We enjoyed our stay in Bruges last year. It's a perfectly preserved medieval town. Like an authentic movie set for an Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks movie, it's complete with town square surrounded by 400-year-old churches, homes, quaint stores, popular cafes, statues and Saturday market in the square.

Four of us were backpacking through Northern Europe, and decided to spend several days in the beautiful Bruges area. We found a hotel on one of the town's many narrow, cobblestone streets, and when we were told the room would be $100 a night, we thought about going elsewhere. However, at the landlord's urging, we climbed to the second floor to take a look.

We were surprised at the wide, open space. It must have once been a school classroom, because it was about 20 feet across by 50 feet long. We could have slept eight people there

without crowding. Additionally, just outside was a large den shared with other guests. It had comfy sofas, chairs, table, sink, stove and refrigerator.

The languages spoken in Bruges, one of Europe's most popular financial centers, include French, Dutch and German. Fortunately for us, English is taught at local schools, and we had no trouble in cafes and stores, including when we wanted to sample some of the world-famous Belgian waffles, mussels and chocolate desserts.

Bruges is the capital of the Belgian province of West Flanders, and because of its many picturesque canals and water tour traffic, it's called the Venice of the North. On the canals, the scenery is spectacular, with large overhanging oak trees framing the waterways, and squads of white swans floating placidly along among the boats.

The town square in Bruges is dominated by the Church of Our Lady, with its medieveal spires soaring high above the town. On the Sunday after we enjoyed the Saturday town market, we watched a traditional wedding party leave the church. They laughed and ran to a waiting horse and carriage, to the cheers and flying rice tossed by friends and family. It was like seeing a chapter out of the 19th Century, or a scene for an Audrey Hepburn movie.