



Discover the Magic of Ghent, Belgium: A Timeless Beauty

Description

The Ultimate Ghent Visitor Guide and Photo Gallery

'Nie pleuje!' – Don't give up!
Ghents moto

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Ghent, Belgium

Belgium is a country that offers a unique blend of beauty and rich history. As you journey through its cities, it feels like stepping into a captivating history book about Europe. The ancient medieval architecture, grand towns and villages, and the World War sites all weave together a narrative of the past. Additionally, the country boasts over a dozen UNESCO World Heritage cultural and natural sites that seem to have been frozen in time, allowing visitors to witness history in its authentic form.

The city of Ghent, in the Flemish region of Belgium, is a wonder for tourists and should be at the top of your list of places to visit when visiting this magnificent country.

Experience an unforgettable weekend in Ghent, where you will be transported back in time by its stunning Gothic buildings, magnificent castles, and captivating architecture. The charming vibe and vibrant energy of the city will astound you. From the moment we set foot in the enchanting Ghent to visit the Gravensteen Castle, we were utterly captivated by its allure.

Ghent is a charming city with mesmerizing stories that will make you sing its praises every time it comes up in conversation. Once you visit, you'll definitely want to share its wonders with others.

Where is Ghent, Belgium?



The historical center of Ghent, view of Prinsenhof and Gravensteen Photo from Adobe Stock Photos

Situated in the northwestern region of Belgium, Ghent is a bustling urban center that forms the heart of an extensive urban area incorporating Ledeborg, Gentbrugge, and Sint-Amandsberg. Serving as the capital and largest city of the East Flanders province, Ghent ranks as the country's third-largest city, following Brussels and Antwerp. With its strategic location as a port and a thriving university city, Ghent is uniquely positioned at the confluence of the Rivers Leie and Scheldt. The city is home to over 262,000 residents, making it the second-largest municipality in Belgium by population.

Ghent is a vibrant and culturally rich city with a significant population of people from foreign backgrounds and immigrants. According to the latest census, 35.5% of the residents have their roots

outside of Belgium, while 15.3% hold a non-Belgian nationality, contributing to the city's diverse and multicultural atmosphere.

Map of Ghent, Belgium

- [Gent](#)

A Long and Storied History



Photo by Joelle's niece Emma

Archaeological evidence shows human presence around the confluence of the Scheldt and the Leie Rivers going back as far as the Stone and Iron Ages. One of Belgium's oldest cities, Ghent, was powerful and well-organized due to its wealthy trade associations and was virtually independent until 1584. Along with Bruges and Ypres, Ghent was one of the most prestigious towns in the medieval county of Flanders. It owes its origin to the economic developments in Flanders during the 10th century. The town was born on the banks of the Leie River under the protection of nearby Gravensteen Castle, built by the Counts of Flanders.

Powerhouse of Europe

Ghent multiplied in the 12th century, and by the 13th century, it was one of the largest and most prosperous towns in northern Europe. Its main economic boom was based on cloth manufacturing. Ghent's luxury fabrics made from English and Scottish wool were renowned throughout Europe until the 15th century. The city's wealth gave it substantial political power. This situation, though, often led to open conflict. At the start of the Hundred Years' War in the early 14th century, Ghent sided with England against the Count of Flanders and the King of France. Trade with England suffered significantly during the Hundred Years' War.

The city recovered in the 15th century when Flanders was united with neighboring provinces under the Dukes of Burgundy. The high taxes later imposed by the dukes of Burgundy prompted several uprisings by the town's citizens in the 15th century. The forces of Philip the Good massacred the army of Ghent at the Battle of Gavre in 1453. With the marriage of Mary of Burgundy to the future Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I in 1477, Ghent passed the rule to the Habsburgs. The future Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was born in Ghent in 1500.



Although native to Ghent, Charles V punished the city after the 1539 Revolt of Ghent and forced the city's nobles to walk in front of the Emperor barefoot with a noose (Dutch: "*strop*") around the neck; since this incident, the people of Ghent have been given the name "*Stroppendragers*" (noose bearers).

Centuries of Wars

The late 16th and 17th centuries brought devastation due to the Eighty Years' War. The war ended Ghent's role as a center of international importance. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Ghent's textile industry returned with fervor. Lieven Bauwens (reportedly after having smuggled the industrial and factory machine plans out of England) introduced the first mechanical weaving machine on

the European continent in 1800. Ghent became the center of the Belgian textile industry and an important port. The docks were accessible to large vessels after extensive improvements were made to the canal and its locks.

After the 19th-century Battle of Waterloo, Ghent and Flanders became part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands with the northern Dutch for 15 years. During this period, Ghent established a university and a vital connection to the sea.

In the 20th century, Ghent was occupied by the Germans in both World War I and II. Somehow, though, it escaped destruction when many of its neighbors did not. The British and local Belgian fighters liberated the city on 6 September 1944.

What are the top sites to see in Ghent, Belgium?

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In the center of the city stands the 14th-century Belfry. At about 300 feet high, it has a 52-bell carillon and is adorned by a gilded copper dragon forged in 1377. The town hall reflects a diversity of styles: its north facade (1518–35) is a magnificent example of Flamboyant Gothic. The east face, completed almost a century later, is in Renaissance style.

The magnificent castle of the Counts of Flanders, Gravensteen, dates from 1180. Gravensteen Castle is an excellent example of the motte-and-bailey castle, a fortification with a wooden or stone keep situated on a raised area called a motte. The Keep and circular walls reveal the incredible restoration efforts, making it one of the most imposing moated castles in Europe. (See the shadow box below to learn more about the castle.)

Ghent is well known for its extensive public squares and marketplaces, among which is the Vrijdagmarkt, “Friday Market,” the center of the life of the medieval city. If you enjoy life’s little luxuries, you will fall in love with the markets. Every shop is different and has something to suit every taste. For example, people who love flowers can visit “Kouter Square.” This flower market has been active since the 18th century. Flower lovers from around the globe visit to see colorful stands selling tulips and endless varieties of flowers and plants. Even for Ghent’s residents, it is a favorite ritual to buy flowers from Kouter Square every Sunday morning.

What charmed us



Photo by Joelle’s niece Emma

In our view, the essence of Ghent makes this city so remarkable. It would be easy to spend hours wandering the beautiful ancient streets, absorbing the incredible architecture and vibrant community. It is wonderful to feel its pulse and energy and appreciate its uniqueness and character. You will quickly discover why it has won many tourism accolades and international acclaim.

The religious sites



Photo by Joelle's niece Emma

Of Ghent's many famous medieval monasteries, the most notable are the ruined 7th-century Abbey of St. Bavo, the birthplace of John of Gaunt, which now houses the Lapidary Museum, and the remains of the Cistercian Abbey of Byloke (1228). The Gothic Cathedral of St. Bavo, dating from the 12th century, contains many valuable works of art, including Hubert and Jan van Eyck's polyptych altarpiece, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432).

Other medieval churches include St. Nicholas, which has the third of the great towers of Ghent (the others are the Belfry and St. Bavo's), and Saint-Michel, containing Anthony Van Dyck's painting of "Christ on the Cross." Ghent is also famous for its *béguinages* (retreats for secular nuns), two of which survived from the 13th century.

Education and the Arts in Ghent, Belgium



Photo by Joelle's niece Emma

Dutch King William I founded Ghent University in 1817 before the state of Belgium was. The student population is around 44,000. The campus and the whole city are beautiful to explore.

Along with five other Universities in Ghent, more than 25 percent of the city population are students. It makes it understandable why there is such a young vibe and a busy social scene here.

Ghent has many fine museums, most notably the Museum of Fine Arts, which contains a beautiful collection of paintings by Flemish masters who lived and worked in Ghent during the 16th and 17th centuries. But you don't need to visit a museum to see fascinating art. The street art here is quite renowned in its own right. It is a city that, at its core, is passionate about art.

Ghent is internationally recognized for its dynamic music scene. Among the most notable sites are the Ghent Opera House, which dates back to the 19th century, the Bijloke Concert Hall, located in a medieval hospital ward, and the HA Concert Hall, situated in a former stock exchange.

OH, those festivals!



Ghent is well known for its festivals, which is why it is often referred to as Festival City. If that is your interest, July is your month. The popular Ten-Day Ghent Festivities usually start in mid-July and bring visitors from all over the world. The annual Jazz Festival is the week before. In September, you will find Jazz in the Park, OdeGand, and the Ghent Flanders Festival.

Fun Facts about Ghent, Belgium

Ghent is spelled Gent in Dutch and Gand in French.

Historians believe the name Ghent originated from the Celtic word *ganda*, which means confluence.

Ghent has always been known as a city of rebels.

According to the tourism office, Ghent is home to over 65 restaurants, 620 cafes, and 250 different kinds of beer.

Ghent is said to have the world's largest number of vegetarian restaurants per capita. The city of Ghent promotes a meat-free day every Thursday called *Donderdag Veggiedag*.

Ghent has three monuments listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites, which is why it is nicknamed the 'Medieval Manhattan.'

Ghent is known for purple cone-shaped, jelly-filled candies called *cuberdons* or *neuzekes* ('noses')

The wool industry was the core of the economy here, and there were enormous amounts of sheep walking around on the grass marshes outside the city center.

Since Ghent is located in the Flemish Region of Belgium, Starbucks uses the Dutch spelling Gent on its coffee mugs.



Top 11 Things to Do in Ghent, Belgium

There are many fun things to do in Ghent that will occupy a multi-day visit.

1. Explore the heart of Ghent, Gravensteen Castle
2. Spot the fantastic Ghent Belfry and climb to the top
3. Wander the vibrant street art culture
4. Check the 15th-Century Butcher's Hall
5. Enjoy a meal at Vrijdagmarkt
6. Take a stroll around the city center
7. Snap some beautiful pictures on St. Michael's Bridge
8. Visit the culinary heart of the city – Patershol
9. Hop onto a water tram and view this gorgeous city from its canals
10. Bike, the city like locals.
11. Participate in the music scene at multiple venues throughout the city or during music festivals

Overall, Ghent has many activities for travelers of all ages and interests. It is especially kid-friendly, with many activities to keep kids occupied.

Ghent's Most Attractive Feature – Gravensteen Castle



We love this majestic medieval fortress, which brought us to Ghent. It did not disappoint.

It is also known as the [“Castle of the Counts.”](#) The castle dates back to 1180, and it was the residence of the Counts of Flanders until 1353. The castle was re-purposed as a court, prison, mint, and cotton factory. It is massive and has a great history that helps you understand the Belgian culture of the 12th century. You learn about Ghent’s complex political and social issues, turbulent past, military architecture, and torture equipment.

One of the fascinating spots in this castle is the “Torture Museum.” It has some terrifying and disturbing

equipment and devices that tell the story of this castle's dark and horrific past. You learn how the counters used this equipment in the 12th century to intimidate and punish those who challenged their authority.

Restoration

The city of Ghent began a significant restoration of Gravensteen in a romanticizing Gothic style between 1893 and 1907 under the architect Joseph de Waele. After its restoration, this castle now has a modern vibrancy. It has a decorative moat on three sides, portraying it as a symbol of the power it once had. Gravensteen Castle was the centerpiece of the Ghent World Fair of 1913. The exhibits within the castle are excellent, and the castle's restoration is exceptional. Make sure to make it to the top of the castle for stunning views of the city of Ghent.

We suggest choosing the audio-visit option, too, which is voiced by Wouter Deprez (a Flemish comedian). He takes you on a journey through the castle's history and shares the castle's story and exciting battles in funny, passionate ways.

How many days should you spend in Ghent, Belgium?

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In our opinion, two full days should suffice. This is because it is not a touristy destination, and you can easily see plenty of things quickly.

You can visit its most beautiful attractions, have fun with the traveling community and kind residents, and relish its local dishes (especially Gentse Waterzooi and Ironed Mastel Pastry).

If you can only spend just one day, here is a suggested itinerary:

1. Start your day at “Simon Says” (coffee bar)
2. Visit Gravensteen Castle
3. Enjoy a canal cruise – see the city from the water
4. Check out this city’s beginning at the Ghent City Museum.
5. Climb the Ghent Belfry for the best view of the city
6. Enjoy dinner at Roots

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Dining and the Nightlife in Ghent, Belgium

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: Photo from Adobe Stock Photos

The City of Ghent has made significant efforts to enhance its nighttime appearance. Renowned designer Ronald Jéol has meticulously crafted a lighting plan which has garnered international acclaim. The striking lighting design takes center stage at the Ghent Light Festival, which occurs every three years and attracts light artists from around the globe. This festival is a spectacular celebration of art and light and has been awarded three stars in the Michelin Guide.

Ghent is a happening city with an active social scene and nightlife. Whether it is packed with lunch crowds, locals having a beer after work, or an evening out, it is constantly buzzing. If you love beer, you have come to the right place!! The selection is vast, and many originate here in Ghent. Dulle Griet, The Gentse Gruut Brewery, Trollekelder, and Cafe Den Turk are the best places to sample local brews

and have a cocktail.

Ghent has one of the most exciting culinary scenes in Europe. The top restaurants we suggest in Ghent include Viva la Puglia, Heritage, Bistro Illyrian, Midtown Grill, Roots, and La Papa Canaria.

How Do You Get to Ghent?



The airport closest to Ghent is the Brussels International Airport. This city doesn't have an airport, but there are four different ways to get there: taxi, bus, car, and train. Trains are likely the most economical and fastest option, and many high-speed trains come to Ghent.

The country's largest airport is in Brussels. If you opt for the train from Brussels, it will take 37 minutes to reach the city. The central station is Gent-Sint-Pieters, which can be reached from all Belgian cities. If you travel to Belgium via the European high-speed train network, you can transfer to Ghent by train at Brussels-Midi, Antwerp, or Lille (France).

If you plan to get on the bus, it takes 55 minutes from Brussels. It may be the slowest way to travel, but it is the cheapest option.

By Car

Ghent is easy to reach by car. The city is only 45 minutes from Bruges and Brussels and a little less than an hour from Antwerp. Two European motorways (E17 and E40) intersect in Ghent. Take the exit “Gent Centrum.” We found the roadways easy to navigate. Once you arrive in the city, you can either park your car free of charge at the edge of the town or use one of the pay lots. If you opt for the latter, the electronic signs on the roads leading to the city center will guide you to the different parking lots.

We do have a warning. Our GPS sent us right through a Pedestrian-only square. Let’s say the looks in our direction made us feel awful! Ryan found the experience so embarrassing, and it was straight out of the city after that. Be conscious of where the GPS sends you. This is a bustling city with tons of pedestrians out and about.

Where to stay in Ghent



Photo from Joelle’s niece Emma

Ghent, Belgium, is a relatively small city. However, it has many accommodation options. There are luxury and upscale hotels, quality budget hotels, vacation rentals, and private room hostels. There is a place to stay that will complement any budget.

We recommend staying in the city center. It will save a lot of time, as the city center has the largest concentration of attractions and historic buildings. That is where some of the best restaurants and nightlife can be found. It is as if all of them were purposely placed within easy walking distance of each other.

It is important to price out accommodations on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both, so it is ideal to check both out. Our personal first choice is [Booking.com](#). If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well. Click the link below to check out hotels and vacation homes in the area. It may be just the motivation you need to start planning that next grand adventure.

[BOOK NOW](#)

When is the best time to visit?



The best time to visit Ghent depends on what you're looking for in your trip.

Spring (April to June): This is a fantastic time to visit. The weather is mild, and the city's parks and gardens are in full bloom. Festivals, like the Ghent Flower Show, also take place during this period.

Summer (July to August): Summer is vibrant with plenty of festivals and events, such as the Gentse Feesten, a large city festival with music, theater, and street performances. The weather is generally pleasant, though it can be quite warm and crowded.

Fall (September to November): The fall is another great time, with cooler weather and fewer tourists. The autumn colors in the city's parks and along the canals can be beautiful. The city is also less crowded, which can make for a more relaxed experience.

Winter (December to February): Ghent can be charming in winter, especially during the holiday

season. The city is festively decorated, and there's a Christmas market that adds to the atmosphere. The weather can be cold and damp, though, so be prepared for that. Snow is a rare event.

Check the [official tourism site for Ghent, Belgium](#)

Final Thoughts



Ghent undoubtedly possesses one of the richest medieval histories in Europe. It exudes an intriguing young vibe and energy, offering a fascinating cultural mixture where people live with passion. The city is a medieval gem with a modern, contemporary feel, which is no easy feat. Combine this with the genuine welcome you receive from the friendly and gracious locals, and you have the complete package.

We came only to visit the castle but ended up spending several hours exploring the city. It was difficult

to leave because the town had so much to offer, but we had a long drive ahead to our next hotel. Learn from our mistake and don't miss out on all the wonders this city has to offer. A family member recently traveled to Europe and said her favorite stop was Ghent. It's truly something special; take the time to explore it fully. It will definitely leave a lasting impression.

If you are looking for more inspiration and want to visit other parts of Belgium, check out our [Belgium Travel Guide](#). It will help you plan your trip and save money.

Ghent Belgium Photo Gallery

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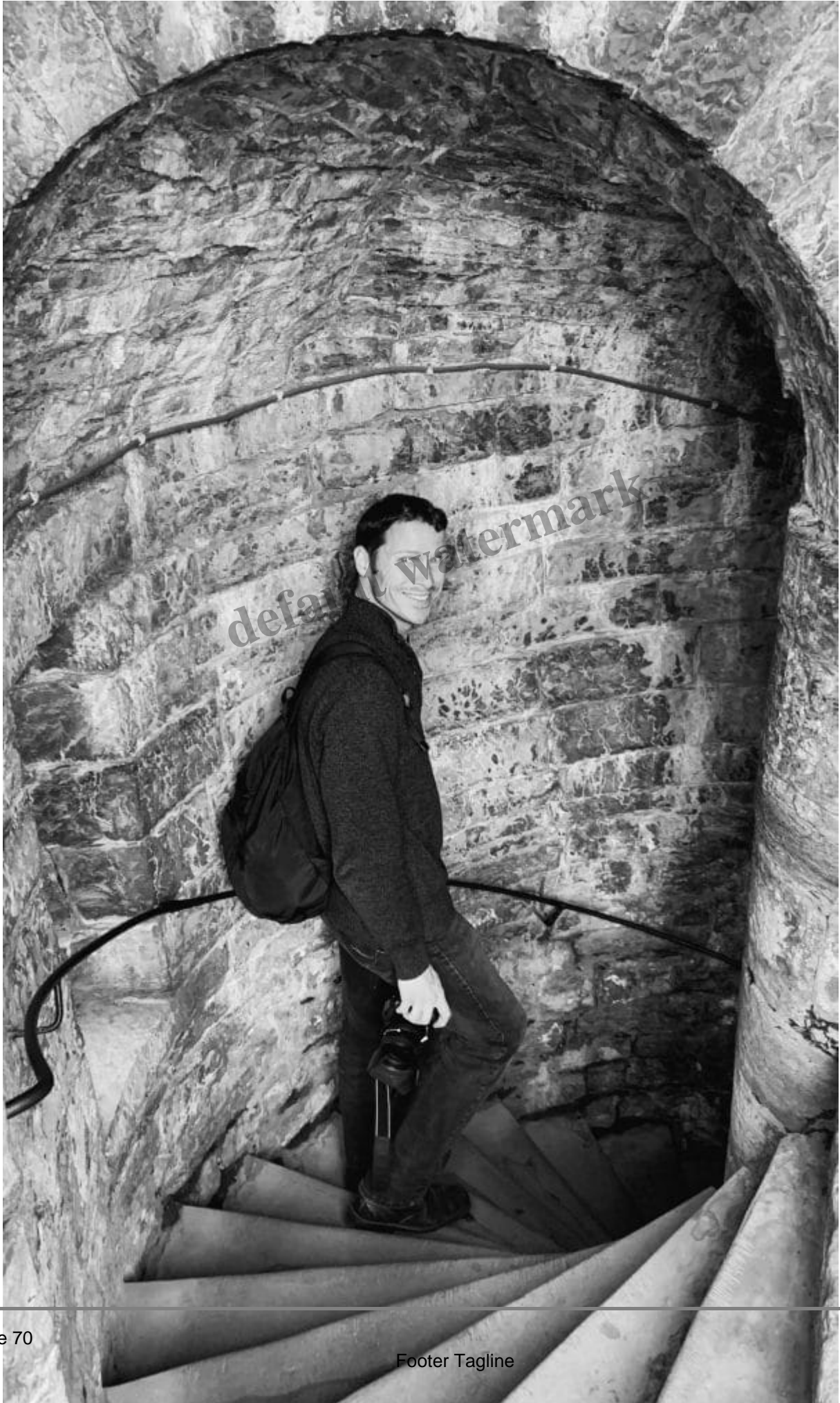




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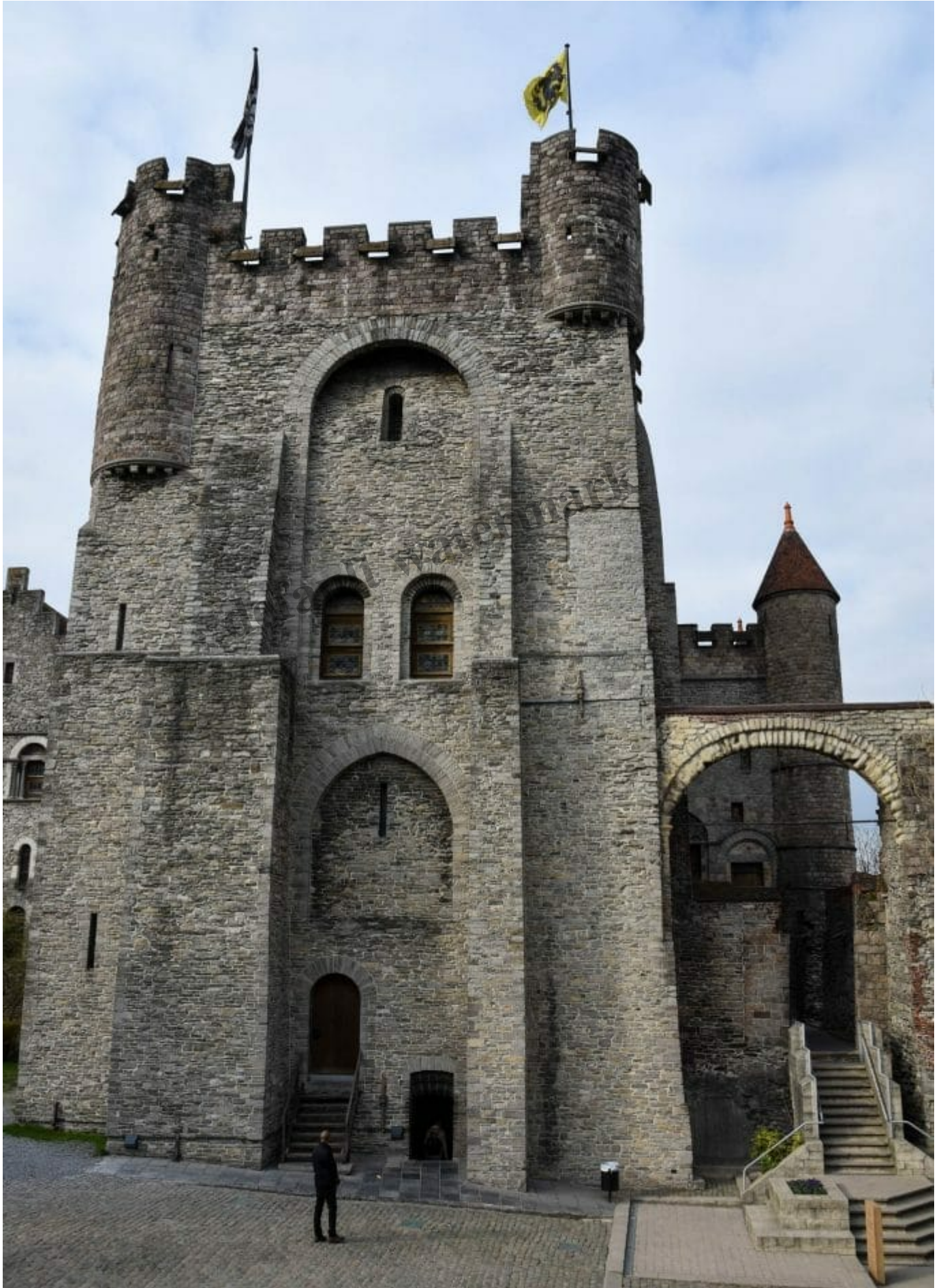




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