



Essential Flanders:

Brussels & Bruges

Discover two of Belgium's cities in the region of Flanders rich in historical architecture, distinctive art, not to mention chocolate, frites, and beer. Start your journey in stately Brussels; the capital of Belgium as well as the European Union. In the fairy tale town of Bruges, you'll have a walking tour through the cobbled streets, lined with canals, churches, historical towers, and quaint cafes. Sometimes called a "medieval pearl" Bruges is packed with great restaurants and fascinating attractions.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- 3 Nights Brussels

- 2 Nights Bruges

INCLUSIONS

- Brussels City Tour
- Private Bruges Walking Tour

- 1st Class Rail Between Cities

- Daily Breakfast



ARRIVE BRUSSELS:

After arriving in Brussels and checking into your hotel, the remainder of the day is at your leisure. Stroll around the Grand Place (Grote Markt), surrounded by the City Hall and several guildhalls. The UNESCO World Heritage Site hosts annual festivals, light and sound shows, and every two years visitors have the chance to see the colorful Flower Carpet. Not far away is a 17th-century fountain with a bronze statue of little boy, the Manneken-Pis. While opinions vary, it draws hordes of tourists and remains one of Brussels trademark attractions. Stop at one of the many cafes that surround the Grand Place for a plate of mussels or frites, accompanied by a famous Belgium beer.

(Accommodations, Brussels)



BRUSSELS:

After breakfast, meet your guide at 10am at the appointed location for your Shared Grand City Tour. You'll start with a short walk to the Grand Place and hear about the history of the remarkable City Hall and its quaint guild houses. Then continue by air conditioned coach and see the beautiful St. Michael's Cathedral, the Congress column and the Heysel District, with the world famous Atomium. It's a landmark building, originally constructed for the 1958 Brussels World Expo in 1958 it remains one of the most popular tourist attractions of the city. Passing the Royal Residence, you'll return to the city center to see the Sablon district with its countless antique dealer shops. The tour continues with a drive to the magnificent Palace of Justice and fashionable Louise Square. After viewing the stately Royal Square, the Royal Palace and the Houses of Parliament, you'll arrive in the Cinquantenaire district, with its Triumphal Arch, exceptional museums and splendid Art Nouveau houses. At the end of the tour, you'll find yourself at the very heart of the European Union, passing in front of three of their most important departments; the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

After the tour, stop for lunch at one of Brussels many restaurants famous for waffles frites. Continue exploring on your own in the afternoon. Attention comic book lovers! The Belgium Center for Comic Book Art is the home of Air-Tin, and his creator, Hergé. Housed in a historic ArtNouveau building, you can learn about the life and works of this creative cartoonist and see firsthand how a comic strip is formed.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Brussels)



BRUSSELS:

Today is at your leisure with more sites to visit or perhaps to return and spend a little more time at attractions on yesterday's tour. Mini-Europe is a park located in Bruparck at the foot of the Atomium. It has the reproductions of the most attractive monuments in the European Union on display. The park contains numerous live-action models (train, mills, eruption of Mount Vesuvius, Airbus, cable cars, etc.). Not just fun for kids, it is a rather cool place to learn quick facts about different European countries! One of the most unexpected sights in the Belgian capital would probably be the duo of the Japanese Pagoda & the Chinese Pavilion in the Domaine Royale de Laeken. Erected in 1901 and 1903 for King Leopold II, they were originally just another fancy of the king, who had seen similar buildings at the 1890 World Fair in Paris. Now housing temporary exhibitions, the Museum for Japanese Arts possesses a collection of 17th and 18th-century porcelain. The Chinese Pavilion contains Chinese porcelains from the same period, and together they now form the Museums of the Far East. Since you are close to Atomium, maybe stop for lunch in their panoramic restaurant. Perched 325 ft. above ground in the top sphere of the monument, it affords impressive views of the city.

Another attraction synonymous with Belgium is the Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate: It encompasses two floors, and offers free samples and demonstrations of how chocolates are made. You'll learn that authentic Belgian chocolates are made with 100% cocoa butter and devoid of any vegetable oil. And unlike many chocolates that you buy locally, their handmade chocolates contain a very limited amount of preservatives. Thus they need to be stored away carefully from extreme heat and should be consumed within approximately 21 days. It's conveniently located just around the corner from the Grand Place.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Brussels)



BRUSSELS - BRUGES:

The travel time by train from Brussels to Bruges averages a little over one hour, so plenty of time for a leisurely breakfast. With its numerous canals and cobblestone streets, Bruges (Brugge to the Belgians) is widely considered a medieval outdoor museum. If the weather is nice, take a boat trip through the canals. You'll see some of the city's most popular sites from a completely different view. Boats depart from jetties around the city throughout the day and evening, and the captains are all full of information and witty anecdotes. If you're feeling energetic, climb to the top of the Belfry, a medieval bell tower and one of the most prominent symbols of the city, for a panoramic view of the town; the 365 steps are worth it. (You will see this tower on your tour from outside, but with not enough time to climb it.) As a popular destination, there are a wealth of dining options with a good mix of Belgian and European fare. And for the record, Bruges has one 3* Michelin restaurant; De Karmeliet.

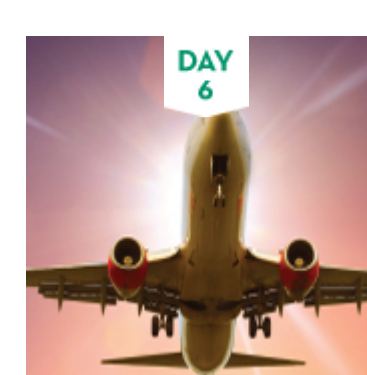
(Breakfast, Brussels; Accommodations, Bruges)



BRUGES:

After breakfast, the local guide will meet you at your hotel for a relaxed private two hour walking tour of this charming town. Along the way, your guide will acquaint you with the history of Bruges, as well as share stories and interesting facts that only locals know. Just a few of the highlights include the Belfry, Burg Square, with its diverse display of architecture, and the Basilica of the Holy Blood. Originally constructed in the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Basilica houses a relic said to contain some of Jesus' blood brought back from the Holy Land by one of the Counts of Flanders. Every day it is placed on a pillow to be worshiped. After a short ceremony, the faithful are invited to hold their hands over the cylinder and say a prayer. Also on the agenda is Gruuthuse Palace and Museum. This impressive palace now houses a huge collection of typical arts and crafts including tapestries and silverware, as well as an authentic guillotine from the 18th century. You'll cross the Dijver and stop at the Church of Our Lady, famous for Michelangelo's famous Madonna and Child painting. And since this is a private tour, if there is a particular square or site you would like to include, your guide will try to accommodate your request. After your tour, stop for refreshments. The 2Be Terrace Bar (as in "to be in Brugge"), provides one of the best views of the city. Afterwards, take a photo/selfie in front of their beer wall; quite literally a wall of beer. Still searching for souvenirs for the folks back home? Chocolate has to be one of Belgium's most famous exports and Chocolatier Dumon is one of Belgium's best-known brands. This charming shop is located in a historic building just off the Markt.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Bruges)



BRUGES:

After breakfast, make your way to the rail station for your return home or onward to your next Avanti Destination!

(Breakfast, Bruges)

*** Itinerary and inclusions are subject to change*