



# BRUGES

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*(Brugge)*

With Renoir canals, pointy, gilded architecture, vivid time-tunnel art, and stay-awhile cafés, Bruges is a heavyweight sightseeing destination, as well as a joy. Where else can you roll or stroll along a canal, munch mussels and wash them down with the world's best beer, savor heavenly chocolate, and see Flemish Primitives and a Michelangelo, all within 300 yards of a bell tower that jingles every 15 minutes? And there's no language barrier.

The town is Brugge (BROO-ghah) in Flemish, and Bruges (broozh) in French and English. Its name comes from the Viking word for wharf. Right from the start, Bruges was a trading center. In the 11th century, the city grew wealthy on the cloth trade.

By the 14th century, Bruges' population was 35,000, as large as London's. As the middleman in sea trade between northern and southern Europe, it was one of the biggest cities in the world and an economic powerhouse. In addition, Bruges had become the most important cloth market in northern Europe.

In the 15th century, while England and France were slogging it out in the Hundred Years' War, Bruges was the favored residence of the powerful Dukes of Burgundy—and at peace. Commerce and the arts boomed. The artists Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling had studios here.

But by the 16th century, the harbor had silted up and the economy had collapsed. The Burgundian court left, Belgium became a minor Hapsburg possession, and Bruges' Golden Age abruptly ended. For generations, Bruges was known as a mysterious and dead city. In the 19th century, a new port, Zeebrugge, brought renewed vitality to the area. And in the 20th century, tourists discovered the town.

### Accessibility Levels

This book rates sights, hotels, and restaurants using four levels:

**Level 1—Fully Accessible:** A Level 1 building is completely barrier-free. Entryways, elevators, and other facilities are specifically adapted to accommodate a person using a wheelchair. If there's a bathroom, it has wide doors and an adapted toilet and sink. Where applicable, the bathing facilities are also fully adapted (including such features as bath boards, grab bars, or a roll-in, no-rim shower). Fully adapted hotel rooms often have an alarm system with pull cords for emergencies.

**Level 2—Moderately Accessible:** A Level 2 building is suitable for, but not specifically adapted to accommodate, a person using a wheelchair. This level will generally work for a wheelchair user who can make transfers and take a few steps. A person who is permanently in a wheelchair may require some assistance here (either from a companion or from staff).

**Level 3—Minimally Accessible:** A Level 3 building is satisfactory for people who have minimal mobility difficulties (that is, people who usually do not use a wheelchair, but take more time to do things than a non-disabled person). This building may have some steps and a few other barriers—but not too many. Level 3 buildings are best suited to slow walkers; wheelchair users will require substantial assistance here.

**Level 4—Not Accessible:** Unfortunately, some places in this book are simply not accessible to people with limited mobility. This means that barriers such as staircases, tight interiors and facilities (elevators, bathrooms, etc.), or other impediments interfere with passage for travelers with disabilities. Buildings in this category might include a church tower that has several flights of steep stairs, or a museum interior that has many levels with lots of steps and no elevator.

For a complete listing of the Accessibility Codes used in this chapter, please see pages 6–7.

Today, Bruges prospers because of tourism: It's a uniquely well-preserved Gothic city and a handy gateway to Europe. It's no secret, but even with the crowds, it's the kind of city where you don't mind being a tourist.

### Accessibility in Bruges

Bruges is an Easy Access city, far more accessible than Paris, Amsterdam, or Frankfurt. In Bruges, however, cobblestone is the state rock; if you're sightseeing in a wheelchair, you might want to sit on a pillow to absorb

the shock of the rock. Luckily, there's often a smooth sidewalk in the middle, so you can wheel your way through the cobbles. While keeping its medieval charm intact, the town manages to open its arms to people at all levels of mobility.

In Bruges, if a hotel has 20 or more rooms, one room has to be designated as accessible. Some hoteliers go to great lengths to adapt their room, while others are merely suitable for a person in a wheelchair. Nevertheless, persons needing Level 1 accessibility can easily find accommodations. The pricier the hotel, the better chance of finding an adapted room; still, I found some fully accessible rooms in less expensive places (see listings on page \*TK).



Belgian trains and Bruges' city buses are generally accessible. Tours in Bruges are less accessible: Bus tours have Level 1 and Level 2 accessibility (depending on the coach). Boat tours, which require going down steps to the dock, range from Level 3—Minimally Accessible to Level 4—Not Accessible.

Many of Bruges' top sights are at least partly accessible to travelers with limited mobility. Fully accessible (Level 1) sights include Market and Burg squares; most of the Church of Our Lady and the Memling Museum; the lower chapel of the Basilica of the Holy Blood; the Renaissance Hall; and the Bell Tower's Exhibition Hall (but not the top of the tower). The Groeninge Museum, Town Hall Gothic Room, and Begijnhof are moderately accessible (Level 2). Only a handful of sights—such as the top of the Bell Tower, the Gruuthuse Museum, and De Halve Maan Brewery Tour—are not accessible.

Bruges' ultimate sight—the town itself—is open to all. And the best way to enjoy that is to get lost on the back streets, away from the lace shops and ice-cream stands.

## ORIENTATION

The tourist's Bruges—and you'll be sharing it—is less than one square mile, contained within a canal (the former moat). Nearly everything of interest and importance is within a convenient cobbled swath between the train station and Market Square (less than a mile apart). Many of my quiet, charming recommended accommodations lie just beyond Market Square.

### If You Need Medical Help

Start with your hotel staff. They are accustomed to handling medical problems. Here are other resources to try: To contact a doctor, call 050/391-528 (during the day), 050/364-030 (at night, 20:00–8:00 in the morning), or 050/813-899 (on weekends). To summon an ambulance, call 100. For a Red Cross ambulance, call 050/320-727.

Two hospitals in Bruges offer 24-hour emergency care: Algemeen Ziekenhuis Sint-Jan Te Brugge (Ruddershove 10, tel. 050/452-111) and Algemeen Ziekenhuis Sint-Lucas (St.-Lucaslaan 29, tel. 050/369-111).

Pharmacies (*apothek*) are marked with a green cross. Every pharmacy displays a list of 24-hour pharmacies that are nearby.

For medical supplies, try Thuiszorg Winkel in the city center (closed Sun, Oude Burg 23, tel. 050/440-352, thuiszorgwinkel.brugge@cm.be).

### Tourist Information

The main TI, about a half-mile from the train station, is fully accessible (**AE, AI, AT** just outside the front door, Level 1). Called **In&Uit** (literally, “In and Out”) it’s in the big, red concert hall on the square called ’t Zand (daily 10:00–18:00, Thu until 20:00, ’t Zand 34, tel. 050/448-686, www.brugge.be). The other TI is at the train station (**AE, AI**, Level 1—Fully Accessible; generally Tue–Sat 10:00–13:00 & 14:00–17:00, closed Sun–Mon).

The TIs sell a great €1 Bruges visitors guide with a map and listings of all of the sights and services. A separate publication, *The Brugge Accommodation Guide*, lists all of Bruges’ hotels, pensions, B&Bs, hostels, and campgrounds with coded icons that tell about accessibility, amenities, and prices (free at TIs). And you can pick up a monthly English-language program called *events@brugge*. The TIs have information on train schedules and on the many tours available (see “Tours,” below). Many hotels give out free maps with more detail than the map the TIs sell.

### Arrival in Bruges

**By Train:** Coming in by train, you’ll see the square bell tower that marks the main square. Upon arrival, stop by the station TI (described above). The station lacks ATMs, but has lockers (€2–3.50, daily 6:00–24:00).

**Access:** **AE, AI, AL, AT**, Level 1—Fully Accessible. However, only platforms 5–10 are accessible by elevator. A fully adapted toilet is near the train information booth (attendant with key on duty at baggage room daily 7:00–19:00).

**Getting to the Center:** The best way to get to the town center is by **bus** (**AE, AI, AL**, Level 1—Fully Accessible). All buses have transfer lifts for wheelchairs. Ask at the train station which bus will take you to your hotel; you can pay the €1 fare on the bus, or buy your ticket beforehand from the machine outside the train station door (just to the left as you exit the station). Buses #1, #3, #4, #6, #8, #11, #13, and #16 go directly to Market Square. Buses #4 and #8 continue to the northeast part of town to the windmills.

The **taxi** fare from the train station to most hotels is around €6. For details on taxis, see “Getting Around Bruges,” below.

To **roll or stroll** to the town center, note that it’s a mile along cobblestone sidewalks (some curb cuts have 2” steps). Cross the busy street and canal in front of the station, head up Oostmeers, and turn right on Zwizdandstraat.

**By Car:** Park at the train station for just €2.50 per day and take the bus into town. There are pricier underground parking garages at the square called ’t Zand and around town (€10/day, all of them well-marked). Paid parking on the street in Bruges is limited to four hours. Driving in town is very complicated because of the one-way system.

## Helpful Hints

**Market Days:** Bruges hosts markets on Wednesday morning (Market Square) and Saturday morning (’t Zand). On Saturday and Sunday, a flea market hops along Dijver in front of the Groeninge Museum.

**Shopping:** Shops are open from 9:00 to 18:00, and a little later on Friday. Grocery stores are usually closed on Sunday. The main shopping street, Steenstraat, stretches from Market Square to the square called ’t Zand. The Hema department store (**AE, AI, AT**, Level 1—Fully Accessible) is at Steenstraat 73 (Mon–Sat 9:00–18:00, closed Sun).

**Money:** Although there are no ATMs at the train station, there are plenty in town. An accessible ATM is near Market Square at Steenstraat 40 and at the bank on the south end of ’t Zand (across square from TI). These ATMs are moderately accessible: at the post office (Markt 5), Fortis Bank (three branches: Simon Stevins Plein 3, Hoogstraat 23, and Vlamingstraat 78), and KBC (Steenstraat 38).

**Internet Access:** The relaxing **Coffee Link** (**AE+A, AI+A, AT**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 2” entry step, one 4” step up to computers), with mellow music and pleasant art, is centrally located in a medieval mall across from the Church of Our Lady (€3/30 min, 16 terminals surrounded by sweet temptations, daily 10:00–18:00 in summer, Mariastraat 38, tel. 050/349-973, well-run by Staf). You

### Museum Tips

Admission prices are steep, but they include great audioguides—so plan to spend some time and really get into it. For information on all the museums, call 050/448-711 or visit [www.brugge.be](http://www.brugge.be).

**Combo-Tickets:** The TIs and participating museums sell a museum combo-ticket (any 5 museums for €15, unlimited validity period). Since the Groeninge and Memling museums cost €8 each, art-lovers will save money with this pass. If you use this combo-ticket, you don't need to wait in any lines—simply go directly to the turnstile, get your ticket punched, and head in.

**Blue Monday:** In Bruges, nearly all museums are open Tuesday through Sunday year-round from 9:30 to 17:00 and are closed on Monday. If you're in Bruges on a Monday, the following attractions are still open: Church of Our Lady, Begijnhof, De Halve Maan Brewery Tour, Basilica of the Holy Blood, Town Hall's Gothic Room, and chocolate shops and museum. You can also join a boat, bus, or walking/wheeling tour.

can also get wired at **Happyrom** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; Ezelstraat 8) and the nearby **Snuffel Backpacker Hostel** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; Ezelstraat 47).

**Post Office:** It's on Market Square near the bell tower (Level 3—Minimally Accessible; Mon–Fri 9:00–18:00, Sat 9:30–12:30, closed Sun, tel. 050/331-411). There are no ramps, since the P.O. is part of a monument (four 8" entry steps).

**Laundry:** Bruges has two accessible self-service laundrettes, each within a few blocks of Market Square. **Mister Wash** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) is at St. Jakobsstraat (tel. 050/336-622), and **Automatisch Wassalon Belfort** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) is at Ezelstraat 51 (tel. 050/354-177).

**Best Town View:** The best view without a climb is from the rooftop terrace of Bruges' concert hall, the Concertgebouw (AE, AI, AL, Level 2—Moderately Accessible). This seven-story building, built in 2002, is the city's only modern high-rise (daily 11:00–23:00, free accessible elevator, on edge of old town on 't Zand, also houses the TI).

### Getting Around Bruges

Bruges is pleasantly compact, but you may want to take the bus or a taxi between the train station and the city center (especially if you have



heavy luggage).

**By Bus:** All city buses are Level 1—Fully Accessible (AE, AI, AL), with transfer lifts for wheelchair users. A €1 bus ticket is good for an hour; an all-day pass costs €3. Nearly all city buses go directly from the train station to Market Square and fan out from there. They then return to Market Square and back to the station. Note that buses returning to the station from the center leave from the library bus stop, a block off Market Square on nearby Kuiperstraat (every 5 min).

**By Taxi:** Standard taxis are only moderately accessible (AE+A, Level 2, wheelchair user must be able to transfer into the taxi, driver is willing to assist you and to place wheelchair in trunk). For standard taxis, you'll find taxi stands at the station and on Market Square. If you need a fully adapted minivan taxi (AE, AI, Level 1—Fully Accessible), you can call one of two different companies: tel. 050/334-444 or tel. 050/384-660.

## TOURS

### Of Bruges

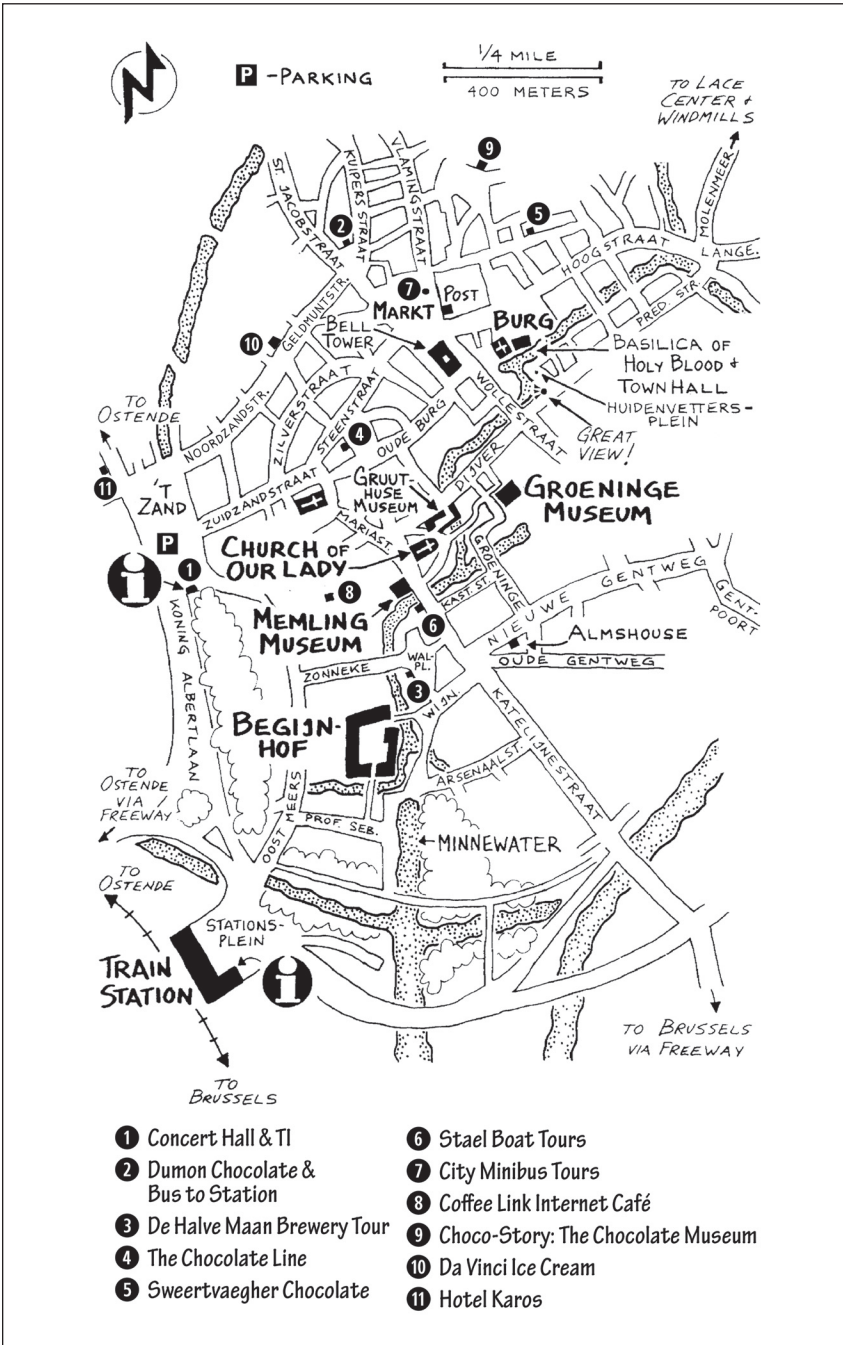
**Bruges by Boat**—The most relaxing and scenic (though not informative or accessible) way to see this city of canals is by boat, with the captain narrating. (Always let them know you speak English to ensure you'll understand the spiel.) Several companies offer basically the same 30-minute tour (€5.70, 4/hr, daily 10:00–17:00). Boats leave from all over town. Stael Boats has fewer steps than the others (€5.70, at Oude Sint Janshospitaal, Katelijnestraat 4, tel. 050/330-041).

**Access:** Level 3—Minimally Accessible, with steps down onto the dock, and more onto the boat (you can't take a wheelchair onto the boat). The staff at Stael will assist with boarding.



**City Minibus Tour**—Leaving Market Square every hour, City Tour Bruges gives a rolling overview of the town in an 18-seat, two-skylight minibus with dial-a-language headsets and video support (€11.50, 50 min, 10:00–20:00 in summer, until 18:00 in spring, until 17:00 in fall, less in winter, tel. 050/355-024, [www.citytour.be](http://www.citytour.be)). The narration, while clear, is slow-moving and a bit boring. But the tour is a lazy way to cruise

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past virtually every sight in Bruges.

**Access:** Their newer buses offer decent accessibility (**AE, AI+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible): You can roll directly on board, but then you'll have to transfer to a seat and stow your wheelchair in the back of the bus. Wheelchair users will want to call ahead to schedule a tour on one of these newer buses. On the older buses, travelers must be able to climb the three steps into and out of the bus (**AE+A, AI+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible).

**Walking/Wheeling Tour**—Local guides lead small groups through the core of town (€5, €12 for a family, 2 hrs, July–Aug daily, mid-May–June and Sept Sat–Sun only, no tours Oct–mid-May, depart from TI on 't Zand at 14:30—just drop in a few minutes early). Though earnest, the tours are heavy on history and given in two languages, so they may be less than peppy. Still, to propel you beyond the pretty gables and canal swans of Bruges, they're good medicine.

**Access:** Wheelchair users have been part of these tours for years. The guides will adjust the tour to accommodate you. To sign up, contact the VFG office (02/515-0261, info@vfg.be, www.vfg.be).

**Horse-and-Buggy Tour**—The buggies around town are ready to take you for a clip-clop tour (€30, 35 min, price is per carriage, not per person). When divided among four or five people, this can be a good value.

**Access:** **AE+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. Wheelchair users must be able to climb into the carriage. The driver will fold and store the chair.

## From Bruges

**Daytours**—Tour guide Frank loves leading small groups on a fascinating “Flanders Fields Battlefield” day trip. This tour is like Quasimodo's (listed below), but more accessible and more expensive. The differences: seven travelers on a minibus, rather than a big busload; pickup from any hotel or B&B (because the small bus is allowed in the town center); an included restaurant lunch, rather than a picnic; and a little more serious lecturing and a stricter focus on World War I. For instance, you actually visit the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper (Ypres in French). Tours cost €59 (Wed–Sun 9:00–17:00, no tours Mon–Tue, call 050/346-060 or toll-free 0800-99133 to reserve).

**Access:** **AE+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. Wheelchair users need to be able to get on and off the bus. Frank will be happy to assist. Some of the sights (cemeteries and trenches) may be a challenge, and travelers with limited mobility will have to decide whether to engage in that part of the tour.

### Bruges at a Glance

▲▲▲**Groeninge Museum** Top-notch collection of mainly Flemish art. **Hours:** Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon. **Access:** Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲▲**Bell Tower** Overlooking Market Square, with 366 steps to a town view and a carillon close-up. **Hours:** Daily 9:30–17:00. **Access:** The Bell Tower is Level 4—Not Accessible, but the Exhibition Hall is Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲▲**Burg Square** Historic square with sights and impressive architecture. **Hours:** Always open. **Access:** Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲▲**Church of Our Lady** Tombs and church art, including Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child*. **Hours:** Mon–Fri 9:30–16:50, Sat 9:30–15:50, Sun 13:30–16:50 only. **Access:** Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

▲▲**Memling Museum/St. John's Hospital** Art by the greatest of the Flemish Primitives. **Hours:** Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon. **Access:** Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲▲**Begijnhof** Benedictine nuns' peaceful courtyard and Beguine's House museum. **Hours:** Courtyard always open, museum open daily 10:00–12:00 & 13:45–17:00, shorter hours off-season. **Access:** Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

▲▲**De Halve Maan Brewery Tour** Fun and handy tour includes beer. **Hours:** Daily on the hour 11:00–16:00, Oct–March at 11:00 and 15:00 only. **Access:** Level 4—Not Accessible.

**Quasimodo Countryside Tours**—If the above tour is full, adventurous slow walkers could consider a similar but more physically demanding package offered by Quasimodo Countryside Tours (**AE+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; they're happy to assist you). There are two different all-day, English-only bus tours through the rarely visited Flemish countryside.

The “In Flanders Fields” tour concentrates on World War I battlefields, trenches, memorials, and poppy-splattered fields (April–Oct Tue–Sun 9:15–17:00; Nov–March Sun, Tue, and Thu only).

▲**Market Square** Main square that is the modern heart of the city, with carillon bell tower (described above). **Hours:** Always open. **Access:** Mostly Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲**Basilica of the Holy Blood** Romanesque and Gothic church housing a relic of the blood of Christ. **Hours:** April–Sept Thu–Tue 9:30–11:45 & 14:00–17:45, Wed 9:30–11:45 only; Oct–March Thu–Tue 10:00–11:45 & 14:00–15:45, Wed 10:00–11:45 only. **Access:** The Lower Chapel is Level 2—Moderately Accessible; the Upper Chapel and adjacent Treasury are Level 4—Not Accessible.

▲**Town Hall** Beautifully restored Gothic Room from 1400, plus a Renaissance Hall. **Hours:** Gothic Room—daily 9:30–17:00; Renaissance Hall—Tue–Sun 9:30–12:30 & 13:30–16:30, closed Mon. **Access:** Gothic Room is Level 2—Moderately Accessible; Renaissance Hall is Level 1—Fully Accessible.

▲**Gruuthuse Museum** 15th-century mansion displaying an eclectic collection that includes furniture, tapestries, and lots more. **Hours:** Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon. **Access:** Level 3—Minimally Accessible.

▲**Chocolate** Sample Bruges’ specialty: Try Dumon, The Chocolate Line, Sweertvaegher, and on and on. **Hours:** Shops generally open 10:00–18:00. **Access:** Most shops are Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

▲**Choco-Story: The Chocolate Museum** Learn the whole delicious story of Belgium’s favorite treat. **Hours:** Daily 10:00–17:00. **Access:** Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

The other tour, “Triple Treat,” focuses on Flanders’ medieval past and rich culture, with tastes of chocolate, waffles, and beer (Mon, Wed, and Fri 9:15–17:00). Be ready for lots of walking.

Tours cost €50, or €40 if you’re under 26 (includes a picnic lunch, 30-seat, non-smoking bus, reserve by calling tel. 050/370-470 or toll-free tel. 0800-97525, [www.quasimodo.be](http://www.quasimodo.be)). After making a few big-hotel pickups, the buses leave town at 9:15 from the Park Hotel on ’t Zand.

**Bus and Boat Tour**—The Sightseeing Line offers a bus trip to Damme and a boat ride back. The bus and boat are fully accessible (AE); go on a good-weather day, because the accessible part of the boat is not covered

(€16.50, April–Sept daily at 14:00, 2 hrs, leaves from the post office at Market Square, tel. 050/355-024).

## SIGHTS

These sights are listed in order from Market Square to Burg Square to the cluster of museums around the Church of our Lady to the Begijnhof (less than a quarter-mile from beginning to end). For a self-guided tour and more information on each sight, see the Bruges City Roll or Stroll, page \*TK.

**▲Market Square (Markt)**—Ringed by a bank, the post office, lots of restaurant terraces, great old gabled buildings, and the iconic bell tower,



this is the modern heart of the city (most city buses run from near here to the train station—library bus stop, a block down Kuiperstraat). Under the bell tower are two great Belgian french-fry stands, a quadrilingual Braille description of the old town, and a metal model of the tower. In Bruges' heyday as a trading center, a canal came right up to this square.

**Geldmuntstraat**, just off the square, is a delightful street with many fun and practical shops and eateries.

**Access:** Most of the square is fully accessible (Level 1), but the cobblestone streets (with 2" curbs) vary in degree of roughness. Geldmuntstraat (AE+A, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) has 4" curbs, with curb cuts down to one or two inches. Some stores have wheelchair-accessible entryways, others have entry steps.

**▲▲Bell Tower (Belfort)**—Most of this bell tower has presided over Market Square since 1300, serenading passersby with carillon music. The octagonal lantern was added in 1486, making it 290 feet high—that's 366 steps. If you can manage the steps, the view is worth the climb.

**Access:** The Bell Tower is Level 4—Not Accessible; the Exhibition Hall is AE, AI, AL, AT, Level 1—Fully Accessible. While the Bell Tower requires a long, steep climb, you can reach the Exhibition Hall on the second floor by elevator (in the courtyard, down the hallway toward the toilet). The toilet off the courtyard is wheelchair-accessible (€0.30, ask attendant for key).

**Cost and Hours:** €5, daily 9:30–17:00, last entry 45 min before closing.

**Evening Carillon Concerts:** The tiny courtyard behind the bell tower has a few benches where people can enjoy the free carillon concerts (generally Mon, Wed, and Sat at 21:00 in the summer, schedule posted on the wall).

**▲▲Burg Square**—This opulent square is Bruges' civic center, historically the birthplace of Bruges and the site of the 9th-century castle of the first Count of Flanders. Today, the easily accessed square is the scene of outdoor concerts and surrounded by six centuries of architecture.

**▲Basilica of the Holy Blood**—Originally the Chapel of Saint Basil, this church is famous for its relic of the blood of Christ, which, according to tradition, was brought to Bruges in 1150 after the Second Crusade. The lower chapel is dark and solid—a fine example of Romanesque style. The upper chapel (separate entrance, up the stairs) is decorated Gothic. An interesting museum is next to the upper chapel.

**Access:** The Lower Chapel is **AE, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; the Upper Chapel and adjacent Treasury are Level 4—Not Accessible (up thirty-seven 7" steps).

**Cost, Hours, Location:** Museum entry—€1.50; April–Sept Thu–Tue 9:30–11:45 & 14:00–17:45, Wed 9:30–11:45 only; Oct–March Thu–Tue 10:00–11:45 & 14:00–15:45, Wed 10:00–11:45 only; Burg Square, tel. 050/336-792, [www.holyblood.org](http://www.holyblood.org).

**▲Town Hall's Gothic Room**—Your ticket gives you a room full of Bruges history, in the form of old town maps and paintings and a grand, beautifully restored "Gothic Hall" from 1400. Its painted and carved wooden ceiling features hanging arches. Trace the story of Bruges via the series of late-19th-century wall murals. See Bruges City Roll or Stroll, page \*TK.

**Access:** **AE, AI, AL+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. The Gothic Room is upstairs and accessible by elevator.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €2.50, includes audioguide and admission to Renaissance Hall, daily 9:30–17:00, Burg 12.

**Renaissance Hall (Brugse Vrije)**—This is just one ornate room with an impressive Renaissance chimney. Underwhelming to most, the hall is a hit with heraldry fans. See Bruges City Roll or Stroll, page \*TK.

**Access:** **AE, AI, AT**, Level 1—Fully Accessible.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €2.50, includes audioguide and admission to Town Hall's Gothic Room, Tue–Sun 9:30–12:30 & 13:30–16:30, closed Mon, entry in corner of square at Burg 11a.



**▲▲▲Groeninge Museum**—This museum houses a world-class collection of mostly Flemish art, from Memling to Magritte. While there's plenty of worthwhile modern art, the highlights are the vivid and pristine Flemish Primitives. ("Primitive" here means before the Renaissance.) Flemish art is shaped by its love of detail, its merchant patrons' egos, and the power of the Church. Lose yourself in the halls of Groeninge: Gaze across 15th-century canals, into the eyes of reassuring Marys, and through town squares littered with leotards, lace, and lopped-off heads.

**Access:** AE, AI, AT, Level 1—Fully Accessible. The museum's entrance has steps, but if you go past the entry to Groeninge (a little alley-like street), you can enter the museum with no barriers. Inside, there's a unisex adapted toilet in the men's restroom.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €8, includes audioguide, Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon, Dijver 12, tel. 050/448-751.

**▲Gruuthuse Museum**—Once a wealthy brewer's home, this 15th-century mansion is a sprawling smattering of everything from medieval bedpans to a guillotine.

**Access:** Level 3—Minimally Accessible. There are six 6" steps at the entry, and the building includes many levels accessible only by steps, sometimes winding and narrow.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €6, includes audioguide and entry to apse in Church of Our Lady, Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon, Dijver 17.

**▲▲Church of Our Lady**—The church stands as a memorial to the power and wealth of Bruges in its heyday. A delicate *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo is near the apse (to the right if you're facing the altar). It's said to be the only Michelangelo statue to leave Italy in his lifetime (thanks to the wealth generated by Bruges' cloth trade). If you like tombs and church art, pay to wander through the apse.

**Access:** AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. The church is wheelchair-accessible, with the exception of a small room (up two 8" steps) at the end of the apse. The nearest accessible toilet is across the street at the Visitors Center of the Memling Museum (see below).

**Cost, Hours, Location:** Michelangelo viewing is free, art-filled apse costs €2.50, covered by €6 Gruuthuse admission, Mon–Fri 9:30–16:50, Sat 9:30–15:50, Sun 13:30–16:50 only, Mariastraat.

**▲▲Memling Museum/St. John's Hospital (Sint Janshospitaal)**—The former monastery/hospital complex has two entrances—one is to a welcoming visitors center (free), the other to the Memling Museum. The Memling Museum, in the monastery's former church, was once a medieval hospital and now contains six much-loved paintings by the greatest of the Flemish Primitives, Hans Memling. His *Mystical Wedding of St.*

*Catherine* triptych is a highlight, as is the miniature gilded oak shrine to St. Ursula.

**Access:** AE, AI, AL, AT, Level 1—Fully Accessible with the exception of a corner room (two 8” steps). You’ll find an elevator (on the right side of the inside entry) and an accessible unisex toilet (€0.30, located in men’s room at visitors center). Loaner wheelchairs are available.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €8 includes fine audioguide, Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon, across the street from the Church of Our Lady, Mariastraat 38.

▲▲**Begijnhof**—Inhabited by Benedictine nuns, the Begijnhof courtyard almost makes you want to don a habit and fold your hands as you wander under its wispy trees and whisper past its frugal little homes. For a good slice of Begijnhof life, visit the simple museum, the Beguine’s House.

**Access:** AE+A, AI+A, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. The cobblestones in the Begijnhof are heavy and rough, making for a bone-jarring wheelchair ride. The museum has one 4” entry step, one 4” step to visit the kitchen, one 8” step to the courtyard, and two 7” steps to see the sleeping quarters.

**Museum Cost and Hours:** €2, daily 10:00–12:00 & 13:45–17:00, shorter hours off-season, courtyard always open, English explanations, Beguine’s House is left of entry gate.

**Minnewater**—Just south of the Begijnhof is Minnewater, an idyllic world of flower boxes, canals, and swans.

**Almshouses**—Returning from the Begijnhof back to the town center, you might detour along Nieuwe Gentweg to visit one of about 20 almshouses in the city. At #8, go through the door marked *Godshuis de Meulenaere 1613* into the peaceful courtyard (free). This was a medieval form of housing for the poor. The rich would pay for someone’s tiny room here in return for lots of prayers.

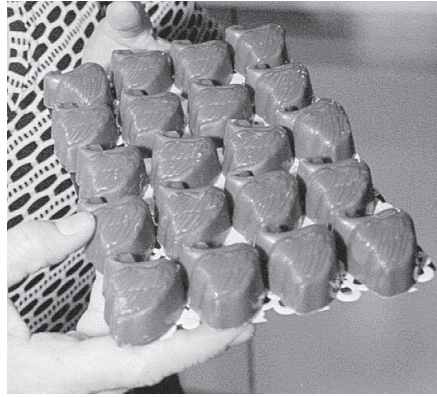
**Access:** AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. There are two 6” steps at the almshouse entry.

## Bruges Experiences:

### Beer, Chocolate, Lace, and Biking

▲**Chocolate Shops**—Bruggians are connoisseurs of fine chocolate. You’ll be tempted by chocolate-filled display windows all over town. While Godiva is the best big-factory/high-price/high-quality brand, there are plenty of smaller, family-run places in Bruges that offer exquisite handmade chocolates. Each of the following chocolatiers is proud of its creative varieties. They’re all generous with samples and welcome you to pick any five or six chocolates to assemble a 100-gram assortment.

**Dumon:** Perhaps Bruges' smoothest and creamiest chocolates are at Dumon (**AE+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; €1.75/100 grams). Madam Dumon and her children (Stefaan and Christophe) make their top-notch chocolate daily and sell it fresh just off Market Square (Thu–Tue 10:00–18:00, closed Wed, old chocolate molds on display in basement, Eiermarkt 6, tel. 050/346-282). Their *ganache*, a dark, creamy combo, wows chocoholics. The



Dumons don't provide English labels because they believe it's best to describe their chocolates in person—and they do it with an evangelical fervor. If you're using a wheelchair, roll up to the window to the left of the entrance and they'll serve you samples there.

**The Chocolate Line:** Locals and tourists alike flock to The Chocolate Line (**AE+A, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, wooden ramp available to cover the 8" step—ask; €3.40/100 grams) to taste the *gastronomique* varieties concocted by Dominique Person—the mad scientist of chocolate. His unique creations include Havana cigar (marinated in rum, cognac, and Cuban tobacco leaves—so therefore technically illegal in the United States), lemongrass, lavender, ginger (shaped like a Buddha), saffron curry, spicy chili, and a Moroccan mint that will take you to Marrakech. My fave: the sheets of chocolate with crunchy roasted cocoa beans. Coming soon: a Pop Rocks/cola chocolate. The kitchen—busy whipping up 80 varieties—is on display in the back. Enjoy the window display, renewed monthly (daily 9:30–18:00, between Church of Our Lady and Market Square at Simon Stevinplein 19, tel. 050/341-090).

**Sweertvaegher:** This smaller place, near Burg Square, features top-quality chocolate (**AE+A, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 4" entry step; €2.65/100 grams) that's darker rather than sweeter, made with fresh ingredients and no preservatives (Tue–Sat 9:30–18:00, closed Sun–Mon, Philipstockstraat 29, tel. 050/338-367).

**Choco-Story: The Chocolate Museum**—This museum, rated ▲ for chocoholics, explains why, in the ancient Mexican world of the Mayas and the Aztecs, chocolate was considered the drink of the gods, and cocoa beans were used as a means of payment. With lots of actual artifacts well-described in English, the museum fills you in on the production of truffles, chocolates, hollow figures, and bars of chocolate. Then you'll view a delicious little video (8 min long, repeats continuously, alternating

Flemish, French, and then English—peek into the theater before entering the top room to time it right). Your finale is in the “demonstration room,” where—after a 10-minute cooking lesson—you get a taste.

**Access:** AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €6, daily 10:00–17:00, where Wijnezstraat meets Sint Jansstraat at Sint Jansplein, near Market Square, tel. 050/612-237, [www.choco-story.be](http://www.choco-story.be). Notice how chocolaty the fine building looks from across the street.

**▲▲De Halve Maan Brewery Tour**—Belgians are also Europe’s beer connoisseurs. This fun, handy tour is a great way to pay your respects. “The Brugse Zot” is the last beer actually brewed in Bruges. While the tour won’t work for wheelchair users, energetic beer-loving slow walkers could manage. The happy gang at this working family brewery gives entertaining and informative 45-minute, three-language tours (often by friendly Inge, tour includes a beer, great rooftop panorama).

Their bistro, where you’ll be given your included beer, serves quick, hearty lunch plates. You can eat indoors with the smell of hops, or outdoors with the smell of hops. This is a great place to wait for your tour or to linger afterward. For more on beer, see page \*TK.

**Access:** Level 4—Not Accessible, lots of very steep steps with no elevator.

**Cost, Hours, Location:** €4.50, daily on the hour 11:00–16:00, Oct–March at 11:00 and 15:00 only, 1 block past church and canal, take a right down skinny Stooftstraat to #26 on Walplein, tel. 050/332-697, [www.halvemaan.be](http://www.halvemaan.be).

**Windmills and Lace by the Moat**—At the northeast end of town are four windmills strung along a pleasant grassy setting on the “big moat” canal.

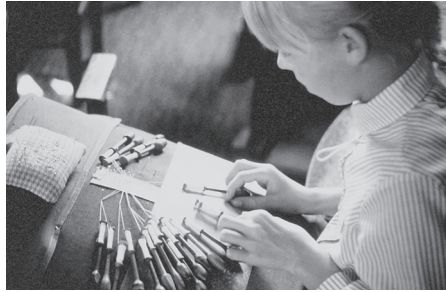
**Windmill:** The St. Janshuismolen windmill is open, but the ramps to the base of the windmills are steep and rugged, and the windmills themselves are not accessible (€2, May–Sept daily 9:30–12:30 & 13:30–17:00, closed Oct–April, at the end of Carmersstraat, between Kruispoort and Dampoort, on Bruges side of the moat).

**Lace:** To actually see lace being made, drop by the nearby **Lace Center** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 2” entry step), where ladies toss bobbins madly while their eyes go



bad (€2.50 includes afternoon demo and small lace museum, as well as adjacent Jeruzalem Church, Mon–Fri 10:00–12:00 & 14:00–18:00, Sat until 17:00, closed Sun, Peperstraat 3, tel. 050/330-072).

The **Folklore Museum** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) in the same neighborhood, is cute but forgettable (€3, Tue–Sun 9:30–17:00, closed Mon, Balstraat 43, tel. 050/448-764-044).



## SLEEPING

Bruges is a great place to sleep, with Gothic spires out your window, no traffic noise, and the cheerily out-of-tune carillon heralding each new day at 8:00 sharp. (Thankfully, the bell tower is silent from 22:00 to 8:00.)



Most Bruges accommodations are located between the train station and the old center, with the most distant (and best) being a few blocks to the north and east of Market Square. Bruges is most crowded Friday and Saturday evenings Easter through October, with July and August weekends being worst. Many hotels charge a bit more on Friday and Saturday, and won't let you stay just one night if it's a Saturday.

### Hotels

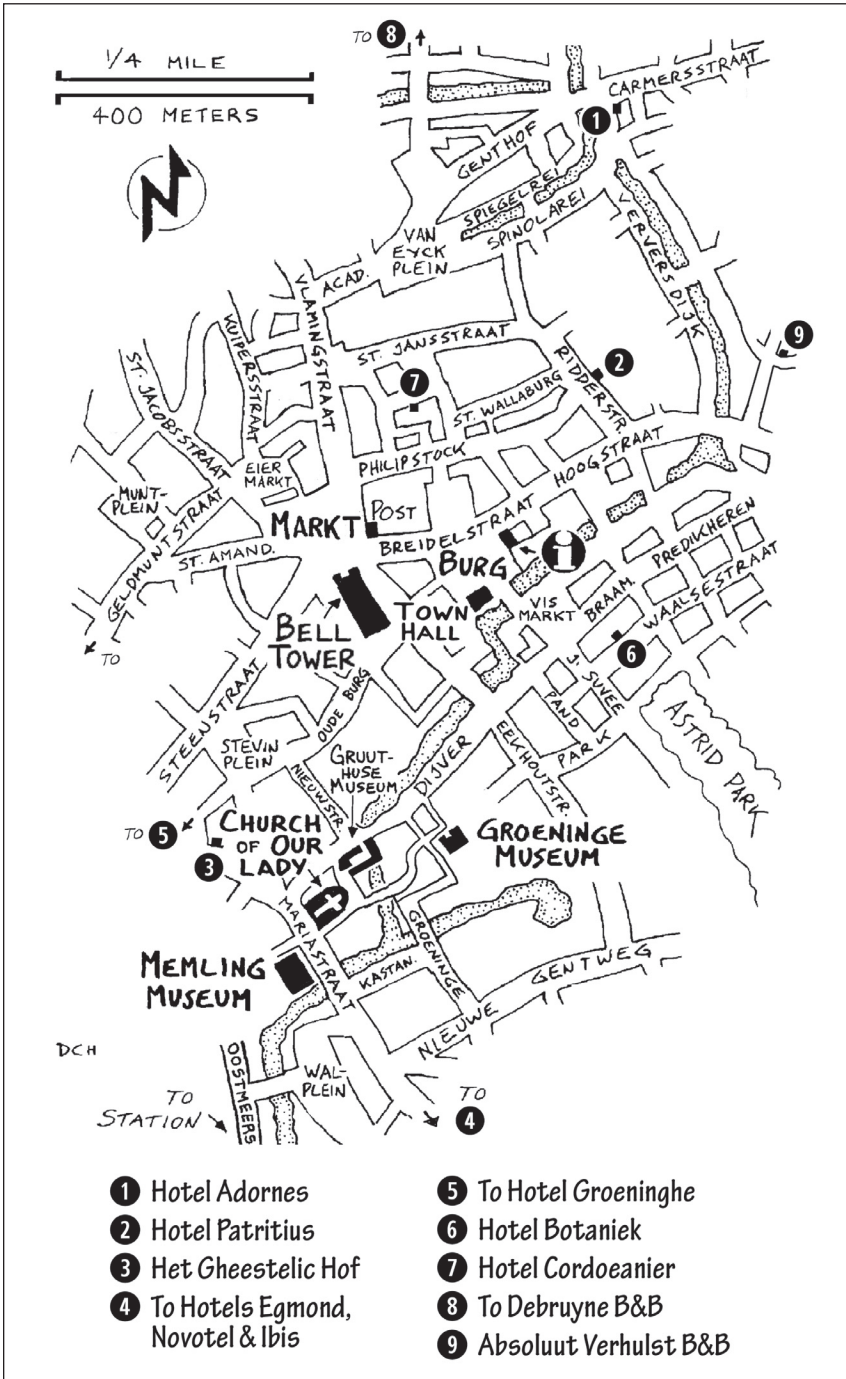
#### Level 1—Fully Accessible

**Karos Hotel** (AE, AI, AL, AR, AB), a block and a half from the TI on 't Zand, is Old World, warm, and welcoming (Db-€70–110, spacious room and bath with roll-in shower, includes breakfast, Hoefijzerlaan 37, tel. 050/341-448).

The adjacent **Novotel** and **Ibis** hotels (AE, AI, AL, AR, AB), closer to the center of town, have three accessible rooms apiece. The Ibis, in a former 15th-century convent, has an entrance ramp and has been updated completely inside and out for accessibility (Db-€69–89, elevator, parking,



## Bruges Hotels



### Sleep Code

(€1 = about \$1.20, country code: 32)

**Sleep Code:** **S** = Single, **D** = Double/Twin, **T** = Triple, **Q** = Quad, **b** = bathroom, **s** = shower only. Everyone speaks English. Unless otherwise noted, credit cards are accepted and breakfast is included.

Katelijnestraat 65A, tel. 050/337-575, fax 050/336-419, [www.hotels-belgium.com/brugge/ibis.htm](http://www.hotels-belgium.com/brugge/ibis.htm)). The Novotel, in a new, Scandinavian-style building, is also completely accessible (Db-€114–121, elevator, pool, accessible restaurant, parking-€9, Katelijnestraat 65B, tel. 050/337-533, fax 050/336-556, [www.novotel.com](http://www.novotel.com), [h1033@accor.com](mailto:h1033@accor.com)).

### Level 2—Moderately Accessible

**Hotel Adornes** (AE, AI, AL, AR, AB+A, ♥) is small and classy—a great value. This 17th-century canalside house has 20 rooms with full, modern bathrooms, free parking (reserve in advance), and a cellar lounge (accessible by lift) with games and videos (Db-€90–120 depending on size, singles take a double for nearly the same cost, Tb-€135, Qb-€145, elevator, near Carmersstraat at St. Annarei 26, tel. 050/341-336, fax 050/342-085, [www.adornes.be](http://www.adornes.be), [info@adornes.be](mailto:info@adornes.be), Nathalie runs the family business). The hotel is accessible by wheelchair through the courtyard in back. One large ground-floor room works for guests using wheelchairs. While the toilet and bathtub are not specially adapted, the bathroom is large enough to maneuver a wheelchair.

**Hotel Patritius** (AE, AI, AL, AR, AB+A), family-run and centrally located, is a grand, circa-1830, neoclassical mansion with 16 stately rooms, a plush lounge and chandeliered breakfast room, and a courtyard garden. This is the best value in its price range (Db-€80-105 depending on size, Tb-€140, about €10 more Fri–Sat, non-smoking, free parking, Riddersstraat 11, tel. 050/338-454, fax 050/339-634, [www.hotelpatritius.be](http://www.hotelpatritius.be), [info@hotelpatritius.be](mailto:info@hotelpatritius.be), Garrett and Elvi Spaey). There is an elevator accessed outside the hotel and one suitable room with an accessible toilet (but bathtub is not accessible). This unit sleeps four and includes a second room that allows privacy for a companion.

**Het Gheestelic Hof** (AE+A, AI, AR, AB, one 8" entry step) is centrally located, with cozy, well-appointed, and well-equipped rooms. The adapted room on the main floor contains a roll-in shower (Db-€60–95,

includes breakfast served in its four-star sister across the street, Heilige-Geeststraat 2, tel. 050/342-594).

**Hotel Egmond (AE+A, AI, AR, AB)** is a creaky mansion quietly located in the middle of the idyllic Minnewater. Its eight 18th-century rooms are plain, with small modern baths shoehorned in, and the guests-only garden is just waiting for a tea party. This hotel is right for romantics who want to be in the countryside, but still just outside town (Sb-€92, small twin Db-€112, larger Db-€120-130, Tb-€150, cash only, Minnewater 15, tel. 050/341-445, fax 050/342-940, [www.egmond.be](http://www.egmond.be), [info@egmond.be](mailto:info@egmond.be)).

**Hotel Groeninghe (AE+A, AI, AR, AB+A)** has eight charming, Old World rooms in a good location close to 't Zand. It's run by friendly Laurence (Sb-€70, Db-€85, Tb-€110, no elevator, Korte Vulderstraat 29, tel. 050/343-255, fax 050/340-769, [www.hotelgroeninghe.be](http://www.hotelgroeninghe.be), [hotelgroeninghe@pandora.be](mailto:hotelgroeninghe@pandora.be)).

### Level 3—Minimally Accessible

**Hotel Botaniek (AE+A, AI, AL, AR+A, AB+A)**, three 8" entry steps), quietly located a block from pleasant Astrid Park, rents nine rooms (Db-€98 Tb-€106, Qb-€115, more for 1-night stays, less for longer stays, elevator, Waalsestraat 23, tel. 050/341-424, fax 050/345-939, [www.botaniek.be](http://www.botaniek.be), [info@botaniek.be](mailto:info@botaniek.be)).

**Hotel Cordoanier (AE+A, AI, AR, AB+A)**, three 7" entry steps), a family-run hotel, rents 22 bright, simple, modern rooms on a quiet street two blocks off Market Square. It's the best cheap hotel in town (Sb-€59, Db-€65, Tb-€75, Qb-€88, Quint/b-€101, €5 extra on Fri-Sat, Cordoanierstraat 16-18, tel. 050/339-051, fax 050/346-111, [www.cordoanier.be](http://www.cordoanier.be), [info@cordoanier.be](mailto:info@cordoanier.be), Kris, Veerle, Guy, and family). Their "holiday house" across the street sleeps up to 10 for €250 a night (includes a kitchen; cheaper for longer stays). The hotel has two ground-floor rooms with wheelchair-accessible toilets, but not baths.

### Bed-and-Breakfasts

B&Bs, run by people who enjoy their work, offer fine value but limited accessibility. They typically have rooms on upper floors reachable only by steep staircases. While none would be suitable for wheelchair users, the two listings below have relatively few stairs and are satisfactory for slow walkers. Parking is generally easy on the street (pay 9:00-19:00, free overnight).

### Level 3—Minimally Accessible

**Debruyne B&B** (AE+A, AI, AR+A, AB+A, ♥), run by Marie-Rose and her architect husband, Ronny, offers artsy, original decor (check out the elephant-sized white doors—Ronny's design) and genuine warmth. If Gothic is getting old, this is refreshingly modern (Sb-€55, Db-€60, Tb-€80, 1-night stays pay €10 more, cash only, non-smoking, free Internet in lobby, north of Market Square, 2 blocks from the little church at Lange Raamstraat 18, tel. 050/347-606, fax 050/340-285, [www.bedandbreakfastbruges.com](http://www.bedandbreakfastbruges.com), [marie.debruyne@advalvas.be](mailto:marie.debruyne@advalvas.be)). Two of the rooms are on the ground floor, but can be reached only by climbing steps. Marie-Rose has hosted wheelchair users before and is willing to help guests tackle the nine 5" steps to the breakfast room and also to serve meals in the guest's room. The bathrooms are suitable but not adapted.

**Absoluut Verhulst** (AE, AI+A, AR, AB+A) is a great, modern-feeling B&B in a 400-year-old house, run by friendly Frieda and Benno. It presents a challenge even for slow walkers, but if you have your heart set on staying at a B&B, this one has fewer stairs than most (Sb-€50, Db-€75, huge and lofty suite-€95 for 2, €115 for 3, and €140 for 4, 1-night stays pay €10 more, cash only, east of Market Square at Verbrand Nieuwland 1, tel. & fax 050/334-515, [www.b-bverhulst.com](http://www.b-bverhulst.com), [b-b.verhulst@pandora.be](mailto:b-b.verhulst@pandora.be)).

## EATING

Belgium is where France meets the North, and you'll find a good mix of both Flemish and French influences in Bruges and Brussels. We've included accessibility information for each place. Unless otherwise noted (by **AT** or **AT+A**), these restaurants do *not* have accessible toilets.

### Belgian Specialties

These dishes are popular throughout Belgium. **Moules:** Mussels are served everywhere, either cooked plain (*nature*), with white wine (*vin blanc*), with shallots or onions (*marinière*), or in a tomato sauce (*provençale*). You get a big-enough-for-two bucket and a pile of fries. Go local by using one empty shell to tweeze out the rest of the *moules*. When the mollusks are



in season, from about mid-July through April, you'll get the big Dutch mussels. Locals take a break in May and June, when only the puny Danish kind is available.

**Frites:** Belgian fries (*Vlaamse frites*, or Flemish fries) taste so good because they're deep-fried twice—once to cook, and once to brown. The natives eat them with mayonnaise, not ketchup.

## Flemish Specialties

These specialties are traditional to Bruges.

**Carbonnade:** Rich beef stew flavored with onions and beer.

**Chou rouge à la flamande:** Red cabbage with onions and prunes.

**Flamiche:** Cheese pie with onions.

**Flemish asparagus:** White asparagus (fresh in springtime) in cream sauce.

**Lapin à la flamande:** Marinated rabbit braised in onions and prunes.

**Soupe à la bière:** Beer soup.

**Stoemp:** Mashed potatoes and vegetables.

**Waterzooi:** Creamy meat stew (chicken, eel, or fish).

**...à la flamande:** Anything cooked in the local Flemish style.

## Brussels Specialties

You can find these specialties in Bruges, though they're technically "native" to Brussels (which tends toward French cuisine).

**Anguilles au vert:** Eel in green herb sauce.

**Caricoles:** Sea snails. Very local, seasonal, and hard to find, these are usually sold hot by street vendors.

Cheeses: Remoudou and Djotte de Nivelles are made locally.

**Choux de Bruxelles:** Brussels sprouts (in cream sauce).

**Crevettes:** Shrimp, often served as croquettes (minced and stuffed in breaded, deep-fried rolls).

**Croque Monsieur:** Grilled ham-and-cheese sandwich.

**Endive:** Typical Belgian vegetable (also called *chicorée* or *chicon*) served as a side dish.

**Filet Américain:** Beware—for some reason, steak tartare (raw) is called "American."

**Tartine de fromage blanc:** Open-face cream-cheese sandwich, often enjoyed with a cherry Kriek beer.

**...à la brabançonne:** Anything cooked in the local Brabant (Brussels) style, such as *faisant* (pheasant) *à la brabançonne*.



## Desserts and Snacks

*Gaufres*: Waffles, sold hot in small shops.

*Dame blanche*: Hot-fudge sundae.

*Spekuloos*: Spicy gingerbread biscuits served with coffee.

*Pralines*: Filled Belgian chocolates.

*Pistolets*: Round croissants.

*Cramique*: Currant roll.

*Craquelin*: Currant roll with sugar sprinkles.

## Tippling

It generally isn't necessary to tip in restaurants (15 percent service is usually already included in the menu price). Still, feel free to tip about 5 percent if the service is good. In bars, you can round up to the next euro ("keep the change") if you get table service, rather than order at the bar.

## Restaurants in Bruges

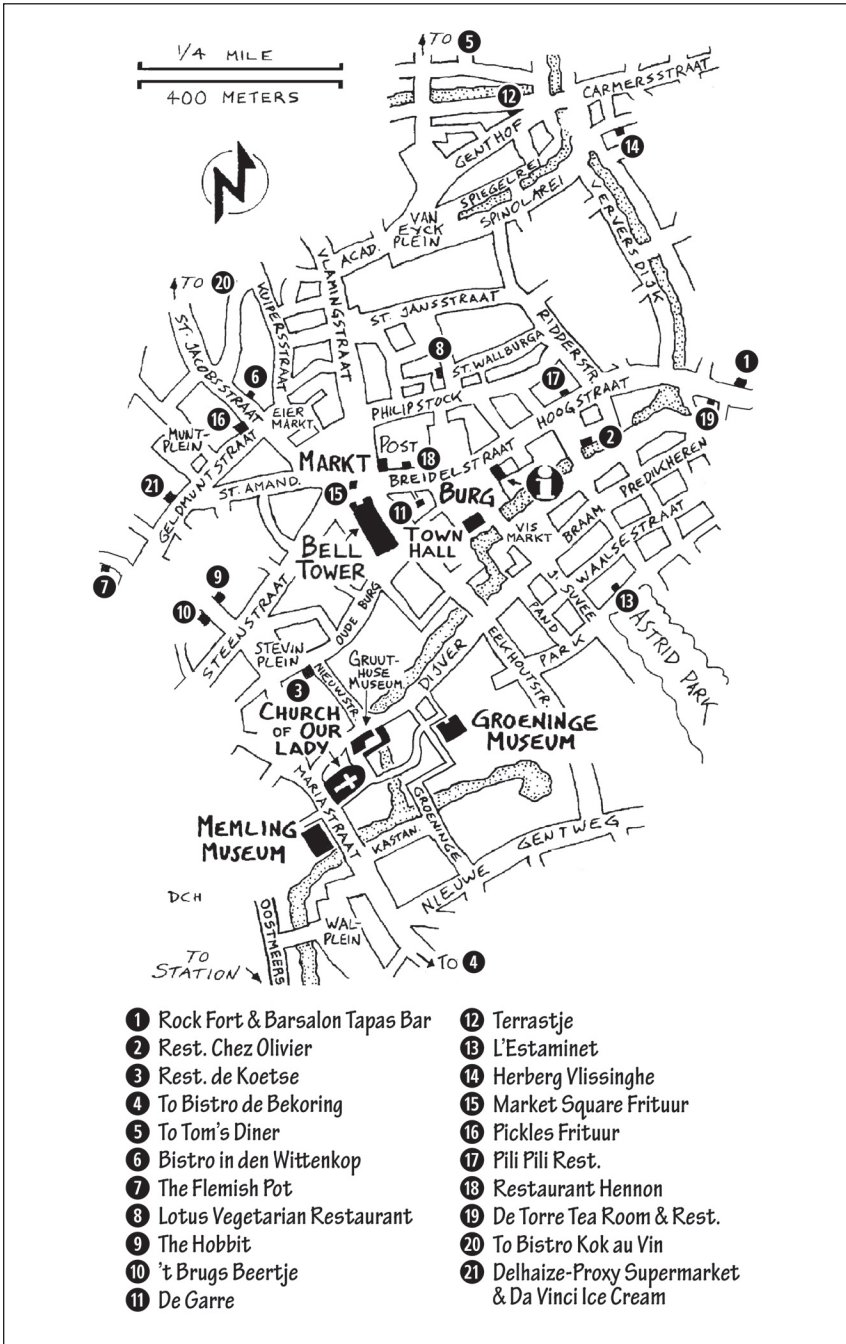
Bruges' specialties include mussels cooked a variety of ways (one order can feed two), fish dishes, grilled meats, and french fries. Don't eat before 19:30 unless you like eating alone. Tax and service are always included in your bill. While tap water comes with a smile in Holland, France, and Germany, it's not the case in Belgium, where you'll either pay for water, enjoy the beer, or go thirsty.

You'll find plenty of affordable, touristy restaurants on floodlit squares and along dreamy canals. Bruges feeds 3.5 million tourists a year, and most are seduced by a high-profile location. These can be fine experiences for the magical setting and views, but the quality of food and service is low. I wouldn't blame you for eating at one of these places, but I won't recommend any. I prefer the candle-cool bistros that flicker on back streets. Here are my favorites:

At **Terrastje** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), an accessible ramp leads you to this chicken-soup-for-the-soul, pub-like bistro. A remarkable selection of Belgian beers and fresh peasant food, cranked up a notch by English Ian and Dutch Patricia, make this place resonate with good cheer (€3–7 tapas, €6–13 meals, Fri–Tue 10:30–23:30, closed Wed–Thu, across the canal from Hotel Adornes, Genthof 45, tel. 050/330-919).

**The Flemish Pot** (AE, AI, AT, ♥, Level 1—Fully Accessible; a.k.a. "The Little Pancake House") is a hardworking eatery serving up traditional peasant-style Flemish dishes. They crank out pancake meals (savory and sweet) and homemade *wafels* for lunch. Then, at 18:00, enthusiastic chefs Mario and Rik stow their waffle irons and pull out a

## Bruges Restaurants



traditional menu of vintage Flemish plates (€25 dinner *menu*, Fri–Wed 12:00–22:00, closed Thu, family-friendly, just off Geldmuntstraat at Helmstraat 3, tel. 050/340-086).

**Rock Fort** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, staff can help with the two 2” entry steps) is a chic, eight-table spot with a modern, fresh coziness and a high-powered respect for good food. Two young chefs, Peter Laloo and Hermes Vanliefde, give their French cuisine a creative and gourmet twist. Reservations are required for dinner, but not lunch. This place is a winner (€11 Mon–Fri lunch special with coffee, beautifully presented €15–20 dinner plates, open Mon–Fri 12:00–14:30 & 18:30–23:00, closed Sat–Sun, great pastas and salads, Langestraat 15, tel. 050/334-113). They also run the Barsalon restaurant next door.

**Barsalon Tapas Bar** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), more than a tapas bar, is the brainchild of Peter Laloo from Rock Fort (listed above), allowing him to spread his creative cooking energy. This long, skinny slice of L.A. buzzes late into the evening with Bruges’ beautiful people. Choose between the long bar, comfy stools, and bigger tables in back. Come early for fewer crowds. The playful menu comes with €6 “tapas” dishes taking you from Spain to Japan (3 selections fill 2 hungry travelers) and more elaborate €14 plates—and don’t overlook their daily “suggestions” board, with some special wines by the glass and a “teaser” sampler plate of desserts. Barsalon shares the same kitchen, hours, and dressy local clientele as the adjacent Rock Fort.

**Bistro Kok au Vin** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) is a modern-intimate-bistro. Chef Jurgen and his wife Britt have a creative, fresh take on local fare (€5–20, Fri–Tue 12:00–14:30 and 18:30–23:00, closed Wed–Thu, Ezelstraat 19, tel. 050/339-521).

**Restaurant Chez Olivier** (AE, AI, ♥, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, barrier-free entry, wheelchair-using regulars), with 10 classy, white-tablecloth tables, is considered the best fancy French cuisine splurge in town. While delicate Anne serves, her French husband, Olivier, is busy cooking up whatever he found freshest that day. While you can order à la carte, it’s wise to go with the recommended daily *menu* (€34 for 3-course lunch, €45 for 3-course dinner, €55 for 4-course dinner, wine adds €15–20, Mon–Wed and Fri–Sat 12:00–13:30 & 19:00–21:30, closed Sun and Thu, reserve for dinner, Meestraat 9, tel. 050/333-659).

**De Torre** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), a tearoom and restaurant, has a fresh interior and a scenic, shady, canal-side terrace. I’d eat here only to be along a canal (€10 3-course lunch, €22–35 dinner *menus*, Thu–Mon 10:00–22:00, closed Tue–Wed, Langestraat 8, tel. 050/342-946).

**Pili Pili** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 3” entry step) is a mod and inviting pasta place, where Reinout and Tom prepare and serve 10 different pastas and great salads at very reasonable prices. The place is clean, low-key, and brimming with quality (€9 lunch plate with wine, €12.50 pasta and wine dinner, Thu–Tue 12:00–14:30 & 18:00–22:30, closed Sun afternoon and Wed, Hoogstraat 17, tel. 050/491-149).

**Restaurant de Koetse** (AE+A, AI, AT+A, ♥, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, popular with wheelchair users, one 2” entry step) is a good bet for central, affordable, quality, local-style food. The feeling is traditional, yet fun and kid-friendly. The cuisine is Belgian and French, with a stress on grilled meat, seafood, and mussels (€27 3-course meals, €20 plates include vegetables and a salad, Fri–Wed 12:00–15:00 & 18:00–22:00, closed Thu, non-smoking section, Oude Burg 31, tel. 050/337-680). The suitable toilet has enough room to maneuver a wheelchair, but there are no grab bars.

**Bistro de Bekoring** (AE+A, AI, ♥, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 8” step down at entry)—cute, candlelit, and Gothic—fills two alms-houses with people thankful for good food. Rotund and friendly Chef Roland and his wife, Gerda, love to tempt people—as the name of their bistro implies. They serve traditional Flemish food (especially eel and beer-soaked stew) from a small menu to people who like holding hands as they dine (€12 weekday lunch, €32 dinners, Wed–Sat from 12:00 and from 18:30, closed Sun–Tue, out past the Begijnhof at Arsenaalstraat 53, tel. 050/344-157).

**Bistro in den Wittenkop** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), very Flemish, is a cluttered, laid-back, old-time place specializing in local favorites. While Lieve cooks, his wife Daniel serves in a cool-and-jazzy, candlelit Flemish ambience (€16–20 main courses, Tue–Sat 12:00–14:00 & 18:00–21:30, closed Sun–Mon, terrace in back, Sint Jakobsstraat 14, tel. 050/332-059).

**Lotus Vegetarian Restaurant** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 4” entry step) serves serious lunch plates (€9 *plat du jour* offered daily), salads, and homemade chocolate cake in a smoke-free, bustling, and upscale setting without a trace of tie-dye (Mon–Sat 11:45–14:00, closed Sun, just off north of Burg at Wapenmakersstraat 5, tel. 050/331-078).

**The Hobbit** (AE+A, AI, ♥, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, staff can help with the one 4” entry step), featuring an entertaining menu, is always busy with happy eaters. For a swinging deal, try the all-you-can-eat spareribs with salad for €13. It’s nothing fancy, just good, basic food in a fun, traditional grill house (daily 18:00–24:00, family-friendly, Kemelstraat 8-10, tel. 050/335-520).

## Belgian Beers

Belgium has about 120 different varieties of beer and 580 different brands, more than any other country...and the locals take their beers as seriously as the French regard their wines. Even small café menus include six to eight varieties. Connoisseurs and novices alike can be confused by the many choices, and casual drinkers probably won't like every kind offered, since some varieties don't even taste like beer. Belgian beer is generally yeastier and higher in alcohol than beers in other countries.

In Belgium, certain beers are paired with certain dishes. To bring out their flavor, different beers are served at cold, cool, or room temperature, and each has its own distinctive glass. Whether wide-mouthed, tall, and fluted, with or without a stem, the glass is meant to highlight the beer's qualities. One of my favorite Belgian beer experiences is drinking a Kwak beer in its traditional tall glass. The glass, which widens at the base, stands in a wooden holder, and you pick the whole apparatus up—frame and glass—and drink. As you near the end, the beer in the wide bottom comes out at you quickly, with a “Kwak! Kwak! Kwak!”

To get a draft beer in Bruges, where Flemish is the dominant language, ask for *een pintje* (a pint, pronounced “ayn pinch-ya”). Cheers is *proost* or *gezondheid* in Flemish. The colorful cardboard coasters make nice free souvenirs.

Here's a breakdown of types of beer, with some common brand names you'll find either on tap or in bottles. (Some beers require a second fermentation in the bottle, so they're only available in bottles.) This list is just a start, and you'll find many beers that don't fall into these neat categories. For encyclopedic information on Belgian beers, visit [www.belgianstyle.com](http://www.belgianstyle.com) or [www.beerhunter.com](http://www.beerhunter.com).

**Ales (Blonde/Red/Amber/Brown):** Ales are easily recognized by their color. Try a blonde or golden ale (Leffe Blonde, Duvel, Kwak), a rare and bitter sour red (Rodenbach), an amber (Palm, De Koninck), or a brown (Leffe Bruin).

**Lagers:** These are the light, sparkling, Budweiser-type beers. Popular brands include Jupiler, Stella-Artois, and Maes.

**Lambics:** Perhaps the most unusual and least beer-like, *lambics* are stored for years in wooden casks, fermenting from wild yeasts that occur naturally in the air. Tasting more like a dry and bitter cider or champagne, pure *lambic* is often blended with fruits or herbs to improve the taste. Homebrewed *lambics*—such as *gueuze*, *faro*, *lambic doux*, and *lambic blanche*—are on tap in old cafés. Only *gueuze*, a blend of aged and young ale, is sold commercially in bottles. Some brand names include Cantillon, Lindemans, and Mort-Subite (literally, “Sudden Death”).

Fruit *lambics* include those made with cherries (*kriek*), raspberries (*frambozen*), peaches (*peche*), or blackcurrants (*casis*). The result for each is a tart beer, similar to a dry pink champagne. People who don’t usually enjoy beer tend to like these fruit-flavored varieties.

**White (Witte):** Based on wheat instead of hops, these milky-yellow summertime beers are often served with a lemon slice. White beer, similar to a Hefeweizen in the United States, is often flavored with spices like orange peel or coriander. Hoegaarden or Dentergems are names to look for.

**Trappist Beers:** For centuries, between their vespers and matins, Trappist monks have been brewing heavily fermented, malty beers. Three typical Trappist beers (from the Westmalle monastery) are *Trippel*, with a blonde color, served cold with a frothy head; *Dubbel*, which is dark, sweet, and served cool; and *Single*, made especially by the monks for the monks, and considered a fair trade for a life of celibacy. Other Trappist monasteries include Rochefort, Chimay, Westvleteren, and Orval.

**Strong Beers:** The potent brands include Duvel (meaning “devil,” because of its high octane, camouflaged by a pale color), Verboten Vrucht (literally, “Forbidden Fruit,” with Adam and Eve on the label), and the not-for-the-fainthearted brands of Judas, Satan, and Lucifer. Gouden Carolus is considered the strongest beer in Belgium, and Delerium Tremens speaks for itself.



**Tom's Diner** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), a “bistro eetcafé,” glows with a love of food in a quiet, cobbled residential area just outside the center. Young chef Tom gives traditional dishes a delightful modern twist, and your meal comes gorgeously presented, “high food” style. The “diner” comes with Creedence Clearwater soft rock, rusty 1960s kitsch knickknacks under 16th-century beams, and friendly and helpful service (hearty yet delicate €15 plates, Thu–Mon 18:00–24:00, closed Tue–Wed, reserve on weekends, north of Market Square near Sint-Gilliskerk at West-Gistelhof 23, tel. 050/333-382).

### Bars Offering Light Meals, Beer, and Ambience

Stop into one of the city's atmospheric bars for a light meal or a drink with great Bruges ambience.

**The 't Brugs Beertje** (AE+A, AI+A, ♥, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, welcoming but crowded, with tight spaces and a 2” entry step) is the place for a huge selection of Belgian beers. While any pub or restaurant carries the basic beers, you'll find a selection of more than 300 types, including brews to suit any season here. They serve only two light meals: pâté or a traditional cheese plate (5 cheeses, bread, and salad for €9, Thu–Tue 16:00–24:00, closed Wed, Kemelstraat 5, tel. 050/339-616, run by fun-loving manager Daisy).

**De Garre** (AE+A, AI, Level 3—Minimally Accessible, six 8” entry steps) is another good place to gain an appreciation of the Belgian beer culture. Rather than a noisy pub scene, it has a dressy, sit-down-and-focus-on-your-friend-and-the-fine-beer vibe. Don't come here expecting to eat anything more than grilled cheese sandwiches...this is for beer and camaraderie (great beer selection, daily 12:00–24:00, off Breidelstraat between Burg and Markt, on tiny Garre alley, tel. 050/341-029). Access here is a challenge, but worth the effort. Since the restaurant is part of a monument, no architectural changes are permitted.

**L'Estaminet** (AE+A, AI, AT+A, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, staff can help with the one 4” entry step, suitable toilet accessed by another 4” step) is a youthful, brown-café-feeling, jazz-filled eatery. Almost intimidating in its lack of tourists, it's popular with local students who come for the Tolkien-chic ambience and hearty €7 spaghetti and good salads. It has more beer than wine, a super characteristic interior, and a relaxed patio facing the peaceful Astrid Park under an all-weather canopy (Tue–Sun 11:30–24:00, closed Mon, Park 5, tel. 050/330-916).

**Herberg Vlissinghe** (AE+A, AI, Level 3—Minimally Accessible, 6 entry steps) is the oldest pub in town (1515), where Bruno keeps things simple and laid-back, serving just hot snacks (lasagna and grilled cheese

sandwiches), but great beer in the best old-time tavern atmosphere in town. This must have been the Dutch Masters' rec room. The garden outside comes with a boules court—free for guests to watch or play (Wed–Sun from 11:00 on, closed Mon–Tue, Blekersstraat 2, tel. 050/343-737).

### Fries, Fast Food, and Picnics

Local french fries (*frites*) are a treat. Proud and traditional *frituurs* serve tubs of fries and various local-style shish kebabs. Belgians dip their *frites* in mayonnaise, but ketchup is there for the Yankees (along with spicier sauces). For a quick, cheap, and scenic meal, hit a *frituur* and sit on the steps or benches overlooking Market Square (convenience benches are about 50 yards past the post office).

**Market Square Frituur** (AE, AI, Level 1—Fully Accessible) are twin take-away french fries carts on the Market Square at the base of the bell tower (daily 10:00–24:00).



**Pickles Frituur** (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 8" entry step), a block off Market Square, is handy for sit-down fries. Its forte is greasy, fast, deep-fried Flemish corn dogs. The “menu 2” comes with three traditional gut bombs: shrimp, chicken, and “spicy gypsy” (daily

11:30–24:00, at the corner of Geldmuntstraat and Sint Jakobstraat, tel. 050/337-957).

**Delhaize-Proxy Supermarket** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) is ideal for picnics (push-button produce pricer lets you buy as little as one mushroom, Mon–Sat 9:00–19:00, closed Sun, 3 blocks off the Market Square on Geldmuntstraat). For midnight munchies, you'll find Indian-run corner grocery stores.

### Belgian Waffles and Ice Cream

While Americans think of “Belgian” waffles for breakfast, the Belgians (who don't eat waffles or pancakes for breakfast) think of *wafels* as Liège-style (dense, sweet, eaten plain, and heated up) and Brussels-style (lighter, often with powdered sugar or whipped cream and strawberries, served in teahouses only in the afternoon 14:00–18:00). You'll see waffles sold at restaurants and take-away stands.

For good Liège-style *wafels* (€2), stop by **Restaurant Hennon** (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible). Their waffles and other dishes are made with fresh ingredients (€2.50–6 plates, Tue–Sun 9:00–18:30,

closed Mon, between Market Square and Burg at Breidelstraat 16). You can also try the **Flemish Pot** (AE, AI, AT, ♥, Level 1—Fully Accessible, listed above).

**Da Vinci Ice Cream** (AE, AI, Level 1—Fully Accessible), the local favorite for good homemade ice cream, has creative flavors and a great, fun ambience. As you approach, you'll see a line of happy lickers. Before ordering, ask to sample the Ferrero Rocher (chocolate, nuts, and crunchy cookie) and Bacio Bianco—rice with white chocolate (daily 10:00–24:00, Geldmuntstraat 34, run by Sylvia from Austria).

## TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

At the Bruges train station, check in at the ticket counter at least 15 minutes before departure to arrange for assistance along the way and at your destination. To use the accessible toilet, ask for the key at the baggage claim. They can also set up a ramp for you, or provide other help boarding.

From Brussels, an hour away by train, all of Europe is at your fingertips. The Brussels Midi/Zuid train station is accessible to people using wheelchairs, and the Brussels Central and Nord stations have recently been retrofitted to improve accessibility. The bathrooms are independently operated and are accessible.

**From Bruges by Train to: Brussels** (2/hr, usually at :31 and :57, 1 hr, €10), **Ghent** (2/hr, 40 min), **Ostende** (3/hr, 15 min), **Köln** (6/day, 3.5 hrs), **Paris** (hrly via Brussels, 2.5 hrs, railpass-holders must pay supplement—ask at station), **Amsterdam** (hrly, 3.5 hrs, transfer in Antwerp or Brussels), **Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport** (hrly, 3.5 hrs, transfer in Antwerp or Brussels, €35). Train info: tel. 050/302-424.

**Trains from London:** Bruges is an ideal “Welcome to Europe” stop after London. Take the Eurostar train from London to Brussels (9/day, 2.75 hrs), then transfer, backtracking to Bruges (2/hr, 1 hr, entire trip is covered by same Eurostar ticket; see Eurostar details on page \*TK).