

## Welcome to Ghent!



### Why Ghent?

Ghent is one of Belgium's most vibrant and historically rich cities. Once one of the most powerful cities in Europe during the Middle Ages, Ghent was a major trade hub and the second-largest city north of the Alps after Paris. Today, it is a dynamic cultural and economic center, home to one of Belgium's largest universities and a thriving innovation scene. Ghent is also known for its well-preserved medieval architecture, a lively arts and music scene, and its reputation as the vegetarian capital of Europe.

Starting point: Poel -> Sint-Michael's Church

#### A little history:

The earliest settlement in this area dates back to Roman times. In 630, a priest chose the confluence of the Leie and the Schelde to build an abbey. The Latin word for confluence is Ganda, from which the word Ghent is derived.

Ghent is known as the birthplace of Emperor Charles the 5th, the Holy Roman Emperor. Until the year 1550, Ghent is one of the most important cities in Europe, with only Paris and London being more important.

Emperor Charles is known to have said: "Je mettrays Paris dans mon Gandt," which is a French word play on the word Gand for Ghent and gant for glove. What he is saying is that he would put the city of Paris in his glove, or the city of his birth, Ghent.

A subtle play on words, since the French do not hear a difference between "Ghent" and "glove".

A few centuries later, the French writer Alexandre Dumas arrived in Ghent by train, and after seeing the industry, he called it the "Manchester of Belgium".

## 1. St. Michael's Church



Saint Michael's church

The brewers' guild wanted to build the largest church in Flanders (15th century). The goal was to build a tower of 130 m high, but due to financial problems they had to finish at 24 m. (at the time of the Tower of Babel it was communication problems, in the 15th century it was financial problems).

## 2. St. Michael's bridge



On Saint Michael's bridge

⇒ Go down to the Korenlei, look towards the Graslei.\$

(Public toilets at "Pakhuisstraat")

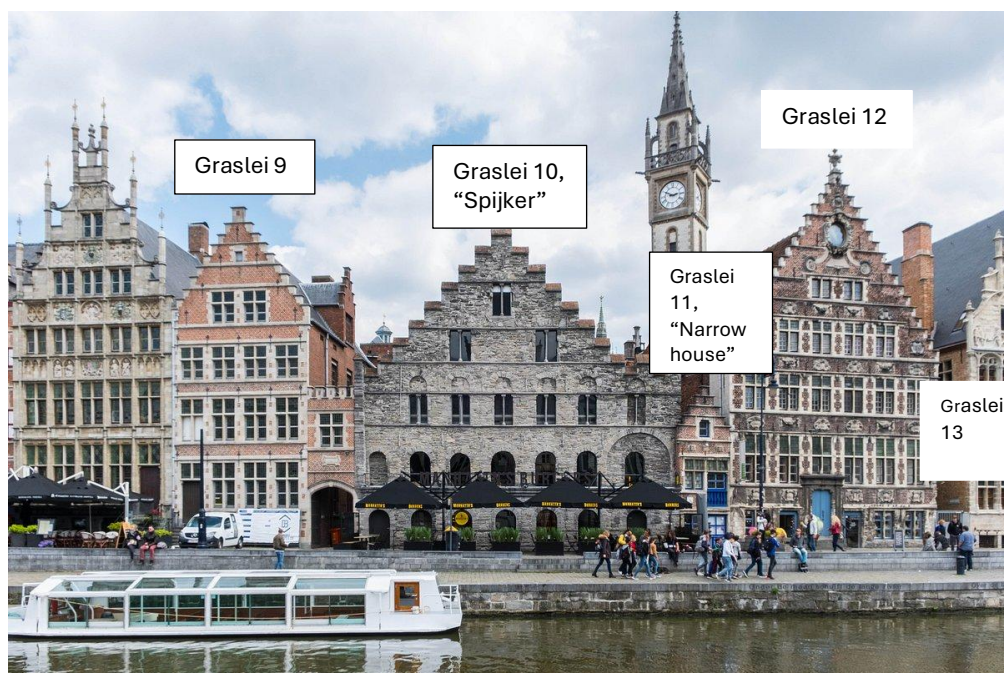


### 3. Graslei



This part of the Leie, between the 2 bridges, is one of the oldest parts of the city. It was already a busy port in the 11th century. Ghent did not produce wheat itself, but it was imported from France. The city had the right to store the wheat for 2 weeks after its arrival, so that in case of famine or war, they would always have a supply of wheat at hand.

When the wheat arrived, it first had to be measured.



- ⇒ Take a look at Graslei 9, the first house where wheat was measured (1435). (Where the sacks of grain were weighed.)
- ⇒ The guild house of the grain measurers, is Graslei 13 (1698).

- ⇒ Graslei 10, is the oldest remaining house on the quay. It was built in the year 1200 and is called "Spijker", which today means nail. But originally it came from the Latin word "Spicarum", which means grain store (Spica = wheat).

This building was used to store the sacks of grain. If you look closely, you will see that the front wall is slightly bent over. This was done to make sure that the sacks of wheat that were lifted up to the higher floors would not damage the front wall. So the front is slightly crooked.

Between the houses there were small streets, which served as a direct way from the water of the Leie to the Korenmarkt in case of fire. After the wheat was stored for 2 weeks, it was taken to the "Korenmarkt" (grain market) to be sold. The grain was transported through these small streets.

Later, as more and more houses were built of stone, the fire hazard diminished, and tiny houses were built to fill the gaps between the existing buildings.

But not all the houses you see here are the original ones. In 1913, Ghent hosted the World's Fair. In order to beautify the city, a team of builders was sent to the city to find the most beautiful facades, which they then copied on Graslei.

#### **4. Boat trip**

#### **5. Grass bridge**



- ⇒ Continue to Vegetable market (via Pensmarkt)

## 6. Vegetable Market



Groentenmarkt (vegetable market)

The vegetable market was used for public executions, with the gallows placed in the middle of the square. Convicts awaiting execution, as well as those who had committed crimes but were not on death row, were placed in the stocks above the gallows. (Above the 'Galgenhuisje') You can still see the iron rings that were put around the necks of these convicts.



Galgenhuisje (Gallow house)

Originally, this square was the fish market (from 1366 to 1689), where the fishermen came to sell their goods. The original height of the ground is at the level of the Gallow House, which is up to where the river came and the fishermen sailed their goods to the docks.



When the Meat Halls were built, the fishermen demanded direct access from the river to the market, so passages were built under the building where they could sail their low flatboats up to the square. You can still see the remains of these passages.

Later (17th century), the "Vismijn" (fish market) was built on the other side of the river and the market changed to a vegetable market. Farmers continued to use the passageways to reach the market from the river.



**Oude Vismijn (Old Fish market)**



In the meat market only high quality meat could be sold. The "Gallow House" was used to sell intestines and leftovers to the poor. After the tour, if you want to buy typical local food, you can go back to the Groot Vleeshuis or buy original mustard at Tierentyn (Groentenmarkt 3).

## **7. Cross over the bridge towards Gravensteen**

If anyone wants real Belgian fries, in an original paper cone, come back here, to Frituur 't Puntzakje.

## **8. Gravensteen**



In the 10th century, a Count of Flanders used this natural high dune to build a medieval bastion. After some time it was rebuilt in stone. The castle served as the residence of the Counts of Flanders until they moved to the more comfortable palace at Prinsenhof.

But even in recent years, the castle has seen some remarkable events. It all began on Wednesday, November 16, 1949. The price of beer had been raised by 1 franc (4 instead of 3 fr). The students of the University of Ghent did not agree. They decided to occupy the castle until their demands were met.

At 2:30 p.m. the students gathered in this square. Some of them entered with tickets. Once inside, they caught the tour guide and cleared the way for all the other students to enter for free with a pushcart filled with rotten fruits and vegetables.

The students lined up on the battlements and began throwing rotten fruits and vegetables at the crowd gathered in the square. But the bystanders just laughed and waved at them.

Suddenly 2 policemen came by on their bikes. At first they waved, but when one of them got a rotten projectile on his head, they called for reinforcements and the fight began. The fire department had to come and tried to scare them off with the fire hose.

By 10 p.m., the police had found the weak link in the defense system: an unprotected tower. They were able to reach it with their new fire department ladder. Many students were arrested, but some managed to escape. The price of beer remained the same.

The event was so spectacular that even the New York Herald Tribune reported: "The students of Ghent are the greatest in the world, though they are not American."

Every year, the students commemorate the event by retaking the castle. And now the police won't chase them away. (Memorial at the entrance of the castle)

⇒ Pass the Old Fish Market

## 9. Bridge of Heads



Bridge of heads

The name Head Bridge, built in 1274, meant as much as the most important bridge into the city. But because this bridge was the place of executions by beheading, it was also called the Beheading Bridge.

In 1371, a wealthy father and his son were sentenced to death by beheading for rebelling against Count Lodewijk of Malle. This evil count was curious to see which kind of love was greater: the love of parents for their children, or the love of children for their parents.

So the Count decided that the one who would cut off the other's head would be granted mercy and live. A heartbreaking, impossible choice.

In the end, the father was able to convince his son: "I am old," he said. "You have your whole life ahead of you. If we cannot agree on a decision, we will both be beheaded. Why not save one life, the most precious one?" He continued to plead until his son agreed.

Both were brought to the place of execution (this bridge). The son, who was brought forward first, waits emotionally for his father. The father is then brought forward, prepared for execution, his neck exposed.

Both father and son shudder at the pain and hurt they know will follow. Finally, the sword is handed to the son. With all his might, the son lifts the sword... And the blade falls out of the hilt!

The blade fell and stuck its tip into the wooden floor of the bridge. This was seen as divine intervention and the Count himself immediately ordered their release.



To remember this remarkable event, a statue of the father and son was placed on this bridge in 1406, until 1799, when it was renovated. The last execution by beheading took place in 1585.

In the STAM Museum there's a painting by Pieter Pieters depicting this scene. In 2011, a scene of hope was transformed from the painful history of this area.

### 10. The monumental gateway

⇒ dating from 1689. It shows Neptune watching over the Scheldt and the Lys.



### 11. Veerleplein



Veerle-plein (Square Veerle)

The Italian artist Alberto Garutti created the installation "Ai Nati Oggi", which literally means: to those who are born to us today.

There is a direct link from this square to all the maternity wards in the hospitals of Ghent. In the maternity ward, there's a big red button that proud parents can press to announce the arrival of their newborn child. The lights on the square will flash!

(Public toilets at Sint-Veerleplein 9)

## **12. Kraanlei**

The name Kraanlei literally means "wharf with crane". It was probably so named because of a wooden crane that was used to lift heavy goods from the boats that docked there. The crane was operated by Kraankinderen, who were actually small adults who used their own physical strength to lift the crane.

## **13. House Alijn**



This is an almshouse, a form of housing provided for the poor, elderly and sick people of the community. This particular almshouse was built as a reconciliation after a blood feud of many years between two families of the Ghent nobility. The Rijm and Alijn families.

Hendrik Alijn, a young fuller ("volder", someone who works with wool, cleaning and treating it so that the fibers are closer together, making it waterproof), had fallen in love with Godelieve, the daughter of a rich weaver.

Her father refused to allow the marriage because he had already given his daughter in marriage to a man named Simon Rijm. Simon was a rich nobleman, also a weaver.

But Godelieve had fallen in love with Hendrik Alijn and refused to answer Simon's proposal. Simon's pride and feelings are hurt, and he angrily seeks revenge on the young fuller.

Together with his brother Goswin and some companions, they plan to murder Hendrik Alijn. They went to the church of St. Jan (now St. Bavo's Cathedral) and murdered Hendrik, his brother Seger and an altar server in 1354.

Hendrik was a magistrate, so his murder was not only an offense against the dignity of magistrates, but because it took place in a church, it became a double offense.

The Rijn brothers were declared outlaws and their houses were immediately demolished. They managed to avoid capture for several years. But in 1361 Simon asked for pardon, which was granted, but only if he went on a pilgrimage of penance and made an annual payment to build and maintain an almshouse on this wharf.

The parents of the murdered Alijn brothers offered to use their house on Kraanlei to build the almshouse as a sign of their mercy.

⇒ Continue on Kraanlei to number 79, House Temmerman.

#### **14. House Temmerman**

A great place to buy typical Ghent sweets, cookies and other delicacies. The house is called "The 7 works of mercy".

Now we all know that Jesus only mentioned 6 works of mercy.  
Can you help me point them out on the facade?



⇒ Continue over the bridge and turn left towards Dulle Griet.



### 15. Dulle Griet cannon



### 16. Friday Market



Since 1199, there has been a market here every Friday. To put that in perspective, that was 300 years before Columbus arrived in America. The square is about 1 hectare. In the middle you can see a statue of Jacob van Artevelde.

Ghent is often called "Artevelde stad" after Jacob. He played an important role during the 100 year war between England and France in the 14th century. Flanders was under French rule, but dependent on England for wool and textiles. Jacob worked out that Flanders gained a neutral position and thus did not lose its economy.

The statue points to England. But the legend says it points to the house of his murderer. He was stabbed in the back while giving a speech from one of the gables of a house here on Friday Market.

(Public toilets at "Vrijdagmarkt")