

GHENT

Distance from Brussels city centre 56km Average temp (Jan) 4°C

Belgian
city
focus
#1

The medieval city of Ghent is often overlooked by Belgium's visitors. But foodies know that some of the country's best places to dine and drink are tucked between the canals and historic landmarks. **Kimberley Lovato** is our city guide

PATERSHOL

The oldest quarter of Ghent once housed textile labourers, when the nearby Gravensteen Castle was converted to a cotton factory in the 19th century. It's now a backdrop for chic restaurants and some of Ghent's most expensive real estate.

SLEEP Don't let the 1859 edifice deter you from entering **Hotel Harmony** (37 Kraanlei, tel. (0)9 324 2680, hotel-harmony.be, doubles from €150), a family-run boutique hotel. Inside, modern design and comforts are found in every detail, from extra-long beds to suites with fireplaces and canal views.

EAT **Waterzooi** (*Vat-ter-zo-ey*) is a cream thickened stew made with chicken and vegetables that traces its origins to Ghent, when seafood fished from the canals was the main ingredient of this traditional dish. Claiming the best of both versions is **Bij den Wijzen & den Zot** (42 Hertogstraat, tel. (0)9 223 4230), the first restaurant to open in the Patershol. Spend just a day in Ghent and you'll hear someone mention **Julie's House** (13 Kraanlei, tel. (0)9 233 3390), where you can warm up with tea and delicious artisanal cakes, brownies, pies and muffins that are, as Julie says, "baked with love and served with joy."



INFO

Brussels Airport is 67km southeast of Ghent.

Train From the airport, direct trains depart at 52 minutes past the hour. They take 60-90 minutes, depending on the number of stops, and cost €11.30. From Brussels Nord in the city centre, there are three trains an hour; the journey takes about 40 minutes and costs €8.10.

Taxi A taxi to Ghent will cost around €125 and will take about 50 minutes.

Tourist office The main office is housed under the Belfry (17a Botermarkt, (0)9 266 5660, visitgent.be).

SHOP Sometimes called 'priest hats', sometimes 'little noses', Belgium's hard-on-the-outside, gooey-on-the-inside conical *cuberdoms* make great edible souvenirs from Ghent's oldest sweet shop, **Temmerman** (79 Kraanlei).

LATER 't Dreupelkot (12 Groentenmarkt) is a tiny establishment serving 200 flavours of jenever: a potent grain alcohol distilled from juniper berries.

CITY CENTRE

The medieval centre is made up of a number of open spaces, with impressive churches presiding over the skyline.

SLEEP An 18th-century house whose previous tenant list reads like a who's who is now the pristine **Hotel Verhaegen** (110 Oude Houtlei, tel. (0)9 265 0760, hotelverhaegen.be, doubles from €195). The interior designer owners have blended architectural heritage with

modern comforts in each of the four rooms and eye-catching common areas.

EAT Head to Kouter, one of Ghent's main squares, for the Sunday flower market, then to the unassuming **Blauwe Kiosk** (1 Kouter) for oysters and white wine.

SHOP **Tierenteyn-Verlent** mustard has been made in Ghent since 1790. The shop on the Groentenmarkt (49 Sparrestraat) is lined with ancient apothecary jars, and orders are filled on demand by scooping mustard from a wooden barrel replenished by the basement factory.

TIP If you're in Ghent on 9 January, make your way to the area in front of St Bavo's Cathedral at 11am for a free new year's drink with the mayor.

DE ZUID

Officially called the **Graaf Van Vlaanderenplein, de Zuid** (the South) was once known for empty buildings and a red-light district. Today it's full of trendy shops, theatre-goers and students.

SHOP Leave all you think you know about chocolate at the door of **Yuzu** (11A Walpoortstraat), where each confection is an art-meets-imagination masterpiece. Centres include mustard, jenever and Delirium Tremens beer.

CULTURE **The Vooruit Arts Centre** (23 Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat) offers everything from dance and theatre to literary readings, plus an art deco café.

TIP Sample the great Belgian beer tradition at the little-known city brewery **Gruut** (10 Grote Huidevettershoek).

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