

Gilded Guildhalls by Day, Candlelit Canals by Night

A 6-Day Belgium Itinerary

DURATION

6 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

April–June & September
Mild 15–22°C days, blooming
courtyards, and thinner crowds than
peak summer

FROM

\$1,150 USD / person
for 2 people, incl. mid-range
hotels, inter-city trains & key
sights

Day 1

Arrival in Brussels — The Grand Place at Golden Hour

Touch down at Brussels Airport, settle into a 17th-century mansion two minutes from the Grand Place, then watch the guildhalls turn gold as the sun drops over Belgium's most famous square.

Airport Train to Brussels-Central

~20 minutes · €12.50 one-way

Belgium's direct airport rail link runs every 10–20 minutes from Brussels Airport (Zaventem) straight into Brussels-Central, dropping you a 5-minute walk from the Grand Place. Buy tickets at the automated machines in the arrivals hall or via the SNCB/NMBS app before boarding.

SNCB/NMBS · belgiantrain.be

Check-In: Hotel Le Dixseptième

2 nights · from €195/night

A restored 17th-century mansion tucked down a quiet lane off the Grand Place, Le Dixseptième pairs antique-filled rooms and a courtyard garden with a location you can't beat — the guildhalls are a 3-minute walk. Ask for a room facing the inner courtyard for the quietest night's sleep.

Hotel Le Dixseptième · ledixseptieme.be

Grand Place at Golden Hour

Free · allow 1 hour

Come back to the square as the late sun catches the gilded guild-hall facades and the Town Hall's 96-metre spire — this UNESCO-listed plaza is genuinely at its best in the hour before the floodlights take over. Circle the square once, then duck down Rue des Bouchers for a look at the covered Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert.

Dinner: Chez Léon

~€35/person · *reservations recommended*

Open since 1893 and still turning out cauldron after cauldron of moules-frites a few steps from the Grand Place, Chez Léon is the classic first-night dinner in Brussels — order the mussels in white wine and cream, and don't skip the double-fried frites.

Chez Léon · chezleon.be

Day 2

Brussels in Full — Atom, Chocolate, and Art Nouveau

A full day north to the Atomium's mirrored spheres, then back into the center for a hands-on chocolate workshop and a proper Brussels dinner.

Tram to the Atomium

~20 minutes · €2.60 single (or €8 day pass)

STIB/MIVB tram 7 and metro line 6 both run direct from central Brussels to Heysel/Heizel, at the foot of the Atomium. A day pass covers trams, metro, and buses for the rest of your sightseeing too.

STIB-MIVB · stib-mivb.be

Atomium & Panoramic Views

~2 hours · €22 adult

Built for the 1958 World's Fair, this 102-metre stainless-steel model of an iron crystal is Brussels' strangest and most photogenic landmark. Ride the escalators up through the spheres to the top-sphere restaurant deck for a 360° view over the city, then browse the design exhibitions inside the lower spheres.

Atomium · atomium.be

Chocolate-Making Workshop at Zaabär

~1 hour · €39/person

A hands-on pralines workshop in a working chocolate atelier near Sainte-Catherine — a chocolatier walks you through tempering and molding, and you leave with a box of what you made. Public workshops run in English several times a week; book a slot a few days ahead in high season.

Zaabär · zaabar.com

Dinner: Belga Queen Brussels

~€48/person · reservations recommended

A grand 19th-century bank hall turned brasserie, with a glass-domed ceiling, a raw bar, and a menu built around Belgian classics done well — the seafood platters and beer-braised dishes are the move. Ask for a table on the mezzanine looking down over the room.

Belga Queen · belgaqueen.be

Day 3

Brussels to Bruges — Into the Fairy Tale

An hour on the train swaps Brussels' grand boulevards for Bruges' cobbled lanes and canals — check in, then get out on the water before dinner.

Train to Bruges

~1h 10m · €17.20 one-way

Direct IC trains leave Brussels-Central roughly every half hour for Bruges, arriving right at the historic center's back door. Grab a window seat on the left for glimpses of Flemish farmland and the odd windmill along the way.

SNCB/NMBS · belgiantrain.be

Check-In: Dukes' Palace Bruges

2 nights · from €245/night

A 15th-century ducal palace turned 5-star hotel, two minutes off the Markt, with a spa, a walled garden courtyard, and rooms that mix original beams with contemporary Belgian design. It's the splurge night of the trip and worth it.

Dukes' Palace Bruges · hoteldukespalace.com

Bruges Canal Boat Tour

~30 minutes · €14/adult

Half a dozen small boat companies run 30-minute loops from docks near the Markt and Rozenhoedkaai, gliding under stone bridges and past the Belfry, Burg Square, and the Béguinage. Boats run roughly every 15–20 minutes in season — no booking needed, just queue at the dock.

Dinner: Bierbrasserie Cambrinus

~€40/person · *reservations recommended*

A beer-lover's dining room a block off the Markt, pairing Flemish classics — carbonade flamande, beer-braised rabbit — with a list running to hundreds of Belgian bottles. The staff will happily match a beer to whatever you order.

Cambrinus · bierbrasseriecambrinus.eu

Day 4 Bruges & a Day Trip to Ghent

Climb the Belfry before the crowds, then take the short hop to Ghent for a medieval castle and a quieter, less-touristed old town.

Climb the Belfry of Bruges

366 steps · €16 adult

Go right at opening to beat the queue and the midday crush — the climb up Bruges' 13th-century belfry tower is steep and narrow, but the reward is a rooftop panorama over the entire red-roofed old town and the surrounding polders.

Musea Brugge · museabrugge.be

Day-Trip Train to Ghent

~25 minutes · €9.90 round trip

Frequent direct trains connect Bruges and Ghent-Sint-Pieters in under half an hour, making Ghent an easy half-day add-on rather than a full relocation. From the station, tram 1 runs straight into the historic center.

SNCB/NMBS · belgiantrain.be

Gravensteen Castle & Graslei Quay

~2.5 hours · €14 adult (castle)

Ghent's 12th-century Castle of the Counts is the real deal — moat, battlements, and a genuinely unsettling little museum of medieval justice included in the ticket. Afterward, walk five minutes to Graslei quay, where a row of gabled guild houses lines the Leie river — Ghent's answer to the Grand Place, with a fraction of the crowds.

Gravensteen · historischehuizen.stad.gent

Dinner back in Bruges: Bistro Den Amand

~€38/person · *reservations recommended*

A tiny, unpretentious bistro just off the Markt that locals rate above most of the tourist-facing spots on the square — seasonal Flemish cooking, a short well-chosen wine list, and a warm dining room that fills up fast. Book ahead; there are only a handful of tables.

Bistro Den Amand · denamand.be

Day 5

Bruges to Antwerp — Diamonds and the Scheldt

A train ride swaps medieval Bruges for Antwerp's bigger, brasher energy — fashion houses, a Gothic cathedral, and a diamond quarter that still cuts a fifth of the world's stones.

Train to Antwerp

~1h 35m (via Ghent) · €19.60 one-way

There's no direct line, so the fastest route runs through Ghent-Sint-Pieters with one easy cross-platform change — still well under two hours door to door. Lockers are available at Antwerp-Centraal if you want to explore before checking in.

SNCB/NMBS · belgiantrain.be

Check-In: Hotel Rubens – Grote Markt

2 nights · from €165/night

A former 16th-century canon's house folded into a quiet courtyard just off Antwerp's Grote Markt, with a walled garden that makes it easy to forget you're in a city center at all. Cathedral, Rubens House, and the diamond quarter are all a short walk.

Hotel Rubens - Grote Markt · hotelrubensantwerp.be

Cathedral of Our Lady & Grote Markt

~1.5 hours · €12 adult (cathedral)

Antwerp's Gothic cathedral took nearly 170 years to build and holds four major Rubens altarpieces, including the Descent from the Cross — reason enough on its own. Step back outside onto the Grote Markt for the guild houses and the Brabo Fountain before the light fades.

Cathedral of Our Lady · dekathedraal.be

Dinner: Fiskebar

~€55/person · *reservations recommended*

A Scandinavian-leaning seafood room near the MAS museum on the old docks, built around a raw bar and a wood-fired grill — oysters, langoustines, and a rotating catch of the day. It's busy most nights, so book a few days out.

Fiskebar · fiskebar.be

Day 6

Antwerp — Rubens, Diamonds, and the Road Home

A last morning with Rubens himself, an afternoon in the diamond quarter and the fashion streets, then the train back out to the airport.

Rubens House (Rubenshuis)

~1.5 hours · €16 adult

Peter Paul Rubens designed and lived in this Baroque townhouse himself, and it's still hung with his own paintings and those of his circle, arranged through the studio, garden, and portico he built. Go early — tour groups arrive by mid-morning.

Rubenshuis · rubenshuis.be

Diamond District Walking Tour

~1.5 hours · €28/person

Antwerp still cuts and trades a huge share of the world's diamonds, and a local guide through the Diamond Quarter around Hoveniersstraat explains how the trade actually works — the exchanges, the community that built the district, and where (and how) to actually buy safely if you're tempted.

Shopping on Nationalestraat & Kammenstraat

Free · allow 2 hours

Antwerp's fashion-school pedigree (the “Antwerp Six”) shows up on these two streets — Nationalestraat for the big designer names, Kammenstraat for vintage and streetwear. It's the best browsing in Belgium outside Brussels' Avenue Louise.

Train to Brussels Airport for Departure

~50 minutes · €17.10 one-way

Direct IC trains run from Antwerp-Centraal to Brussels Airport roughly every half hour — allow at least 3 hours before an international flight to clear check-in and security.

SNCB/NMBS · belgiantrain.be

