

## THE PERFECT 10 GHENT

## Cut from a fine cloth

Heritage textiles and fine design in a medieval gem

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**1 HIGH AND MIGHTY:** Situated in the heart of Flanders between Brussels and the Belgian coast, Ghent is a compact city filled with spectacular medieval cathedrals. Begin a stroll at St Michael's Bridge for a photo opportunity of the big three cathedral towers in one frame — St Nicholas' Church, the Belfry and St Bavo's Cathedral. The Scheldt gothic-style central tower at St Nicholas' Church acts as a natural lantern, with the light shining directly into the transept. At the Belfry, a UNESCO World Heritage site, make your way to the top for a great city vista. Most popular is St Bavo's Cathedral, home of an altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers. Created in 1432, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* is regarded as one of the most influential paintings of all time. Its panels are being restored, but thankfully only in sections; the work is due for completion in 2019. More: [visit.gent.be/en/home](http://visit.gent.be/en/home).

**2 TO THE CANALS:** Plan a cruise along the River Leie and through the canals for just before sunset, when the light is at its best and guildhouses from as early as the 12th century are reflected in the water. Look up to the Flemish sky that Jacques Brel sang so fondly about in the tune *Marieke* and view the cathedral towers in the distance. While sipping on champagne on a guided canal tour with De Bootjes Van Gent, you'll putter past Gravensteen, the Castle of the Counts, a giant fortress built in the 12th century for the ruling dynasty of Flanders. It has an Arms Museum as well as the Museum of Judicial Objects full of centuries-old instruments of torture and coercion. More: [debootjesvangent.be](http://debootjesvangent.be); [gravensteen.stad.gent/en](http://gravensteen.stad.gent/en).

**3 SOCIAL FABRIC:** Also along the water, a former cotton mill has been transformed into the Museum About Industry, Labour and Textile (MIAT) to celebrate Ghent's history as a significant player in the textile industry. Tools of the Industrial Revolution are housed here, including the Mule Jenny, a spinning machine smuggled in from Britain in the late 18th century that helped make Ghent the "Manchester of the European mainland". Within walking distance is the city's Design Museum where the *Plain/Purl* exhibition (until October 1) explores the role of textiles in design, fashion, art and architecture. The museum hosts an interesting collection, from Henry van de Velde's 1935 train interiors to Alonso glassware. More: [miat.gent.be](http://miat.gent.be); [designmuseumgent.be/en](http://designmuseumgent.be/en).

**4 HANG ON:** Remnants of those glory days of the textile trade are still to be found at Kloskanthuis linen shop, which has been selling Flemish nappery, blouses and dresses since 1880. Also worth a visit, even if you don't plan to make a purchase, is wallpaper



ALAMY



Ghent at sunset, top; music during the Festival of Flanders, above; waffles from Etablissement Max, above right; canal tour, below



VISIT FLANDERS

emporium Priem. Its two "behangpapier" stores, opposite each other, feature paper, fleece and vinyl wall hangings from the 1950s onwards. Big geometric and floral 70s-style prints are the specialty; buy some to line your drawers, a psychedelic reminder of the city. For vintage bric a brac, head to the flea market outside St James' Church held on Fridays and weekend mornings.

**5 WAR OF THE NOSES:** After trying the Belgian staple, moules-frites (mussels and chips), or perhaps the famous hearty Flanders stew, waterzooi, sample some of the city's finest desserts. For Belgian waffles, head to Etablissement Max, home to the original rectangular-shaped Brussels waffles, with griddles that date back to 1839. Chocolate lovers should seek out the minimalist Joost Arijis for the finest pralines. A Ghent delight is the raspberry-flavoured gums known as cuberdons; because they are cone-shaped they are also known as rode neuzen or red noses. An ongoing battle between two street vendors over who sells the best cuberdons has resulted in what's known as the "war of the noses". Judge them for yourself at the Groentenmarkt. More: [etablissementmax.be](http://etablissementmax.be); [joostarijs.be](http://joostarijs.be).

**6 IN HARMONY:** A university town such as Ghent, which has more than 70,000 students, is going to be lively. Catch performers and bands in bars and cafes on any night, but to take advantage of the city that UNESCO recognised as a Creative City of Music, visit during the Ghent Festival of Flanders in September-October (ends October 9 this year). This event celebrates classical, jazz and world music in scenic outdoor venues, opening with OdeGand, complete with a light show, along the canals. Travel by boat to 60 different concerts; best for families is the Musical Parkwalk. More: [gentfestival.be](http://gentfestival.be).

**7 SECRET SHOPS:** Behind the riverfront guildhouses are cobbled streets of boutiques housed in 14th-century artisan cottages. Go beyond the main shopping drag, Veldstraat, into the connecting alleyways where you'll find French, Belgian and Dutch fashion design. For special gifts, Piet Mood is a must. Just across the street, check out vinyl record store Music Mania, which is well-stocked with original pressings and new releases. More: [pietmoodshop.be](http://pietmoodshop.be); [musicmaniarecords.be](http://musicmaniarecords.be).

**8 NEW AND BOLD:** Ghent has been called the medieval Manhattan, but there are modern marvels to admire including the City Pavilion. Built in 2012 and designed by Ghent-based firm Robbrecht and Daem-Marie Jose Van Hee, its twin-gabled roof is hard to miss. Some locals call it "the sheep pen" but the open-air market hall has won awards and is widely embraced. I recommend lunch at the Belfort Food Bar underneath

and then to take a stroll to the new library and media centre, De Krook, designed in part by Pritzker Prize-winning architects RCR Aranda Pigem Vilalta. Each of its floors is designed to be a balcony to the city with open views. More: [visit.gent.be](http://visit.gent.be); [belfortfoodbar.com](http://belfortfoodbar.com); [dekrook.be](http://dekrook.be).

**9 WATERING HOLES:** Take a seat amid Flemish beer paraphernalia at De Dulle Griet where more than 400 brews are on offer. Be sure to sample Rodenbach, a sour red Flemish beer, or those feeling game should order a giant coachman's glass of house brew. Be warned, you have to deposit one of your shoes, which is hoisted to the ceiling, to ensure the glass is returned. Prefer gin? Head waterside to Dreupelkot and choose from a menu of 200 varieties of jenever including infusions of hazelnut, passionfruit, tiramisu and even cactus. It's customary to take a first sip at the bar, and recommended that you give the proprietor, and Santa Claus lookalike, Pol, the nod of approval. More: [dedullegriet.be](http://dedullegriet.be); [dreupelkot.be](http://dreupelkot.be).

## BEST BEDS



**10 IT'S LACROIX, SWEETIE:** Close to all the action and housed in a grand 18th-century building is Sandton Grand Hotel Reylof. Admire the sweeping central staircase and a lobby and lounge filled with velvet sofas and plump cushions before stepping into a suite handsomely redecorated with wallpaper and fabrics by Christian Lacroix and the Designers Guild. Works of art in oil and ink by Dutch artist Rick Triest feature throughout. There's a garden courtyard leading to a wellness centre, gym and pool housed in a former coach house. Instead of pillow chocolates, expect those raspberry cuberdons. Breakfast is a full buffet feast and there's a French restaurant onsite. More: [sandton.eu](http://sandton.eu).

Andrea Black was a guest of Visit Flanders.

• [visit.gent.be](http://visit.gent.be)  
• [visitflanders.com](http://visitflanders.com)