child/concession €8/free/5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun). Following a radical and quite controversial re-

vamp a few years ago, the Flemish Primitives no longer hold pride of place and the artworks are now not presented in strict chronological order. If sequence is your thing, start in Room 2, then backtrack to Room 1 and from there proceed through the rest of the museum. Free English-language booklets and audio-guides are available at the entrance.

Room 1, entitled *Municipal Patronage*, concentrates on works from the 15th and 16th centuries, many of which were commissioned by the city of Bruges. The gruesome *Judgement of Cambyses* (1498) by Gerard David depicts the Persian king being led from his throne and flayed alive. Here too is *The Last Judgement*, a fantastically nightmarish work by Hieronymus Bosch. It's filled with fire and mayhem, men and nuns being boiled alive and strange creatures devouring everything in sight.

Room 2 presents the Flemish Primitives. Most notable are works by Jan Van Eyck, who is generally considered to be the first great master of this period (see boxed text, below). Van Eyck's masterpiece *Madonna with Canon George Van der Paele* (1436) is a radiant portrayal of the Madonna and the infant Jesus surrounded by

THE FLEMISH PRIMITIVES

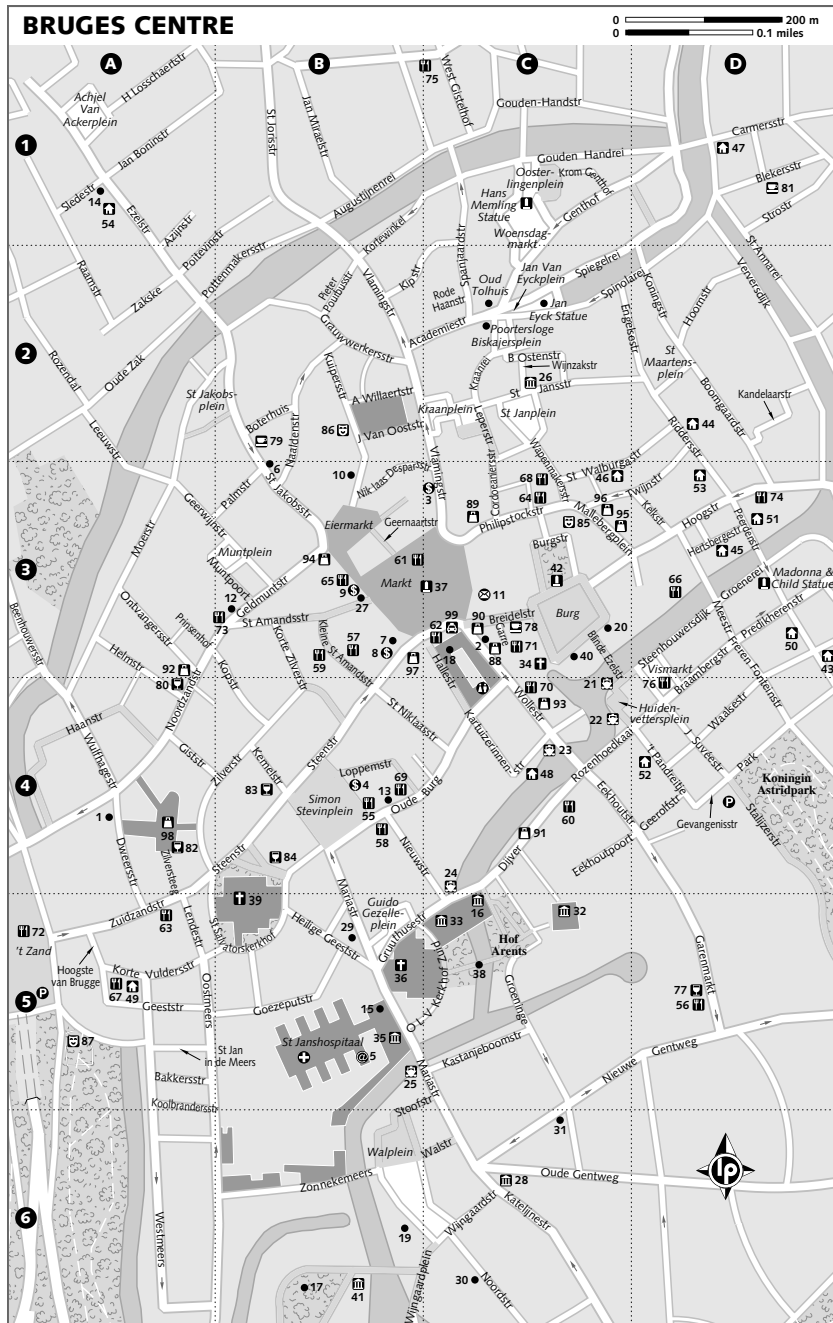
The period of the Flemish Primitives was one of Belgium's most glorious artistic times. Artists were commissioned to record the lifestyles of the ruling class as well as religious works. Their work was characterised by the use of radiant colours and intricate detail, which brought texture and subjects to life. These artists and artworks greatly influenced the course of European art and, centuries later, still astonish viewers.

Jan Van Eyck (c 1390-1441) Widely credited as the artist who invented oil painting. This isn't strictly true – what Van Eyck did was use oil as a medium for mixing colours instead of using the traditional, less-resilient tempera (an egg-based substance). He lived in Bruges but worked both there and in Ghent. His most celebrated artwork is *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1426-32), painted for Ghent's cathedral (p161). It's one of the world's greatest art treasures and a must-see.

Rogier Van der Weyden (c 1400-64) Succeeded Van Eyck as court painter to Philip the Good, and followed the style of his predecessor, blending religious emotion with sharp realism. Van der Weyden became the town painter for Brussels and executed works for the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) there, though many were destroyed during 1695's French bombardment. One of his masterpieces, *De Kruisafneming* (The Descent of the Cross), now hangs in Madrid's Museo del Prado, but a few are on display in Bruges' Groeningemuseum (above).

Hans Memling (c 1440-94) Frankfurt-born Memling was one of the most acclaimed artists of his day. He carefully composed paintings and expertly used colour to faithfully recreate God's material world. Bruges is the place to see his works. His famous *Moreel Triptych* (1484), named after Willem Moreel, Bruges' mayor, was innovative in its use of true perspective and is displayed in the Groeningemuseum. A handful of other works can be seen at Bruges' Museum St Janshospitaal (p128).

Gerard David (c 1460-1523) Arrived in Bruges from the Netherlands in the 1480s and succeeded Memling as Bruges' premier painter. As events would have it, he became the last great artist of this era because Bruges' fortunes waned and Antwerp, the great port city to the north-east, became the focus of Belgium's next artistic period.



three figures: the kneeling canon and, next to him, St George (his patron saint), while a richly clothed St Donatian looks on. The textures and detail are almost photographic – to viewers in the 15th century the portrait must have appeared incredible. Also in this room is Van Eyck's very honest portrait of his wife, Margaret. Here too is Hans Memling's *Moreel Triptych*, in which the serious central scene of brown-garbed saints is offset by fine detail such as the cheeky grin on a nearby child or the priest petting a deer.

Room 3 moves on to the Renaissance in Bruges, with several works by Jan Provoost and Pieter Pourbus. The latter is noted for his stern portraits. Rooms 4 to 8 explore baroque, neoclassicism and symbolism, as well as sculpture.

Room 9 is given over to Belgian modern art from early last century, and includes works by Henry Van de Velde, Jean Brusselmans and Rik

Wouters, as well as several dark pieces by Constant Permeke. Dominating the whole scene is the *Last Supper* (1929) by Gustave Van de Woestyne, one of the expressionists who set up at St Martens-Latem near Ghent early in the 20th century. Surrealism also gets a look in, with the movement's pivotal figure, René Magritte, represented by *L'Attentat* (The Assault; 1932). There's also Paul Delvaux's strange *Sérénité*.

Rooms 10 and 11 focus on more-recent modern art, with Pierre Alechinsky's *The Three Days* (1959) a highlight.

Other Sight

Occupying a stately 18th-century patrician house formerly owned by the Arents family, the **Arentshuis** (Map p126; Dijver 16; adult/child/concession €2.50/free/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) divides into two. The ground floor is reserved for temporary exhibitions while upstairs is given over to the powerful paintings and

INFORMATION

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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Bhavani.....	55 B4	Christophe.....	56 D5	De Belegde Boterham.....	57 B3	De Koetse.....	58 B4	De Stove.....	59 B3	Den Dwyver.....	60 C4	Food & Flower Market.....	61 B3	Frietkotjes.....	62 C3	GB Express.....	63 A5	Het Dagelijks Brood.....	64 C3	Huyze Die Maene.....	65 B3	Kaffee Pergola.....	66 D3	Lokkideze.....	67 A5	Lotus.....	68 C3	Louis Delhaize.....	69 B4
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DRINKING

Bolero.....	77 D5	De Garre.....	78 C3	De Republiek.....	79 B2	Est Wijnbar.....	80 A4	Herberg Vlissinghe.....	81 D1	Joey's Café.....	82 A4	't Brugs Beertje.....	83 B4	Top.....	84 B4
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SHOPPING

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WESTERN FLANDERS

WESTERN FLANDERS

etchings of Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), a Bruges-born artist of British parentage. Industrial themes are his strong point, and the exhibition is well worth visiting if you're into sombre paintings of dockyards and the like.

The tree-lined square at the rear of the Arentshuis is **Hof Arents**, a tranquil respite from the busy Dijver. Sit and contemplate four sculptures by Rik Poot entitled *De Ruiters van de Apocalyps* (Riders of the Apocalypse) before exiting the square to discover a tranquil canal lined with timber houses – one of the most picturesque nooks in Bruges. The canal is backed by humped **St Bonifaciusbrug** (Map p126). Cross the bridge to find a tiny window at the back of the Gruuthuse museum – according to local belief, it's Europe's smallest Gothic window.

Applied and decorative arts are the themes of the **Gruuthuse** (Map p126; Dijver 17; adult/child/concession €6/free/4; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun). The museum takes its name from the flower and herb mixture – the *gruut* – traditionally used for brewing beer. Most of the exhibits are labelled in Flemish only. Still, it's well worth spending some time here for the superb local tapestries, furniture and sculptures.

The **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Map p126; Mariestraat; adult/child/concession €2.50/free/1.50; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 1.30–5pm Sun) is a dark, sober building that dates from the 13th century and is most noted for its art treasures. Of these, the *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo is the undisputed gem. This small marble statue (1504) was bought in Italy by a Bruges merchant and was the only work of art by Michelangelo to leave Italy in his lifetime. Although pilfered several times by occupying forces, the statue has always been returned. It's also possible to visit the tombs of Charles the Bold (Karel de Stoute) and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy.

The prestigious **Museum St Janshospitaal** (St John's Hospital Museum; Map p126; Mariestraat 38; adult/child/concession €8/free/5; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun) is housed in a restored chapel of a 12th-century hospital. It's home to six masterpieces by Hans Memling (see boxed text, p125), and works by lesser-known painters of that time. Memling is noted for the fine quality of the figures in his religious paintings, such as the central panel of the *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* triptych (1479) that's presented here. Perhaps more enchanting is the reliquary of St Ursula. Shaped like a miniature wooden Gothic church, the reliquary's six painted panels depict the medieval tale of the beautiful St Ursula and the 11,000 virgins

who were massacred by the Huns in Germany while returning from a pilgrimage to Rome. The attention to detail is stunning.

Next to the museum is a restored 17th-century **apotheek** (pharmacy; Map p126), which originally belonged to the hospital. Feel free to wander in after visiting the museum.

The 13th-century **St Salvatorskathedraal** (St Saviour's Cathedral; Map p126; Steenstraat; ☎ 2–5.45pm Mon, 9am–noon & 2–5.45pm Tue–Fri, 9am–noon & 2–3.30pm Sat, 9–10am & 2–5pm Sun) is Bruges' oldest parish church. After years covered in scaffolding, the church's unusual 99m-high tower – incorporating turrets and spires with neo-Romanesque flair – is once again distinctly visible. Inside, the **Treasury** (adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 2–5pm Sun–Fri) displays works by Dirk Bouts and Pourbus.

The slick **Diamantmuseum** (Diamond Museum; Map p126; ☎ 050 34 20 56; Katelijnestraat 43; admission €6; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm) reveals Bruges' medieval role as the first diamond-polishing centre. It's home to the world's two smallest diamond sculptures – tiny profiles of the former King Baudouin and Queen Fabiola, each no more than 3mm in diameter. Even with a magnifying glass, it takes a sizable imagination to pick the resemblance. Diamond-polishing demonstrations are held at 12.15pm, and cost an extra €3.

Family brewery **Brouwerij De Halve Maan** (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 26 97; www.halvemaan.be; Walplein 26; admission €4.50; ☎ 11am–4pm Apr–Sep, 11am–3pm Oct–Mar), founded by Henri Maes in 1856, produces Straffe Hendrik (Strong Henry), a medium-strong (7%) ale, and Straffe Hendrik Blonde, a golden ale. These beers took their names from the family's tradition of baptising the first-born son from each generation 'Henri'. Crowded guided tours (45 minutes; in Flemish, French and English all at once) wind their way up and down the brewing hall and through a museum, to finish with a beer. Tours depart on the hour, and can include as many as 50 people.

The serene **begijnhof** (Map p126; admission free; ☎ 9am–6.30pm) dates from the 13th century and was traditionally the home of Beguines (see boxed text, opposite). The modest but dignified whitewashed houses are these days home to some 50 single women of all ages. The large convent at the rear of the tree-lined square is inhabited by Benedictine nuns. In spring a carpet of daffodils covers the grass. All this quaintness makes it one of Bruges' top attractions – in summer loads of people wander around but, despite the numbers, it remains a tranquil haven and a 'must see'. Just

BEGIJNEN & BEGIJNHOF

Begijnhoven (*béguinage* in French) are clusters of small houses surrounded by a protective wall and built around a central garden and church. In a nutshell, they're a town within a town. They were built in the Low Countries in the 12th century by *Begijnen* (Beguines), a Catholic order of unmarried or widowed women. The order was established largely due to the gender imbalance caused by the Holy Land Crusades – large numbers of men embarked on these adventures but many never returned. With little prospect of marriage, some single women joined forces and set up religious communities that adhered to vows of obedience and chastity but not, unlike nuns, poverty. The women were often from wealthy families and devoted their time to caring for the elderly and sick, and to work such as making lace. Their communities were independent and the women earned their living from making textiles and from benefactors who would pay the Beguines to pray for them.

At the start of the 20th century there were about 1500 Beguines in Belgium but the order has now virtually died out. Flanders' many *begijnhoven*, however, still exist and are still lived in, these days by ordinary townfolk. In 1998 Unesco added 14 of the country's 22 *begijnhoven* to its World Heritage List.

The best-preserved and most beautiful *begijnhoven* to visit are those in Diest (see St Katharina-begijnhof, p209), Lier (p200), Bruges (opposite) and Kortrijk (p157). The latter even offers overnight accommodation – see p159.

inside the main entrance is **'t Begijnhuisje** (Map p126; adult/student/senior €2/1/1.50; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Sat, 11am–noon & 2–5pm Sun), a typical house that is now a tiny museum. The *Begijnhof* is a 10-minute walk south of the Markt – head down Steenstraat, crossing Simon Stevin-plein and walking down Mariastraat before turning into Wijngaardstraat, and you'll soon see the main entrance, across the humped bridge.

Known in English as the Lake of Love, the **Minnewater** (south of Walplein) harks back to Bruges' medieval heyday. This waterway was a dock from where ships as far afield as Russia came laden with cargoes of wool, wine, spices and silks and left loaded with Flemish cloth.

ST ANNA QUARTER

Most of the following sights are located in the St Anna quarter, or Verloren Hoek (Forgotten Corner) as it's nicknamed. This area is somewhat off the beaten track, and spreads out northeast of the Markt, east of St Anna-rei canal. It's largely a tranquil, residential quarter, dotted with churches, windmills and small museums.

The quarter's biggest attractions are the lace centre and adjacent church, occupying almshouses in St Anna's heart. The **Kantcentrum** (Lace Centre; Map p123; www.kantcentrum.com; Peperstraat 3a; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat) is best known for its bobbin lace-making demonstrations – informal gatherings of 20 or so women who congregate (afternoons only) in a small room at the rear of the complex. It's

fascinating to watch, and a credit that these women are determinedly keeping the art form alive. The centre's lace museum displays a very modest collection of traditional lace.

The adjacent, onion-domed **Jeruzalemkerk** is more intriguing, built by the Adornes family in the 15th century as a replica of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It's a macabre monument. The dark, split-level church is dominated by a gruesome altarpiece (note the skulls and ladders) and the black-marble tomb of Anselm Adornes, whose heart was buried here after he was murdered in Scotland in 1483. To top it all off there's a replica of Christ's tomb, complete with imitation corpse.

The **Museum voor Volkskunde** (Folklore Museum; Map p123; Balstraat 43; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun) occupies a row of restored *godshuizen* (see boxed text, p130). Exhibits include an old Flemish kitchen, a hatter's shop and a 1930s-style *snoepwinkel* (sweet shop). One room has been converted into a café – De Zwarte Kat – serving drinks and snacks.

Flanders' best-known poet is celebrated at the **Guido Gezellemuseum** (Map p123; Rolweg 64; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm Tue–Sun). Gezelle became a cult figure among Flemish freethinkers in the early 20th century. He was born in 1830 in this house, which belonged to a noble family – his father was the gardener and Gezelle lived here until age 16, when he left to study at Roeselare (between Bruges and Kortrijk). The museum contains books and documents recalling his life and

GODSHUIZEN OF BRUGES

One of the delights of wandering around Bruges is the chance of coming across a complex of *godshuizen* (almshouses). These groups of terraced houses were built by merchant guilds for their members and by wealthy philanthropists for the poor and elderly. There are still 46 *godshuizen* in Bruges – the oldest date from the 14th century. The complexes are usually surrounded by a protective wall that encloses a central garden and chapel.

One of the town's cutest and most central *godshuizen* is **Godshuis De Vos** (Map p126; Noordstraat 2-8). It dates from 1713 but was restored in 1995. Another is **Godshuis St Jozef & De Meulenaere** (Map p126; Nieuwe Gentweg 8-32), which can be entered through large black doors. Two *godshuizen* have even been turned into museums – the Museum voor Volkskunde (p129) and the museum at the Kantcentrum (p129).

works, such as *The Evening and the Rose*, are sold at reception.

In the 13th century, Bruges' great walls were dotted with *molens* (windmills) where cereals were ground into flour. Four still stand on the eastern rampart and two can be visited: the 18th-century **St Janshuismolen** (Map p123; Kruisvest; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, Sat & Sun Apr-Sep), and the nearby **Koelweimolen** (Map p123; Kruisvest; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug). The sails are occasionally set in motion, and each houses a tiny museum.

The **Engels Klooster** (English Convent; Map p123; Carmersstraat 85; admission free; ☎ 2-3.30pm & 4.15-5.15pm Mon-Sat) was founded in 1629 by a community of canonesses (women who belong to a religious order but have not taken a vow) who fled England and, for many years, offered shelter to other Catholic exiles. One sister is on duty each day to give tours of the sumptuous baroque church. Just enter the courtyard, ring the bell and wait inside.

Activities

Saddle up – Bruges is ideal for cyclists. Either rent one and head off by yourself, or join a group (see p132). Stay around town – there's no better way to see a sizable swath of the city in a relatively short time – or head out along the Damse Vaart canal to Damme (30 minutes, 6km one way). Alternatively, the Riante Polder Route is a full-day excursion, clocking up 44km and taking in Damme and Knokke at the coast. Note that strong North Sea winds can make cycling impossible along the polders and the coast on windy days.

The Bruges tourist office has produced an English-language brochure for visiting cyclists entitled *5x on the Bike Around Bruges* (€1.50). It gives a map and good explanations of five possible routes ranging from 18km to 29km;

the Damme to Oostkerke route (23km) is picturesque.

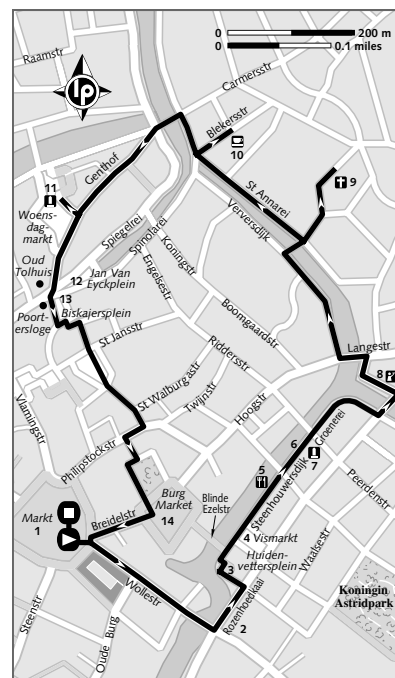
Bike-rental outfits are abundant, and **Fiet-sen Popelier** (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 32 62; Mariastraat 26; normal bike per hr/half-/full day €3.50/7/10, tandem €8/15/22; ☎ 10am-6pm, to 8pm Jul & Aug) is recommended. Children's bikes (same prices as adults') are available, and baby/toddler seats and baskets are provided for free. Helmets can also be hired. No deposit required for bikes. The cycles here are in excellent condition, never more than six months old, with moulded seats, six gears and good suspension. Some regional cycling maps, including the Riante Polder Route, are sold.

It's also possible to rent bikes from the **train station** (Map p123; per half-/full day €6.50/9.50, deposit €12.50; ☎ 7am-8pm).

Walking Tour

The **Markt** (1; p122) is the natural starting point. After craning your neck here, sidestep the many horse-drawn carriages and jostle down Wollestraat, a shopping favourite, before crossing the canal to **Rozenhoedkaai** (2). This quay offers the city's best belfry shot – make a mental note to return later when it's stunningly illuminated against a dark evening sky.

Follow the canal to **Huidenvettersplein** (3), a charming square (lined with popular restaurants) that leads to the **Vismarkt** (4; p137), Bruges' morning fish market. Follow Steenhoudersdijk to the next bridge, where romantics might want to make a dinner booking at **Kaffee Pergola** (5; p135). Continue on **Groenerei** (6), a short but delightful promenade along a particularly pretty part of the city's canal system. At the corner of Groenerei and Peerdenstraat is a street-corner **statue** (7) of the Madonna and Child; such elevated statues are common in Flanders, although this one is unusual for its modern features.



WALK FACTS

Start Markt
Finish Markt
Distance 2.8km
Duration About two hours

Groenerei peters out into a pedestrian walkway and curves sharply to a bridge. Cross the bridge and turn left, zigzagging your way past Predikherenrei's many terrace tables, to arrive at the confluence of two canals. Here there's a superb **view** (8) – at its best in the afternoon – of the city's turreted skyline.

The next part of the tour takes you off the beaten track to Bruges' less touristy quarters. Join Langestraat, cross the bridge, take the first right into Verversdijk and follow it to the first pedestrian bridge. Cross the canal to see **St Annakerk** (9); this 15th-century church lends its name to the St Anna quarter that fans out east of here. Once across the canal, turn left and follow St Annarei to the next bridge, which marks the junction of two canals and offers a great view to the southwest of the

15th-century Poortersloge (Burghers' Lodge). The city's wealthiest merchants once met in this slender-towered building. Opposite the Poortersloge is the Oud Tolhuys, where, until the 18th century, tolls were levied on goods being brought into the city.

Stop for a drink at Bruges' oldest *café* (pub), **Herberg Vlissinghe** (10; p137), or wander along Genthof to Woensdagmarkt to see a **statue of Hans Memling** (11), erected in 1874. The Flemish Primitive artist is buried in St Gilliskerk, a few blocks further north. For a statue of the most famous artist of this genre, head to nearby **Jan Van Eyckplein** (12). This square marks the end of a canal that was once crammed with boats en route to the Markt.

Head due south now through quiet residential backstreets, past the smell of warm chocolate emanating from **Choco-Story** (13; p125), to eventually join the **Burg** (14; p124). From here, navigate through the tourists swarming along Breidelstraat and you're back at the Markt.

Bruges for Children

Bruges is a great place to hang out with little kids, though you'll have to watch out for the open canals. Kids generally enjoy taking a **canal trip** (p132) or **horse-drawn carriage ride** (p132), or climbing the 366 steps up the **belfry** (p124). Taste-testing at **Choco-Story** (p125) or feeding the resident swans at the **Begijnhof** (p128) are also popular, as is the boat ride to **Damme** (p140). To let off steam, there's a popular **playground** (Map p123) at the southern end of Koningin Astridpark.

Cycling is fabulous for kids of various ages, and bikes can easily be hired (opposite). If your kids are young, the town centre is not the best place to safely cycle, and there are too many cobbles. Instead, make for the Minnewater, from where you can access the raised cycle path that circles the town. Head northeast on this path and you'll pass the windmills at Kruisvest. Continue north to reach the Noorweegse Kaai, the start of the Damse Vaart canal, which runs from Bruges to Damme (6km) and is flanked by a great cycling path. Alternatively, join a QuasiMundo tour (p132) – staff provide baby seats or 'third-wheels' (p304), and children under eight years go for free.

Boudewijn Seapark (☎ 050 40 84 08; www.boudewijnseapark.be; A Debaeckestraat 12, St Michiels; over/under 12yr €21/18, children under 11m free; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue Apr-Jun, 10am-6pm Thu-Tue Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun Sep) is a theme park with rides, a big playground, a

mini-train, ice-skating in winter and a controversial dolphinarium (a US dolphin psychologist recently found the animals living under constant stress). It's about 2km south of Bruges, and can be reached on bus 7 or 17 from 't Zand or Biekorf.

Other regional theme parks are **Plopsaland** (p148) and **Earth Explorer** (p142).

Kids love the Belgian coast and it's within spitting distance of Bruges – 20 minutes by car to **De Haan** (p145), or 15 minutes by train to Ostend. If you choose the latter, remember there's a 1km walk from the train station to **Ostend beach** (p141), or simply jump on the **Kusttram** (Coast Tram; see boxed text, p145). With luck, you may even catch *paardevisser*s (horseback fishermen) at Oostduinkerke (p147).

The **Gezinsbond** (☎ 0479 76 22 10; www.gezinsbond.be) has baby-sitters, but it's not as easy as just phoning and delivering (see p304).

Tours

BIKE TOURS

Cycle tours are big business in Bruges, and several companies offer three- to four-hour tours of the town and/or the surrounding countryside. **QuasiMundo** (☎ 050 33 07 75; www.quasimundo.com; under/over 26yr €18/20, with own bike €14; ☹ mid-Mar–mid-Oct) is highly recommended. The guy who runs this company has been involved in cycle tourism for more than a decade. Three tours with English commentary are offered: a 2½-hour (8km) tour of Bruges; a four-hour (25km) cycle to the Dutch border and back via Damme; or tours of Bruges by night. Bookings are necessary.

CANAL TOURS

Taking a **canal tour** (adult/child €5.70/2.80; ☹ 10am–6pm Mar–mid-Nov) is a must. Yep, it's touristy, but what isn't in Bruges? Viewing the city from the water gives it a totally different feel than by foot. Cruise down Spiegelrei towards Jan Van Eyckplein and it's possible to imagine Venetian merchants entering the city centuries ago and meeting under the slender turret of the Poortersloge building up ahead. Boats depart roughly every 20 minutes from jetties south of the Burg, including Rozenhoedkaai and Dijver, and tours last 30 minutes. Expect queues in summer.

HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE RIDES

The clip-clop of hooves hitting cobblestones resounds constantly in the streets of Bruges. In summer, aim to jump on board between 6pm and 7pm – by this time day-trippers have

left the city, locals are stirring dinner at home, and most tourists are taking a shower. Bruges' streets take on a semitransquil air at this time of day, and the gold-topped buildings shimmer in the late sun rays. All the carriages depart from the Markt, and their well-trodden route takes 35 minutes (including a pit stop at the Begijnhof). The cost is €30 (for five people).

MINIBUS TOURS

Quasimodo (☎ 0800 975 25; www.quasimodo.be; under/over 26yr €40/50) is a small company that's been offering two excellent day trips for years. The Triple Treat tour explores Damme plus nearby castles and promises a waffle, beer and chocolate at various establishments around Bruges. The Flanders Fields tour takes in Ypres and its famous WWI battlefields. The price includes all admission charges and a picnic lunch. Reservations are necessary. Both trips (9am to 5pm) operate Tuesday to Sunday from April to October. The rest of the year there's a Triple Treat tour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and a Flander's Field tour on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Tours don't run between mid-December and mid-February.

Sightseeing Line (☎ 050 35 80 24; www.citytour.be; adult/child €11.50/6.50; ☹ 10am–8pm Jul–Sep, 10am–6pm Apr–Jun & Oct, 10am–5pm Mar, Nov & Dec, 10am–4pm Jan & Feb) runs a don-your-multilingual-headphone, 50-minute minibus City Tour, leaving the Markt hourly.

Festivals & Events

Bruges Festival Musica Antiqua (www.musica-antiqua.com) Week-long music festival in early February.

Cinema Novo Film Festival (www.cinemanovo.be)

Ten-day festival in mid-March that highlights Asian, African and Latin American films.

Heilig-Bloedprocessie (www.holyblood.com) The Holy Blood Procession is Bruges' most famous annual event. It's held at 3pm on Ascension Day (17 May 2007, 1 May 2008 and 21 May 2009) and celebrates the drops of Christ's blood that are kept in the town's basilica. The relic is paraded through town in an elaborate, medieval-style procession. Tickets for a grandstand/bench seat on the Markt cost €11/4.75 and are sold at In&Uit Brugge (see p122).

Cactus Festival (www.cactusmusic.be in Flemish) Two-day festival of world music held on the second weekend of July at the Minnewater.

Praalstoet van de Gouden Broom The Pageant of the Golden Tree has been held roughly every five years since 1958 (the next is 4pm on 25 and 26 August 2007). It celebrates the marriage of Charles the Bold (Karel de Stoute) to Margaret of York in 1468.

Sleeping

Bruges has a wealth of accommodation. All options are oppressively overbooked during the high season, which starts soon after Easter and lasts until October (sometimes longer). Most places don't charge more in the high season. The tourist office will book accommodation for free.

Like B&Bs, self-contained guesthouses and holiday flats are booming in Bruges. The tourist office's brochure *Logies* details many. Inquire about discounted rates in winter, and for stays of more than three nights.

BUDGET

Camping Memling (☎ 050 35 58 45; www.campingmemling.be; Veltemweg 109, St Kruis; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car €5/3/4/5; ☹ year-round) The quietest local camping ground, located in St Kruis, about 2.5km east of town. Take bus 11 from the train station to the Vossensteert stop and walk 400m back in the direction of Bruges.

Snuffel (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 31 33; www.snuffel.be; Ezelstraat 47-49; dm/d per person €14/18; ☹ ☒) Funky, unpretentious place that's been around for years and is the most 'alternative' hostel in Bruges. The rooms are basic but original, the staff is friendly, and there's a kitchen, bar and occasional live music. From the train station take bus 3 or 13 and get off at the first stop after the Markt.

Bauhaus (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 10 93; www.bauhaus.be; Langestraat 135; hostel dm/d/tr per person €15/17/19, hotel s/d €28/44, flats per person €25; ☹ ☒) This place just keeps growing. It started life as a bustling hostel and over the years has added a hotel section and, more recently, self-contained flats. It's one of the most popular hang-outs for young travellers, though the blue rooms hardly fuel the imagination. The double rooms in the hotel section have private shower cubicles; elsewhere there are communal bathrooms. The spacious apartments, located above the new reception

and internet café, are good value but have simple (almost makeshift) furnishings. Bauhaus has a bar and adjoining café that are lively and loud, and good cheap meals are available. Take bus 6 or 16 from the train station.

B&B Degraeve (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 57 11; www.stardekk.com/bedbreakfast; Kazerveest 32; s/d/tr €33/45/58) In a quiet, untouristed part of town and owned by a good-humoured woman, Marjan, who has filled the two spacious rooms with way-out décor. Expect religious trinkets, stuffed swans and a delicious homemade sweet apple wine. Breakfast is taken in your room, and the bathroom facilities are shared.

Hotel Lybeer (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 43 55; www.hotellybeer.com; Korte Vulderrstraat 31; s/d/tr/q with bathroom €38/55/72/90, s/d without bathroom €25/45; ☹ closed last fortnight Jun; ☹) Half a step up from your average hostel. Located in a typical Bruges terrace house that's 'just clean enough to be healthy, just dirty enough to be happy', according to a sign at reception. It's run-down in parts – peeling paintwork, scruffy carpet and cracked walls – but the rooms have colourful décor and a hotchpotch of furnishings. There's a bar and kitchen.

MIDRANGE

B&B Gheeraert (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 56 27; www.users.skynet.be/brugge-gheeraert; Riddersstraat 9; s/d/tr €55/60/80, €10 extra for 1-night stay; ☹ ☒) The three lofty rooms at this B&B are lovely. Occupying the top floor (up a steep spiral staircase) of a listed historic mansion just 300m from the Burg, the rooms are spacious, and have white décor and polished timber floors. The two nicest rooms, at the rear, look out over the garden. Breakfast is taken in the family's dining room, and there's also a small salon for guests to use. Children and babies (cot and highchair available) are welcome.

B&B Dieltiens (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 42 94; www.bedandbreakfastbruges.be; Waalsestraat 40; s/d/tr €55/65/85,

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

B&B Setola (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 49 77; www.bedandbreakfast-bruges.com; St Walburgastraat 12; s/d/tr/ff €50/60/80/100, €10 extra for 1 night stay; ☹ ☒) If you want to stay right under the belfry, or thereabouts, don't go past this vibrant B&B. Located on a quiet backstreet a few minutes' walk from the Markt, it occupies a mansion dating from 1740 and has three spacious 2nd-floor guestrooms with cool, clean vibes. One room can even accommodate a family with two older kids (they'll need to climb a steep ladder to a mezzanine bed). A fabulous buffet breakfast tops it all off and Lut, the woman who runs this B&B, is as helpful and hospitable as they come. Children and babies (cot and highchair available) are genuinely welcome.

€10 extra for 1-night stay) This place is run by a very friendly couple, Annemie and Koen, who've welcomed visitors for well over a decade – and their hospitality still shines. Their classical-style home occupies a mansion that featured on the first map of Bruges, published in the 16th century. Lovingly restored, the house has three polished guestrooms, all with private facilities and TV, situated on the top (2nd) floor. Wooden floors, subtle warm tones and modern furnishings are the theme throughout.

Tine's Guesthouse (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 50 18; www.tinesguesthouse.com; Zwaluwenstraat 11; s/d/f €55/65/124; ☒) If you don't want the carillon within cooee, consider heading here. For service, you'll find no better. This B&B is run by the wonderfully effervescent Tine, whose mission in life is to spoil visitors – she'll happily pick you up from the train station and, as the B&B is located 1.5km north of the Markt, she provides free bikes. Oh, there's also a free packed lunch to follow the awesome breakfast. The two rooms – plus kitchen, lounge room and small patio – have fresh décor and are situated on the 1st floor of the house next door to Tine's. If you're travelling with kids, this place is ideal, and there's free street parking.

Huyze De Blokfluit (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 42 94; www.bedandbreakfastbruges.be; Peerdenstraat 16; studio for 2 people €65, apt €75, per extra guest per night €10; ☒ ☒) This cute 17th-century terrace house is divided into a small ground-floor studio and a slightly larger 1st-floor duplex apartment. Neither place is huge, but neither are the prices. Furnishings are simple but authentic and, as it's owned by the couple who operate B&B Dieltiens, attention to detail is paramount.

B&B Den Vijfhouck (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 44 02; www.denvijfhouck.be; Sulfbergstraat 1; s/d €70/75, €10 extra for 1-night stay) One block south of the Begijnhof,

this beautiful little grey corner cottage is almost like a mini boutique hotel. Rooms are pristine and service is immaculate, and Janien, the woman who runs this place, is a joy.

Ridderspoor (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 90 11; www.ridderspoor.be; Riddersstraat 9; studio for 2 people €75, apt €85, per extra guest per night €10; ☒ ☒) This is a superb address in a neoclassical mansion in the heart of town. All the rooms are fully equipped with kitchen, washing machine and spacious living areas. Choose from the attic loft (two people) with its wonderful belfry view, or one of three larger apartments (four to six people).

Ter Duinen Hotel (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 04 37; www.terduinenhotel.be; Langerei 52; s/d from €98/105; ☒) A little hotel facing a canal, just over 1km north of the Markt. The neat rooms have a refined, romantic air and the staff is efficient and friendly. Prices depend on room size and location – front rooms with a canal view are dearer. The long breakfast room looks out onto a pretty paved courtyard.

Hotel Adornes (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 13 36; www.adornes.be; St Annarei 26; s/d/f from €95/110/140; ☒) Pleasant hotel with a rustic feel that occupies three old gabled houses in the often-overlooked St Anna quarter. The 20 rooms are all modern and there's a good buffet breakfast, complimentary parking, free bikes and a crackling open fire in the breakfast room. Rates as one of the friendliest and most helpful midrange hotels in Bruges. Baby cots are available (€10), and a child's bed costs €15.

B&B Huyze Hertsberge (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 35 42; www.huyzehertsberge.be; Hertsbergestraat 8; d €120-145) One of the city's newest B&B addresses, and a must for antique aficionados. Run by charming Caroline Van Langeriaert, this mocha-toned townhouse on a quiet back lane in the city heart has been in Caroline's family for four generations. The four spacious rooms

are each elegantly different from the next, and the pristine breakfast room has views to a tranquil canal-side garden where guests are free to while away spare moments.

TOP END

Pand Hotel (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 06 66; www.pandhotel.com; 't Pandreite 16; s/d/ste from €125/150/225; ☒ ☒) Boutique hotel, hidden away on a tree-lined backstreet just a few minutes' walk from the Markt and very much for lovers of luxury. A former 18th-century carriage house, it sports 26 rooms, each individual and loaded with antiques and *objets d'art* (the family who owns the hotel also runs an antique shop). The more expensive rooms have Jacuzzis, and the suites are draped in rich Ralph Lauren fabrics. Breakfast is served in a virginal white dining room.

Hotel De Orangerie (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 16 49; www.hotelorangerie.com; Kartuizerinnenstraat 10; s/d/t €170/195/250; ☒ ☒) Refined but friendly 20-room hotel that started out as a 15th-century convent and boasts a canal-side position (close to the Markt) that's impossible to beat. The hotel's façade is one of the prettiest scenes in Bruges. Avoid room No 103 – it's something of an afterthought. Breakfast's available for €19.

Relais Ravestein (Map p123; ☎ 050 47 69 47; www.relaisravestein.be; Molenmeers 11; d from €248; ☒) Hip new canal-side hotel that offers a beautiful marriage between classic grandeur and contemporary chic. Exposed beams in the bedrooms vie for attention with bubble baths and so-called 'tropical rain' showers (ie blast yourself with 36L of water per minute – lucky Belgium's not suffering from drought, yet).

Eating

From cosy *estaminets* (taverns) to first-class restaurants – Bruges has all bases covered.

CAFÉS & BRASSERIES

Huyze Die Maene (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 39 59; Markt 17; mains €10-14; ☒) lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A classic brasserie in a prime position on the Markt. Great for a casual lunch or dinner. Limited Flemish cuisine is backed by friendly service.

Lokkedize (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 44 50; Korte Vuldersstraat 33; dishes €10-14; ☒) from 6pm Tue-Sun) Good spot for a late-night bite. An open fire and moody music ensure return patronage. Meals are typically Mediterranean, such as *meze* or *moussaka*, and the kitchen stays open 'til midnight, sometimes later.

Du Phare (Map p123; ☎ 050 34 35 90; www.duphare.be; Sasplein 2; mains €11-18; ☒) 11.30am until late, closed Tue) Off-the-beaten-track tavern serving everything from kangaroo steaks to ostrich or carpaccio. The generous servings, great atmosphere and reasonable prices ensure its popularity in this unvisited quarter. Known also for its monthly live blues/jazz session (check the website for dates). Bus 4 stops out the front.

Mezzogiorno (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 42 29; Wollestraat 25/3; mains €14-16; ☒) noon-6pm, closed Wed) Contemporary Italian *café* that's proves Bruges is not all old hat. Head up the cement steps near design shop B and enter a world where modern décor and fresh food are paramount.

Opus Latino (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 97 46; Breidelstraat 24; mains €14-17; ☒) lunch & dinner, closed Wed) Hidden down a narrow cobbled alley on the busy link between the Markt and Burg, most tourists miss this funky brasserie – don't make the same mistake. Local demand is high for the few canal-side tables. The cuisine is modern, and prices refreshingly low for this part of town.

RESTAURANTS

Lotus (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 10 78; Wapenmakerstraat 5; ☒) 11.45am-2pm Mon-Sat) Quaint lunchtime restaurant catering to those who love colourful healthy meals. The cuisine is vegetarian and the menu consists of two choices: a *kleine maaltijd* (small meal; €9.20), or a good-value *grote* (large) version (€10).

Sint Barbe (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 09 99; De Damhouderstraat 29; mains €10-17; ☒) lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Thu-Mon) Hidden away opposite St Anna church, this

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Number 11 (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 06 75; www.number11.be; Peerdenstraat 11; d €115-140, ste €215) There's no mincing words – this is a stunner. The couple who run it, Annie and artist husband, Pavel, offer travellers the intimacy of a boutique hotel combined with the personal charm of a B&B. It's housed in a charcoal-coloured terrace house in the historic centre. The three rooms – 'Vanilla', 'Grey' and 'Chocolate' – bathe in individual charm but harmonise as a whole. Antique furnishings sit alongside Pavel's philosophical artworks, a claw-foot tub (the Vanilla room) reclines next to a modern vanity unit, a sunken bath (Chocolate) looks out over exposed attic beams. The ground-floor suite (a small self-contained apartment) opens onto the home's trim terrace garden. The breakfast room, with its communal dining table, shares this view. Guests have a salon for their exclusive use, which is overseen by the most kooky chandelier you'll ever see.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Kaffee Pergola (Map p126; ☎ 050 44 76 50; Steenhoudersdijk; mains €20-23; ☒) closed dinner Tue & Wed) Follow the fairy lights to this most romantic of outdoor addresses, hidden among greenery beside a quiet and very picturesque stretch of canal right in the centre of Bruges. Book one of the four tables perched along the canal, and settle back to the sound of birdsong and the glow of fading light as evening mellows. A limited range of delicious Belgian specialties is offered, and the service is attentive. This place is owned and operated by the discreet top-end Hotel Die Swaene, located across the canal, and though relatively new is highly popular.

confident little restaurant offers a small selection of Belgian dishes, including meat, fish and vegetarian options. With modern décor, ultrafriendly staff and excellent prices, it's little wonder the locals have taken it to heart.

Ryad (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 13 55; Hoogstraat 32; mains €13-20; 🍴 dinner) Bruges' dining scene has been boosted by the influx of many new cuisines in recent times. This intimate Moroccan haunt is one of note. Couscous and tagines are its forte, and the décor's deliciously dark.

Bhavani (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 90 25; Simon Stevinplein 5; mains €14-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Wed) A simple Indian restaurant on a bustling tree-lined square off Bruges' main shopping street. As you'd expect, vegetarians and nonvegetarians are well catered for, and the food is authentic and moreish.

Bistrot De Schaar (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 59 79; Hooistraat 2; mains €15-21; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Thu) An out-of-the-way, good-value restaurant located just below street level. In fine weather there's also a large terrace across the road next to the canal lock. The cuisine is a Mediterranean-Belgian mix and the char-grilled specialities are excellent.

Tom's Diner (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 33 82; West Gistelhof 23; mains around €17; 🍴 6.30pm-1am, closed Tue & Wed) To the north of town, a little way out of the tourist centre and all the better for it. This whitewashed gabled corner house has a rustic interior and serves stylish modern-Belgian food at very affordable prices.

De Koetse (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 76 80; Oude Burg 31; mains €17-36; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Thu) Restaurants on the Markt dish up the ubiquitous mussels and *frites* (fries), but quality and ambience can be trite and lacking. If you want both good mussels and attentive service, follow the locals here. *Paling in 't groen* (eel in spinach sauce; €20), another Belgian speciality, also features.

Den Dwyer (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 60 69; Dijver 5; dishes €18-27, 3-course menu incl beers €46; 🍴 dinner, closed Tue) For an evening of Burgundian-style revelry and indulgence, head to this large, well-established restaurant located on the tree-lined Dijver. The cuisine is traditional Belgian, inventively spiced with beer-based sauces and marinades.

De Stove (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 78 35; Kleine St Amandsstraat 4; mains €18-28, menu with/without wine €58/42; 🍴 lunch Sat-Tue, dinner Fri-Tue) A charming little restaurant tucked away on a pedestrianised lane close to the Markt. Despite the perennial rave reviews, it refuses to flaunt itself. The

eight tables are arranged around an old stove, the service is intimate and personable, and the food – largely fish specialities – is excellent.

Christophe (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 48 92; Garenmarkt 34; mains €20-30; 🍴 7pm-1am Thu-Mon) A cool late-night bistro with marble table-tops and a decent range of Flemish staples such as fresh Zeebrugge shrimps. Excellent late-nighter.

Hertog Jan (☎ 050 67 34 46; Torhoutsesteenweg 479; mains €48-50, menus from €70; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Hail a taxi to experience Hertog Jan. About 3.5km west of the centre, this suburban restaurant is the current talk of gourmet circles. Expect French cuisine such as Limousin lamb and Bresse dove, or sample the works with the *degustation* menu.

De Karmeliet (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 82 59; Langestraat 19; lunch menu €60, menu *degustation* €145; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍴) If Michelin stars are your quality assurance, then this is Bruges' top address. Not one but three twinkles means it has long been a firm favourite of food lovers throughout Belgium. Chef Geert Van Hecke's French *haute cuisine* is responsible for all the fuss. For weekends you'll need to book a week ahead.

QUICK EATS

Het Dagelijks Brood (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 60 50; Philipstockstraat 21; snacks €5-11; 🍴 7am-6pm, closed Tue) Part of a national bakery-tearoom chain (see p103), with just one big table where you can eat breakfast or feast on lunch staples such as salads, *boterhammen* (sandwiches) or savoury pies.

De Belegde Boterham (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 91 31; Kleine St Amandsstraat 5; 🍴 noon-4pm, closed Sun) No-fuss tearoom tucked away in a pedestrianised alley close to the Markt. Firm local favourite, and the filled baguette sandwiches (€6.50) are delicious. Also serves salads (€10).

Frietkotjes (Map p126; Markt; 🍴 11am-11pm) Take-away *frites* (from €2.50) and hot dogs (from €3) can be bought from the two green vans on the Markt. These little vans, by the way, are a gold mine for the local city council, paying €250,000 per year to be able to use this prime spot.

SELF-CATERING

Recommended supermarkets:

GB Express (Map p126; Zuidzandstraat 5)

Louis Delhaize (Map p126; Oude Burg 22)

Proxy/Delhaize (Map p126; Geldmuntstraat)

Smatch (Map p123; Langestraat 55; 🍴 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat)

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Soaking up Bruges at one of its weekly markets is a great way to do as locals do. Belgians love comparing produce at fruit and veggie stalls, complementing flower-sellers on their latest array or browsing bric-a-brac. You'll find little old ladies assessing the state of the charcuterie, young couples doing their weekly shop and gents politely inspecting antiques.

The **food and flower market** (Map p126; 🍴 7am-1pm Wed) on the Markt is the most picturesque. If you're here on a weekend, content yourself with the busy fresh **produce market** (Map p126; 🍴 8am-1pm Sat) on 't Zand, which is also a general goods market.

At the colonnaded **Vismarkt** (Fish Market; Map p126; Steenhoudersdijk; 🍴 8am-1pm Tue-Sat), fishmongers have been selling their North Sea produce for centuries. These days only a few vendors set up on the cold stone slabs, but it's still worth a wander. Join locals buying snacks such as *maatjes* (herring fillets). On weekends, the Vismarkt and nearby **Dijver** (Map p126; 🍴 10am-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar-mid-Nov) are taken over by antique and bric-a-brac stalls.

Drinking

De Republiek (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 02 29; St Jakobsstraat 36; 🍴 from 11am) Local favourite and one of Bruges' most congenial pubs. A modern affair, located under the same roof as Cinema Lumière, and with a big, out-back terrace in summer. Meals are available (€9 to €13) and the kitchen is open 'til midnight. DJs take over on Friday and Saturday nights.

De Garre (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 10 29; Garre 1; 🍴 noon-1am) Hidden in a narrow cul-de-sac between the Markt and the Burg, this tiny old *estaminet* is a beer-specialist pub – browse through the umpteen-page menu while trying to decide.

Joey's Café (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 12 64; Zilversteeg 4; 🍴 from 11.30am Mon-Sat Oct-May, daily Jun-Sep) Lose the tourists at this muso's haunt, strangely located inside the Zilverpand shopping centre. The candle-lit atmosphere is dark and relaxing. Once in a blue moon the affable owners, Kristel and Stevie, organise live gigs.

Est Wijnbar (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 38 39; Noordzandstraat 34; 🍴 from 5pm Thu-Mon) Tidy wine bar with a pleasant summer terrace and live music – jazz, blues, boogie or folk – every Sunday from 7.30pm.

Top (Map p126; St Salvatorskerkhof 5; 🍴 from 9pm Tue-Sat, from 10pm Sun) A cool little bar that opens late and moves until morning. The décor's cool, stark and bland.

't Brugs Beertje (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 96 16; Kemelstraat 5; 🍴 4pm-1am, closed Tue & Wed) Probably Belgium's most famous beer pub. It's a tiny place situated on a poky backstreet, and offers around 200 national brews, listed by brewery.

Bolero (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 81 11; Garenmarkt 32; 🍴 10pm-4am, closed Tue & Wed) Bruges' only gay and lesbian bar.

De Windmolen (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 97 39; Carmersstraat 135; 🍴 from 11am, closed Sat) Quaint corner *café* overlooking St Janshuismolen in St Anna. A fitting port o' call for a drink after visiting the windmills or nearby Guido Gezellemuseum.

Entertainment

Concertgebouw (Map p126; ☎ 050 47 69 99; www.concertgebouw.be; 't Zand 34) Contemporary comes to Bruges in the form of this concert hall, the newest building on the city's skyline. Opened in 2002 to celebrate Bruges' year-long stint as the European City of Culture, its minimal design incorporates the city's three famous towers and its colour perfectly melds with the city's rosy hues. It regularly stages theatre, classical music and dance.

Cactus Muziekcentrum (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 20 14; www.cactusmusic.be in Flemish; Magdalenestraat 27) The city's premier venue for contemporary and world music – either live or DJ. It's a little way out of the town centre, and small as live music venues go.

Celtic Ireland (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 45 02; Burg 8) Offers pints of draught Guinness and live music (rock, jazz or blues) on Friday and/or Saturday evenings from 10pm (every night in summer).

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Herberg Vlissinghe (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 37 37; Blekerstraat 2; 🍴 from 11am, closed Tue) Bruges' oldest *café*. Someone has been pouring beer here since 1515 – mind-blowing, really. Local legend has it that Rubens painted an imitation coin on the table here and then did a runner. Snacks are available.

LACED UP

Lace (*kant* in Flemish, *dentelle* in French) blossomed in Flanders in the 16th century. *Naaldkant* (needlepoint lace), which developed in Italy, was predominantly made in Brussels while *kloskant* (bobbin lace) is believed to have originated in Bruges. The latter requires thousands of painstaking and meticulous movements of bobbins and pins. Each lace-maker had her own patterns, which stayed in the family and were handed down through generations.

The bulk of lace sold in shops throughout Belgium these days is either handmade in Asia or machine-made in France. If you want handmade lace from Belgium you're going to have to hunt for it and state what you want. Even reputable shops generally do not advertise which of their stock is made outside Belgium.

Watch lace-makers at work at the **Kantcentrum** (p129), or take a stab at it yourself with **Caroline Flokman** (☎ 050 67 87 61; <http://users.telenet.be/brugesprivatelacelessons>), who gives half-day private lessons (€60) in her Bruges home.

In the mood for a movie? Grab your partner and head for either of these cinemas:

Cinema Liberty (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 20 11;

Kuiperstraat 23) Mainstream movie offerings.

Cinema Lumière (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 34 65; St

Jakobsstraat 36) Features two auditoriums, and shows foreign and mainstream films and an occasional classic.

Shopping

Steenstraat, the main shopping thoroughfare, is lined with a small collection of international chain stores. The nearby Geldmuntstraat and Noordzandstraat are home to boutiques. For details on the city's markets, see p137.

† **Apostelientje** (Map p123; ☎ 050 33 78 60; Balstraat 11; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) It's not finding lace that's the problem in Bruges – it's avoiding it. About 80 lace shops operate in the city, many tucked away in nooks and crannies or concentrated along Wollestraat and Breidelstraat. This shop is well away from all of these and stocks about 70% antique lace. For more on lace, see boxed text, (above).

B (Map p126; ☎ 050 49 09 32; Wollestraat 31a) An outlet for all manner of Belgian designs – everything from clothes to household products and toys.

De Biertempel (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 37 30; Philipstockstraat 7) Beer specialist shop where you can even pick up a well-priced bottle of Westvleteren (€4.95).

Bottle Shop (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 99 80; Wollestraat 13; ☎ 10am-7pm) Not your typical off-licence – this shop goes to town with copious quantities of beer, *jenever* (gin) and mineral waters, all displayed in slick surroundings.

Chocolatier Van Oost (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 14 54; Wollestraat 11) A small establishment with an excellent reputation for handmade pralines.

It's on a hectic shopping street, and is easily overlooked – allow the scent of warm chocolate to lead the way. Once inside, accustom yourself to the rich displays, then note the vats of molten chocolate being stirred out back.

L'Héroïne (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 56 57; Noordzandstraat 32; ☎ Mon-Sat) Some of Belgium's top designers are represented in this discreet boutique on one of Bruges' main shopping streets.

Tintin Shop (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 42 92; Steenstraat 3; ☎ daily) Stocks everything any Tintin buff could ever want, and more.

Other recommendations:

Delvaux (Map p126; ☎ 050 49 01 31; Breidelstraat 2) Home-grown handbags and other leather goods.

Galler (Map p126; ☎ 050 61 20 62; Steenstraat 5) One of Belgium's better chocolate chain shops.

Mille-Fleurs (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 54 54; Wollestraat 33) Specialises in Flemish tapestries.

Olivier Strelli (Map p126; ☎ 050 34 38 37; Eiermarkt 3) Prominent corner boutique given over to Belgium's best-known designer.

Rombaux (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 25 75; Mallebergplein 13) Fabulous music shop in an antique setting.

Secondo (Map p126; ☎ 050 33 07 88; Mallebergplein 3) Sells pre-loved Delvaux handbags, most in pretty good nick.

Zilverpand (Map p126) Shopping gallery between Steenstraat and Noordzandstraat.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Busabout buses pass through Bruges (for more information, see p318). They pick up and drop off at Snuffel (p133).

TRAIN

Bruges' **train station** (☎ information office 050 30 24 24) is about 1.5km south of the city centre.

There are trains every half-hour to Brussels (one way €11.60, one hour) and Ghent (€5.40, 20 minutes). Hourly trains go to Antwerp (€12.40, 70 minutes), De Panne (€7.40, one hour; change at Lichtervelde), Knokke (€3, 15 minutes), Kortrijk (€6.40, 40 minutes), Ostend (€3.30, 15 minutes) and Zeebrugge (€2.40, 10 minutes).

To get to Ypres (Ieper in Flemish; €10.10, two hours), take the train to Kortrijk; here you must wait 30 minutes for the hourly connection. Buy a B-Dagtrip ticket (see boxed text, p324) if you're planning a day trip. This ticket costs €11.40 and includes a return train fare, admission to four museums and a drink in a *café*.

Getting Around

A small network of buses operated by **De Lijn** (☎ 070 22 02 00; www.delijn.be in Flemish) covers destinations in and around Bruges. Most depart from De Lijn's information office (Map p123) on the square in front of the train station, and many stop at central locations such as 't Zand, Markt, Wollestraat and Biekorf on Kuiperstraat.

From the train station, buses 1, 3, 4, 11, 13, 14 and 16 head for the centre – take any bus marked 'Centrum'.

A single ticket bought at De Lijn's information office costs €1.20 (or €1.50 on the bus), a *dagpas* (day ticket) is €5 (or €6 on the bus) and a 10-journey *lijnkaart* (network card) is €8 (€10 on the bus). A *tweerittenkaart* (two rides) costs €2 and can be used either for one journey by two people, or for two rides by one person. Buses run from 5.30am until about 11pm. On Friday and Saturday, limited night-bus services run from the centre to the suburbs (and to Damme) until 2am.

CAR

A medieval city enmeshed by waterways is hardly an ideal place for four wheels. There are several big car parks in town but it's considerably cheaper to leave your car at the periphery. The best place is the covered car park next to the train station. Here you'll pay €0.50 per hour or just €2.50 for 24 hours, and you get a free return bus ticket to the centre for the car's driver and all passengers.

TAXI

Taxis wait on the Markt and at Stationsplein (in front of the train station). Otherwise phone ☎ 050 33 44 44 or ☎ 050 38 46 60.

DAMME

pop 10,900

Day-trippers prize the former fishing village of Damme, 6km northeast of Bruges. A long time ago, Damme nestled on the edge of the Zwin, a waterway connected to the sea. A canal was built between it and Bruges and, by the 13th century, Damme was the region's bustling port. But along with Bruges, its fate was sealed when the Zwin silted.

Information & Sights

Central to everything is the Gothic **stadhuis**, where Charles the Bold, one of the nation's 15th-century rulers, and Margaret of York wed in lavish style in 1468. Directly in front of the stadhuis is a **statue of Jacob Van Maerlant**, a 13th-century Flemish poet who lived and died in Damme. He's buried in **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Our Lady's Church; Kerkstraat). This church dates back to the 12th century and was vastly expanded in the village's heyday, only to be abandoned and partially torn down when things started to wane. In summer, climb the robust tower for good views.

Opposite the stadhuis, a restored patrician's house is home to the **tourist office** (☎ 050 28 86 10; www.vvvdamme.be in Flemish; Jacob Van Maerlantstraat 3; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) and the **Uilenspiegel Museum** (☎ 050 28 86 10; www.vvvdamme.be/arrangementen.htm in Flemish; Jacob Van Maerlantstraat 3; adult/family €2.50/5; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Oct–mid-Apr). The latter recounts the stories of Uilenspiegel, a villain in German folklore but a jester and freedom fighter in Flemish literature.

Sleeping & Eating

B&B De Stamper (☎/fax 050 50 01 97; Zuiddijk 12; r €95) Enter this rural retreat to timewarp centuries. Located 2km from Damme, this old farmhouse dates from 1647 – and the worn-down stairs to the bedrooms prove it. The rustic rooms have farmyard views and are close to a huge open kitchen where sizable dinners (€28) are prepared.

Etcafé De Spieghel (☎ 050 37 11 30; Jacob van Maerlantstraat 10; tapas €2-5, mains around €18; ☎ Wed-Mon) Rustic split-level eatery next to the tourist office that serves snacks and typical Flemish fare.

Napoleon (☎ 050 35 32 99; Damse Vaart Zuid 4; mains €19-26, 3-course lunch menu €29; ☎ Thu-Mon) This small classical restaurant presents seasonal French cuisine using a creative market kitchen. It's

EERIE ENSOR

The **Ensorhuis** (Ensor's House; ☎ 059 80 53 35; Vlaanderenstraat 27; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5pm, closed Tue) is where expressionist pioneer James Ensor lived and painted from 1875 to 1916. The ground floor was a souvenir shop owned by his aunt. When Ensor inherited it, he installed a studio upstairs and it was here that he painted his most riotous piece, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels*, in 1888.

Ensor (1860–1949) was in part rejected by the art world due to his coastal seclusion. He's best known for his macabre and sometimes quite savage images of skeletons, phantoms and garish masks. After a brief stint doing seascapes and portraits, he abandoned the traditional for clashing colours and carnivalesque scenes that often have a whiff of death and a distinctly unnerving effect. *The Entry of Christ into Brussels*, depicting a brilliantly colourful parade of sins, was shamefully sold off to the USA half a century ago, evidence of the low esteem in which Ensor was held by the Belgian state. Only in the last decade has effort been made to show national appreciation – a comprehensive retrospective was held in Brussels in 1999, the 50th anniversary of Ensor's death.

Ostend also made much ado about this anniversary, but it has still been criticised for allowing his birthplace on Langestraat to be demolished. The restoration of the Ensorhuis in 2001 went a little way to silence critics. There's not a great deal to see inside, and none of his original works are displayed – for those you'll need to head to Ostend's Museum voor Schone Kunsten (below) or, better still, the excellent collection at Antwerp's Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (see p182). Instead, life-size reproductions of many of his most famous pieces adorn the walls here. Probably the most interesting object is the ground-floor cabinet filled with garish old masks that Ensor used as inspiration in many of his paintings. The piano, table and seat located in the salon are also original furnishings.

A good book to pick up to explore the artist's life is *Ensor* by Ulrike Becks-Malorny.

contraptions for kids – everything from mini ice-cream vans to flying horses are available for rental.

MUSEUM VOOR SCHONE KUNSTEN

The **Museum of Fine Arts** (☎ 059 80 53 35; Marie Joséplein 11) should be open again by the time you read this, following relocation to an old post office building in the heart of town. The permanent collection features works by local lads such as James Ensor (see boxed text, above), and Leon Spilliaert. Spilliaert was born in Ostend in 1881, and was captivated by the seascapes around him.

PROVINCIAAL MUSEUM VOOR MODERNE KUNST (PMMK)

The **Provincial Museum of Modern Art** (☎ 059 50 81 18; www.pmmk.be in Flemish; Romestraat 11; adult/concession €5/4; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), better known as PMMK, exhibits an enjoyable selection of modern Belgian paintings and sculptures. It's a good place to catch a work by recently retired Antwerp sculptor Panamarenko. His *Vliegende sigaar – Vliegende tijger* (Flying cigar – Flying tiger) stays true to his flights of fancy.

FORT NAPOLEON

Resting atop secluded dunes some 3.5km north of town, the impenetrable pentagon of **Fort Napoleon** (☎ 059 32 00 48; www.fortnapoleon.be in Flemish; Vuurtorenweg; adult/child/concession €4/free/3.50; 🕒 11am-1pm & 2-6pm Apr-Oct, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is Europe's only intact Napoleonic fortress. Started in 1812, it was built to fight off sea-faring attackers, but the Brits never obliged. Its chequered history includes becoming a German headquarters in WWII and later a rendezvous point for 'bad boys and naughty girls', as the audio-guide says. Cross the 2.5m-thick walls, tour the dry moat and take in the rooftop before beating a retreat to the well-priced bistro located within the fort, or the high-style restaurant tacked onto the side. The Kusttram stop 'Duin en Zee' is about 500m away.

EARTH EXPLORER

Let the kids loose at **Earth Explorer** (☎ 059 70 59 59; www.earthexplorer.be; Fortstraat 128b; adult/child €12.50/10; 🕒 10am-6pm Feb–mid-Nov, Thu-Sun mid-Nov–Feb), a science-based theme park 3km north of town. The Kusttram stop 'Duin en Zee' is out the front.

ATLANTIC WALL MUSEUM

Also known as Domein Raversijde, this **open-air museum** (☎ 059 70 22 85; Nieuwpoortsesteenweg 636; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr–mid-Nov) tells the chilling tale of wartime occupation via kilometres of underground passageways and artillery – artillery that still menacingly faces to sea. Take the Kusttram southwest to the stop 'Domein Raversijde'.

Festivals & Events

Ostend's biggest annual event, the **Bal des Rats Morts** (Dead Rats Ball), is an exuberant costumed event held on the first Saturday in March.

Sleeping

Ostend groans under the weight of hotels (some close from December to March). Unless indicated otherwise, all of our recommendations are open year-round. Prices given are for the peak summer period (July and August) – it's well worth inquiring about discounts at other times of the year.

B&B 't Atelier (☎ 059 43 61 01; www.atelier-oostende.be; Velodroomstraat 43; s/d €55/70, weekend €75/90, penthouse per week/weekend €300/200, loft per week/weekend €325/200; 🕒 Easter-Dec; ☒) A stone sculptor's home just a few minutes walk from the beach, with two 2nd-floor guestrooms plus a self-contained penthouse (with private terrace) and a 'loft' (odd name for a basement family apartment but the space works well). The mocha-coloured rooms are functional and sober, with artistic flourishes. The Kusttram stops at Koninginnelaan, two minutes' walk away. Greet, the woman who runs it, is vibrant.

Guesthouse Eduard II (☎ 059 43 03 08; www.oostende-bedandbreakfast.be; Eduard Decuyperstraat 11; s/d €60/76) This is an Art Deco house dating from 1933 that's been beautifully restored. A spiral staircase leads up to two 2nd-floor tasteful guestrooms with modern, minimal décor.

Hôtel du Parc (☎ 059 70 16 80; www.duparcoostende.com; Marie Joséplein 3; s/d/tr/ff from €57/87/94/100) An Art Deco gem. This hotel is a classified monument and it has loads to recommend it. Located above a brasserie of the same name, it's smack bang in the middle of town and only 100m from the beach. An old-world atmosphere pervades until you reach the rooms, entirely renovated a few years back and still fresh and modern. If a little balcony matters, request a 1st-floor room at the front of the hotel.

Studio-Hotel Avenue (☎ 059 80 55 44; www.hotel-avenue.be; Koninginnelaan 27; s/d/t/q €70/85/90/97) A

nondescript sort of place, one block from the beach, that offers comfortable, self-contained rooms ideal for families. Rates don't include breakfast, and prices are considerably reduced outside summer holidays. The Kusttram stops at Koninginnelaan, 50m away.

Thermae Palace (☎ 059 80 66 44; www.thermaepalace.be; Koningin Astridlaan 7; d with/without sea view €195/170, ste from €220; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) The city's top address, on the beachfront west of the centre. This palatial Art Deco building affords wonderful sea views. The rooms are stock-standard but the breakfast is worth writing about, a huge buffet strewn along a room that almost communes with the sea. The Kusttram (direction De Panne) stops at the hotel. Babies and children are welcome.

Other recommendations:

De Ploate (☎ 059 80 52 97; www.vjh.be; Langestraat 82; dm €16.60) Uninspiring hostel but well located in the heart of town.

Hostellerie 't Vistrapje (☎ 059 80 23 82; Visserskaai 37; s/d/t/q €45/70/87/109, apt €100) A long-established little hotel-restaurant recommended for both its food and its 2nd-floor apartment (sleeps four adults) with Visserskaai views.

Eating

Visserskaai is the place for seafood snacks. Every day – summer and winter from early morning to evening – colourful *kraampjes* (stalls) set up along the quay, and vendors sell prepared plates of cooked fish, seafood cocktails and, best of all, bowls of steaming hot *wollekes* (sea snails).

OK (☎ 059 29 50 53; Monacoplein; snacks €4-9; 🕒 11am-11pm) Finger food, burgers and sandwiches are the staples at this hip new *café* attached to the casino.

Di Vino (☎ 0473 87 12 97; Wittenonnenstraat 2; mains €12.50-16; 🕒 lunch Thu-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) Intimate wine bistro that's big with the locals. A small

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Taverne James (☎ 059 70 52 45; Galerie James Ensor 34; 🕒 10am-8pm Fri-Wed) This Ostend institution is one of those experiences that's available nowhere else. Located in a small covered shopping gallery in the heart of town, this small wood-panelled *café* basks in its international reputation for excellent *garnaalkroketten* (deep-fried prawn croquettes). A plate of two croquettes will set you back €9.50. The tavern's been around since 1954 and, although twee, it drones with homespun and international visitors.

chalked-up menu offers staples like goat-cheese salad, lasagne and vegetarian dishes.

Bottarga (☎ 059 80 86 88; Albert I Promenade 64c; mains €14-20; ☹ closed Mon Sep-Jun) This bistro brings modern to Ostend's beachfront. Splashy purple and orange décor, a choice of Belgian or Thai cuisines, and ultrafriendly staff make it stand out from the promenade pack.

Mosselbeurs (☎ 059 80 73 10; Dwarfsstraat 10; mains from €17; ☹ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) The place in Ostend to eat well-priced mussels – 1.3kg jumbo pots go for €17 to €19. Don't be put off by the building's tacky façade (plastered with fake mussels) – this place packs in diners thanks to fresh produce and efficient service.

Ostend Queen (☎ 059 29 50 55; Kursaal, Monacoplein; mains from €26; ☹ lunch & dinner) Fishy business at its best. This relatively new seafood brasserie on the 1st floor of Kursaal casino received *Michelin Guide* accolades before even opening. Thanks to the subsequent controversy, tables have since been in high demand. If OQ doesn't fit the bill, stay downstairs for a steak or salad on the long seaside terrace at the casino's Coffeehouse (☎ 059 29 50 52).

David Dewaele (☎ 059 70 42 26; Visserskaai 39; mains €27-43; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This inconspicuous little restaurant is nestled among the throng on Visserskaai, and is one of Ostend's best seafood haunts. Dewaele worked at De Karmeliet (p136), Bruges' top restaurant, and his cuisine is nothing short of inventive. However, the modest interior borders on boring.

Other recommendations:

Windavès (☎ 059 80 89 29; Koningsstraat 2; mains €15-20; ☹ lunch Fri-Wed, dinner Fri-Tue) Colourful and spacious restaurant offering world cuisines plus plenty of imaginative vegetarian fare.

Food markets (☹ 7am-2pm Thu) Vendors set up on Wapenplein, Groentenmarkt and Mijneplein.

Primeurs Achiel (Nieuwstraat 19; ☹ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-7.30pm Wed-Mon) Supermarket.

Spar (Van Iseghemlaan 49) Supermarket.

Drinking & Entertainment

More than ever before, nightlife in Ostend centres on Monacoplein, home to the revamped casino. In the streets leading off from it, particularly Langestraat and Van Iseghemlaan, you'll find a cinema, nightclubs and pubs.

Kursaal (☎ 059 70 51 11; www.kursaalostende.be in Flemish; Monacoplein) Following a lengthy overhaul, Ostend's landmark beachfront casino is back in action, with all its early '50s features intact. Even if you're not into gaming (pass-

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Brasserie du Parc (☎ 059 51 13 05; Marie José-plein 3; ☹ 8am-10pm) Ostend's most snooty *café* (pub/bar). This Art Deco showpiece dates from 1932 and is full of stained-glass windows, old leather chairs and cigarette smoke. The crowd ranges from tourists to *fur-clad madammekes* – elderly bourgeois women who order in French, as was done in the olden days.

port needed to play), it's worth a wander – take a look at the statue of Marvin Gaye, go for a drink at the beachfront Coffeehouse (left), move onto the Liquid Healing nightclub, or check out who's performing in the concert hall.

Café Botteltje (☎ 059 70 09 28; Louisstraat 19; ☹ 3pm-3am Tue-Sun) Bills itself as a 'delightful brown *café* with the biggest selection of beers and gins on the Belgian coast'. While it's more like a rambling English pub than a *gezellige bruine kroeg* (cosy, convivial brown *café*), it does have an excellent variety of beers (280 varieties), and is packed most summer evenings.

Den Artiest (☎ 059 80 88 89; Kapucijnenstraat 13; ☹ from 5pm) Trendy split-level brasserie serving everything from fruit *jenever*s to house beer. Live music most Tuesdays from 9pm – expect local bands doing jazz or covers, and admission is free.

Other recommendations:

Café Jazz Kelder (☎ 0475 41 18 20; Langestraat 71; ☹ 8pm Thu-Sun) Little cellar venue with live jazz.

Le Dome Beach Club (☎ 059 80 32 15; Langestraat 15; ☹ from 10pm daily summer, Thu-Sun winter) Draws a young clubbing crowd.

Rialto Cinema (☎ 059 70 61 58; Langestraat 39) Eight-screen cinema.

Getting There & Around

Like other port towns in this part of the world, the Channel Tunnel impacted sharply on Ostend. Hoverspeed services came to an end and, for a few years, there were no ferry connections between here and the UK. There is now one sea link – **TransEuropa Ferries** (www.transeuropaferry.com; ☎ 059 34 02 60), but they're only for those travelling by car, motorcycle or mobile home (no foot passengers). For more details see p319.

Hourly trains run from Ostend to Bruges (€3.30, 15 minutes), Brussels (€14.10, 1½ hours), Ghent (€7.80, 50 minutes) and Ant-

werp (€15.20, 1½ hours). To Ypres (€12.90, total journey 1¾ hours), take a train to Roeseolare (via Bruges), then the local bus to Ypres. For all train details contact Ostend **train station** (☎ 059 70 15 17).

De Lijn (☎ 070 22 02 20) operates regional buses and trams. Buses are used on inland routes; the Kusttram (see boxed text, below) runs along the coastline. Some useful bus services include those to Veurne (bus 69, €2, 1¼ hours) and Diksmuide (bus 53, €2, 45 minutes). De Lijn has a ticket/information office inside the bus/tram terminal next to the train station, plus a small kiosk in the town centre at Marie Joséplein. To get from the train station into the town centre, take a Kusttram (direction De Panne).

NORTHEAST COAST

The Belgian coast northeast of Ostend stretches for just 33km, from the discreet village of De Haan to the Zwin nature reserves on the Dutch border. En route is the bland town of Blankenberge, the port of Zeebrugge and the wealthy resort of Knokke, as well as small villages. All of the towns are easily reached by the Kusttram (see boxed text, below).

De Haan

pop 11,700

Prim and proper De Haan (The Cock) nestles among dunes 12km north of Ostend. It's Belgium's most enchanting beach resort – a *belle-époque* gem made up of winding avenues, early 20th-century villas and a pretty Art Nouveau tram station. Legend has it that a group of fishermen were saved from shipwreck by the crow of a rooster, hence its name. De Haan's most famous visitor was Albert Einstein, who lived here for a while after fleeing Hitler's Germany in 1933.

DE KUSTTRAM

Trams that trundle almost the length of Belgium's 66km coastline are known as **De Kusttram** (The Coast Tram; ☎ 070 22 02 20). They're operated by De Lijn and call in at all the seaside towns and villages between Knokke, to the northeast, and De Panne in the southwest. The trams are a superb means of getting around the area and also make enjoyable day trips from one coastal resort to another. They pass along the dunes and through the heart of Ostend – you can glimpse the landmark Kursaal casino and the harbour – and stop at the coast's most picturesque village, De Haan (above). Heading southwest, obvious attractions are the Paul Delvaux Museum (p148) and, for those travelling with kids, Plopsaland (see p148). There are 70 stops en route and it takes just over two hours to traverse the whole strip. Trams depart every 15 minutes from 5.30am to 11pm. A single ticket for a short/long journey costs €1.20/2, or you can purchase a one-/three-day ticket for €5/10, which allows unlimited travel on the tram and also on local De Lijn buses.

The **main tourist office** (☎ 059 24 21 34; www.dehaan.be; Leopoldlaan 24; ☹ 9am-noon & 2-5pm) is in the *gemeentehuis* (town hall). Handier is the **branch tourist office** (☎ 059 24 21 35; Koninklijk Plein; ☹ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Mar) inside the town's tram station.

B&B Stella Maris (☎ 059 23 56 69; www.stellamaris.be; Memlinglaan 11; s/d €50/60) is a nondescript 19th-century brick house, just metres from the tram station. It turns into a woodcutter's dream upon entering – timber panelling, wooden floors and heavy furnishings throughout. Two of the three rooms share a bathroom.

La Tourelle (☎ 059 23 34 54; www.latourelle.be in Flemish & French; Vondellaan 4; s/d/t with bathroom €65/75/92, without bathroom €50/60/82, €3 extra for 1-night stay) occupies a pale, turreted mansion not far from the tram station. It's decorated in soft, romantic tones; room No 9 occupies the corner tower and is particularly lovely. Kids and babies welcome.

Romantik Manoir Carpe Diem (☎ 059 23 32 20; www.manoircarpediem.com; Prins Karellaan 12; s/d/f from €120/125/240, ste from €160; ☹) is a connoisseur's hotel, situated on one of the highest dunes in De Haan, a few hundred metres from the beach. The whitewashed villa, with its distinct semicircular entrance, offers tranquillity and English-style charm – open log fires in the public areas and immaculate rooms.

Blankenberge & Zeebrugge

Nine kilometres northeast of De Haan is Blankenberge (population 18,000), an unremarkable seaside town full of high-rise apartments and summer crowds.

Just 4km further is Zeebrugge (population 4000), a former fishing village that has been dwarfed by the enormous artificial harbour that's been under construction here since 1895. The initial project was based around a

W WESTERN FLANDERS

crepuscular-shaped mole, built out from the shore to safeguard incoming and outgoing ships. It was finished in 1907 and the harbour proved an economic success until WWI when Allied forces sunk blocking ships at its entrance in a bid to foil German submarine activity. One of the town's few sights is the **St George Memorial**, erected in honour of the sailors who died in this operation; it's at the base of the reconstructed mole. In WWII, the harbour was bombed by the Germans; it only reopened to sea traffic in 1957 after the mole was rebuilt and *Thetis*, the last of the WWI blocking ships, was removed.

Despite all the wartime operations, Zeebrugge is sadly best remembered for the *Herald of Free Enterprise* tragedy. In 1987 a car ferry en route to Dover from Zeebrugge sank immediately after departure, killing nearly 200 people on board. The ferry's bow doors had not been closed when the ferry set sail.

Like some other coastal towns, Zeebrugge is divided into two: Zeebrugge-Centrum (Centre) and Zeebrugge-Bad (Beach). It's at the latter you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 050 54 50 42; Zeedijk; ☹ 10am-1pm & 1.30-6pm Jul, Aug & school hols), in a little beachfront kiosk.

If you should happen to be in the area at lunchtime, head to the new **Channel 16** (☎ 050 60 16 16; Werfkaai 16; mains €18-40; ☹ from 11am) near Zeebrugge-Centrum. This welcoming 1st-floor bistro is located in a semi-industrial area with views over the old fishing harbour.

For details on overnight ferries between here and England and Scotland, see p319. The ferry terminal is 3km from Zeebrugge train station, but there's no bus connection.

Knokke-Heist

pop 33,700

Welcome to northern Europe's St Tropez. Knokke-Heist is the collective title for five villages that line the northeastern end of the Belgian coast. The main town, Knokke, is the preferred summer destination for the nation's bourgeoisie. On first inspection it looks anything but elite, with monotonous high-rise apartments blocking views of the beach and sea. Dig a bit deeper to find the choicest slice of this conglomeration, Zoute, a village dotted with palatial white mansions, art galleries and swanky shops.

Knokke maintains its lead in the coastal resort stakes by offering a diverse calendar of annual events including a celebrity ball in March, a photographic festival in April and an

International Cartoon Festival (in June or July) that has been running since the early 1960s.

The **tourist office** (☎ 050 63 03 80; www.knokke-heist.be; A Verweeplein 1; ☹ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm) occupies a room in the stadhuis, about 500m from the train and neighbouring tram station. When arriving in town, head straight down Lippenslaan, the town's main street, and you'll find it on the right.

Entertainment rests largely on **Casino Knokke** (☎ 050 63 05 05; www.casinoknokke.be in Flemish & French; Zeedijk-Albertstrand 509), home to a 72m-long mural entitled *Le Domaine Enchanté*, painted by René Magritte in 1953. Chances are you won't see this famous piece, as the complex is expected to close for some time while a new 98m-high tower is built on top of the existing 1930s casino. The tower, due for completion by 2009, will include a hotel and apartments.

Hotel Villa Verdi (☎ 050 62 35 72; www.hotelvilla.verdi.be in Flemish; Elizabethlaan 8; s/d €100/130) occupies a typical whitewashed villa in Zoute. It has perfectly placed rooms and is very reasonably priced for this affluent part of the coast.

Bartholomeus (☎ 050 51 75 76; Zeedijk 267; mains from €25; ☹ lunch & dinner Fri-Mon) is considered one of Belgium's best restaurants, and that for a self-taught chef. The cuisine is, of course, fish based, and the tables have sea views (a rarity on the Belgian coast given either the rows of high-rises or candy-coloured beach cabins).

Knokke is easily reached by train from Bruges (€3, 15 minutes), or by tram (€2, one hour) from Ostend.

Zwin Nature Reserves

The area northeast of Knokke is home to a couple of nature reserves that have served as bird refuges for millennia. The best known is

Het Zwin (☎ 050 60 70 86; www.zwin.be in Flemish & French; Graaf Leon Lippensdreef 8; adult/child €5.20/3.20, combined ticket incl the Vlindertuin €8.40/5.20; ☹ 9am-7pm Easter-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Easter, closed Wed Nov-Mar), 5km northeast of Knokke. It's a tranquil region of polders and mud flats, a vastly different landscape from that of medieval times when the Zwin, one of the world's busiest waterways, connected Bruges with the sea.

The Zwin silted long ago and the area, as a whole, is now the largest salt marsh in Belgium. Flanked by the North Sea, Het Zwin covers 150 hectares (an additional 25 hectares stretch into the Netherlands) and is an important destination for migrating swans, ducks and geese – some 20,000 reed geese

flock here annually. Europe's largest owl, the *oehoe* (eagle owl), lives here, as do storks, the result of a highly successful breeding program that started in 1956. The salty landscape hides rare species of beetle and spider, as well as the *zwinnebloem* (sea lavender) that coats much of the area in purple in summer.

A third of the reserve is open to the public, and there are paths for hikers (rubber boots are essential for much of the year). Guided walks (€2 and usually in Flemish or French) are conducted at 10am every Thursday and Sunday.

The **Vlindertuin** (Butterfly Garden; ☎ 050 61 04 72; Bronlaan 14; adult/child €4.60/2.90, combined ticket incl the Zwin €8.40/5.20; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct), halfway between Knokke and Het Zwin, is a popular side trip.

Bus 12 (€1.50, hourly) links Knokke train station with Het Zwin. Services are limited outside school holidays.

Little known by outsiders is another official reserve, **Zwin-Polder**, immediately northeast of Knokke. It was secured by the Flemish Community's nature division in 2002 following a lengthy legal battle with real-estate developers. Its 222 hectares plays host to some of the most rare birds in Europe, many of which can be seen during the bird-watching period from March to November.

SOUTHWEST COAST

Head southwest along the coast from Ostend and you enter the Westkust, another 33km stretch of coastal resorts, including Nieuwpoort, Oostduinkerke, Koksijde, St Idesbald and De Panne, that ends at the border with France. Once again, the Kustram (see boxed text, p145) shuttles the full length of this coastline and is ideal for getting around.

Nieuwpoort

pop 10,600

Nieuwpoort holds a special place in Belgian history. It was here that the German advance during WWI was halted when local partisans opened the sluiceways on the Noordvaart canal, allowing the sea to flood the fields between the IJzer River and the train line and forcing the retreat of three German divisions. As a result, Nieuwpoort was put squarely on the front line, where it remained for the rest of the war. Just east of the town, at the bridge over the IJzer, you can see the sluiceways, together with a series of **memorials** to the hundreds who died here in WWI. A **statue of King**

Albert I marks the centre of the largest monument, a creamy-brick rotunda erected in 1938 and situated 300m from Nieuwpoort's port.

The town itself is largely uninteresting. It comprises two parts: the historic 12th-century fishing port of Nieuwpoort, situated on the IJzer and now also home to one of northern Europe's biggest marinas, and Nieuwpoort-Bad (also called Nieuwpoort-aan-Zee), the modern beachfront resort some 2km away.

Like Ostend, Nieuwpoort is a favoured seafood hunting ground for Belgian day-trippers. Fish shops, such as **Vishandel Gaëtane** (☎ 058 23 70 68; Kaai 35), line the main road opposite the port.

Continue along this road and you'll arrive at Nieuwpoort-Bad. Here is the beachfront **tourist office** (☎ 058 23 39 23; Hendrikaplein 11; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm) and a cache of hotels. The best address is the newly revamped hotel and restaurant **Cosmopolite** (☎ 058 23 33 66; www.cosmopolite.be; Albert-laan 141; s/d/t from €72/107/132; ☹). Set back one block from the beach, its seaweed-green décor's a delight. The restaurant has mains for €17 to €25 and does a generous three-course seafood lunch menu for just €20.

Alternatively, **B&B New Largo** (☎ 058 23 80 28; www.newlargo.be; Victorlaan 6; d/tr €54/84), about 500m from the beach, offers five tidy pastel-toned rooms in a separate building next to the owner's whitewashed cottage. It feels like a mini-hotel, rather than a traditional B&B.

Oostduinkerke, Koksijde & St Idesbald

pop 20,900

It's 6km from Nieuwpoort-Bad to **Oostduinkerke**, where a handful of local men have preserved an age-old tradition of shrimp fishing on horseback. Half an hour before and an hour after low tide, the **paardevisers** (horseback fishermen) ride on stocky Brabant horses into the sea, dragging triangular nets as they trawl for shrimp. Until the start of the 20th century, horse fishing was still carried out along the Belgian coast, as well as in parts of the Netherlands, France and Britain. It died out after WWI, except in Oostduinkerke. These days it's done for tourists and tradition rather than to haul any great catch, and can be seen irregularly between April and June and again in September and October (when water temperatures are ideal for shrimps). Ask for the season's schedule at the Oostduinkerke **Dienst Toerisme** (Tourist Office; ☎ 058 53 21 21; Leopold II-laan 2, Oostduinkerke; ☹ 8am-noon & 1.15-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4.15pm Fri), located in the old

town hall, 1.5km inland opposite a hard-to-miss horsefisher statue. For more about fishing, visit the newly renovated **Nationaal Visserijmuseum** (National Fishery Museum; ☎ 058 51 24 68; Pastoor Schmitzstraat 5, Oostduinkerke; adult/child €2/1.25; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sun), behind the tourist office.

Oostduinkerke has one of the coast's few hostels. The new, low-set **De Peerdevisser** (☎ 058 51 26 49; www.vjh.be; Duinparklaan 41, Oostduinkerke; dm/d per person €16.60/29; ♿) is 1km inland from the main coastal road, set back in a leafy residential street. It caters to families, and even has a small playground.

Riding the Kusttram west, you'll be hard-pressed to pinpoint where Oostduinkerke ends and Koksijde and adjoining **St Idesbald** begin. There's nothing to see in Koksijde, but St Idesbald has a major attraction, the **Paul Delvaux Museum** (☎ 058 52 12 29; www.delvauxmuseum.com; Delvauxlaan 42; admission €5; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, Thu-Sun Oct-Dec). The museum occupies the house and studio of Paul Delvaux (1897-1994), one of Belgium's famous surrealist artists. Delvaux covered canvases with haunting images such as dreamy and erotic sleepwalkers in trams and stations, skeletons, moonlight, classical features and reclining nude women. The pretty whitewashed cottage and garden sitting smack in coastal suburbia come as a surprise considering Delvaux's penchant for out-of-the-ordinary scenes. The exhibition contains plenty of drawings, sketches and original paintings as well as memorabilia - family photos, letters, a toy train and the like. The museum is 1km from the Koksijde/St Idesbald tram stop. From the stop, walk along the main road (in the direction of De Panne) to the first main street on the left, from where the museum is signposted.

For somewhere to stay there's **B&B Certi Momenti** (☎ 058 51 89 05; www.certimomenti.be; Myriamweg 16, St Idesbald; d €65; ♿). This B&B occupies a whitewashed villa on a quiet backstreet about 200m from the main coastal road and not far from the Delvaux Museum. It has bold colours, thoughtful décor, and individual (but small) rooms - choose from Nameste, Déjà vu, or Stones & Things. The owners live in an annexe so there's plenty of privacy. The bathroom and toilet are communal.

Back on the main road, head to **Oh** (☎ 058 52 05 72; Koninklijke Baan 289, St Idesbald; menu €20, incl drinks €50; ☎ lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Thu-Mon) to sample Belgium's booming restaurant and lounge scene. Lie back among purple tassels and dine on a blend of Belgian, Italian and Asian dishes.

De Panne pop 9900

The Kusttram ends its southwestward journey 4km past St Idesbald at De Panne. This busy resort started life as a fishing village set in a *panne* (hollow) among the dunes. Its most noted feature, an imposing beachfront **monument** to Léopold I, commemorates the spot where the king first set foot on Belgian territory in 1831.

Historically, De Panne is best known for the role it played in both world wars. It was part of a small patch of Belgian territory that remained unoccupied by the Germans during WWI, due to flooding around the IJzer (see Nieuwpoort, p147). King Albert I moved his home and the government here, where they remained until 1918. In WWII, the retreating British army reached the sand dunes between De Panne and Dunkerque (Dunkirk in English) in France from where they were famously evacuated in 1940.

De Panne's **tourist office** (☎ 058 42 18 18; www.depanne.be; Zeelaan 21; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 1-6pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat & Sun Sep-Jun) is in the *gemeentehuis*, 1km inland from the closest tram stop.

For a walk in protected sand dunes along well-marked paths, head 2km west of De Panne to **De Westhoek Vlaams Natuurreservaat**, a nature reserve bordering the French frontier. This area is rich in migratory birds in winter, and on a summer's evening you might even hear a nightingale. Climb to the top of Belgium's highest dune, Hoge Blekker (33m), for an as-far-as-the-eye-can-see beach vista.

For kids young and old there's **Plopsaland** (☎ 058 42 02 02; www.plopsaland.be in Flemish; De Pannelaan 68, Adinkerke-De Panne; adult/under 1m/concession €23/free/22; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Jun, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5.30pm Wed, Sat & Sun Sep & Oct). This theme park is based around Belgian TV characters Samson and Gert, Plop the gnome and Wizzy and Woppy, to mention a few, and is one of the most visited attractions in the whole country. There's a plethora of rides, all free once you're inside. The Kusttram from De Panne stops nearby.

Hotels are abundant but all are old-fashioned and fussy. However, **Artevelde** (☎ 058 41 10 51; www.artevelde.info; Sloepenlaan 24; s/d €35/60; ☎ Easter-Sep), only 50m from the beach, is family run and family friendly. Rooms with a private bathroom are a tad more expensive.

For a breath of contemporary, dine at seductive **Venue** (☎ 058 41 13 70; Nieuwpoortlaan 56;

mains €18-25; ☎ closed Wed). Located on the main coastal road, De Panne's newest restaurant offers a slinky setting and (once again) a marriage of Belgian, Asian and Italian cuisines.

While the Kusttram rattles along the main coastal road, those arriving by train are inconveniently deposited 2.5km inland from the beachfront - to get to the heart of things just jump on the Kusttram or hire a bike (€9.50 per day, with a €12.50 deposit) from De Panne train station.

VEURNE pop 11,900

Veurne (Furnes in French) is a charming little town with an absorbing cluster of medieval buildings, all barely a five-minute drive from the coast. Unlike nearby Ypres and Diksmuide, Veurne remained relatively unscathed throughout both world wars (it was the Belgian army's headquarters in WWI), and its picture-postcard central square is now a day-tripper magnet. Accommodation is limited, but it's well worth an overnight trip, especially if you're travelling with young kids or looking for a romantic hideaway. In July it hosts the Penitents' Procession (see boxed text, below).

The **tourist office** (☎ 058 33 55 31; www.veurne.be in Flemish; Grote Markt 29; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) is in the town hall, in the heart of town.

Sights

Make a beeline for the **Grote Markt** with its cluster of interesting buildings. The Flemish Renaissance-style **stadhuis**, erected between 1596 and 1612, features a bluestone loggia extending from the original façade. Connected to the stadhuis is the **Gerechtshof**, a former court of justice, and its attached **belfort**, a lovely mustard-toned affair complete with tiers and a balcony. Brooding behind the World

Heritage-listed belfry is the massive bulk of **St Walburgakerk**. This church drew pilgrims from far and wide during the Middle Ages.

On the opposite side of the Grote Markt, at the start of Ooststraat, is the 15th-century **Spaans Paviljoen** (Spanish Pavilion), originally built as a town hall but converted into a garrison for Spanish officers during the Hapsburg rule. Opposite is the former **Vleeshuis**, a gabled butchers' hall from 1615 that now houses a library.

Rising from Appelmarkt, on the Grote Markt's southeast corner, is **St Niklaaskerk** (admission €1.50; ☎ 10-11.45am & 2-5.15pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep). The church's bulky, detached tower affords good views.

Snowdrops raise their heads in February in the small **park** behind the stadhuis; here too is a **bust of Paul Delvaux**.

The **Bakkerijmuseum** (Bakery Museum; ☎ 058 31 38 97; Albert I-laan 2; adult/child €4/1; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-5.30pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 1-5.30pm Mon-Thu Sep-Jun, 1-5.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 1.30-5pm Sun Oct-Mar) is the only real highlight away from the Grote Markt.

Sleeping & Eating

De Loft (☎ 058 31 59 49; www.deloft.be; Oude Vestingstraat 36; s/d/tr/f €57/67/86/99; ♿) Small hotel/tearoom/art gallery situated halfway between the train station and the Grote Markt. Not the most visually appealing place but it's a great option for families because it's very child-friendly (there are rooms with kitchenettes, and a secured play area). The beach and Plopsaland (see opposite) are also just a short drive away. From the train station, turn left into Statiestraat, cross the canal, turn right, and then veer left into Oude Vestingstraat.

Two good options for dining are ensconced in and around St Niklaas church. **Onder den Toren** (☎ 058 31 65 66; St Niklaaspleintje 1; mains €17-25; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) is a modern, split-level bar/

PENITENTS' PROCESSION

Veurne holds one of Belgium's most unusual gatherings - the *Boetprocessie*, better known in English as the Penitents' Procession. On the last Sunday in July, hundreds of anonymous people clad in dark-brown cowls solemnly carry enormous wooden crosses through the streets in a parade that dates back, in its current form, to 1644. The roots of the parade go back much further. In the 11th century, Count Robert II of Flanders was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when his ship was lost in a storm. He vowed that if he were saved, he would give the relic of the cross that he was carrying to the first church he saw. Veurne's St Walburgakerk was the recipient. In today's procession, many of the penitents go barefoot, a simple act that lends weight to this eerie evocation of long-past traditions.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

't **Kasteel en 't Koetshuys** (☎ 058 31 53 72; www.kasteelenkoetshuys.be; Lindendreef 5; s/d with bathroom €90/100, without bathroom €70/80; ☒) The most delightful place to stay in Veurne (or in this whole corner of Flanders, for that matter). And it's also excellent value, to boot. The red-brick mansion dates from 1907 and has a half-dozen or so rooms, done out in pale blues, browns and caramels – a deliciously romantic combination. High ceilings, old marble fireplaces (not in use), linen sheets, bathrobes, small balconies and a caring welcome from the woman who runs it are the attractions. Breakfast and light meals (mains €12 to €20) – bistro-style cuisine using organic produce – are taken in a restored stable at the garden's rear (open 10am to 7pm). Children are welcome, and there's a baby cot. It's 300m from the town centre.

restaurant hidden under the church's tower (hence the name). Alternatively, there's **Le Petit Cabaret** (☎ 058 62 04 02; Appelmarkt 1; mains €25-27; ☒ lunch & dinner, closed Wed & lunch Sat), an intimate corner restaurant where sand or sawdust trench under your feet.

The Grote Markt is lined with inexpensive *cafés* and brasseries. **Taverne Flandria** (☎ 058 31 11 74; Grote Markt 30; ☒ closed Wed evening & Thu), a down-to-earth pub with a drunken monk logo, is a good place to try some brews (sadly, the nearby Westvleteren beers aren't stocked). At **Brasserie Excelsior** (☎ 058 31 10 86; Grote Markt 31; snacks €8, mains €12-17; ☒ closed Mon evening & Tue) taste the town speciality, *potjesvlees*, a terrine made of chicken, veal and rabbit and served cold with slices of bread.

Other recommendations:

Spar (Zuidstraat 36) Supermarket on one of the main shopping streets.

Market (Grote Markt; ☒ 8am-12.30pm Wed) Weekly food market.

Getting There & Away

Veurne's attractive little **train station** (☎ 050 30 49 73), a protected monument, is 600m east of the Grote Markt – head straight up Ooststraat, the main shopping street. Trains leave half-hourly for De Panne (€1.60, seven minutes) or inland to Diksmuide (€2.50, 11 minutes) and Ghent (€10.10, 65 minutes).

AROUND VEURNE

Kasteel Beauvoorde

The Renaissance-style **Beauvoorde Castle** (☎ 058 29 92 29; Wulveringemstraat 10, Wulveringem; adult/child €4/free) is secreted away in the hamlet of Wulveringem, about 7km south of Veurne. Audio-guides are handed out for English-speaking visitors – good for delving into the life and times of Arthur Merghelynck, who owned and restored the castle from 1875. It's best to ring in advance

for opening hours because they're complicated. There's no public transport from Veurne.

Diksmuide

pop 15,500

Like Ypres, the town of Diksmuide, 10km southeast of Veurne, was obliterated during WWI due to its frontline position on the IJzer's eastern bank. Although painstakingly restored, its 20th-century gables just don't have the authenticity needed to make it a big pull.

About 1.5km from town is the **IJzertoren** (☎ 051 50 02 86; www.ijzertoren.org; IJzerdijk 49; adult/child/family €6/3/15; ☒ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Jan-Mar & Oct-Dec), a colossal 84m-high cement tower that's long served as a Flemish nationalist symbol. The original tower, built in 1930 as a war memorial, was mysteriously blown up 16 years later. This 1950 replacement spans 22 floors and houses a new museum devoted to war-associated displays and Flemish emancipation.

In beer circles, the town of Diksmuide is best known for its speciality brewery, **De Dolle Brouwers** (p50).

Westvleteren

Another pilgrimage point for beer lovers is the **Abdij St Sixtus**, 4km from the village of Westvleteren, halfway between Veurne and Ypres. Monks at this abbey brew one of the country's famous Trappist beers (see Westvleteren, p47).

YPRES

pop 35,000

Only the hardest of hearts are unmoved by Ypres (Ieper in Flemish). In Belgium's southwest corner, Ypres and its surrounding area was the last bastion of Belgian territory unoccupied by the Germans in WWI. As such, the region was a barrier to a German advance towards the French coastal ports around Calais.

More than 300,000 Allied soldiers were killed here during four years of fighting that left the medieval town flattened. Convincingly rebuilt, the town and its surrounds, known as the Ypres Salient, are dotted with cemeteries and memorials.

Information

British Grenadier (☎ 057 21 46 57; Meensestraat 5; ☒ 9.30am-1pm, 2-6pm, 7.30-8.30pm) Bookshop specialising in all things WWI related, including war graves searches and tour bookings.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (☎ 057 20 01 18; www.cwgc.org; Elverdingestraat 82; ☒ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Supplies detailed information on Commonwealth cemeteries and individual graves. This office covers all the cemeteries in northern Europe.

Internet (In het Klein Stadhuis, Grote Markt 32, Ypres; ☒ 11am-8pm, closed Sun in winter) There's one terminal here (free use when you purchase something).

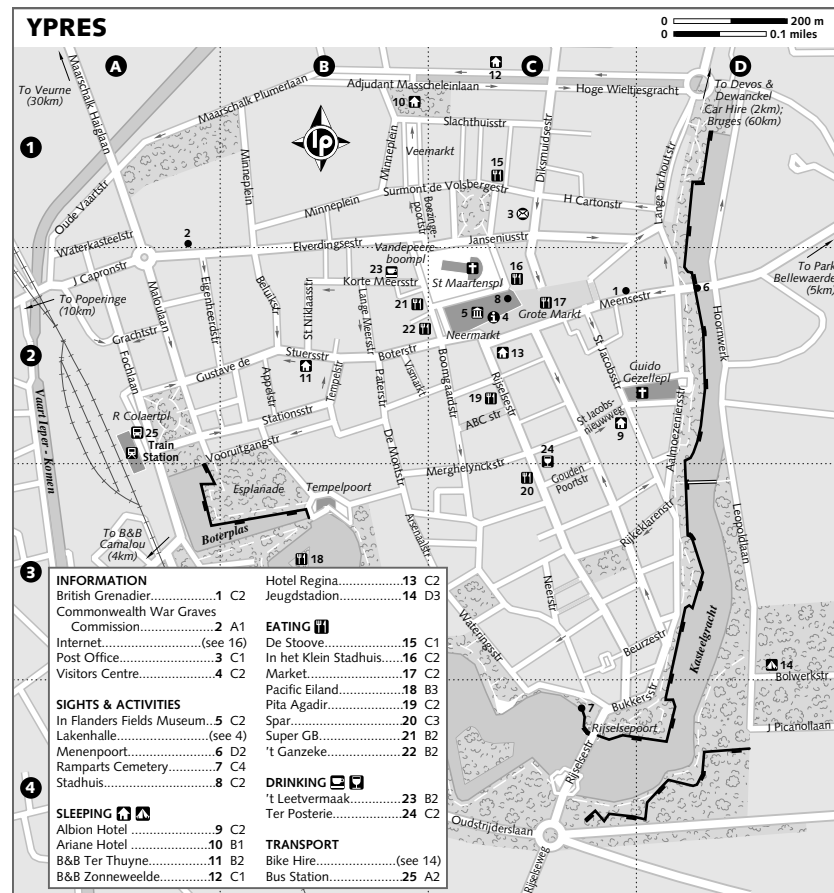
Post office (Diksmuidestraat 33)

Visitors centre (☎ 057 23 92 20; www.ieper.be; Lakenhalle, Grote Markt; ☒ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) Tourist office for Ypres and surrounds.

Sights

In medieval times, Ypres ranked alongside Bruges and Ghent as an important cloth town, and its postwar reconstruction holds true to its former prosperity.

The enormous **Lakenhalle** (cloth hall) with its 70m-high belfry dominates the Grote Markt. The original version was completed in



1304 beside the Ieperslee River, which is now underground. In those times, ships could sail in to the Lakenhalle to unload their cargoes of wool, which were stored on the 1st floor and sold from the halls at street level.

The Renaissance-style **stadhuis** is attached to the eastern end of the Lakenhalle. It's noted for the lovely arcade gallery that runs along the front and, inside, for a huge and impressive stained-glass window.

Stories have long been told about the WWI battlefields of Flanders. There were the tall red poppies that rose over the flat, flat fields, the soldiers who disappeared forever in the quagmire of battle, and the little town of Ypres that was wiped off the map. **In Flanders Fields Museum** (☎ 057 23 92 75; www.inflandersfields.be; Grote Markt 34; adult/child/family €7.50/3.50/18; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) tells such stories and more. Located on the Lakenhalle's 1st floor, it's devoted to the promotion of peace as much as the remembrance of war, and is a moving testament to the wartime horrors experienced by ordinary people. The museum is named after the famous poem written in the spring of 1915 by Canadian medical officer John McCrae, who was posted near Ypres. Last tickets are sold one hour before closing time.

The **Menenpoort** (or Menin Gate, as this memorial is known in English) stands at the end of Meensestraat, about 300m from the visitors centre. It is perhaps the saddest reminder of the town's past. The huge white gate is inscribed with the names of 54,896 British and Commonwealth troops who were lost in the quagmire of the trenches during WWI and who have no graves. Every evening at 8pm, traffic is halted while buglers from the local fire brigade sound the Last Post. This simple, moving tradition was started in 1928, the year after the gate was built, and with the exception of WWII has continued ever since.

The town's southern half is flanked by a wide moat and steep stone ramparts that are topped by pleasant gardens and walking/cycling paths, known as **Vestingroute**. Pick up the tourist office's **Ramparts Route** brochure to explore these historic fortifications. The walk described in the brochure starts in the southeast at an old ammunition dump (accessible only with a city guide) and traces the entire ramparts (2.5km) to the Menin Gate. Between Leeuwentoren (Lion's Tower) and Rijselpoort (Lille Gate) is the **Ramparts Cemetery**, the closest military cemetery to town.

For details on the Salient as well as organised and self-guided tours of the area, see p156.

Festivals & Events

Kattenfestival Ypres' main folkloric event is the annual Festival of the Cats. Although cat-lovers around the world may be enraged by the idea, the festival has its roots in the 12th-century tradition of throwing live cats from the Lakenhalle's belfry. Cats, it was believed, personified evil spirits and this ritual, which continued until 1817, was their undoing. Today's version – which sees (toy) cats hurled on the second Sunday in May – was revived in the 1930s. The celebration has its climax every three years when the town hosts the **Kattenstoet**, a parade of giant cats – the next is May 2009.

Dranouter Folkfestival For information on this festival, see Dranouter, p156).

Sleeping

Ypres has a smattering of options in most price brackets.

B&B Ter Thuyne (☎ 057 36 00 42; www.terthuyne.be; Gustave de Stuersstraat 19; s/d €40/70; ☑) Martine Eggermont runs this delightful B&B, found right in the heart of town. The three rooms are all comfortable and modern – the light blue room at the front is the pick. Wooden floors, warm contemporary (but not trendy) décor, and an excellent buffet breakfast (served on small tables downstairs) are key features.

B&B Camalou (☎ 057 20 43 42; www.camalou.com; Dikkebusseweg 351; s/d €55/70, discount per night for 2 nights or more €6; ☑) Good for those with a car. Located 4km out of town with three lovely old rooms. The woman who runs it is a local tourist guide and will readily assist travellers. The B&B even has its own beer, brewed in nearby Watou.

Hotel Regina (☎ 057 21 88 88; www.hotelregina.be; Grote Markt 45; standard s/d €65/75, executive s/d €90/100) Located on the Markt and overlooking the Lakenhalle, this is Ypres' most atmospheric hotel. A complete makeover a few years back brought its 17 rooms into minimalist line. Service can be standoffish, but that's also part of the minimalist trend.

Ariane Hotel (☎ 057 21 82 18; www.ariane.be; Slachthuisstraat 58; s/d €85/110) A friendly, modern hotel in a quiet residential area just north of the Grote Markt. Wartime memorabilia dots the common rooms, and there is also a tidy restaurant.

Other recommendations:

Jeugdstadion (☎ 057 21 72 82; info@jeugdstadion.be; Bolwerkstraat 1; camp sites per adult/car €4.50/4.50; ☎ mid-Mar–Oct) Camping ground and youth centre 900m southeast of the town centre.

B&B Zonneweide (☎ 057 20 27 23; Adjutant Masscheleinlaan 18; s/d €25/48) Old-world and fastidiously clean, with shared bathroom facilities and a hotchpotch of furniture and décor. Room No 1 is the best. In summer, there's a two-night minimum.

Albion Hotel (☎ 057 20 02 20; www.albionhotel.be; St Jacobsstraat 28; s/d €80/98) Functional, unfussy (with not even a painting on the walls), modern hotel.

Eating & Drinking

't Ganzeke (☎ 057 20 00 09; Vandepereboomplein 5; mains €13-24; ☎ Tue-Sun) Family-friendly, no-nonsense brasserie good for a snack or light meal. On Saturday it's a favourite with stallholders from the nearby market, and the atmosphere is particularly animated.

't Leetvermaak (☎ 057 21 63 85; Korte Meersstraat 2; mains €18-23; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Smooth new bistro – hidden on a quiet backstreet well away from tourist tracks – that was instantly loved by the locals. Sit at the counter or on a big comfy chair and enjoy the jazz sounds while awaiting excellent Belgian cuisine, including homemade *garnaalkroketjes* (shrimp croquettes).

De Stoove (☎ 0479 22 92 33; Surmont de Volsbergestraat 12; mains under €20; ☎ lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Thu-Mon) There's a relaxed ambience at this stylish fish restaurant, located just a few streets away from the Lakenhalle. In season, it's good for mussels.

Pacific Eiland (☎ 057 20 05 28; Eiland 2; mains €20-22; ☎ lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Wed-Sun) Located on an island in the middle of the ramparts, this place is good for families (it includes a small playground and rowboats) and those discovering the Vestingroute (see opposite). The décor's unexceptional but the setting and classic Belgian cuisine are fine.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

In het Klein Stadhuis (☎ 057 21 55 42; Grote Markt 32; mains €14-19; ☎ closed Sun winter; ☑) There's just something about this little *café/brasserie* that makes it one of our perennial favourites. Is it the location, tucked away in a quaint guildhall next to the stadhuis? The split-level design and unfailingly friendly staff? The delicious and really good-value meals (plus plenty for vegos and kids)? Or simply the fact that it rates just as highly among locals as it does tourists? Whatever, it's a must for a casual meal.

Ter Posterie (☎ 057 20 05 80; Rijselsestraat 57; ☎ 11.30am-2am Thu-Tue, shop 11am-7pm Thu-Tue) Beer devotees head straight to this large cellar pub, which stocks 170 national brews (and sells 250 types from the adjoining shop). Set back from the street and has a garden terrace.

Other recommendations:

Market (Grote Markt; ☎ Sat morning) Food and clothing market.

Pita Agadir (☎ 057 20 12 91; Rijselsestraat 42; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5.30pm-2am, closed Tue) Pita joint that's been around for years and serves couscous (€13.25) and pitta or kebab (€4).

Spar (Rijselsestraat 72) Supermarket.

Super GB (Vandepereboomplein 15) Supermarket.

Getting There & Around

From Ypres **train station** (☎ 025 28 28 28) there are hourly trains direct to Kortrijk (€4.30, 30 minutes) and Ghent (€9.50, one hour), and west to nearby Poperinge (€1.90, eight minutes). For Brussels (€14.60, 1½ hours), Bruges (€10.10, 1¼ hours), Antwerp (€16.30, two hours) and Ostend (€12.90, two hours), change in Kortrijk.

Regional buses leave from the bus station to the left outside the train station.

Cars can be rented from **Devos & Dewanckel** (☎ 057 20 13 35; Industrielaan 2; per day with unlimited kms €50, deposit €500), about 2km north of the Grote Markt.

As Ypres' wartime sights are spread over a wide area, you'd need several days to do the area justice by bike, and even then you'd only be covering the tip of the iceberg. Note also that this region is not as flat as much of the rest of Flanders. The Ypres visitors centre sells bike maps (€2) but the explanations are in Flemish only. Bikes can be rented from Jeugdstadion (see opposite) for €5 per day.

AROUND YPRES Ypres Salient

The Ypres Salient was the site of some of WWI's most fierce and bloody battles – for more information, see boxed text, p154. The Salient's wartime reminders are scattered over a large area – it would take weeks to tour it extensively. To see the sights in Ypres itself plus just a handful of the outlying cemeteries and memorials, you'll either need to take an organised tour or allow a full day to get around by car (see p154). Touring by bike is also possible (see Getting There & Around, above). Those looking for specific graves should contact either the Commonwealth War Graves

AT THE CROSSROADS OF WAR

The Ypres Salient was formed by Allied attempts to push the invading German army away from its goal – the North Sea and its strategic French port towns. The geological formation of the Salient – a line of long, low ridges that ran for about 25km from Langemark north of Ypres to near Menen, close to the border with France – provided good vantage points. The armies fought battle after battle at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives in a bid to hold the ridges. As one local tour operator, Salient Tours, describes it: 'The years of deadlocked trench warfare created a barren landscape of mud and despair...local villages such as Passendale slowly descended into a merciless hell on earth'.

There were four key battles at Ypres. The first, in October and November 1914, basically set the lines of the Salient, with both sides digging in and gaining relatively little ground either way for the remainder of the war. The second battle in spring of the next year was a gas attack launched by the Germans around Langemark immediately to the north of Ypres. Gas was a tactic employed for the first time in WWI, and it had devastating effects not only on the advancing soldiers it targeted but also on the retreating army. In this case, French, Algerian and Canadian soldiers took the brunt of the German onslaught and counterattack. On 31 July 1917 British forces launched the third battle, which stretched over three months and is commonly remembered as the Battle of Passendale, or the 'battle of the mud'. This horrific episode was fought in shocking weather in fields already torn to bits by shells. It cost the lives of thousands and thousands of soldiers, all for a few kilometres of ground. In April 1918 the Germans made their final assault and, although the Allied gains of the previous year were lost, the tide was about to turn. By November, the war was over.

These days, particularly in summer when the weather is good and life in this rural corner of Belgium seems to go on as it always has, it's initially hard to imagine the destruction and loss of life that took place. But the 170 cemeteries with row upon row of crosses soon hammer home the bloodshed. Should you be here on a cold day in winter when the lifeless fields are no more than muddy bogs and fog hangs inches from your face and drapes the graves of the dead, you'll have less difficulty conjuring up the scene of almost a century ago.

The Belgian army still diffuses large quantities of unexploded munitions from this area. Most of what's found is unearthed on farms, so it's unlikely you'll come across anything while doing the rounds of the sights. Much less common is the discovery of remains – in 2006, in a freshly ploughed field near the village of St Yvon, the remains of three British soldiers were found. One was even identified, thanks to the metal name tag he wore.

Commission or the British Grenadier (see Information, p151, for details of both).

The following publications are available either at the Ypres visitors centre or the British Grenadier.

In Flanders Fields Route booklet (€2.50) is an 82km itinerary complete with map and sight information. Allow two days by car for the whole itinerary; if you have just one day, concentrate on areas north and east of Ypres.

Another booklet is *Major & Mrs Holt's Concise Battlefield Guide to the Ypres Salient* by Toni and Valmai Holt (€4.85). It offers three- and four-hour itineraries plus plenty of historical information. This guide is designed to be used with the Holt's *Battle Map of the Ypres Salient* (€4.15), an essential extra if you want to track down some of the lesser-known sights.

For something more concise there's *The Great War in Flanders* (€1).

They Called It Passchendaele by Lyn MacDonald (€16) is an excellent oral history of more than 600 people involved in one of Ypres' major battles. *The Roses of No Man's Land* (€17.80) by the same author tells the unsung story of the medical teams who struggled to save the soldiers.

DRIVING TOUR

The following tour begins and ends in Ypres and winds through the Salient's northern and central sectors. It can be comfortably covered by car in a day and is outlined on the Salient Tour map (p155).

From central Ypres, head north on the N369 (direction Diksmuide) to the **Essex Farm Cemetery (1)**, on the right about 3km from town

just past a motorway flyover. The wounded from the battlefields across the canal at the rear of this cemetery were brought to a first-aid bunker next to the cemetery, the remnants of which can be seen here to the cemetery. It was here, too, that Canadian doctor John McCrae wrote the famous poem *In Flanders Fields*.

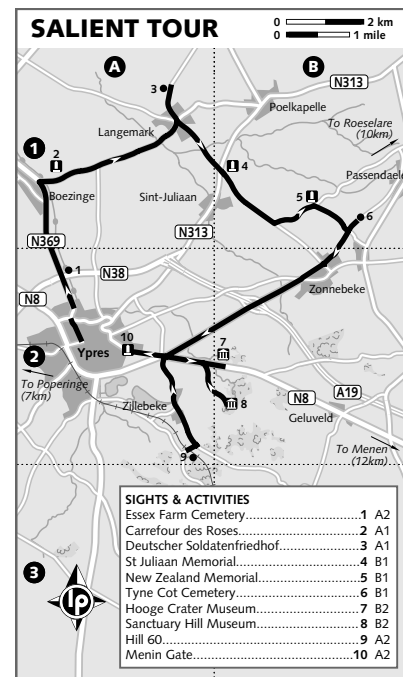
From Essex Farm Cemetery, continue along the N369 for a couple of kilometres to a bridge across the canal near Boezinge. Turn right, cross the canal and continue toward Langemark, noticing on your left en route the **Carrefour des Roses (2)**, a simple but moving Breton stone calvary erected in memory of the French soldiers who died in 1915's first gas attack.

Continue for about 4km to the village of Langemark, then turn left at the crossroad and follow the road for 750m to the **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof (3; German Cemetery)**. This cemetery, with its rows of black headstones interspersed with mossy stone crosses, is the resting place of more than 44,000 German soldiers, many of them young students and cadets who fell in the first battle of Ypres. Behind the stone entrance gate is a massive common grave; as you pass through the gate, four statues by German sculptor Emil Krieger are visible as silhouettes.

Retrace your path to the crossroad at Langemark and continue straight on for nearly 2km to the crossroad marked by the **St Juliaan Memorial (4)**, also known as the Brooding Soldier. This soaring Canadian monument, erected in 1921, depicts a soldier with head bowed resting on the butt of his gun.

From the memorial, take the main road (direction Zonnebeke) to the third turn-off on the left (about 2.25km). This leads to a crossroad marked by a **New Zealand Memorial (5)**, a solitary column dedicated to those who died in the Battle of Broodseinde in October 1917.

Leaving the memorial behind you, turn right and follow the road about 1.25km to the turn-off to **Tyne Cot Cemetery (6)**. The largest British Commonwealth war cemetery in the world, it sits on a plateau with the towers of Ypres visible in the distance. The Northumberland infantrymen who tried taking this ridge gave the cemetery its name – they fancied that the German bunkers positioned on the hillside here looked like Tyneside cottages. One of these bunkers can partly still be seen, as it was incorporated into the white Cross of Sacrifice that stands as the cemetery's focal point. Before the cross are row upon row of



pristine white headstones, lined up at regular intervals and each bearing a name, rank, serial number, date of birth, national emblem and, sometimes, an inscription chosen by a member of the family. Behind the cross is a cluster of graves of soldiers who were buried here during the last stage of the war – the random positioning of their graves stands in stark contrast to the orderly rows below. In all, 11,956 soldiers are buried at Tyne Cot. At the rear of the cemetery is a huge semicircular wall inscribed with the names of 34,857 soldiers who have no known grave and whose names were unable to fit on Ypres' Menin Gate.

From Tyne Cot head down through the village of Zonnebeke and join the road leading to Zillebeke. It's ruler-straight and eventually joins the N8, the road to Menen. Turn left here to proceed to two small museums where you can browse around (and even buy) some wartime memorabilia or have a drink and a snack.

On the left, about 1.5km along the Menen road (N8), is the **Hooge Crater Museum (7)**; ☎ 057 46 84 46; Meenseweg 467; adult/child €3/1.50; 🕒 10am–5pm Mar–Nov Tue–Sun. It features a polished WWI display.

The other option is the **Sanctuary Hill Museum** (8; ☎ 05 746 63 73; Canadalaan 26; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm) at Hill 62, whose turn-off is about 500m before the Hooge Crater Museum. This hotchpotch of a place is stuffed full of old photos, helmets, shoes, guns, grenades etc, all collected by the present owner's grandparents immediately after the war. At the back, some of the original trenches (and the relic of a bombarded tree) have been left to convey to visitors a little of the wartime scene.

Backtrack to the N8, then turn off to the last sight, **Hill 60** (9) at Zillebeke. From central Zillebeke (1.5km from the N8), follow the signs for another 1.5km to arrive at this enclosed grassy area on the left. Hill 60 is nothing more than a few concrete bunkers, bomb holes pocking the landscape, and trenches that are obvious after all these years. A photo board near the roadside memorial shows what the hill looked like during wartime. Some people find that this site – more than any cemetery, museum or memorabilia collection – conveys the essence of war.

From Hill 60, backtrack to the N8, turn left, and return to Ypres via the **Menin Gate** (10).

TOURS

Two companies offer very good bus tours and they're an excellent way to see well-known and some out-of-the-way sights. Bookings at least a day or two in advance are necessary.

Salient Tours (☎ 057 21 46 57; www.salienttours.com; 2½-/4hr tour €20/25; ☎ Thu-Tue Mar-Nov) These highly personalised tours (just eight people) are run by an Englishman based in Ypres. Book at the British Grenadier (see p151). **Quasimodo** (p132).

Dranouter

Fiddlers three and more make their way to this village, 12km southwest of Ypres, on the first weekend in August for its famous folk music festival. For the rest of the year, be content with the town's **t Folk Experience Museum** (☎ 057 44 69 33; www.folkdranouter.be; Dikkebusstraat 234; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat). From Ypres, bus 71 (30 minutes) runs three times daily.

Park Bellewaerde

This kid's **theme park** (☎ 057 46 86 86; Meenseweg 497; adult/child €25/21.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Easter hols & Wed-Sun May) is 5km from Ypres along the road to Menen (by bus, take direction Menen, from the train station). There's a multitude of attractions including a 4-D cinema, rides and animals.

POPERINGE

pop 19,400

During WWI the small town of Poperinge, 12km west of Ypres, acted as a posting station for soldiers heading to or from the Ypres Salient. To the English, this town of entertainment and prostitutes, out of the range of artillery fire, became a good-time destination known simply as 'Pops'. This endearing name gave no clue to its more sinister side as a place of execution for wartime deserters.

To the Belgian mind, Poperinge is associated with beer (plenty of small breweries operate in this area) and, more specifically, hops. The town has been the heart of Belgium's hops-growing region for centuries and even boasts a newly renovated hops museum. Poperinge also has the most unusual and finest accommodation option in this corner of Flanders (see boxed text, opposite).

You'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 057 34 66 76; www.poperinge.be; Grote Markt 1; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Apr-mid-Nov, closed Sun mid-Nov-Mar) in the stadhuis basement.

When exiting the tourist office, turn right and head 30m down the road to the town hall courtyard – step inside the courtyard to arrive at a most chilling sight. Gone is the hustle and bustle of modern life, replaced by a soundscape telling of the 1917 execution here of 17-year-old soldier Herbert Morris, and others, for desertion. The stone-walled **death cell** where they spent their last night is just metres from the original **shooting post**, now softened somewhat by a backdrop engraved with Rudyard Kipling's epitaph of war, *The Coward*. Brochures available in the cell explain in some detail the injustices of that time.

Talbot House paints a different wartime picture – for details see boxed text, opposite.

To find out all you ever wanted to know – and more – about hops there's the **Nationaal Hopmuseum** (☎ 057 34 66 76; Gasthuisstraat 71; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 2-6pm Jul-Sep, Sun only May & Jun), located in De Stadsschaal, a newly renovated 19th-century hops storehouse two blocks west from the tourist office.

The region's best overnighting and dining option is **Hotel Recour/Restaurant Pegasus** (☎ 057 33 57 25; www.pegasusrecour.be; Guido Gezellestraat 7; d/ste €150/325; breakfast €14.5-course menu €65; ☎ ☎), located in an 18th-century grey-stone mansion, previously home to a hops merchant, right in the heart of town. It's rustic refinement: just eight individually themed rooms, antiques,

nostalgic colour combinations and king-sized four-poster beds.

Poperinge is one of the few places in the country where you can sample *hopscheuten* (hops shoots). These shoots, just centimetres long, are a regional delicacy. Up until recently, they were available only in April, but modern soil-heating techniques and tunnelled greenhouses mean they're now on menus from around New Year until April. **Café de la Paix** (☎ 057 33 95 78; Grote Markt 20) is good for the shoots, and for one of the region's best-known beers, Homelbier.

Poperinge sits at the end of the train line from Ypres (€1.90, eight minutes, hourly).

KORTRIJK

pop 74,000

The Texas of Flanders: that's Kortrijk (Courtrai in French). This effervescent town, just 7km from the French frontier, has a strong sense of identity and is powering ahead with buoyant industries (textiles and steel) and an increasingly modern centre. Although often overlooked by visitors on the go between Flanders' old cloth cities and the famous WWI battlefields, it's well worth an overnight stay.

Kortrijk was founded as a Roman settlement known as Cortoriacum and, along with other regional towns, became an important Middle Ages cloth-trading centre. The town was known for linen – its position on De Leie, a chalk-free river, allowed for good-quality flax production. In 1302 Kortrijk was the scene of the famous Battle of the Golden Spurs (see boxed text, p159), now brought to life in a new museum.

Orientation & Information

Kortrijk train station is 400m from the town hub, the Grote Markt.

The **tourist office** (☎ 056 27 78 40; www.kortrijk.be/toerisme; Begijnhofpark; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is newly housed in a purpose-built pavilion attached to the Groeningeabdij.

Free internet access is available at **Centrale Bibliotheek** (Central Library; ☎ 056 27 75 00; Leiestraat 30; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon & Wed, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat).

Sights

The new **Kortrijk 1302** (☎ 056 27 78 50; Begijnhofpark; adult/child €6/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) uses interactive multimedia to revisit the famous Battle of the Golden Spurs (see boxed text, p159). It's next to the tourist office, and attached to the **Groeningeabdij** (Groeninge Abbey; ☎ 056 27 77 80; Houtmarkt; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun), which details other aspects of Kortrijk's history. Applied and decorative arts – including fine examples of locally produced silver and damask (linen with a woven pattern) – are the highlights.

The **Grote Markt** was heavily bombed by the Allies in WWII, leaving few original buildings. At its core stands the turreted **belfort**, a lonely remnant of the medieval cloth hall that was bombed irreparably. A war memorial now marks the belfry's base. The **stadhuis** (Grote Markt; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) houses two 16th-century chimneypieces: one in the ground-floor Schepenzaal (Aldermen's Room), the other upstairs in the Raadszaal (Council Chamber).

A block east of the Grote Markt is **St Maartenskerk**, an oft-renovated church with a sturdy but decorative tower. Immediately north, a portal opens to Kortrijk's enclosed **Begijnhof** (see boxed text, p129). Flemish countess Joan of Constantinople founded this charming cluster of houses in 1242, though what you see today

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

For those wanting to get a real feel of the Great War, there's nothing quite like Poperinge's **Talbot House** (☎ 057 33 32 28; www.talbothouse.be; Gasthuisstraat 43; admission Ticket 1/Ticket 2 €5.50/8; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, closed Mon). Little imagination is needed to conjure up the scene of yesterday, when soldiers used this house as a home away from home and to momentarily forget the realities of war. Reverend Philip 'Tubby' Clayton set up the Everyman's Club here in 1915 to offer a place of rest and retreat for anyone, regardless of rank. These days it offers simple accommodation (in either the original building or the garden house, single/double per person €25/23, breakfast €6) plus two new permanent exhibitions about life behind the lines and at the house itself. Families are welcome to stay – there's a kitchen for whipping up meals and even a baby cot and high-chair. Note that you don't need to stay here to visit the exhibitions – Ticket 1 includes access to everything except the main house; Ticket 2 is the complete tour.

is just 300 years old. Narrow cobbled streets wind round the whitewashed cottages that feature dark green trim. Only modern intercom systems, attached to each doorway, detract from the old-world ambience. One house is a tiny museum, while another is a B&B (see B&B De Begijnhofkamers, opposite).

Continue north to **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Our Lady's Church), where the spurs from the French knights killed in the great battle were brought. Long since gone, the church's principal treasure now is Van Dyck's *Kruisoprichting* (Raising of the Cross). A short walk will bring you to the only reminders of the town's original stone walls, the twin-towered **Broeltorens**, squatting on either side of the Leie River.

The nearby **Broelmuseum** (☎ 056 27 77 80; Broelkaai 6; admission free; ☞ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun) occupies a classical mansion and houses sculptures, ceramics and paintings by local artists, including Roeland Savery, a 16th-century painter employed throughout Europe for his detailed landscapes.

The town's only other sight is outside the city centre but is well worth finding. The **Nationaal Vlas, Kant en Linnenmuseum** (National Flax, Lace & Linen Museum; ☎ 056 21 01 38; Etienne Sabbelaan 4; adult/child €3/1.75, or both sections €4.75/3; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Mar-Nov) is the country's finest lace museum. In short, it's Belgium's answer to London's Madame Tussaud's, with wax figures bringing to life dioramas that illustrate flax production and lace use throughout the cen-

BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS

In medieval times, the folk of the Flemish cloth towns were known for their spirited opposition to French domination – the Battle of the Golden Spurs (*Guldensporenslag* in Flemish) is their most famous fight.

On 11 July 1302 a lightly armed force of weavers, peasants and guild members from Bruges, Ypres, Ghent and Kortrijk met outside Kortrijk to face the aristocratic army of Philip the Fair, King of France. Philip had sent well-equipped knights to seek retribution for the massacre at the Brugse Metten (see p120). As part of their tactics, the Flemish townsfolk disguised a boggy marsh with brushwood. Expecting little from their lowly foes, the knights on horseback failed to notice the trap and were quickly snared and slaughtered. For the first time, professional knights were defeated by an amateur infantry, and the event became a symbol of Flemish resistance and the subject of Flanders' first great novel, *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (The Lion of Flanders), written by Hendrik Conscience. These days Flanders celebrates a holiday on 11 July.

turies. Some famous Belgians, including Eddy Merckx, were used as models. The museum has two sections – the modern lace and linen museum and an adjoining flax section (the latter housed in a restored farm shed). It's about 3km south of the centre; take bus 3 (every 20 minutes) from the train station to the stop in front of the museum.

Sleeping

Kortrijk offers a selection of innovative, well-priced accommodation.

B&B Full House (☎ 056 21 00 59; www.full-house.be/en/index.php; Beverlaai 27; s/d €65/72 Sun-Thu, €72/78 Fri & Sat) Heaven for those with a sweet tooth. The three rooms, done in different colours and stunning in even the minutest detail, are based on the same theme: Belgian sweets. One is called Napoleon, another is Babelutte and the third is Chocotoff.

B&B De Begijnhofkamers (☎ 056 22 83 74; Begijnhof 23; s/d/t/q Sun-Thu €50/62/87/112, Fri & Sat €69/85/120/150) This is your chance to stay in a Flemish *begijnhof*. Two neat small rooms – pink Marcella and white Laura – are offered in this beautifully renovated cottage.

Hotel Groeninge (☎ 056 22 60 00; www.hotelgroeninge.be; Groeningestraat 1a; s/d €60/75) Yet another unusual address. This atmospheric hotel dates from 1895, with spacious rooms radiating from an impressive spiral staircase. Furnishings are a happy mix of modern and old. Baby cots are available.

Hotel Messeyne (☎ 056 21 21 66; www.messeyne.com; Groeningestraat 17; s/d €115/130; ☞) Kortrijk's newest hotel/restaurant is a dynamic duo. Originally a patrician's house, the owners have struck a winning chord by combining classic architectural features – beamed ceilings and original fire-

places – with modern accents. The restaurant (open lunch and dinner Monday to Friday and dinner Saturday) offers excellent traditional French/Belgian cuisine (mains €21 to €25).

Eating & Drinking

Arte (☎ 056 25 99 88; Grote Markt 3a; mains under €20; ☞ 11am-11pm, closed Mon) One of a line-up of pleasant *cafés*/restaurants on the Markt.

La Casbah (☎ 056 25 36 46; Rijselsestraat 42; mains €14-19; ☞ lunch & dinner, closed Wed) Ignore the gaudy wall murals at this corner Moroccan restaurant and concentrate instead on the flavour-some *lamsschenkel* (leg of lamb) couscous.

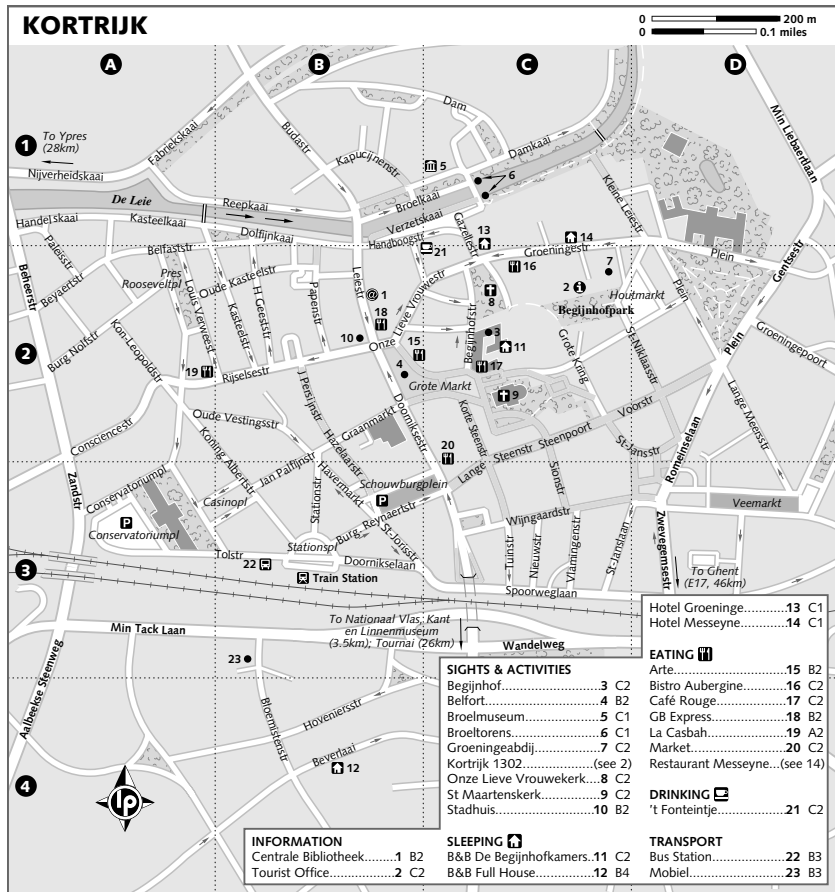
Café Rouge (☎ 056 25 86 03; St Maartenskerkhof 6a; mains €14-23; ☞ from 11am Tue-Sun) Fabulously located on a tree-lined pedestrianised square between the Begijnhof and St Maartenskerk, this modern bistro offers a large variety of cuisines and the town's most inviting terrace tables.

Bistro Aubergine (☎ 056 25 79 80; Groeningestraat 16; mains €17-26; ☞ closed lunch Sat & dinner Sun) Split-level bistro in a tastefully restored townhouse. The well-heeled clientele, particularly lunchtime businesspeople, dine on innovative Flemish cuisine spiked with local beers.

't Fonteintje (☎ 056 22 20 88; Handboogstraat 12; ☞ 11am-9pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, to 11pm Jul-Aug) One of Kortrijk's oldest *cafés* (dating from 1661), this atmospheric hideaway has modern art, smoke-stained walls and also the city's only riverside terrace. The latter's a great place for a drink or snack in summer.

Also recommended:
Restaurant Messeyne (see Hotel Messeyne, left).

Market (Grote Markt, Doorniksestraat & Schouwburgplein; ☞ 8am-noon Mon) Food and clothing market.
GB Express (Leiestraat 12) Supermarket.



Getting There & Around

Trains depart Kortrijk **station** (☎ 056 26 33 10) for Oudenaarde (€3.60, 20 minutes), Ghent (€5.70, 20 minutes), Ypres (€4.30, 30 minutes), Tournai (€4.30, 50 minutes), Bruges (€6.40, 50 minutes) and Brussels (€10.70, one hour).

De Lijn (☎ 059 56 53 53) runs local buses that depart from in front of the train station.

For bikes there's **Mobiël** (☎ 056 24 99 10; www.mobiël.be; Bloemistenstraat 2b; city bike hire half-/full day €7/9; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1.30-6pm Sat). This outfit offers Belgium's best range of rental bikes and accessories – everything from stock-standard *stadfiets* (city bikes) to *ligfiets* (lying-down bikes) and even *riksjahs* (rickshaws). If you prefer something gratis, ask for a 'sponsored' bike (free for a half-day). **Mobiël** keeps a full complement of kids' bikes, and also has *aanhangfiets* ('third-wheels'; see p304) and *fietskar* (enclosed trailers that two small kids can sit in). Long-term bike rentals are particularly attractive – for example, a trekking bike costs €12 per day but just €60 for a month. Decent secondhand bikes are also for sale (€80 to €100). You'll need to show your passport to rent a bike.

OUDENAARDE

pop 28,000

The little Flemish town of Oudenaarde (Aude-*naarde* in French) is known around the world for its magnificent wall tapestries...and in beer circles for its brewing prowess (although none of the local breweries, such as Roman, Felix and Liefmans, are open to individual visitors).

Almost equidistant between Kortrijk and Ghent, the town drapes the Scheldt River (Oudenaarde means 'old landing place') and had firm access to the early cloth trade. But its fame was sealed when the local weavers switched to tapestry-making in the mid-16th century. Enormous wall tapestries filled with exquisite detail and luminous scenes of nature, nobility or religion were soon in demand by royalty in France and Spain; Oudenaarde grew fat and famous. However, the wars that swept this part of Europe in the next two centuries embroiled the small town, and by the end of the 18th century the tapestry industry had all but disappeared.

The best place to see a dozen of these works is the Clothmakers' Hall in the **stadhuis**, which also happens to be one of Flanders' most striking town halls. This late-Gothic structure imperially occupies the northern end of the

Markt, Oudenaarde's main square, and is home to the impressive collection of genuine tapestries, plus the **tourist office** (☎ 055 3172 51; www.oude-naarde.be in Flemish; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat Nov-Mar).

Should you decide to stay overnight, there's a smattering of hotels and restaurants. Dignified and stylish hotel/restaurant **Hostellerie La Pomme d'Or** (☎ 055 31 19 00; www.lapommedor.be; Markt 62; s/d €75/100, mains €15-25), across from the stadhuis, is the town's best locale. Not far off the Markt, **Wine & Dine** (☎ 055 23 96 97; Hoogstraat 34; mains €14-20; ☎ closed Sun dinner & Mon) serves fine food, and the interior is trendy. **De Carillon** (☎ 055 31 14 09; Markt 49) is an endearing *café* in a stand-alone gable house at the base of St Walburgakerk. Terrace tables provide enjoyable views of the stadhuis, and it's a good spot to sample one of the regional brews (such as Ename Tripel, Liefmans Kriek and Oudenaards Bruin).

Oudenaarde is well placed as a day-trip destination from almost anywhere in this part of Flanders. There are frequent trains from Kortrijk (€3.60, 20 minutes) or Ghent (€3.70, 35 minutes), and Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp are all less than 1½ hours away. The train station is 1km from the Markt – turn right when leaving the station and head along Stationsstraat and Nederstraat.

GHEENT

pop 229,300

Ghent is Flanders' unsung city. Sandwiched between Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp, this attractive medieval canal city has long been overlooked by visitors on the traditional art-town hop between Belgium's big three. But if you're the type who prefers exploring away from the tourist hordes, funky Ghent's definitely the spot.

Known as *Gent* in Flemish and *Gand* in French, Ghent was medieval Europe's largest city outside Paris. Sitting on the junction of the Leie and Scheldt Rivers, it was the seat of the counts of Flanders who built a fearsome castle, Het Gravensteen, that's visible today. By the mid-14th century Ghent had become Europe's largest cloth producer, importing wool from England and employing thousands of people. The townsfolk were well known for their armed battles, civil liberties, and protests against the heavy taxes imposed on them.

Charles V, one of the most important rulers in European history, was born in Ghent in 1500. In 1540, when the townsfolk refused to

pay taxes to fund Charles' military forays into France, he came down swiftly and heavily on the city, crushing the rebellion and abolishing the town's privileges. His actions gave the locals a nickname (see boxed text, p215).

These days, Ghent is the capital of the province of Oost-Vlaanderen and is Flanders' biggest university town. Time your trip to coincide with the fabulous Gentse Feesten (see Festivals & Events, p165) to see the city at its liveliest.

Orientation

The Korenmarkt, the westernmost of Ghent's three central squares, is the city's centre. It's 2km from the main train station, St Pietersstation, but is regularly connected by trams 1, 10 and 11.

Halfway between the city centre and the train station is the university quarter, spread along St Pietersnieuwstraat.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

FNAC (☎ 09 223 40 80; Veldstraat 88) Department store with a strong bookshop.

INTERNET ACCESS

Coffeelounge (☎ 09 329 39 11; Botermarkt 6; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Mon) Atmospheric *café* with four computers.

LAUNDRY

Ipsowash (St Jacobsnieuwstraat 9) Self-service laundrette.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Apotheek Van Gansbeke (☎ 09 223 27 08; Korte Munt 6) Central pharmacy.

MONEY

ATM At the post office on Maria Hendrikaplein, close to the train station.

Europabank (☎ 09 221 00 31; St Pietersstation; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Exchange agency located inside the train station.

POST

Main post office (Lange Kruisstraat 55) In the town centre.

Post office (Maria Hendrikaplein 69) Handy to the train station.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 09 266 52 32; www.visitgent.be; Botermarkt 17; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) In the vaulted cellar underneath the belfry.

Use-it (www.use-it.be; St Pietersnieuwstraat 21; ☎ 1-6pm Mon-Fri) Tourist office for young travellers. Produces all manner of maps and guides aimed specifically at under 26ers.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Connections (☎ 09 223 90 20; www.connections.be; Hoogpoort 28) All-round agency.

Sights & Activities

ST BAAFSKATHEDRAAL

Although **St Baaf's Cathedral** (☎ 09 269 20 45; St Baafsplein; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 5pm Nov-Mar) is unimpressive from the outside, formidable queues form to see *De Aanbidding van het Lam Gods – The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat & 1-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat & 1-3.30pm Sun Nov-Mar). This lavish representation of medieval religious thinking is one of the earliest-known oil paintings. Completed in 1432, it was painted as an altarpiece by Flemish Primitive artist Jan Van Eyck, and has 20 panels (originally the interior panels were displayed only on important religious occasions, but these days they're always open to view). The work represents an allegorical glorification of Christ's death: on the upper tier sits God the Father flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist and on the outer panels are the nude Adam and Eve. The lower tier centres on the lamb, symbolising the sacrifice made by Christ, surrounded by all manner of religious figures and a landscape dotted with local church towers. The luminous colours and the rich, detailed crowd scenes are stunning.

The painting has had an illustrious history – the Calvinists nearly destroyed it; Austria's Emperor Joseph II was horrified by the nude Adam and Eve and had the panels replaced with clothed versions (the originals are now back in place); and the painting was marched off to Paris during the French Revolution and

DISCOUNT CARDS

Ghent's Museum Pass (€12.50) gives free entrance to the top museums and monuments, including all the sights listed below (except for canal cruises). It's valid for three days and can be bought from the tourist office and the museums. It's worth buying, especially if you intend visiting the Gravensteen and Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), the city's most expensive sights, plus a few cheaper attractions.

GHENT

INFORMATION

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- ATM.....(see 8)
- Casa Rosa Infowinkel.....(see 48)
- Coffeelounge.....2 C2
- Connections.....3 C1
- Europabank (exchange).....4 A6
- FNAC.....5 C3
- Holebifederatie.....(see 48)
- Ipsowash.....6 D1
- Main Post Office.....7 D2
- Post Office.....8 A6
- Tourist Office.....9 C2
- Use-It.....10 D3

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- De Gentenaar Rederij (Canal Cruises).....12 C1
- Gent Watertoerist (Canal Cruises).....13 C2
- Gravensteen.....14 C1
- Huis van Alijn.....15 C1
- Kunsthof St Pietersabdij.....16 D5
- Museum voor Schone Kunsten.....17 C6
- Museum voor Vormgeving.....18 B1
- St Baafskathedraal.....19 D2
- Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst.....20 C6

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- B&B Karavanserai.....22 C1
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- Hotsy Totsy.....60 B2
- NT Gent Schouwburg.....(see 34)
- Sphinx.....61 C2
- Studio Skoop.....62 E3
- Video.....63 D2
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SHOPPING

- Belgian Treasures.....65 C2
- Bloemenmarkt.....66 C3
- Het Oorussen.....67 C1
- Home Linen.....68 C1
- Kunstmarkt.....69 C2
- Prondelmarkt.....70 D1
- Stripwinkel Adhemar.....71 D1
- Tierenteijn-Verient.....72 C1
- Vogelmarkt.....73 C1

TRANSPORT

- Bike Hire.....74 A6
- Biker.....75 D1
- De Lijn Kiosk.....76 C2
- De Lijn Kiosk.....77 A6
- Eurolines Office & Bus Stop.....78 A6

EATING

- Belga Queen.....31 C2
- Brooderie.....32 C1
- Contact GB.....33 C2
- De Foyer.....34 D2
- Eethuis Avalon.....35 C1
- Faim de Toi.....36 D2
- La Malcontenta.....37 C1
- Marco Polo Trattoria.....38 C1
- Market.....39 D1
- Market.....40 B2
- Organic Market.....41 C1
- Pakhuis.....42 C2
- Panda.....43 C1
- Souplounge.....44 C1
- Tasty.....45 C1
- Tête à Tête.....46 C1

DRINKING

- Café Trefpunt.....47 D1
- Foyer Casa Rosa.....48 D1
- Herberg De Dulle Griet.....49 C1
- Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant.....50 C1
- Limonada.....51 C2
- Pink Flamingo's.....52 D1
- 't Dreupelkot.....(see 50)
- 't Galgenhuisje.....53 C1
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ENTERTAINMENT

- Café Den Turk.....55 C2
- Charlatan.....56 D1
- Chocolat.....57 D2
- De Bijloke.....58 B4
- De Vlaamse Opera.....59 C3
- Hotsy Totsy.....60 B2
- NT Gent Schouwburg.....(see 34)
- Sphinx.....61 C2
- Studio Skoop.....62 E3
- Video.....63 D2
- Vooruit.....64 D3

SHOPPING

- Belgian Treasures.....65 C2
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- Prondelmarkt.....70 D1
- Stripwinkel Adhemar.....71 D1
- Tierenteijn-Verient.....72 C1
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TRANSPORT

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- Biker.....75 D1
- De Lijn Kiosk.....76 C2
- De Lijn Kiosk.....77 A6
- Eurolines Office & Bus Stop.....78 A6

was later stolen by the Germans who concealed it in an Austrian salt mine during WWII. The panel *De Rechtvaardige Rechters* (The Fair Judges), stolen in 1934, is still missing.

The church houses many other paintings, including the replacement panels of Adam and Eve, and Rubens' 1624 *St Bavo's Entrance into the Monastery of Ghent*, as well as beautiful stained-glass windows.

BELFORT

This 14th-century World Heritage-listed **belfry** (☎ 09 233 39 54; Botermarkt; adult/child €3/free; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Easter-mid-Nov) rises from the old Lakenhalle (cloth hall); the entrance is around the back of the tourist office. As is to be expected, it affords spectacular views of the city – use the lift or the stairs.

MUSEUM VOOR VORMGEVING

The **Design Museum** (☎ 09 267 99 99; www.design.museum.gent.be; Jan Breydelstraat 5; adult/child/concession €2.50/free/1.20, 10am-1pm Sun free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is one of Ghent's little-known gems. It comprises two sections: furnishings from the Renaissance to the 19th century adorn the front part of the building, whereas 20th-century art – everything from a Victor Horta-designed Art Nouveau wall cabinet to '70s psychedelic sofas – takes centre stage in the glass-covered rear wing.

GRAVENSTEEN

This fearsome 12th-century **castle** (☎ 09 225 93 06; St Veerleplein; adult/child/concession €6/1.50/2.50; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), located smack in the heart of the city, belonged to the counts of Flanders. It's the quintessential castle, with moat, turrets and arrow slits, and was built to protect the townsfolk as well as to intimidate them into law-abiding submission.

STEDELIJK MUSEUM VOOR ACTUELE KUNST (SMAK)

Ghent's highly regarded **Museum of Contemporary Art** (☎ 09 221 17 03; www.smak.be; Citadelpark; adult/child/concession €5/free/3.80, 10am-1pm Sun free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), better known by its acronym, **SMAK**, is located south of the city centre. It opened in the 1990s under the direction of Jan Hoet, one of Europe's most famous museum curators. It's a huge place and you'll need the map handed out at reception to find any of the big names. Look out for works by Karel Appel, Pierre Alechinsky and Panamarenko – three of Belgium's best-known modern artists – as

well as artworks by international celebrities such as Christo, Warhol and Hockney.

MUSEUM VOOR SCHONE KUNSTEN

Ghent's **Museum of Fine Arts** (☎ 09 240 07 00; www.mskgent.be; Citadelpark) is expected to reopen in 2007 following restoration. In the meantime, some of its collection is exhibited in St Baafs-kathedraal (p161) and at SMAK (p163). The museum has a good collection of Flemish Primitives and a couple of typically night-marish works by Hieronymus Bosch – including one of Bosch's most famous pieces, *De Kruisdraging* (Bearing of the Cross), depicting Christ surrounded by hideous mocking characters.

KUNSTHAL ST PIETERSABDIJ

The **Art Centre of St Peter's Abbey** (☎ 09 243 97 30; www.gent.be/spa; St Pietersplein 9; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Apr–Nov, last entry 4.30pm) is a venue for art and culture exhibitions in the setting of a former abbey. Well worth a look if something's on at the time of your visit.

HUIS VAN ALIJN

The **Alijn House** (☎ 09 269 23 50; www.huisvanalijn.be in Flemish; Kraanlei 65; admission free, puppet show €2.50; ☎ 11am–5pm Tue–Sun) occupies a set of beautifully restored almshouses in the city's heart. The museum's theme focuses on life as it was at the start of the 20th century. It's all very quaint, even more so on Sundays when puppets (10am) take centre stage.

Walking Tour

Ghent's celebrated medieval core contains not one but three central squares separated by two imposing churches and a belfry. This trio of towers has long been the skyline's trademark, and viewing it is the essential start. Begin at the westernmost square, **Korenmarkt (1)**, then turn your back on the view until you're right in the centre of **St Michielsbrug (2)**, the nearby bridge over the Leie River. The view now is as good as it gets. Also visible are the towers of the medieval Gravensteen castle and, closer to hand, the **Graslei (3)**. This much-photographed waterfront promenade is another cherished view but, like in Bruges, it's a medieval fake – the warehouses and townhouses were largely rebuilt for Ghent's 1913 World Fair.

Cross the bridge, then step down to the **Korenlei (4)**, the riverside walkway on the opposite bank. Ghent sprung up along this and nearby

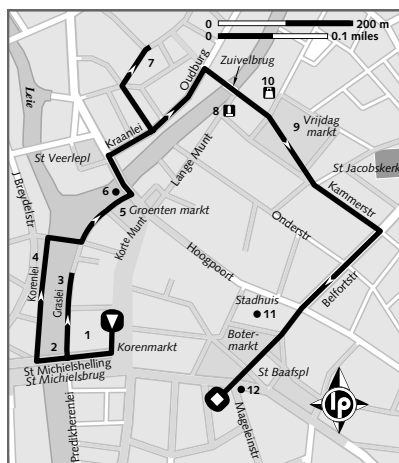
waterways because the Leie and Scheldt rivers, which meet in the city, provided easy access to the North Sea and trading. In summer these two promenades hum with happy students.

Follow the Korenlei north, passing the flower-festooned dock where canal boats moor, cross the next bridge and turn left for the **Groentenmarkt (5)**, the city's former market square (organic produce is still sold here Friday morning). This intimate square houses the **Groot Vleeshuis (6)**; Groentenmarkt 7; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), a Middle Ages meat market that is now a promotion and tasting hall for regional products. Cheese, mustards and beers are all offered – pull up a chair beneath a leg of ham that's being hung and dried here as in earlier times.

Continue north and cross the river once more to arrive at the Kraanlei. This is the start of **Patershol (7)**, the city's only remaining fully preserved medieval quarter. The gaggle of twisting cobbled lanes is very old-world – leather tradesmen once lived here, as did the religious order of the Carmelites (the *Paters*, ie Fathers, gave the quarter its name). After years of neglect, the area was renovated in the 1980s and is now home to many restaurants and B&Bs.

WALK FACTS

Start Korenmarkt
Finish Belfort
Distance 3km
Duration About two hours



Get lost in the Patershol's labyrinth of alleys before crossing Zuivelbrug back to the east bank, en route passing **Dulle Griet (8)**, a 5m-long red cannon designed to shoot 250kg balls (but that's never put to the test). The nearby **Vrijdagmarkt (9)**, once the city's forum for public meetings and executions, is lined with *cafés* and shops, including designer boutiques like **Het Oorussen (10)**; see p169). The wide square is most animated each Friday when stallholders set up a large food and general goods market.

Head down Kammerstraat, turn right into Belfortstraat, and follow it uphill to the flamboyant Gothic/Renaissance **stadhuys (11)**. Wedding entourages often leave the building – it's a prime spot for marriages. From here it's downhill all the way to the **belfort (12)**; see p163) – climb or ride to the top for a fabulous view of the city.

Tours

Ghent lends itself to being viewed from the water. The aspects only seen from a **canal cruise**, and the relative serenity of being on a boat, lend the city a whole new persona. Boats depart every 15 minutes between 10am and 6pm.

Canal-cruise companies:

- De Bootjes van Gent** (☎ 09 223 88 53; Korenlei 4a; adult/child per 40min €4.50/2.50, per 90min €9/4.50; ☎ Mar–mid–Nov)
- De Gentenaar Rederij** (☎ 0473 48 10 36; Vleeshuisbrug; adult/child per 55min €5/2.50; ☎ daily Apr–mid–Oct, Sat & Sun mid–Oct–Mar)
- Gent Watertoerist** (☎ 09 269 08 69; Graslei 7; adult/child per 40min €5/2.50, per 90min €9/4.50; ☎ Mar–Nov)

Festivals & Events

De Gentse Feesten (Ghent Festivities; www.gentsefeesten.be in Flemish) Annual 10-day festival in mid-July in which the heart of Ghent is transformed into a good-hearted party of music and street-theatre. Started over 30 years ago, it's still characterised by lots of fun, drinking, loud music and packed streets. The city's many squares become venues in themselves, with tents set up for street-theatre performances and puppet buskers. The *feesten* include '10 Days Off...' (www.10daysoff.be), one of Europe's biggest techno parties, attracting up to 50 of the world's top DJs, as well as the Blue Note jazz festival (www.bluenotefestival.be). Most of the events (except the jazz and techno fests) are free.

Filmfestival Gent (www.filmfestival.be) Well-attended festival in mid-October that has grown from humble beginnings in '74. Strong focus on music in film.

GAY & LESBIAN GHENT

Flanders' biggest gay, lesbian and bisexual organisation is **Holebifederatie** (www.holebifederatie.be in Flemish; Kammerstraat 22). It has a popular *café*, **Foyer Casa Rosa** (☎ 09 269 28 16; Belfortstraat 39), and an information shop, **Casa Rosa Infowinkel** (www.casarsa.be/infowinkel in Flemish; ☎ 6–10pm Mon, 3–9pm Wed, 4–7pm Sat), where you can pick up a free guidebook (in Flemish) listing organisations, bookshops and *cafés* throughout Flanders and Brussels. Holebifederatie also operates an information/help hotline called **Holebifoon** (☎ 09 238 26 26; ☎ 6–10pm Mon & Thu, 2–10pm Wed).

Sleeping

Ghent offers innovative accommodation. All budgets are catered for, but book at least a month in advance for the Gentse Feesten (see left). The thriving B&B scene is organised by **Bed & Breakfast Ghent** (www.bedandbreakfast-gent.be).

BUDGET

Camping Blaarmeersen (☎ 09 266 81 60; camping.blaarmeersen@gent.be; Zuiderlaan 12; camp sites per adult/car/tent €4.50/2.50/4.50) Pleasant ground located a long way west of the city. Take bus 9 (direction Mariakerke) from St Pietersstation to the Europapbrug stop, then take bus 38 or 39, which stop out the front.

De Draecke (☎ 09 233 70 50; www.vjh.be; St Widostaat 11; dm/tw €16.60/42; ☎) A great place to stay. This attractive hostel occupies a renovated warehouse in the heart of town – the rooms are clean and modern, no dorm has more than six beds (each dorm has a private bathroom), and the breakfast is a self-serve buffet. From the train station, take tram 1, 10 or 11 to St Veerleplein.

Brooderie (☎ 09 225 06 23; www.brooderie.be; Jan Breydelstraat 8; s/d/t €55/68/88; ☎) Also recommended. It has three simple rooms (shared bathroom facilities) located above a bakery and tearoom. Unpolished wooden floors, earthy furniture, and a fabulous location are the salient features.

Atlas B&B (☎ 09 233 49 91; www.atlasben.be; Rabetstraat 40; s/d/t €55/68/88; ☎) Globetrotters are the *raison d'être* of this delightful B&B, and the rooms succinctly reflect this – try Asia, Africa, America or Europe. The latter is the pick of the bunch, with a warm-toned Tuscan feel that's perfect on a cold grey day. Unless you're into small rooms,

avoid Africa or America. Tram 1 from the train station stops outside the front door.

MIDRANGE

In's Inn (☎ 0494 36 18 61; insinn@pandora.be; Corduwaniersstraat 11; €75) There's a self-contained ground-floor studio room in this little B&B, located in the charming Patershol quarter. In (the vibrant host) and her architect husband have managed to squeeze every conceivable appliance (including washing machine and clothes dryer) into the studio's kitchen/laundry – and it still looks good. There are two free bikes, and young children and babies are welcome.

Chambre Plus (☎ 09 225 37 75; www.chambreplus.be; Hoogpoort 31; d from €75, ste €125; ☒) Gorgeous B&B with a fab location on a pedestrianised street right in the city centre. Choose from Sultan, Congo or Côte Sud – all exotic themed rooms complemented by convivial hosts and an unbelievably gastronomic breakfast.

Verzameld Werk (☎ 09 224 27 12; www.verzameldwerk.be; Onderstraat 23a; r €95, 15% extra for 1-night stay) Spartan doesn't begin to describe this avant-garde B&B located in what is now the shell of an old townhouse right in the centre. 'Art&design and movements inbetween' is the owner's description of the place. Come without expectations (easy enough considering Ingrid's and Frank's website gives nothing away) and you may just enjoy it. Breakfast is taken in your room – just open the fridge to find it.

Monasterium PoortAckere (☎ 09 269 22 10; www.monasterium.be; Oude Houtlei 50-58; hotel s/d/tr €60/90/125, guesthouse s/d without bathroom €45/90, d/tr with bathroom €100/125) A night with the nuns... well, not quite, but it's close. This hotel/guesthouse occupies a former convent near the historic centre. The rooms, all once nuns' quarters, have been given the odd decoration, but all in all it's pretty bare. Rooms in the hotel section are spacious, but those in the 1st-floor *gastenverblijf* (guest-

house) are small and sober with little neogothic windows. It's definitely out of the ordinary.

Hotel Erasmus (☎ 09 224 21 95; www.proximedia.com/web/hotel-erasmus.html; Poel 25; s/d/f €75/95/150, luxury s/d €85/110) Renovated 16th-century house with a dozen rooms, some with stained-glass windows and oak-beamed ceilings. The cheaper rooms are twee rather than antique, but the luxury room is done out as authentic 16th century. The medieval ambience, superb buffet breakfast (€10), friendly staff and central location make it an all-round good option.

Hotel Harmony (☎ 09 324 26 80; www.hotel-harmony.be; Kraanlei 37; s/d from €110/125; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) The Patershol's newest address is Ghent's only 4-star family-run hotel, and a delight to boot. Named after the owner's daughter, it occupies two buildings, including a riverfront mansion dating from 1859, all of which have been lavishly renovated. Book room No 31 to relax in a big bath with a view of the city's historic towers.

Also recommended is **B&B Karavanserei** (☎ 09 233 62 11; Geldmunt 45; s/d/tr €50/65/90). Think 1001 Nights and you're right on track. It has two spacious rooms.

Eating

CAFÉS & BRASSERIES

Broederie (☎ 09 225 06 23; Jan Breydelstraat 8; light meals €10; ☒ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun) This rustic tearoom serves wholesome soups as well as sweet and savoury snacks and is a firm local favourite. Beers are available and there is a chessboard for those so inclined.

De Foyer (☎ 09 225 32 75; St Baafsplein 17; mains €9-17; ☒ 10am-late Wed-Mon) Convivial brasserie on the 1st floor of the Publiekstheater, near the tourist office. Overlooking St Baafskathedraal, dine on an array of Flemish meals and snacks including wicked pancakes. The three-course lunch menu (€11, Monday to Friday only) is great value.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Engelen aan de Waterkant (☎ 09 223 08 83; www.engelenaandewaterkant.be; Ter Platen 30; s/d/tr €110/120/150; ☒ ☑) The name translates as 'Angels on the Waterside', and, indeed, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more angelic or romantic B&B in Belgium. Interior designer Ann Willems started this B&B after falling in love with a statue of a little wooden angel that she found in an antique shop. From there the angels took flight, resulting in two luxuriously spacious rooms that are beautifully thought out and magically understated.

The B&B is about 1.5km from both the city centre (tram 40 from the Korenmarkt stops about 500m away at Ter Platenbrug) and the train station (take one of buses 70 to 79 to the stop Ter Platenbrug). Price-wise it's hardly top-end material; quality-wise it's superb.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

't **Velootje** (☎ 09 223 28 34; Kalversteeg 2; ☒ from 9pm but variable) Unique doesn't begin to describe this extraordinary Patershol pub. It started life as a bike-rental shop and, somewhere in its convoluted past, it morphed into a boozier. Don't even think of visiting if you're even slightly claustrophobic: the interior is crammed from floor to ceiling with all manner of junk and riches including, in reference to past-life experiences, antique bikes (one of which is apparently of great historic value).

To find the pub, walk north along Oudburg until you see a pile of junk leaning against the wall in one of the pedestrianised lanes on your left. There's no sign out the front, just a Westmalle hoarding attached to the wall.

RESTAURANTS

Eethuis Avalon (☎ 09 224 37 24; Geldmunt 32; dagschotel €8.50, 3-course menu €11.50; ☒ lunch Mon-Sat) Spacious, well-priced vegetarian restaurant with modest décor located close to the Gravensteen. Inside, it's a warren of little rooms, or you can dine outside on a small terrace.

Panda (☎ 09 225 07 86; Oudburg 38; mains €9-11, 3-course menu €16; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☒) For a more formal vegetarian setting than that of Eethuis Avalon, there's the excellent Panda, hidden behind an organic food shop. Step down to canalside for a cosy and peaceful location, and enjoy a good selection of well-priced, tasty dishes.

Marco Polo Trattoria (☎ 09 225 04 20; Serpentstraat 11; mains €13-18; ☒ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) Part of the Italian 'slow food' drive, combining organic produce and candlelit surroundings. Both the atmosphere and the well-priced meals are highly recommended.

La Malcontenta (☎ 09 224 18 01; Haringsteeg 7; mains €14-20; ☒ dinner Wed-Sat) One of many restaurants in the quaint Patershol quarter. This one specialises in high-quality cuisine from Spain and the Canary Islands.

Tête-à-Tête (☎ 09 233 95 00; Jan Breydelstraat 32; mains €17-24; ☒ lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Stars twinkle and candles shine in this refined little restaurant that manages to marry lace curtains and modern décor in a winning way. Book a table in the enclosed terrace for canal views, and enjoy typical Belgian cuisine made with aplomb.

Belga Queen (☎ 09 280 01 00; Graslei 10; mains €16-30; ☒ lunch & dinner) A couple of years old but still wearing the crown around town. This big brasserie/restaurant occupies a 13th-century warehouse with a prized canalside position. Seafood lovers, vegetarians and carnivores are all copiously catered for.

Faim de Toi (☎ 09 223 63 93; Belfortstraat 10; mains €22-27; ☒ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner daily) New and immensely popular designer restaurant/lounge bar serv-

ing contemporary versions of classic cuisine spiced for world tastes. As you'd expect from this burgeoning breed of restaurants, the tone is cool (and the seats are hard plastic).

QUICK EATS

Souplounge (☎ 09 223 62 03; Zuivelbrugstraat 6; small/large soup €3/4.50; ☒ 10am-7pm) One of the new breed of modern soup kitchens and great for a light, fast meal.

Tasty (☎ 09 225 74 07; Hoogpoort 11; light meals €3-7; ☒ 11.30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Good variety of light meals and delicious fresh juices are available at this little funky eat-in/takeaway joint.

SELF-CATERING

Contact GB (Hoogpoort 42; ☒ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Supermarket.

Market (Vrijdagmarkt; ☒ 7.30am-1pm Fri) Food market.

Market (St Michielsplein; ☒ 7.30am-1pm Sun) Food market.

Organic market (Groentenmarkt; ☒ 9am-1pm Fri)

Drinking

The canalside Graslei is adorned with terrace *cafés* throughout summer. The Vrijdagmarkt is just one of the nightlife hubs. Another is St Pietersnieuwstraat, good for dingy student hang-outs that stay open into the wee hours.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pakhuis (☎ 09 223 55 55; Schuurkenstraat 4; mains €15-25; ☒ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) This huge brasserie/restaurant occupies a beautifully restored textile warehouse on a dog-eared backstreet and, for years now, has drawn young and old alike. Pop in for a post-movie drink and end up sipping on warm oysters at midnight – it's that sort of place. The cuisine is eclectic and the kitchen is open until 11.45pm.

Café Trefpunt (☎ 09 233 58 48; Bij St Jacobs 18; ☎ from 7pm) Run by the organisers of the Gentse Feesten (see p165), most of the week this is a laid-back pub, but on Mondays there are DJs, jam sessions or live concerts.

't Dreupelkot (☎ 09 224 21 20; Groentenmarkt 12; ☎ 11am-1am Tue-Sun) An austere bar that majors in *jenever* and packs in the punters. Shares the same enticing waterfront location as Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant (see below).

't Galgenhuisje (☎ 09 233 42 51; Groentenmarkt 5; ☎ from 3pm Tue-Sun) The city's smallest pub. It dates back to the 17th century, and its name means 'the gallows' (that's what went down on this square in times past). It's formidable how many people squeeze in here on Friday and Saturday nights.

Herberg De Dulle Griet (☎ 09 224 24 55; Vrijdagmarkt 50; ☎ noon-1am) One of Ghent's best-known beer pubs. Local brews include Guillotine (9.3%), Delirium Tremens (9.5% – watch out for pink elephants if you down too many of these) and the city's strongest beer, Piraat (10.5%). The tables are old *kriek* (cherry lambic beer) barrels and the beer list makes for solid reading.

Limonada (☎ 09 233 78 85; Heilige Geeststraat 7; ☎ 10pm Mon-Sat) Go retro at this stylish '70s lounge bar. Luminous furniture – designed on-site – is one of the attractions.

Pink Flamingo's (☎ 09 233 47 18; Onderstraat 55; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, 2pm-3am Fri & Sat) Barbie meets Princess Di at this knowingly kitsch *café*. The décor changes every three months, and you can rest assure it'll be bad taste. Even if its aesthetics aren't your thing, the funky background tunes will win you over.

Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant (☎ 09 225 06 80; Groentenmarkt 9; ☎ 11am-late) Another port o' call for beer lovers. Offers a pleasant canalside terrace and a popular bar draped with dried hops. It's definitely on the tourist circuit.

Entertainment

Pick up free entertainment guides from the tourist office or in pubs. Many concerts and theatre performances can be booked through **FNAC** (☎ 09 223 40 80; Veldstraat 88).

CINEMAS

Sphinx (☎ 09 225 60 86; St Michielshelling 3) Cinema close to the Korenmarkt that majors in art-house films.

Studio Skoop (☎ 09 225 08 45; St Annaplein 63) This is a five-screen cinema with a cosy old atmosphere.

LIVE MUSIC & NIGHTCLUBS

Culture Club (☎ 09 267 64 41; www.cultureclub.be; Afrikalaan 174; ☎ from 7pm Wed-Sun) According to one British magazine, this is the 'world's hippest club'. It's roughly 2km to the northeast of the centre.

Hotsy Totsy (☎ 09 233 47 18; Onderstraat 55; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 8pm-3am Sat & Sun) The unassuming façade of this bar belies its local standing. It's one of the city's most popular small venues for everything from jazz to poets.

Café Den Turk (☎ 09 233 01 97; Botermarkt 3; ☎ 4pm-2am Wed-Mon) Dates from 1228 and naturally prides itself on being Ghent's oldest pub. It's tiny, and inside it's nothing special, but occasionally there's a night of live jazz or blues.

Flanders Expo (☎ 09 241 92 11; Maaltekouter 1) Although Brussels is the premier destination for international rock bands, Ghent does get a fair share. Performances are usually staged at the Expo, a couple of kilometres southwest of the centre.

Oude Beestenmarkt is where some of Ghent's best DJs got their start. The string of little venues here includes **Video** (Oude Beestenmarkt 7; ☎ Thu-Sat), a tiny boutique club that attracts a like-to-be-seen clientele, and **Chocolat** (Oude Beestenmarkt 4; ☎ 7.30pm-5am Thu-Sat). Both are big on everything from techno to drum'n'bass.

For dancing in town, head to **Chalatan** (Vlaamarkt 6). This is Ghent's biggest music bar, with live gigs most Thursdays and Sundays.

PERFORMING ARTS

Vooruit (☎ 09 267 28 28; www.vooruit.be in Flemish; St Pietersnieuwstraat 23) Excellent arts centre, and the city's main venue for dance and performances by visiting theatre companies. This impressive building, on the edge of the student quarter and close to the revamped Zuid district, was built in 1912 as a cultural centre for the Socialist Party and is worth a look in itself. From the Korenmarkt it's about 1km, or take tram 41 to the stop 'Zuid' at Graaf van Vlaanderenplein.

De Bijloke (☎ 09 269 92 92; www.debijloke.be in Flemish; Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2) Classical music buffs will find a good selection of concerts held in this hall, which is within the Bijloke complex.

De Vlaamse Opera (☎ 070 22 02 02; www.vlaamseopera.be; Schouwburgstraat 3) Ghent's main venue for opera performances. It was built in 1840 and boasts horseshoe-shaped tiered balconies and elegant salons.

NT Gent Schouwburg (☎ 09 225 01 01; St Baafsplein 17) The Nederlands Toneel Gent is the city's premier theatre company, and performances

(exclusively Flemish-language) can be seen here at the company's home.

Shopping

Local shoppers head for Veldstraat, which leads off immediately south of Korenmarkt. It's pedestrianised (except for trams), and is where you'll find department stores like FNAC, Inno and C&A. Mageleinstraat (east of Veldstraat) and its offshoots are fashion hunting-grounds.

Sunday morning is market time, with the following markets operating from 7am to 1pm: **kunstmart** (art market) at Korte Munt; **bloemenmarkt** (flower market) on Kouter; **vogelmarkt** (bird market) at the Vrijdagmarkt; and **prondelmarkt** (flea market; also operates Friday and Saturday mornings) on Steendam.

Other recommendations:

Belgian Treasures (☎ 09 223 16 43; St Baafsplein 6) Sells all manner of Flemish tapestries, many made nearby at St Niklaas.

Het Oorcussen (☎ 09 233 07 65; Vrijdagmarkt 7) Unimposing shop that's home to top Flemish fashion designers including Ann Demeulemeester and Dries Van Noten.

Home Linen (☎ 09 223 60 93; Korenlei 3) Large collection of handmade Belgian linen.

Stripwinkel Adhemar (☎ 09 224 32 39; Kammerstraat 25) Comic-strip shop.

Tierenteijn-Verlent (☎ 09 225 83 36; Groentenmarkt 3) Mustard makers who've been around since 1790.

Getting There & Around

The **Eurolines office** (☎ 09 220 90 24; Koningin Elisabethlaan 73) is 100m from St Pietersstation. Buses leave from this office. For details on services see boxed text, p317.

Ghent has two train stations. The main one, **St Pietersstation** (☎ 02 528 28 28), is a distinct, fortresslike affair about 2km south of the city centre. Some trains also stop at Gent-Dampoort to the east of the city. From St Pietersstation there are trains every half-hour to Antwerp (€7.80, 45 minutes), Bruges (€5.40, 20 minutes), Brussels (€7.40, 45 minutes), Kortrijk (€5.70, 20 min-

utes) and Ostend (€7.80, 50 minutes), as well as hourly connections to Oudenaarde (€3.70, 35 minutes) and Ypres (€9.50, one hour).

The city's public transport network is operated by **De Lijn** (☎ 070 22 02 00). Its information kiosks (train station ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri; Korenmarkt ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat) sell bus and tram tickets and have free transport maps. Trams to the town centre (1, 10, 11, 12 and 13) depart from the tram station in the tunnel to the left as you exit the train station. Free night buses operate from 11.30pm to 2.30am on Friday and Saturday nights.

Bikes can be rented either from the luggage room at the **train station** (☎ 09 241 22 44; per day €9.50, plus €12.50 deposit) – remember to bring your passport for identity – or from **Biker** (☎ 09 224 29 03; Steendam 16; half-/full day €6.50/9; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Tue-Fri, to 5pm Sat), located in the town centre.

ST MARTENS-LATEM

pop 8300

From 1904, St Martens-Latem, 10km southwest of Ghent, was home to symbolists and later to expressionist artists whose works are now displayed in a trio of museums. The **Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens** (☎ 09 282 51 23; www.museumdd.be; Museumlaan 14; adult/child/concession €3/free/2; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) is the principal attraction with a rich collection of paintings by Gustave De Smet and Constant Permeke, leaders of that time, as well as works by Ensor and many others. As museums go, it's fairly small and can be covered easily in an hour or so. The other museums, **Museum Leon De Smet** (☎ 09 282 30 90; Museumlaan 18; admission free; ☎ 2.30-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 2.30-6pm Sat & Sun Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 2.30-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter, closed Jan) and the nearby **Museum Gustave De Smet** (☎ 09 282 77 42; Gustaaf De Smetlaan 1; adult/concession €2.50/free; ☎ 2-6pm Wed-Sun May-Sep, 2-5pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr, closed Jan), are even smaller, each devoted to works by these expressionist brothers.

Buses 34, 35 or 36 from Ghent stop about 400m from the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens.

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