

Bruges

3 Mar 2009 by Richard Neville

Ex Cumbrian wine merchant and now Languedoc resident Richard Neville was asked recently by an architect friend how to get the most out of a visit to the historic Flemish city of Bruges, recently featured in the film In Bruges, and kindly shares his recommendations with us.

FIRST STOP

Tourist Information Office: at the new concert hall in 't Zand or at the railway station for info on exhibitions, festivals, tours, museums, concerts, performances, etc. **EXIT**, a paper for locals, shows all cultural events of the month. The booklet **Brugge Cityzine** is also interesting.

There is plenty of information on the internet, eg on the [official Bruges website](#).

GETTING AROUND

The centre is best seen **on foot**. Many pavements are cobbled so good shoes recommended. Be aware of cyclists travelling the wrong way down one-way streets.

Few tourists leave the 'golden triangle'. We would hire bicycles, for at least half a day, to explore the rest of the city. **Bike hire** shops in Hallestraat (most expensive), Mariastraat and Gentpoortstraat, plus others.

The path around the ring canal from opposite the station to Dampot, passing the windmills, is a quiet path to regain your cycling confidence. With bicycles you can see the gates and all the central canals, explore the peripheral areas and get outside the city ring.

All roads, except for two or three (notably Noordzandstraat and Steenstraat), are two-way for cycles but not cars. Drivers are very respectful of cyclists.

You can also see the city by **horse-drawn carriage**. Starts in the Maarkt. Can be very long queues at peak times so choose the hour carefully.

Tour by **minibus** start in the Maarkt. **Boat** tours also an option.

SIGHTS and VISITS

Where do you start? There's so much to see. Bruges is an open-air museum: Maarkt, Burg, canal-side houses, Bonifacius Brug in Gruuthouse, Minnewater and Begijnhof (if you enter their little church at midday you will find the nuns singing), Rozenhoedkaai...

There are numerous churches, houses and buildings, Belfort tower (366 steps), art museums (including Arenthuis with Frank Brangwyn's work), hospital museums, archaeology museum, diamond museum, chocolate-making demonstration, brewery visit, lace-making - too many for a weekend.

The new concert hall has an open day on 26 April 2009.

Recommended:

The Jerusalem Church, Balstraat - Pepperstraat

Basilica of the Holy Blood, Burg

Michelangelo's Madonna with child, **The Church of our Lady**, Mariastraat

Lofts above the Memling museum (**Hospitalmuseum Memling in Sint Jan**), Mariastraat

Gruuthouse Museum

GUIDED TOURS

These are for groups and you pay a fee for the guide. Some are walking, others are by bike. The following are examples but there's more detail on the official website.

City walks: Hanseatic Bruges; Bruges Canals; Flemish Primitives; World Heritage Walk; Almshouses; Chocolate Walk; Architecture of the 21st Century; Historic Beer Walk

The new concert hall.

Cycle tours: Quasimodo Biketours, Bruges by Bicycle

I asked in the Tourist Information about **architecture tours** for architects. Surprisingly they have none except the 21st century tour, which they said is a visit to the concert hall and new footbridges! I thought that old architecture is what a visit to Bruges is all about. She indicated that you can find an appropriate guide and set up your own tour if you wish, through [S-wan](#) (short for Special Wanderings).

There is some interesting new architecture in the city, and I don't mean the new concert hall. The city promotes good contemporary design alongside the old (as shown in the photo above) and there are also many interesting alterations. They show the bold decision of a UNESCO World Heritage Site city to encourage good, strong, modern design to contrast with the ancient instead of demanding a pastiche.

EATING and DRINKING

Breakfast, coffee, tea

Le Pain Quotidien, Philipstockstraat 21

Carpe Diem, Wijngaardstraat 8. [www.tearoom-carpediem.be](#). Try a selection of their mini cakes.

Lunch

de Bottelier, Sint-Jakobstraat 63. [www.debottelier.com](#) (book in advance). Tel 0032 50 331860

Le Pain Quotidien, Philipstockstraat 21

Sunny terrace

For a rest and a drink in the sun: **Café T'Klein Veneti** north side of Rozenhoedkaai has the sunniest terrace but not the best beverages.

Restaurants

For a special treat: **De Karmeliet**, Langestraat 19. There are not many Michelin 3 star restaurants in the world and one of them is in Bruges. Expensive but memorable, the ultimate gastronomic pleasure to experience once in a lifetime. [www.dekarmeliet.be](#)

Just opened and should be good: **Refters**, Molenmeers 2. A new bistro venture of de Karmeliet. Need to book at least a month in advance. Closed Sunday and Monday. Tel 0032 50 444900.

We like: **Rock Fort**, Langestraat 15. [www.rock-fort.be](#) Advisable to book a little in advance.

Good Belgian cooking with beer and different beers served with each course: **Den Dyver**, Dijver 5. [www.resto.be/ware/details.jsp?businessid=4268](#)

SPECIALIST BEER PUB

't Brugs Beertje, Kemelstraat. Open from 4pm. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Give our regards to Daisy, Bram and Martin behind the bar. Also Peter, Paivi, David, Beasty, Marleen, if they are in. You can consult my tasting notes of 600 Belgian beers - ask Daisy for it.

If you want to try a selection of Belgian beer styles, then I suggest the following, though they will find you the best equivalent if none of these is in stock. They won't mind if you share bottles so that you can taste more of the range. Alternatively, visit more than once.

Geuze lambic: ask for the one displaying most true geuze with barnyard character from 3 Fonteeinen Oude Geuze Vintage or Cantillon Geuze Lambic Bio or Hannsens Oude Geuze or Boon Oude Geuze Mariage Parfait.

Fruit lambic: ask for the one displaying most real fruit and barnyard character from 3 Fonteeinen Oude Kriek or Boon Kriek or Boon Framboise or Oudbeitje or Oude Beersel Oude Kriek or Hannssons Oude Geuze Kriek.

Oud bruin: Aardmonnik Earth Monk or Bios Vlaamse Bourgogne or Ichtegem's Grand Cru or Liefmans Goudenband.

Faro: ask Daisy (or Bram or Martin) if they have a good one or try Faro Boon.

Witbier: Troublette or Van de Saisis.

Blond: Quintine Blond or Saison Dupont or Taras Boulba for less alcohol but lots of flavour.

Amber: Bush Prestige or Orval (a Trappist beer).

Tripel: De Graal Tripel or Karmeliet Tripel (nice glass) .

Stout: Hercule.

Dubbel: Bornem Dubbel (if it has not changed style) or Trappist Rochefort 10 or Trappist Rochefort 8.

Followed, of course by chips from the stalls in the Markt.

SHOPPING

There are so many quality shops that they can distract you from seeing the rest of Bruges. Here are some that we like:

Cakes: Detavernier, Wijngaardstraat 8 (part of Carpe Diem)

Chocolates: Spiegelare, Ezelstraat (150m from Ezelpoort towards centre, on left); Detavernier, Wijngaardstraat 8 (part of Carpe Diem); The Chocolate Line, Simon Stevinplein 19.

Fruit and veg: Danny & ? south side of Smedenstraat

Cheese, ham and other wonderful things hanging from the ceiling: Diksmuids boterhuisje south side of Geldmunstraat.

Bottled beer: All Things Bruges: Wollestraat 53 (south end, east side, in cellar)

Tea: Het Brugs Theehuis, Wollestraat 8 (we adore their 5 Green Rose); Javana, Steenstraat 6 (we like their Javana Mengsel and their Mystic Green)

Music: Rombaux, Mallebergplaats 13 (the shop itself is interesting)

Furniture: Du Fossé, Academiestraat 3-9

OPEN- AIR MARKETS

Food and clothes: Saturday morning 't Zand

Vegetables: Wednesday morning Markt, Saturday morning Beursplein

Fish: mornings Vismaarkt

SAUNA AND MASSAGE

There are a few. Try Het Hemelhuis, Groenerei 16.