

A Magic Player's Guide to Ghent

Hi there, fellow Magic Player! Welcome to Ghent, your host city for MagicFest Ghent. This article will tell you, in a little under 2000 words, how to get around in the city, what some of our historical highlights are, and where you can go to party and/or game.

For those of you who would rather read strategy articles than city guides, let me start with the tl;dr version:

- Avoid taking your car into the city center
- Tram 1 is the easiest connection between the tournament venue, the train station and the city center
- You can easily explore the main sights in under 2 hours if you're in a hurry.

Getting to Ghent from Brussels Airport

There's a train station at the -1 level of the Airport. You can buy a ticket right there at the machines/ticket office. The trip will cost € 15,60.

From there, there's 3 ways to get to Ghent:

- At 3 past the hour (19:03, 20:03, etc.), there's a direct train (direction: Oostende or Knokke), that will take you to Ghent in just under 1 hour. This is by far the most convenient option.
- At half past the hour (19:30, 20:30, etc.), there's the option to take a train (direction: Bergen (in Dutch) / Mons (French)) to Bruxelles-Midi (3rd stop), where you'll have 15 minutes to transfer to another train (direction: Oostende) which will take you directly to Ghent. It will take you 1h 7min and it's slightly less convenient, but still beats waiting longer.
- At 24 past the hour (19:24, 20:24, etc.), there's a "slow" train that also goes to Ghent, but it makes a lot of small stops. Travel time: 1h 24min. I advise against taking this option (you'll just waste time).

To look at travel options yourself, go to <https://www.belgiantrain.be/en/>.

Getting to Ghent from Charleroi Airport

Public transport from Charleroi is not as convenient, so I advise taking a Flibco bus instead. You can buy a ticket at the Airport, or you can book one on www.flibco.be. Tickets are about €15, unless you book well in advance.

You'll arrive at the Gent Sint-Pieters train station, at one of the back platforms. You can find busses and trams in front of the station.

Tram 1 stops are situated in front of the station, in the corner on your far left, under the big building. To go to the city center, take tram 1 in that direction. It's the one closest to the station. To go to the venue (Flanders EXPO), where Holiday Inn is also situated, it's the stop on the other side. You'll have to buy a ticket, there's machines at the tram stop.

If you want to go to our LGS, where there's gaming/beers to be had on Thursday and Friday, it's a 15 minute walk: <https://goo.gl/maps/wf4J4bnKeSn>

Alternatively, you can take one of the many busses at platforms 13-16. You'll need to get off at the "Heuvelpoort" stop, which is the 4th one.

Getting to Ghent by car

There's good news and bad news.

The good news is that Ghent can easily be reached by car. The city lies at the intersection of the E40 and E17 highway, which conveniently connects it to Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges and Kortrijk. It's a 30 minute drive from either of those cities. If you're going directly to the Flanders Expo convention center, just follow the signs to "EXPO". The site itself can be quite confusing, but this video explains it nicely: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl8sffB2rss>. You can park your car at the site and take a tram to the center from there.

The bad news is that Ghent is set up to seriously disincentivise car traffic in the center. I strongly recommend parking your car at Flanders Expo and using public transport to get around from there instead. For those who do insist on driving in the center, make sure to read on.

The concept of our "Mobility Plan" is quite simple. Ghent is divided in 3 areas:

- Outer ring: the area outside the R40 ringway (grey belt)

There's no special restrictions in this area, though you'll need to pay to park your car here - as is the case in the entire city.

- Greater center area: the area inside the R40 ringway (grey belt)

Inside this area, there's a 30km/h speed limit. In addition, the area is split up in different sections, and it is prohibited to drive from one section to there other directly - you'll have to go back to the R40 ringway and drive to the entrance of the next section. Parking tariffs here are higher than in the outer area.

- Restricted area: the historical center, as well as the student district (purple areas)
Car traffic is **strictly prohibited** here, and so is parking.

The borders between the different sections of the greater center area, as well as access to the restricted area, are monitored with automatic cameras, that will fine you if you pass through.

If you still want to take your car to the center, here's three more pointers:

- Keep a close eye on the traffic signs. There's a lot of them.
- Don't rely on your GPS system if it hasn't been updated recently. Use the Waze App or Google Maps instead.
- Search for the underground parking lot closest to your destination and follow the "P-route" along the R40 ringway to get there. The signs also show how many spots are still available in each parking lot.

Exploring the city

Coming from Flanders Expo or the Sint-Pieters train station, tram 1 will be your direct connection to the city. You can get off at the "Korenmarkt" stop, which will put you right in the heart of our town.

Ghent has one of the nicest medieval town centers in Europe, with many buildings being over 500 years old. Because there is no car traffic, you can stroll around without a care in the world. The center is also very compact - although Ghent as a whole covers about 150 km², the historical center itself can easily fit in a 2x2 km square. I'll list a few highlights.

Our signature buildings are the three towers: the Saint Bavo Cathedral, the Belfry Tower, and the Saint Nicolas Church. The Saint Bavo Cathedral is free to enter and houses some magnificent stained glass windows, as well as a huge whale skeleton (weird, I know). If you pay the €6 admission, you can also enter the crypt, which houses the magnificent Van Eyck multi-panel painting "Ghent Altar Piece", which generally considered to be the greatest painting created in early medieval times.

In between the Belfry and the Saint Nicolas Church, you can find our Town Hall. In front of the Saint Nicolas Church, there's also the old Postal Office. Just behind the Postal Office, there's a canal surround by medieval guild halls. You can take a 1-hour boat trip there, which is probably the best way to go about seeing all of the main sights and get some historical context in the process.

Just beyond the aforementioned guild halls, there's also a full-on medieval castle (The Castle of the Counts, "Gravensteen" in Dutch), which also features a torture museum and a bunch of old weaponry.

Partying

As a University town, Ghent features ample opportunity to go out at night. There's no huge clubs though; Ghent is more about pub crawling and cozy bars. While there's bars all over the city, there's three principal hotspots for drinking and dancing:

- The "Vlasmarkt", near Saint Jacob's church. Here you will find, among other things, the Charlatan, where you can dance all night to various types of music. There's usually 2 or 3 different DJ's or live bands playing in different rooms. Next to it is Kinky Star, which is smaller and features live music from local alternative bands.
- The "Korenmarkt", right in the heart of town, is the more tourist-y area. Most bar feature popular music, some have a small dance floor to get your groove on. There's also a few dedicated beer houses nearby, such as "Waterhuis aan de Bierkant", which offer hundreds of different Belgian beers for you to try. Don't try all of them though!

Another notable bar here is "Comic Sans", which is a geek-themed bar that features arcade games, among other things.

- The "Overpoort", which is the student district, situated near the Saint Peter's square (15 min. walk from the train station). Here you'll find a large selection of small bars of different varieties, and a slightly younger crowd.

Gaming

Finally, Ghent features 2 game stores:

- The biggest one is [Outpost](#), situated next to the student district. From the Sint Pieters train station, it is just a 15 minute walk. This is where the more competitive crowd goes; they host FNM's in a variety of different formats and offer a wide selection of single cards and accessories, as well as boardgames. They also have top-end gaming PCs where you can play online or just among your friends.
- Closer to the city center is [Word's End Comics](#), which is targeted more towards casual gamers. They don't carry single cards, but if you like comic books, they have a very nice selection.

So that's Ghent in a (huge) nutshell. I hope you enjoy your stay, and good luck competing at the MagicFest!

Tom De Decker