

Tour  
Information



# Christmas in Bruges





## Travel

### Passports

Please ensure your 10 year British Passport is not out of date and is valid for a full three months beyond the duration of your visit. EU, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino or Switzerland valid national identification cards are also acceptable for travel to Belgium.

### Visas

British and EU passport holders are not required to have a visa.

For all other passport holders please check the visa requirements with the appropriate embassy.

Belgian embassy: 17 Grosvenor Crescent, London SW1X 7EE. Tel: (0)20 7470 3700.  
[London@diplobel.fed.be](mailto:London@diplobel.fed.be)

For visa information: Tel: 0871 376 0023, or visit [www.vfs-be-uk.com](http://www.vfs-be-uk.com)  
Open Mon-Fri 0900-1200.



### Tickets

You will be issued with return train tickets.

Please take care not to lose your tickets and please check that the details on your tickets are accurate. Your ticket is non-transferable and non-refundable. No refund can be given for non-used portions.

Standard Premier on Eurostar tickets is indicated by two asterisks in the class type section in the top right hand corner. A light meal will be served to passengers travelling Standard Premier on Eurostar. Standard class Eurostar tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although there is a buffet car serving drinks and snacks.

TGV tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although a buffet car is available.

### Train Seats

On all legs of the journey you have reserved seat and carriage numbers which are shown clearly on your ticket.



### Baggage

As with most trains, passengers are responsible for carrying baggage onto and off the train. Baggage can be stored on overhead shelves or at the entrance to the carriages. Trolleys are available at St Pancras and Lille, but bags do need to be carried on to the platform. Porters are sometimes but not always available at St Pancras.

Travel Editions recommends a luggage delivery service called **thebaggageman**, where your suitcase can be picked up from your home before departure and delivered straight to your hotel; therefore removing the worry about carrying your cases onto and off the trains.

For further information:

<http://www.thebaggageman.com>

### Labels

Please use the luggage labels provided. It is useful to have your home address located inside your suitcase should the label go astray.

### Transfers

On arrival in Lille you will be transferred by coach to Bruges (approx. two hours) and the Aragon Hotel.

### Special Requests

If you haven't already, please notify Travel Editions of any special requests as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements.



## Accommodation

### Aragon Hotel, Bruges

The cosy and friendly four-star Aragon Hotel enjoys a superlative location just behind the Markt square within easy walking distance of Bruges' myriad of sights. Facilities here include a comfortable lounge/bar (offering complimentary tea/coffee from 2-4pm), a breakfast room and 42 very well-appointed bedrooms with private bath/shower with luxurious l'Occitane toiletries, hair-dryer, TV, minibar and telephone. Upgrades to executive rooms are also available at the hotel, many of which have a small balcony or terrace, some with views of the belfry. The hotel does not have a restaurant but there are plenty of restaurants close to the hotel.

For more information visit their website:

<http://www.aragon.be>



## Food

Belgium's food specialities extend far beyond just beer, chocolate, chips and waffles. This small country has rich local resources with fish and mussels harvested from the North Sea, pheasant, rabbit and venison from the forested hills of the Ardennes, and excellent beef and lamb from the Flemish polders.

Traditional dishes include *moules frites*, *stoemp* (mashed potato with leeks and carrots), *witloof en oven* (endives wrapped in ham and covered in cheese sauce), *waterzooi* (fish or chicken and vegetable broth), *paling in't groen* (eel cooked in a sauce of spinach, herbs and white wine), *lapin aux pruneaux* (rabbit cooked with prunes and beer), *Faison à la brabançonne* (pheasant cooked in butter with Brussel sprouts and endives), and *filet américain* (or *steak tartare*, raw mincemeat mixed with egg, onion and capers).

You will find plenty of places to enjoy a meal or snack, ranging from the Michelin-Starred to the humble *fritkot* (chip stand).

Watch out for restaurants offering a lunchtime special set menu – *dagschotel* or *plat du jour* – they offer great value for money. Usually, a discretionary service charge is added to your bill in restaurants and bars, and no further tipping is required,



although if service is considered excellent, it is customary to round up the bill.

## Drink

Over 400 beers are brewed in Belgium – ranging from the mass-produced lagers like Stella Artois to the local, artisanal microbreweries. You will find everything from brown ales, amber ales, white beers, Flemish reds, Indian pale ales, to stouts and Lambic beers. *Trappist* beers, such as *Chimay*, *Achel*, *Orval*, *Rochefort*, *Westmalle* and *Westyleteren*, are brewed in Trappist monasteries, with monks taking an active part in the production process and the profits supporting the monastery. *Bières d'Abbaye*, the best known being *Leffe* and *Grimbergen*, however, are commercially brewed, just using the name and recipe of former monastic breweries. Try a *Hoegaarden* for a white beer, *Lambics* and *Guezes* for oak-aged beers, a *Duvel* for a blonde ale, a local *Cantillon* (microbrewed in Brussels), or if you prefer something sweeter, the cherry-flavoured *Kriek*.

The local spirit is *Jenever*, similar to gin, originally flavoured with juniper berries.

### **This tour is on a bed and breakfast basis and includes;**

- Christmas Eve dinner at a local restaurant
- Christmas Day dinner at a local restaurant



## Destination

### Bruges

Set on a labyrinth of canals lined with magnificent medieval buildings. As well as being picturesque, there is a wealth of artistic and architectural heritage to uncover, reflecting its history as the cradle of Flemish painting and its economic significance as a textile and trade centre up to the late 15th century. The focal point of the city to which all roads seem to lead, is the impressive Markt central square, flanked by magnificent houses with crow-stepped gables, old guildhalls, towering belfry, and the covered market. Elsewhere, the Burg square is lined by four of the city's most impressive buildings: the Gothic townhall, Basilica of the Holy Blood dating from the 12th century, the Renaissance court record office and the old law courts. Other sights include the medieval city walls, St-Salvator Cathedral, picturesque Begijnhof almshouses and Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady), famed for its "*Madonna and Child*" by Michelangelo, but part of the attraction of this beautiful city is just to wander at leisure along its canals and squares, soaking up the festive atmosphere, enhanced by a colourful Christmas market. The city boasts several superb museums too - don't miss the Gruuthuse Museum housed in a 15th century palace, with an impressive collection of tapestries and lace, the Groeninge Museum's stunning collection including Jan van Eyck's serene "*Portrait of Margaretha van Eyck*" and Gerard David's gruesome "*The Judgement of Cambyses*" and finally Mernling Museum set in the 12th century hospital of St John's, itself one of the most beautiful buildings in Bruges.

For more information about Bruges:  
<https://bezoekers.brugge.be>

### Antwerp

Belgium's second city, Antwerp, is one of the world's largest ports and a thriving modern city renowned as the centre of the diamond industry as well as being home to a characteristically Flemish old town. Home and birthplace of Rubens, the city has a strong artistic heritage reflected in its host of churches and museums. As with many Flemish towns and cities, Antwerp boasts an impressive

market square surrounded by 16th and 17th century guildhalls and flanked on one side by the richly adorned 16th century town hall. Other unmissable sights here include the Cathedral and belfry, Butchers' Hall dating from 1502, Rubens' House and several more important churches. Amongst the city's many museums, the Plantin-Moretus is outstanding, housed in the former printworks of famed printer Plantin, covering some 34 rooms and containing the renowned Gutenberg Bible, one of only 13 in the world.

For more information about Antwerp:  
<http://www.visitantwerpen.be>

### Ghent

Less famous than its near neighbour, Ghent is a vibrant university city home to 43,000 students and Flanders' spiritual citadel. Criss-crossed by canals and waterways, its old town is perfect for exploration on foot and it boasts a wealth of sights to interest the visitor. One of the city's great attractions is the Cathedral - St Baafskathedraal - that houses the famed "*Adoration of the Mystic Lamb Altarpiece*" by Jan van Eyck, which dates from the 15th century and is widely regarded as one of the most important works of art in the world. Elsewhere in Ghent, do not miss the 91m high belfry, 15th century Cloth Hall, townhall, numerous important churches including St-Michielsbrug and St-Jacobskerk, several delightful market squares, Graslei quayside lined with ancient houses in a pure Flemish architectural style dating from the 12th to 17th centuries and 12th century Gravensteen (Chateau des Comtes). There are notable museums, too, including the Museum voor Schone Kunsten with its collection of ancient and modern paintings including works by Hieronymous Bosch, SMAK modern art museum and Museum of Decorative Arts.

For more information about Ghent:  
<http://www.visitgent.be>

## **Christmas**

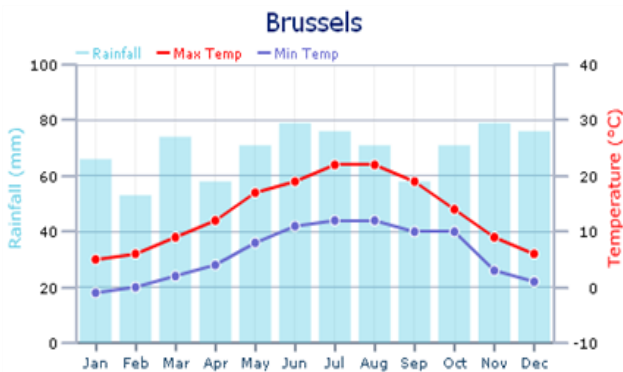
It is traditional in Belgium for families to have their main Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve. Most shops will be closed on Christmas Day and Boxing Day although there will be a limited selection of bars and restaurants open. Your tour manager will have details of opening times and Christmas services.

## **Tour manager**

Your tour manager will be on hand throughout the tour to ensure that everything operated according to plan. If you have any problems or questions please see him or her immediately – it is often possible to resolve complaints or problems very quickly on the spot, and do everything to help you enjoy your holiday.

# The Basics

**Climate** – The weather in Bruges at this time of year is likely to be cold and there is the chance of rain or snow. Our best advice is to come prepared.



**Time** – GMT +2 hours (Summer time Apr-Oct); GMT + 1 (Standard time Nov-Mar).

**Language** – French & Flemish.

**Religion** – Roman Catholic.

**National holidays** – New Year's day (01 Jan); Easter Monday; Labour day (01 May); Ascension day; Whit Sunday; Whit Monday; Independence day (21 Jul); Assumption of Mary (15 Aug); All Saints' day (01 Nov); Armistice day (11 Nov); Christmas day (25 Dec); Boxing day (26 Dec).

**Currency** – Euro. €1 = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

**Banks** – Cashpoints compatible with international banking networks are located in all towns and cities, as well as airports, major train stations and other spots. They usually offer an attractive exchange rate. Those banks that still exchange foreign currencies into local money will always charge a transaction fee, so withdrawing money from an ATM usually represents the most logical means of obtaining euros.

**Credit cards** – American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted across the country. If you're eating at a restaurant, check prior to the meal that your card will be an acceptable

form of payment. Even in cities, it's advisable to carry a supply of cash with you at all times. Varying amounts of commission can be charged.

**Electricity** – 220 volt, two-pin continental plug.

**Drinking water** – Tap water is safe to drink. (Although you'll find a huge amount of bottled water for sale too)

**Shops and museums** – Shops are open Mon-Sat 1000-1800/1900. Department stores often remain open longer, up to 2100 on Friday. Outside main areas, some shops may close at lunchtime. Please note that most museums are closed on Mondays.

**Clothes & shoes** – You may like to bring a warm sweater for cool evenings. Light rain wear for the occasional storm and good grip/flat walking shoes are recommended.

**Camera** – bring plenty of memory cards/film and any spare camera batteries as these are not always available. Please check with your guide before photographing people.

**Bath plugs** – The hotel has plugs for basins, but it is useful to carry a 'universal' one with you.

**Telephones/mobiles** – You should be able to use your mobile phone in France, depending on your operator and contract.

**Tipping** – To keep our tours affordable, we do not increase the tour price by adding in tips. However, in the tourism industry, there is a certain level of expectation that when receiving a good service, one does award with a tip. Tour Managers, Representatives, Guides and Drivers appreciate a tip at the end of their involvement with the tour, but this is entirely at your discretion. We believe in allowing you to tip according to your level of satisfaction with their services, but for your guidance about £2-3 per person per day for the tour manager is the norm. We would like to reiterate that tipping is an entirely optional payment and this information is given purely to answer any questions you may have about it.



## Health

### Doctor/Dentist/Chemist

Please talk to your tour manager if you are feeling unwell and they will organise for you to see a doctor.

**Keep receipts for insurance claims.**



### Hospital

Your tour manager/hotel reception will arrange hospital transport.

**Keep receipts for insurance claims.**

### General Health Advice

We suggest you take a good supply of your own individual medicines with you and always keep some in your hand luggage in case you get delayed or your luggage goes astray. General-purpose supplies for bites, stings, or scratches, and your usual medication for headaches, or stomach upsets are always recommended. Oral re-hydration sachets are excellent for topping up salt and glucose levels.

Visit the NHS Fit For Travel website for more generally information specific to the country you are visiting – [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk)

### Inoculations

You should check with your own doctor and take their advice as to which inoculations are required for the country you are visiting, as only they know your medical history and recommendations are liable to change at short notice.



## Emergencies

**Should an emergency arise, please call our offices on:**

00 44 20 7251 0045

Outside office hours (Mon-Fri 0900-1700), telephone our emergency staff on:

00 44 20 7431 8201 or

00 44 7899 796542 or

00 44 7831 133079 or

00 44 1235 850720

**PLEASE USE THESE NUMBERS ONLY IN THE EVENT OF A GENUINE EMERGENCY.**



## Insurance

To be covered under your Travel Insurance Policy, if you become ill, it is essential that you contact a local doctor and also telephone the emergency number of your insurance company. You will **NOT** be covered for any claim unless this procedure is carried out. Your insurance company will then decide on the best course of medical attention.

### European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The EHIC replaced the old E111 in 2006. Valid in all EEA countries, the card lets you get state healthcare at a reduced cost or sometimes for free. It will cover you for treatment that is needed to allow you to continue your stay until your planned return. It also covers the treatment of pre-existing medical conditions.

Please note that the EHIC **is not** an alternative to travel insurance. It will not cover any private medical healthcare or costs such as being flown back to the UK, or lost or stolen property. Therefore, it is important to have both an EHIC and a valid private travel insurance policy. It is also important to note that each country's healthcare system is slightly different, so the EHIC might not cover everything that would be generally free on the NHS.

We strongly recommend that you take out an appropriate travel insurance policy when you travel abroad.

For more information about the EHIC please visit:

<https://www.ehic.org.uk>

If you find that you are in need of consular assistance during your holiday:

British consulate Brussels  
Avenue des Nerviens 9-31  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

Tel: +32 2 287 62 11

[consularsection.brussels@fco.gov.uk](mailto:consularsection.brussels@fco.gov.uk)

Open by appointment only. Consular emergency service is in operation every day, 24/7, on +32 2 287 62 11.

**Travel Editions**

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