



Ghent: some highlights

This short walk introduces you to all the highlights of the historical city centre. You will catch a glimpse of the main buildings and savour some of the many delicacies the city has to offer. Consider it a teaser... enjoy to the full, and of course, don't resist the temptation to have more!

Our walk starts at **Sint-Veerleplein** ①, in the shadow of the imposing **Castle of the Counts** ②. Nowhere else in the world will you find such a massive castle right in the heart of a city. Whoever comes to Ghent without visiting this castle, which was built in 1180, deserves thumb screws, a stay in the dungeons or even the guillotine (which was last used in 1861). All this is on display inside the Castle of the Counts.

Where you are currently standing, the Count's chickens once roamed around. The poultry yard was long gone when the **Old Fish Market** ③ opened its doors here in 1689, with its beautiful gateway! High above the entrance Neptune keeps watch with his golden trident, flanked by the Scheldt (male) and the Lys (female).

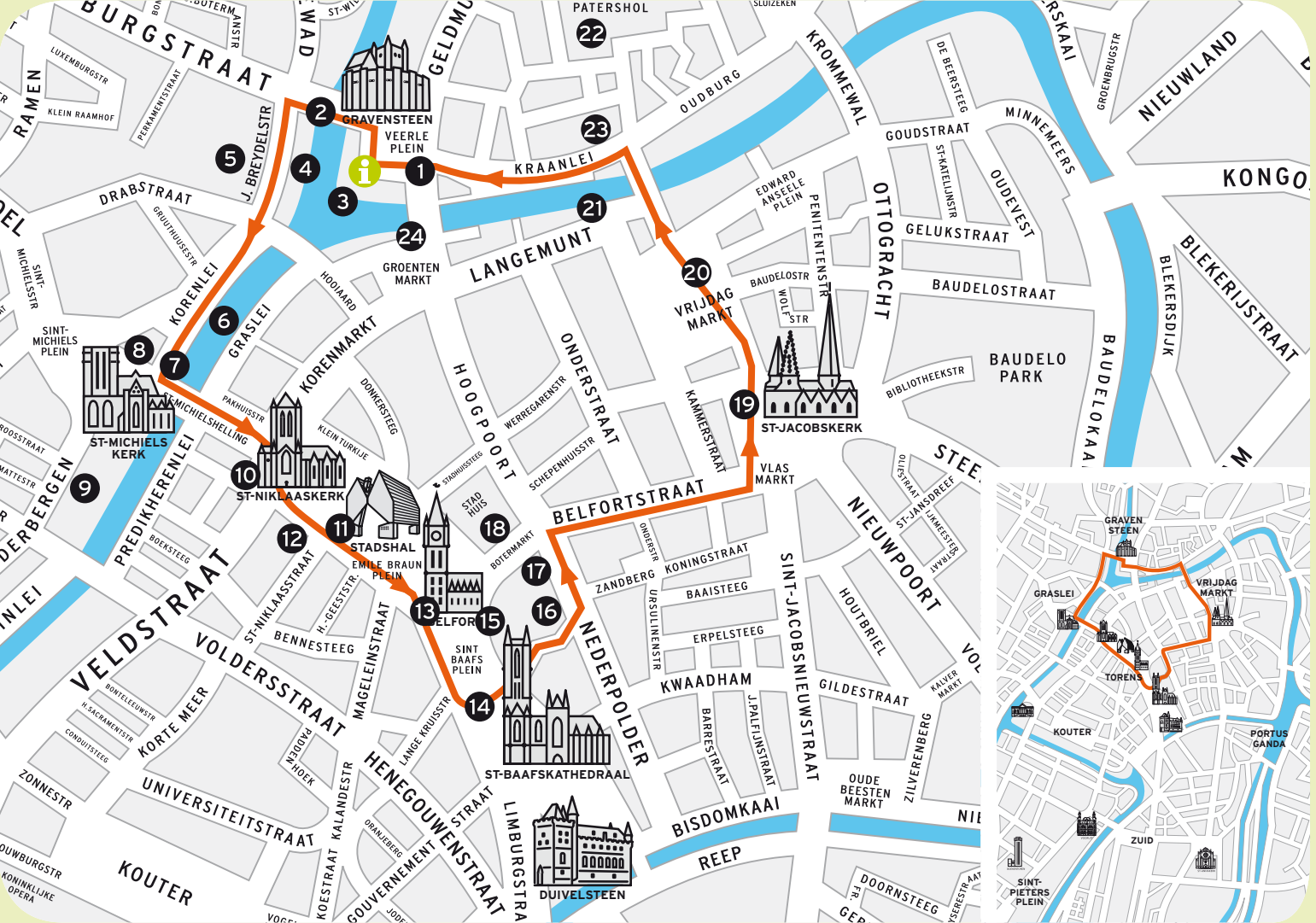
Unless you've just visited the **Visit Gent Tourist Information Centre** ④, we recommend you do so asap! You can "surf" on the high-tech table designed by Arne Quinze or let the staff put a smile on your face!

And off we go! We leave the Old Fish Market and (for the time being) catch one last glimpse of the Castle of the Counts. We turn left and cross the Lieve via the bridge. In the 13th century this was the first artificial link between the city and the North Sea, and thus of high economic importance. Today it is used only for tourist boat tours and leisure kayaking, and to spot stately water birds.

On the left, in the row of houses along the water you'll see the only remaining wooden back wall in the entire city. A little bit further, on the other side of the road, are 'De Gekroonde Hoofden' (The Crowned Heads) watching over the crossing for eternity. Charles V is the third from the left below. If you keep walking straight on, you'll end up in Ghent's antiques street, but we're turning left.

Jan Breydelstraat is brimming with more lovely restaurants, hidden outdoor cafes (on your right!) and 'divine' bric-a-brac shops. Halfway through, you can have a rest while admiring a beautiful view from the small **Appelbrugparkje** ④, one of the city's many hidden gems. Facing it is the **Design museum Gent** ⑤, which is home to a unique collection and hosts many exhibitions with international allure. The enormous vase in the courtyard alone, which is several metres high, is worth a visit!

But the best is yet to come... Just a few metres ahead lie **Graslei and Korenlei** ⑥, which together formed the first trade port in Ghent back in the eleventh century. The buildings on the left and right banks of the River Lys are unique and of a timeless beauty.



Many tourist guides describe this as one of the most beautiful cityscapes in Europe - and we're sure you won't disagree. This is also the ultimate meeting place where the inhabitants of Ghent, commuters, students and tourists enjoy the sun and each other's company.

Let's resist the temptation (or maybe not - feel free to have a break!) We stay in Korenlei and walk toward the staircase, onto **St Michael's Bridge** ⑦. Here (and here only) you can admire Ghent's skyline in its entirety. Take your time to stamp it on your memory. Or at least on your camera's memory card.

The tower of **St Michael's Church** ⑧, next to the bridge, was to be 138 metres high, but was never completed. The plans turned out to be too grand, and there was not enough money at hand. Behind the church, along the water, stands **Het Pand** ⑨, which used to be a Dominican priory and hospital. The building is now owned by Ghent University and is used as a cultural and conference centre.

Now that we've photographed them, we can go and admire the three towers from close-by. We walk towards the first tower, the one from **St Nicholas' Church** ⑩, built in the thirteenth century in Scheldt Gothic style with blue stone from the Tournai region. On your right, you see Veldstraat, where all the major shopping chains are represented. Newly refurbished Korenmarkt with the former Post Office building looks like a large terrace.

Left of the church you'll see Klein Turkije (Little Turkey), probably the only nightlife spot in the world with countless dormer windows and medieval step gables. This was the first paved street in a city full of filthy dirt roads. The street was built based on the stories of the crusaders returning from the Holy Land, which was then colloquially called Turkey.

Today it leads to the **City Pavilion** ⑪ at Emile Braunplein. The City Pavilion is one of Ghent's new architectural highlights. Striking features include the roof structure and the use of glass, wood and concrete. There is space for concerts, dance shows and markets.



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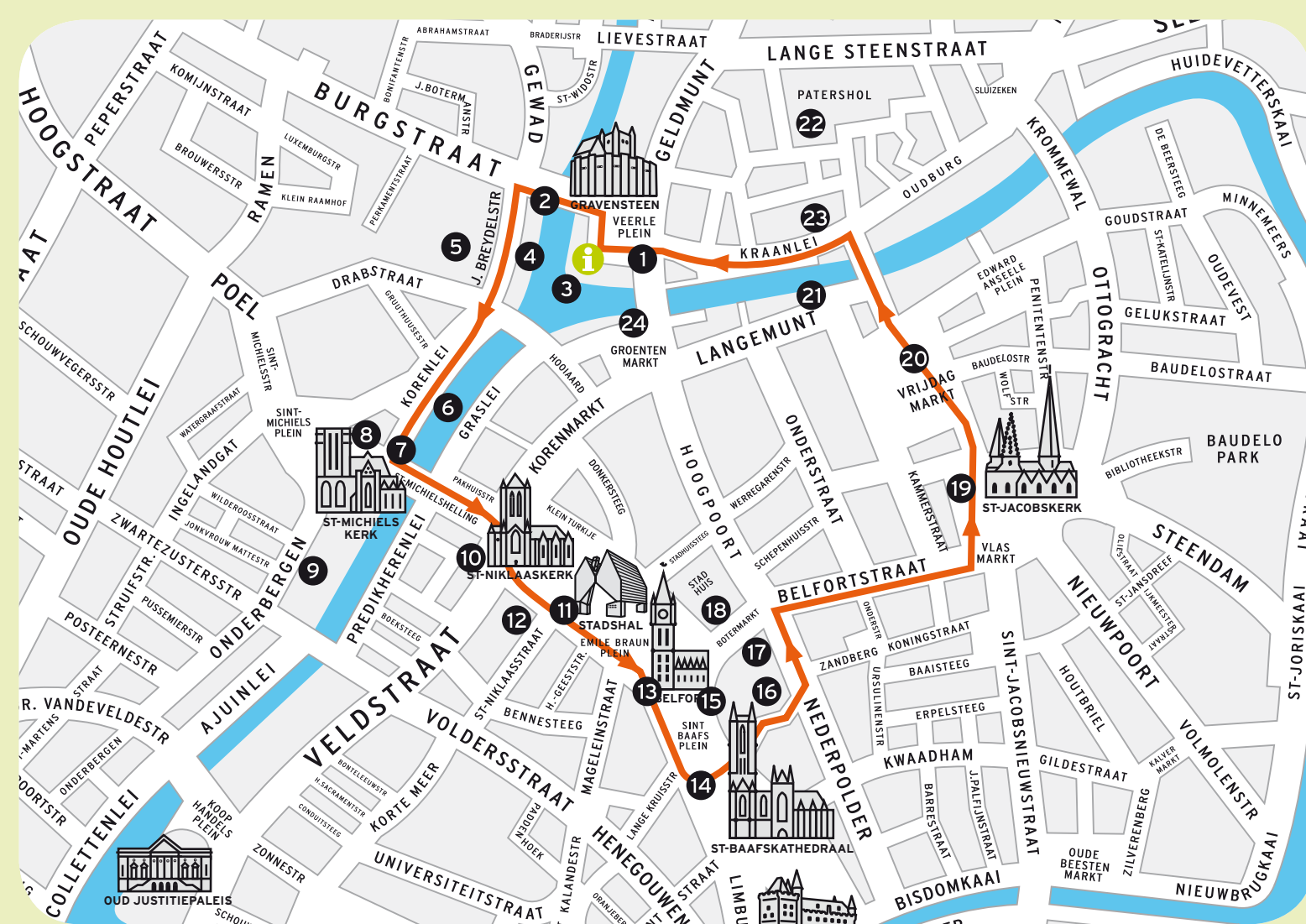


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Discover the bubbly establishment Belfort Stadscafé & Restaurant under the city hall. The existing art elements - the Minne sculptures and the Mathildis clock - were given a new place in the design.

Also worth mentioning is the **Masons' Guild Hall** 12, a (contested) mix of old and new on the corner of the Sint-Niklaasstraat. The facade of the sixteenth-century building was long hidden behind the haphazardly built working-class houses. It was so well hidden that an exact copy of the house was built on the Graslei for the 1913 World Exhibition! Look up, on top of the facade there are six curious little devils that seem to be dancing around: the Moresque dancers.

The second and highest tower of the world-famous Ghent skyline is the **Belfry** 13. This imposing tower is topped by a dragon which watches over the city's inhabitants and its privileges, which it received in 1180. Until 1869, together with the town guards, the dragon would keep an eye on the city from up above, always on the look-out for invaders or - and this was more likely - devastating fires. The alarm bells have been silent for a long time; the carillon, on the other hand,

often delights us with wonderful melodies. Since 1999 the Belfry has been a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site.

If the Belfry symbolises worldly power, then the tower of St Bavo's Cathedral symbolises godly grace.

St Bavo's Cathedral 14 was once nothing more than a small parish church. Today, little remains of the chapel that was consecrated in 942. The oldest remains are the two Romanesque aisles from 1150 in the crypt. When the Ghent diocese was founded in 1559, the church automatically became a cathedral ('cathedra' = chair of the bishop). The cathedral will be scaffolded for five years due to thorough restoration works.

The cathedral is not only home to dozens of art treasures, it also houses the most important work in Flemish art history: **The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb** by the Van Eyck brothers. One of the panels of this beautiful altarpiece, The Just Judges, was stolen in 1934. Amateur detectives and treasure hunters have been relentlessly searching for it ever since...

The masterpiece will be restored in several phases, but two thirds of the original will still be open to the public.

Flanked by his muses the god Apollo watches over the beautifully refurbished square from the **theatre building** 15. Water flows from the fountain, and beer is plentiful in the many cosy outdoor cafes.

We enjoy the city's typical hustle and bustle for one more minute, then we turn into the Biezekapelstraat, left in front of the cathedral. Less than fifty metres into this street, all sounds seem to have faded away. But if you're lucky, you will be treated to a wonderful melody from one of the windows, a hidden musician seems to accompany your steps with a delightful soundtrack. In reality what you hear are the students at the conservatory which is located in the **Sikkel** 16.

This building, with its two small towers and private well, clearly belonged to a very rich family. Let's not forget that in the fifteenth century Ghent had only five wells for its 65,000 inhabitants!

We continue our walk and pass under the wooden buttress (not a footbridge!) and end up in what was once the main street: if you go right, you end up at Scheldehaven, if you go left you end up at Hoogpoort and eventually at the Lys River. We follow the latter route and walk along the facade of the Sikkel building (which has a torch snuffer) to the junction with Belfortstraat.

Facing the **Cour St Georges** 17, where Mary of Burgundy stayed in 1477, you can admire the imposing **Town Hall** 18. You will immediately notice two (of its many) architectural styles: to the right you can see the sixteenth-century Flamboyant Gothic style and to the left the Italian Renaissance, which came much later. Inside the Town Hall you can discover more than six centuries of history. Guided tours are available from May till end of September.

We turn right into Belfortstraat and pass by the headquarters of the Ghent police force (which rose to fame through the Belgian TV series Flikken) on our way to **St James' Church** 19. This is the heart of the Ghent Festivities, a ten-day festival which is held every year in July. However, in Vlasmarkt, the party's on every day (or better: every night). At the Sint-Jacobs flea market on Friday, Saturday and Sunday you'll find the perfect souvenir to take home.

We walk along the facade of the church to the 'totem pole', a monument honouring the nineteenth-century folk singer Karel Waeri created by Walter De Buck, a sculptor and folk singer who is also one of the founding fathers of the Ghent Festivities.

We look the singer in the eye and turn left towards **Vrijdagmarkt** 20. For centuries this was the centre of public and social life in Ghent: this is where royalty was welcomed, feasts were celebrated and disputes were settled. In the centre of the square, Jacob van Artevelde is pointing towards England, for eternity. In the fourteenth century, his opportunistic choice to support the English king resulted in Ghent being mainly neutral and therefore prosperous during the Hundred Years' War. Thanks to this 'Wise Man from

Ghent' the cloth industry flourished like never before. Ghent is still referred to as 'the city of Artevelde', nearly 700 years after he was murdered by his rivals. You can leave Vrijdagmarkt along many streets and alleys. We opt for Meerseniensstraat. From Zuivelbrug across the Lys you can see **Mad Meg** 21 on your left. This impressive wrought-iron cannon has been in the same spot for 425 years and has never fired a single shot. Its ox red colour is original.

We walk across the bridge and leave the Kuip for 's Gravensgrond: this area originally belonged to the count and was therefore not city property.

You immediately come face to face with a beautiful facade decorated with bas-reliefs of the Six Works of Mercy. Six? That's right! Historians are becoming increasingly convinced that the Seventh Work, burying the dead, is missing because it is too gloomy. The first, feeding the hungry, is not a problem: just pop into the shop filled to the brim with Ghent specialities.

Or head to the beautiful **Patershol** 22, an authentic working-class neighbourhood with an equally authentic medieval street plan. This is now the culinary mecca of the city. But if you're a foodie, you can also turn right into Oudburg, one of the most colourful streets in the city, thanks to its many cultures and nationalities.

Unfortunately we can't go both ways. We're going left, into Kraanlei. There, a welcoming gate invites us to savour the silence on the internal courtyard of The **House of Alijn** 23. This used to be a place of worship and was built as a penance for the murder of Hendrik and Seger Alijn. It was also a place of refuge for women in need. Today it is a museum about the culture of everyday life that inspires visitors of all ages.

We keep walking towards Sint-Veerleplein, past an Indian restaurant that doubles as a sauna (!) and briefly stop in front of the Waterhuis aan de Bierkant. Are you confused by its name, which translates as 'Water House on the Beer Side'? Well, the house was actually built in the water and by the waterside is where all wine and beer barrels were unloaded in the past. Do you feel as if somebody is watching you? Don't worry, it's only Ghent's Manneken Pis, who watches over all passers-by from his pedestal.

On your left, across the bridge, you can catch a glimpse of the **Great Butchers' Hall** 24, where you can taste specialities from East Flanders, from Gandaham to cuberdons. The place to be for Ghent's very own mustard is across the square, at Tierenteyn, where they still make this hot treat today. Did you know that Charles V considered mustard an absolute must when eating ham?

More information?

**Go to www.visitgent.be
Or contact the tourist office at
the number +32 9 266 56 60**

