

# Bruges is Belgium's medieval masterpiece

## City of canals offers magical tranquility, centuries of history

Sometimes referred to as “the Venice of the North,” Bruges is famous for its canals and medieval architecture, most of which remain intact.

Highlights of this UNESCO World Heritage Site include the Basilica of the Holy Blood, a 12th-century Gothic church, and the Belfort, a 272-foot-high tower that figured so prominently in the 2008 film “In Bruges,” a dark comedy about two Irish hitmen on the run.

The view from the Rozenhoedkaai is one of the most photographed places in the Historic Center. This is where the Groenerei and Dijver canals intersect, and it's a popular stop for tour boats plying the waterways encircling the town. Visitors can stroll the ramparts and admire the windmills, as well as several medieval-town gates.

The Belfort, which presides over Market Square, forms part of a 13th-century complex that served as a market hall during the Middle Ages. Visitors up for the challenge of climbing the 366 steps to the top of the tower can stop for a breather and admire the old treasury, a carillon with 47 melodious bells and an imposing clockwork mechanism. Those who succeed in making the



**IN BRUGES** – The Rozenhoedkaai sits on the river in the foreground of Belfort tower. Image: *Emperorcosar. Adobe Stock.*

strenuous climb will be rewarded with unforgettable views of the city and surrounding countryside.

The Stadhuis – Bruges' City Hall – is one of the oldest in the Low Countries. Constructed in 1376, the Gothic hall is a work of art in itself, with its splendid 19th-century murals and a colorful vaulted ceiling.

The 400-foot-high tower of

the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, or Church of Our Lady, makes it the second-tallest brick building in the world. Construction began in 1225 and continued for nearly 300 years before it was completed. The interior houses a treasure trove of art, including Michelangelo's Madonna and Child carved in 1505. In 1944, the Nazis looted this exquisite, 4-foot-tall

marble sculpture, and it was recovered a year later from a German salt mine, a story recounted in the 2014 film “The Monuments Men”.

The Groeninge Museum houses an impressive collection of Belgian paintings from the late Middle Ages to post-war modern art. One highlight is the world-famous collection of “Flemish Primitives,” which includes works by Jan Van Eyck, considered the father of oil painting, and celebrated for “The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,” a 15th-century polyptych, consisting of 12 wooden panels and is one of the most coveted masterpieces of medieval art.

Minnewaterpark in the south part of Bruges, is home to a small rectangular lake known as the Lake of Love. Legend has it that if you walk over the lake bridge with your partner, you will experience eternal love.

Bruges is a popular destination on European river cruises. Travelers are discovering that river cruising is one of the most comfortable and intriguing ways to discover Europe. River cruising allows up-close-and-personal access to cosmopolitan cities and quaint villages because so many towns were built along these medieval highways.

# Berkshires offer luscious piece of the past

## Hills come to life, flourish in western Massachusetts

The hills sparkle in western Massachusetts. Taconic Hills' stony soil provides an astonishing sustenance that has nurtured the imaginations of writers, artists and musicians for more than a century.

The location's wherewithal sparked emotion from Henry David Thoreau. The legendary wordsmith called it “a country as we might see in dreams, with all the delights of paradise.”

A trio of states converge on these rock-ribbed hills that extend from Mount Greylock, located south of the Connecticut border. It's where New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut converge. Mount Greylock hangs like a halo over a patchwork quilt of farmer's fields and valleys. It's where you can see five states from its peak on a clear day.

Quiet hillsides turn lush with moss-laden trees and thick clusters of clover during the summer. By autumn, the hills emanate a fiery palette of crimson, orange and gold. The Berkshires, a highland region, are a cultural retreat, with venues like Tanglewood, MASS MoCA – the country's largest contemporary art center – and the Norman Rockwell Museum.

Stockbridge is a Rockwell community. It is where the artist made his home and the museum is nearby. It houses more than 570 drawings and paintings



**NATURAL BEAUTY** – The autumn landscape lights up in Massachusetts Berkshires in the western part of the state. Image: *thomas. Adobe Stock.*

that capture Rockwell's prosaic view of smalltown America that includes 300 covers for the Saturday Evening Post.

Rockwell's studio remains intact. Easels, brushes and books are scattered. Visitors can explore its 36 acres of grounds, including excellent views of the Housatonic River and the Berkshire Hills.

Stockbridge also is the setting for Alice's Restaurant – which never was a

setting but instead an 18-minute song by Arlo Guthrie that later was made into a film. The real Alice, Alice Brock, and husband Ray, lived in the former Trinity Church on Division Street, a location for much of the movie. The building today is home to The Guthrie Center and The Guthrie Foundation.

Mother Ann Lee, a founding leader of the Shakers, established her religious community in Hancock Shaker

Village near Pittsfield. An offshoot of Quakerism, Shaker refers to the tendency of followers to shake their religious ecstasy. The village has 20 original Shaker buildings, including a round, stone barn that rises like a pagoda from the center of the community.

Nearby Arrowhead is the house where Herman Melville penned “Moby Dick”. Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne met during a climb on Monument Mountain in 1850. Melville struggled to pay two mortgages and support his wife's family. Legend has it that Hawthorne urged his friend to keep working on his story about a whale.

Edith Wharton's circumstances, meanwhile, didn't share Melville's struggles. Born Edith Jones, her family's prominent New York name became the basis for the coined phrase “Keeping up with the Joneses”.

The celebrated author of “The Age of Innocence”, Wharton built The Mount – her palatial estate in Lenox in 1902. The property is based on the principles expressed in her first major book, “The Decoration of Houses”. The main house and formal are open to the public.

Massachusetts' reputation is built on Boston and its famous islands. Perhaps a trip to the state's western side will widen its status.