

Fabulous Flanders

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Glorious Brussels
Coastal Gems on the Flemish Coast
Ypres Pilgrimage
Mussels and More
From Beer to Jenever
At the Cutting Edge of Fashion



flanders
belgium

Features

Travel Writers Focus on their Flanders

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Destination Flanders

Brussels | GLORIOUS BRUSSELS

John Saunders takes a tour of Brussels and discovers the eclectic and fascinating lure of the Capital of Flanders.

SHOP WINDOW

Markets and bargains galore. Find out where to find the best bargain in Flanders.

Bruges | THE PLEASURE OF BRUGES

Anthony Lambert travels to Bruges in admiration of one of the most desirable destinations in Flanders.

AN ARTISTIC LEGACY

From Flemish primitives to Art Nouveau, Artistic styles, architecture and paintings all make their mark.

Antwerp | A CITY OF CREATIVITY AND VITALITY

Anthony Lambert visits Antwerp, a thriving metropolis with a cultural heart of its own.

CHOCOLATE BLISS

A guide to probably the world's most favourite sweet!

Ghent | GONE TO GHENT

Anna Hyman tells a tale of adventure in historic surroundings plus the places that make Ghent a food heaven.

DIAMONDS FOREVER

Famous for its sparkling gems, Antwerp's diamond industry tradition continues to dazzle.

WHATS ON IN 2008

A guide to events in the coming year. From parades to processions and markets to museums, 2008 is set to be another activity filled year and these are just some of the highlights on offer.

Leuven | LEUVEN THE CITY

Particularly known for its famous brew Stella Artois, there's more to this beautiful city than meets the eye. Anna Hyman investigates.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International, domestic and general information about your trip to Flanders.

Mechelen | MELODIOUS MECHELEN

Anna Hyman
As the Carillon Bells ring out, it not just a rich cultural heritage that awaits visitors to Mechelen. Anna Hyman takes a tour.

THE FLEMISH COAST

Anthony Lambert discovers a journey on the the coastal tram in search of some coastal gems.

MUSSELS AND MORE

Learn about the Flemish reputation for excellent food and gastronomy.

AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF FASHION

Find out more about the Flemish flair for designer-wear.

FROM BEER TO Jenever

A thirst-quenching guide to how, where and what to drink!

Ypres Pilgrimage

Tim Ware visits historical In Flanders Fields Country on a poignant but exhilarating tour of battlefields and museums in the Ypres area. His tour takes him to historic Passchendaele and travels around the region to discover the many spots which were once frequented by our brave ancestors.



4-5

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8-9



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18-19



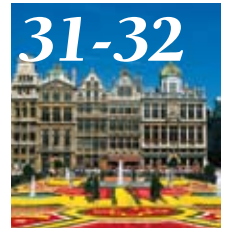
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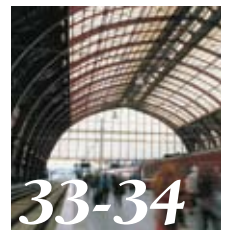
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Fabulous Flanders

Flanders – Always Exceeds Expectations



So what is it about Flanders that captivates our visitors, making them want to come back time and again?

First timers are amazed to discover that a small region, so close to home has so much to offer. But cobbled streets and picture perfect canals are only part of the story... the Flemish take their food seriously, so there are restaurants aplenty. And if you want to combine relaxation with culture or shopping, you can admire works by Flemish Masters, or buy creations by cutting edge designers that sell for a fraction of the price in the UK. So read on, sample all that Flanders has to offer, enjoy your visit and make sure you tell your friends!

DISTANCES ARE SHORT AND FLEMISH CITIES ARE CLOSELY LOCATED TO EACHOTHER.

Getting there

One of the UK's closest European neighbours, Flanders is easily accessible by air, sea, road and rail. Regular and frequent services operate from all over the United Kingdom making Flanders the perfect destination to serve as the gateway to Europe. To discover ways of getting there, turn to the Practical Information section on pages 33-34.

Useful Distances

London – Brussels: 204 Miles / Brussels – Antwerp: 29 miles
Brussels – Bruges: 60 miles / Brussels – Ghent: 35 miles
Brussels – Leuven: 16 miles / Brussels – Mechelen: 16 miles
Brussels – Ostend: 70 miles / Brussels – Ypres: 78 miles

BRUSSELS

Brussels sights

An extraordinary place

1958 was a good year. In many ways it marked the threshold of the world we live in, with the arrival of the Barbie doll, the credit card, and the parking meter in London. Brussels hosted the first post war International Exhibition, opened by King Baudouin of the Belgians with a speech in which he urged nations to embrace peace and scientific progress. Towering over the Exhibition was the Atomium, a giant molecular model symbolising mankind's burgeoning fascination with the atomic structure at the heart of things. Newly re-furbished and shining, the Atomium is as potent a symbol now as it was fifty years ago. An exhibition in the lower spheres of the structure features photographs of its building and opening, redolent of the stridently optimistic style of the 1950s and of the sheer physical effort entailed in building such an object before machines took the strain. A lift sweeps you up to the top sphere, with panoramic views across the Royal Park with its magnificent greenhouses, to the city beyond. The original Exhibition park, now a popular venue for strolling and picnicking, has been enhanced by the flumes and waves of the subtropical water world of Océade, and the National Planetarium. At the foot of the Atomium lies the fulfilment of some of the hopes and aspirations of fifty years ago – Mini Europe.



© vzw Atomium asbl

More than 300 finely crafted miniature buildings represent the member states of the European Union so that you can fly within minutes from the stone temples of Malta, past Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower, and on to Rome without the bother of a passport or a budget airline. This is the cosmopolitan canvas on which the colourful picture of today's Brussels is painted. ■

AUTHOR | JOHN SAUNDERS

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL

Town Hall – Grand Place
Brussels 1000 | Tel.: +32 2 513 89 40
www.brusselsinternational.be

A city of Fine Living

Inspiring Places

Glorious Brussels

Brussels is a city of villages, a network of neighbourhoods each with its distinctive qualities to be explored, but the real centre lies around the collection of ancient buildings that form the Grand' Place. Painstakingly re-built following a destructive French bombardment in the 17th century, this is a medieval town square on a human scale. Architecturally fascinating, these are not grand edifices designed to subdue the spectator by the power of their builders, as in so many European city centres, but much more friendly and inclusive. They tell the story of Brussels as the home of princes of the mercantile, not military, variety. Not that the city is short of heavy stone monuments of political power. Up the hill to the east, the Royal Palace and the Palais de Justice were amongst the largest constructions of the 19th century, when the newly independent Kingdom was keen to make a statement, but the Grand' Place is where the people are. Diplomats and their secretaries, journalists, lobbyists and guitarists from Latvia and Ljubljana, London and Lithuania, mix and match in the melting pot of Brussels. There' always something happening in and around this space. The square sparkles and sings at Christmas, and the streets between here and Place St. Catherine are lined with stalls selling festive fare from all over Europe. This same pan-European eclecticism feeds the strong spring of artistic creativity that bubbles up in every public space, indoor and outdoor, throughout Brussels and throughout the year. Music and dance, theatre, fashion, and the graphic arts continuously break new ground.

Fine living

On the other hand tradition is also alive, not least on the table, and you can't come here and not savour a plate of mussels and frites along the narrow cobbled rue des Bouchers just a step away from the Grand' Place, and then stroll through the elegant shopping arcade of the Galeries Saint-Hubert. Just beyond the Galeries is a classic Brussels bar, À la Morte Subite. Sit in the cool clasp of a slightly faded 1920s décor and sip a glass of Westmalle triple, a Trappist beer that's a good example of the attention to quality that makes Belgian brewing the equivalent of fine wine production in other countries.

Famous city artisans

That food and drink have always been at the heart of daily life is clear from the paintings of my favourite artist, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who died in Brussels in 1569. Only around forty of his works survive and there is a handful to delight in the Royal Museum of Ancient Art up on the Mont des Arts. No matter how serious the subject, there's always a medieval peasant or two feasting away in a corner of the canvas. He painted at a time when this most culturally sophisticated corner of Europe was threatened by the ravages of war, and his work is full of humour, acute social observation and comment. I think he would have made his mark in today's Brussels.

Graphic celebrations....

Bruegel's deft characterisation of the Middle Ages would have lent itself to the world of the cartoon, celebrated in the Centre for Comic Strip Art on rue des Sables. The star of this show is undoubtedly Tintin whose adventures have captivated a world-wide following. There is a fascinating gallery in the Centre dedicated to Tintin's creator, Hergé, who lived and worked in Brussels until his death in 1983.

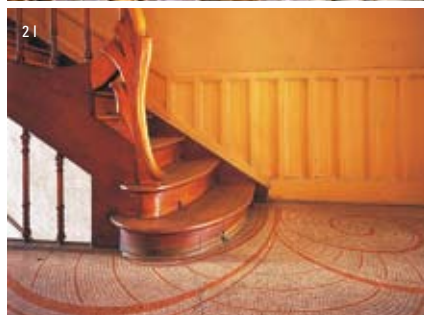
The streets of the city bear the indelible mark of another Brussels artist, Victor Horta, doyen of Art Nouveau architects. Around the turn of the 20th century, Art Nouveau designers sought to make living spaces more friendly and natural. Using curves of stone and iron, glass and wood, houses, shops and warehouses became softer and embracing. It's very much in the spirit of Brussels that so many of these buildings are still enjoyed. Take a break from high class shopping on Avenue Louise, the Bond Street of Brussels, to explore the Art Nouveau houses that pepper the neighbouring streets, then at the top of the Avenue a table at a pavement cafe on rue Jourdan is another friendly space to sit and share the evening light with the locals. ■

AUTHOR | JOHN SAUNDERS

1 | St Hubert Galleries

2 | Beautiful Art Nouveau architecture

3 | Mannekin Pis in costume





© Oscar Elias

History in the Making

Light from old street lamps glistens the dark cobblestones, still damp from an earlier shower. The church towers and the market-hall belfry are gently floodlit by soft orange lights and stand out against the black sky. Elegantly gabled houses are mirrored in the small canal basin, the night air as still and silent as the water.

It's worth being a night owl to experience Bruges at its most atmospheric, which of course means staying there, but you need many days to appreciate fully this miraculous survival of a medieval city in which there is hardly a discordant note. As Arnold Bennett wrote in 1896, "the difference between Bruges and other cities is that in the latter you look about for the picturesque, while in Bruges, assailed on every side by the picturesque, you look curiously for the unpicturesque, and don't find it."

The reason for Bruges's popularity and prosperity today lies in the misfortune of its medieval inhabitants whose livelihoods were undermined by the 16th-century silting of the Het Zwin estuary, which linked the ports of Damme and Bruges with the sea. Until then, Bruges saw the arrival and departure of up to 150 ships a day, and its population in 1500 was twice that of London. Many of Bruges's buildings were funded from the city's weaving industry, which relied on English wool. With the loss of its maritime trade, Bruges entered a period of decline that was not arrested until the gradual discovery of this sleeping beauty during the 19th century. ■

AUTHOR | ANTHONY LAMBERT



Floodlit Bruges at Night

TOURISM BRUGES In&Uit – Tourism Bruges

PO Box 744

B-8000 Brugge

Tel.: +32 50 44 46 46

www.brugge.be

The Pleasure of Bruges Fine Living

Most visitors begin their exploration of Bruges in the large open square called the Markt, which is at its most colourful during the Christmas market. On its south side is the bulk of the 13th-century Halle and its soaring belfry, a symbol of municipal power and prestige. It's well worth climbing its 366 narrow steps for the unrivalled view over the city and to see the feverish activity on the hour when an enormous brass drum, like a giant musical box, triggers 47 bells into musical activity.

On the nearby Burg is the 14th-century Stadhuis, Belgium's oldest Gothic town hall with magnificent painted ceiling and murals of events in the city's history. In the Brugse Vrije old courthouse in the corner of the square is the most extraordinary renaissance chimneypiece of black marble and oak carving with a vast overmantel; it flows out to the side so that the central wooden statue of Charles V is framed by both sets of grandparents. Also on the Burg is the Basilica of the Holy Blood, part 12th century Romanesque and part neo-Gothic, which has an ornate silver reliquary containing a phial of what is said to be Christ's blood.

The Art of Living

Bruges reputation for its art collections has been recently enhanced by the formation of the Flemish Art Collection at the Groeninge Museum, bringing together paintings from Antwerp and Ghent as well as Bruges in a permanent collection. The Groeninge is already world famous for its collection of 15th-century Flemish Primitive art, which achieved unprecedented realism in its depiction of the physical world, and there are some gruesome paintings by Gerard David and Jan Provoost which appeal to the gleeful prurience of children. But it also has important Baroque works and intriguing collections of 19th- and 20th-century Flemish painters who will be new to most British eyes.

Besides four other art galleries forming with the Groeninge the Museums of Fine Arts, there are over a dozen museums, devoted to diamonds, lace, folklore, archery, windmills, archaeology and Belgium's irresistible chocolate. There's a medieval hospital and numerous churches, one with the highest brick tower in Europe. For music lovers, the magnificent new Concertgebouw, with 1300-seat concert hall and 320-seat hall for chamber music, offers a varied programme of classical, jazz and world music.

The Pleasure of Bruges

But the greatest pleasure of Bruges is simply wandering among its historic buildings and admiring the wonderful brickwork, spires, pinnacles, turrets, crow-stepped gables and dormers. No walk should miss the tranquil Beguinage, which was founded in 1245; it was once an enclosed community of pious women whose husbands had perhaps gone on the Crusades, but today it is occupied by Benedictine nuns. It's no wonder that the whole of the historic city is ranked a UNESCO world heritage site.

If your feet need a rest, you can take a boat trip through the canals for a different perspective. Or perhaps at one of over a hundred restaurants offering exquisite banquets, haute cuisine, and traditional dishes made using Belgium's wonderful beers. The number of Flemish and international eateries is plentiful, offering cuisine for every taste. ■

AUTHOR | ANTHONY LAMBERT

- 1 | Romantic canal boat rides
- 2 | View from the Belfry
- 3 | Lacemaking
- 4 | Benedictine Nuns at the Beguinage



© Sophie Lesur

© M. Matsumoto

© Oscar Elias



Stimulating the imagination

Antwerp is famous for its galleries and historic buildings, but even here there are some revelations. Few new arrivals have heard of the Plantin-Moretus Museum, and on the face of it a printing museum doesn't sound terribly exciting. In reality it is one of the most extraordinary museums in Europe, one of very few museums to be ranked a world heritage site. Step into this 16th-century complex of buildings with its 35 rooms and it's as though its occupants had slipped out for lunch. The family's domestic quarters and the printing works founded in 1555 are all part of the rabbit warren of rooms large and small, ranging from kitchen, bedroom and drawing room to printing room, proofreaders' room and type foundry. The walls are hung with miraculously well-preserved Cordoba leather, and others have family portraits by Rubens who was a close friend of Balthasar Moretus.

This is just one of about twenty museums and galleries in the city, headed in popularity by Rubens House with its beautiful garden. More of his work and a world-class collection of paintings from the 15th to the 20th century fill the palatial surroundings of the Museum of Fine Arts. Two of his greatest works hang in Antwerp Cathedral, which is the largest Gothic church in Belgium and took 169 years to build from 1352. Nearby are the city's main square and the picturesque triangular market place with its gloriously fenestrated guild houses. ■

AUTHOR | ANTHONY LAMBERT

TOURISM ANTWERP

Grote Markt 13 | 2000 Antwerp

Tel.: 00 32 32 32 01 03

toerisme@stad.antwerpen.be

www.antwerpen.be

Catwalk in reverse



Antwerp, a city of Creativity and Vitality

There is only one way to arrive in Antwerp: by train. No other approach begins to match the splendour and lavish decoration of newly restored Antwerp Central station which astonishes first-time visitors. It is only the first of many surprises that Antwerp has to offer. It's a city that takes time to get to know, partly because its districts have very different identities and characters, but also because each street can be an extraordinary mix of architectural styles. Even the shops are an eclectic mix – a bookbinder next to a greengrocer, an enticing delicatessen next to an expensive fashion salon or a quirky art gallery.

Waterside city

No visit to Antwerp would be complete without sight of the River Scheldt that has enabled the city to become one of Europe's largest ports and has been the source of its prosperity. As an old saying goes, "We owe the river to God, but everything else to the river." A huge regeneration of the riverfront and warehouse buildings is revitalising the quays and turning the city back towards the water with its medieval castle and imposing maritime buildings such as the Entrepot du Congo. The best way to appreciate the docks is to take a boat trip or, for a romantic excursion, try a candlelit dinner cruise.

From Diamonds to Design

Another traditional source of the city's wealth has been diamonds, and there

are various factories, museums and showrooms in the Jewish neighbourhood devoted to a lady's best friend. But newfound wealth and vitality have come from Antwerp's fashion designers, and the annual fashion show in June attracts over 6,000 visitors from all over the world. It's worth visiting the ModeNatie just to see the imaginative conversion of an industrial building into a fashion centre housing various institutes and MoMu, a museum devoted to avant-garde clothes design. The results of all this creativity can be found in the designer stores that line Nationalestraat and Steenhouwersvest.

The value placed on good design is nothing new in Antwerp. The district of Zurenborg, for example, has some outstanding Belle Epoque buildings in a variety of styles – neoclassical and neo-Flemish but above all, Art Nouveau. The area attracts numerous visitors and has become a trendy place to live, thanks to the determination of residents to save the neighbourhood from redevelopment. A similar revival is taking place in the former working-class district of Stuivenberg, where new uses are being found for former railway and industrial buildings. Around the Middelheim museum there are houses that could have been lifted straight out of an English garden city. Most recently the new courthouse has been designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership with a striking roofline resembling a series of sails.

Music plays an important part in the city's cultural life, with jazz festivals and a month of concerts from the end of October, as well as performances from the Royal Ballet of Flanders, opera and several concert halls, not to mention dozens of clubs. At Antwerp's most recent museum, City Sounds, in the grand former Butchers' Hall, visitors receive a palm PDA with stylus and headphones; key in a number and you can hear music appropriate to a picture or instrument on display; information about the exhibits can even be emailed to a computer at home. You have seen the future of museums!

Cultural Food offerings

Go to Lombardia in Lombardenvest and you may feel you've seen the future of food. Run by the effervescent Alain Indria whose grandfather cooked for the King of the Belgians, it combines all kinds of healthy, fresh foods in combinations that you're unlikely to have tasted. His juices and ginger tea are famous and unique, but his is one of hundreds of great restaurants, bars and cafés around a city that takes food seriously. But like so much of Antwerp, Alain's creations are certain to be a surprise. ■

AUTHOR | ANTHONY LAMBERT

Pavement café



Antwerp Train Station



Rubens House



Antwerp Skyline





Going to Ghent

Ghent nestles on the confluence of the rivers Scheldt and Leie and with its criss-crossing waterways, canals and magnificent old gabled buildings, is not only a photographer's dream but also a "real" city with a strong identity of its own, one where people live, work and play; a rebel city, no stranger to conflict – one of the last places in Gaul to accept Christianity, and one whose citizens have and still do challenge authority.

The introduction of the spinning Jenny was to revolutionise Ghent's textile industry both in cotton and linen – the water of the river Leie being suitable for retting flax. This coupled with the creation of a 33km canal linking the inland port to the west stretch of the Scheldt meant that larger vessels could berth and along with a thriving horticultural industry Ghent's prosperity was assured.

Its university has endowed it with a youthful vitality – witness the students rushing to lectures; its industrial sector has prevented it from becoming just a beautiful living museum; and its port, Belgium's second largest, with its influx of cargoes and crews from round the world has given it a cosmopolitan air. Its shops are full of a wide range of enticing things to buy and as night falls, Ghent comes to life again with its theatres, concert halls, cinemas, nightclubs and bars. ■

AUTHOR | ANNA HYMAN



Canals and old gabled buildings

GHENT TOURIST OFFICE

Belfort

Botermarkt 17A | Ghent

Tel.: +32 92 66 52 32

www.visitgent.be

“Must Do’s” in Ghent Fine Living

Most of us head first of all to St Michael’s bridge in an attempt to capture the perfect shot of the city’s three landmark towers along with the bustling waterfront before making our way to the massive St Bavo’s Cathedral. Its huge underground crypts are magnificent, but it is the painting of the van Eyck brothers, Jan and Hubert, in the De Villa chapel that draws the crowds. And the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* truly is worth seeing. It was painted between 1420-32 and is a massive work with some 240 characters in it. Look closely at the exquisitely painted landscape – 42 species of plants and flowers have been identified. Many people have tried to acquire it, one tried to burn it, one of its panels was stolen (it has been replaced by a copy) and in World War II it was moved to France, then to Austria where it was found by the Americans in a salt mine in 1945. Today it is kept behind glass for protection.

Even higher than the cathedral tower is that of the Belfry, topped by a dragon – a symbol of the wealth and power of the 14th century guilds. It is a handy landmark as the Tourist Information Office can be found in its basement.

The tower completing the trilogy is that of St Nicholas church, worth going into for a glimpse of its highly ornate altarpiece. Next to the church is the Town Hall, built in 1518 as the tallest in Europe, but for various reasons building stopped and was not resumed until the end of the 16th century, hence part of it is Gothic, the other, Renaissance.

Ghent also has a brooding castle complete with moat, arrow slits and turrets in its centre. It is the only medieval fortress in Flanders and over the centuries also served as a mint, court of justice, jail and a cotton mill. Some of the much restored castle is open to the public but the memories most of us take away are that of its torture museum and the fantastic view of the city from the keep.

Museums galore...

A more pleasant and attractive interior can be seen at the Design Museum also known as the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design. Inside the handsome 18th century building is a stunning collection of gleaming furniture, glittering chandeliers and objets d’art. In the new extension are examples of more modern design including art nouveau pieces by the likes of Victor Horta and Henri van de Velde. Ghent is studded with museums so it is just as well that visitors can buy a three-day museum card giving access to 14 of the most important museums and monuments.

When sightseeing on foot becomes too much there is the option of taking a ride through the streets in a horse-drawn carriage or taking to the water for a cruise

along Ghent’s picturesque waterways. The latter reveal to their best advantage the superb gabled buildings, which once belonged to the guilds. If it is a clear, sunny day make sure you have your camera with you for when the guildhalls are reflected in the still water beneath them it is magical! Keep an eye open for the leaning 800-year-old Grain Weighers’ House – it was actually built that way to facilitate the raising of grain sacks.

A foodie heaven

Ghent is a great place for foodies. A good starting point is the Groot Vleeshuis, where, beneath the medieval wooden beams of the old meat market, is a tasting hall where you can both enjoy a meal and purchase delicious regional products.

There are lots of interesting restaurants many of them in the tangle of medieval cobbled lanes that make up the Patershol area. If you see “waterzooi” on the menu do try it. It is pure comfort food, a sort of soup-stew made with leeks, carrots, celery, parsley and potatoes and either chicken or fish.

If you are looking for chocolates to take home you can both buy and see them being made in Luc Van Hoorebeke’s shop close to the cathedral. If your sweet tooth still hasn’t been satisfied then head for Temmerman on the Kraanlei to purchase almost every type of confectionary imaginable. Some of us prefer savouries, however, and we wouldn’t dream of leaving Ghent without a visit to the Groentenmarkt and Tierentyn. Here you can buy all manner of preserves and spices but the shop is most famous for its delectable homemade mustards.

Abound with activity

There is always something going on in Ghent from the lively markets selling anything from crafts to produce to bric-a-brac to music and events. If you are in Ghent in the second half of July you will find yourself drawn into the 10-day Ghent Festivities when this liveliest of cities erupts with sheer joie de vivre. And that is why Ghent is so special for me – a city proud of its rich heritage and its vibrant present, yet one that is also reaching out to its future. ■

AUTHOR | ANNA HYMAN



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- 1 | *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*
- 2 | *Vrijdagmarkt*
- 3 | *Views of the Belfry Tower*
- 4 | *A pub at every corner*

Leuven the City



Leuven's Beguinage

© M. De Lausnay

Beer has been brewed in Leuven since 1366. Today it is home to InBev of Stella Artois fame and the family brewery pub Domus as well as some 178 restaurants, 241 cafes and a claim to “Europe’s longest bar”. An attraction indeed!

A rich Heritage

Leuven is a city with vitality and a cosmopolitan air that complements its beautiful old buildings and rich heritage. Its university, founded in 1425, attracts students from all over the world and its science library is one of the largest in Europe.

Some of the students and professors are fortunate enough to live in what could be considered to be some of the most charming student accommodation, the beautifully preserved red brick Great Beguinage. It is now an enchanting town within a town consisting of some 70 small houses, cobbled streets, gardens and canals where once lived the Beguines, women who became lay sisters and followed a life of religious instruction. In 2000 it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Flamboyant Buildings

Leuven’s Town Hall in the Great Market Square dates back to 1439, and is the most wonderful example of the flamboyant Gothic style of architecture with its exuberant corner and ridge turrets,

oriel and balustrade. Each of its three floors is decorated with niches, each sheltering one of 236 statues. Opposite the Town Hall stands ancient St Peter’s church and in its Treasury you can find two of the most famous Flemish masterpieces – The Last Supper and The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus by Dirk Bouts.

Green Leuven

Leuven is also a relaxingly “green” city with delightful places like Park Abbey with its lakes, the grounds of Arenberg Castle and the Botanical Garden with its restored Orangery and hot houses full of exotic blooms. Whilst to the south of the city are the nature reserves of the Meerdaal forest and Heverlee wood.

Master Brewers

It is the brewing of beer that played an important role in Leuven’s prosperity. Records from 1366 show the name of a brewery Den Horen, which two centuries later had developed into the most important commercial enterprise in Leuven. Den Horen was eventually to come under the control of a master

brewer, one Sebastien Artois. The “Stella” came about in 1926 when the brewery produced a barley beer called Stella (star). Nowadays the variety of beer on offer is plentiful and you can even be forgiven for substituting wine for beer with your meal! ■

AUTHOR | ANNA HYMAN

Leuven is easy to reach by car, bus or train. Located only 20 mins by train from Brussels. This university town is only a 15 minute train ride from Brussels International Airport.

LEUVEN TOURIST OFFICE STADHUIS

Grote Markt | 3000 Leuven
Tel.: +32 16 21 15 39
www.leuven.be

Open all year Mon to Sat from 10am. to 5pm. Also open Sundays from 10 am. to 5 pm. from 1 March to 31 October.
Closed on public holidays.

Melodious Mechelen

The strains of *Yellow Submarine* were ringing out over the rooftops of Mechelen. We were well aware that the city was famous for its carillon bells but had expected something rather more sedate and in keeping with the elegant, gracious and noble buildings of this once capital of the Low Countries than something by the Beatles.

The majority of carillons ring out from belfries, but in Mechelen the most celebrated carillon – two sets of 49 bells and a seven-bell unit, totalling some 80 tonnes – is in the tower of St Rombout's cathedral, said to be the most beautiful tower in Flanders. Begun in 1452 plans were made for it to reach 548ft but in 1521 this plan was dropped. However, it is still an impressive 318ft high and there are 514 steps if you climb it for the view from the top.

Mechelen began as a lakeside community in prehistoric times but its Golden Age was under the Dukes of Burgundy in the 15th and 16th centuries after Charles the Bold established his Court of Accounts here. However, it was thanks to Margaret of Austria that the town really achieved fame and prosperity. Margaret, attracted the greatest minds of the time to her court – men like Erasmus, Durer and Thomas More along with distinguished musicians, historians and painters. She built many mansions; one, her palace on the Keizerstraat, is open to the public and well worth a visit. As is the Busleyden museum, housed in a splendid medieval building with a wealth of paintings, furnishings, tapestries and sculptures.

Flanders reputation for exquisite lace and tapestry is justly deserved, and Mechelen produced some of the finest. Luckily the old traditions continue to this day. Lace making is still taught in the town and tapestries are woven in the De Wit Royal Tapestry Factory. On our tour we watched with admiration, the employees going through the painstakingly slow and skilful processes of manufacture, restoration and conservation.

No visit to Mechelen is complete without visiting the St John's church to see Rubens beautiful triptych *The Adoration of the Magi*; it is said that his first wife posed for the Virgin's face. Another must-do museum is the Toy Museum on the Nekkerspoel. It is enchanting and we spent ages there rediscovering our childhood favourite toys.

It was in a restaurant that we came across a delicious dish called Mechelen Cuckoo. Its name intrigued us but we were to discover that the cuckoo is really a chicken – a rather large variety with cutely feathered feet. Another speciality was the superb locally grown asparagus.

Our favourite way to end the day was to find a bar and sit with a Gouden Carolus beer from the local Het Anker brewery listening to the melodies from the carillon drifting over us and the rooftops of Mechelen. Perfect, just perfect. ■

AUTHOR | ANNA HYMAN



CARILLONS

A carillon, according to the dictionary, comes from an old French word 'quarregnon' meaning a peal of four bells. Early carillons were either played by hand or connected to a clock and set to play just as it was about to sound the hour. The discovery of a manual keyboard made it possible to increase the number of bells sounded. In Mechelen in 1583 the tone was improved by the use of a pedal board with base stops thus creating a much richer tone. Bell foundries are now capable of producing carillons of more than 47 bells – and one of the most famous towns for carillons is Mechelen, where there is even a school for bell-ringers.

Carillon concerts take place on Monday evenings from June to the end of September, other performances are held throughout the year at 11.30 am. on Saturdays and Mondays, and 3pm. on Sundays.

MECHELEN TOURIST OFFICE

In and Out Mechelen
Hallestraat 2-4
Tel.: +32 70 22 28 00
www.inenuitmechelen.be



Ypres Pilgrimage

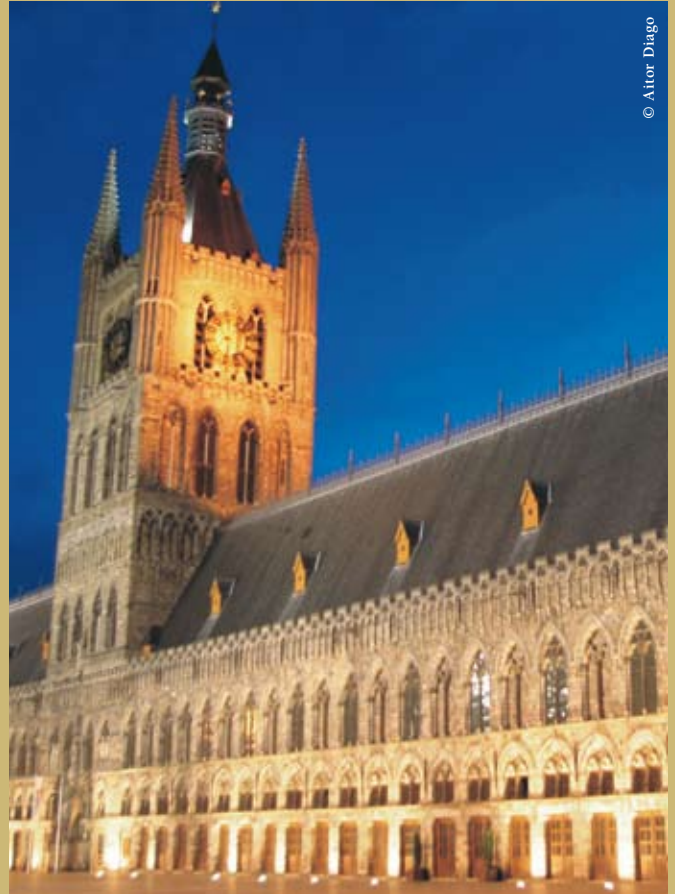
Forever Honoured

It's 7.45pm and I'm in the picturesque Flemish town of Ypres. At the entrance to the town square, small groups gather under the massive archway of the Menin Gate. The police close the road on either side of the arch and then, spot on eight o'clock, three uniformed figures, bugles in hand, march smartly to the centre of the street. They raise an arm in salute and the first haunting notes of *The Last Post* ring out. At the Menin Gate, whatever the weather, the town remembers the sacrifices made by soldiers during World War I.

In memory of the brave...

Some of the bloodiest battles of the war took place around Ypres. The town's folk have sworn to pay tribute to the memory of the dead and injured in what was one of the greatest battles in history. And, for almost 80 years, with the simple nightly ceremony at the Menin Gate, they have been as good as their word. The ceremony is an integral part of the town's way of life. In those 80 years, it has taken place every day except for the time between 1940-44, when the German occupation of Belgium during World War II made it an impossibility. Apart from the ceremony, there are other things to see at the Menin Gate. Climb the steps at the gate leading up to the ramparts and there's a bronze plaque, unveiled in 1993, recognising the great contribution made by Australian troops during the war.

The In Flanders Field Museum is housed in the Cloth Hall, one of the most splendid Gothic-styled buildings in Belgium, in the main square – the Grote Markt – and stands as a lasting tribute to those terrible times. Since



the museum opened in April 1998, more than two million people have passed through its doors. The twin themes of the museum, which has won a tourism award from the British Guild of Travel Writers, are “remember and relive”. The permanent exhibition highlights the preparations for war, the destruction, and the fragile peace that followed. More particularly, it details events in the Salient, the frontline around Ypres, where alone there were more than half a million casualties.

Daily reminders of the past

If life in Ypres is inexorably caught up in World War I, it is understandable. The whole town was raised to the ground during the war, so the buildings that stand today are painstaking copies of their illustrious predecessors. Almost on a daily basis farmers are still digging up an “iron harvest” of unexploded World War I shells in and around Ypres. But that doesn't detract from the charm of the place.

There is no feeling of gloom in the cafés and bars in and around the Grote Markt, as locals and visitors alike savour a glass of beer in the shadow of the 300ft-plus spire of St. Martin's Cathedral. In the cathedral, the harmonious meeting of styles reflects the period in which the original building went up – between the 13th and 15th centuries.



© D. de Kievit

Behind a glass screen in the apse are a number of tombs including that of Bishop Cornelis Jansen, who caused uproar in the Catholic Church in the 17th century with his controversial thesis on predestination and died of the plague in 1634. ▶



FACTFILES

Multi-cultural aspects of WWI

The armies of four nations dominated the front in Flanders: the German Empire, France, the British Empire and Belgium. Most of the soldiers belonged to one of these four national armies. However, the colonial superpowers of France and the British Empire deployed large groups of almost all their colonies in the conflict. It was not uncommon to find soldiers from China, Africa and India on the battlefields. All of whom were present in the name of their colonial master. At the front in the Westhoek and in the Hinterland there are traces of at least fifty different cultures involved in the battles. Today of course, a stark reminder of their participation in the Great War can be found in the various cemeteries and memorials.

Authentically reconstructed

With the cobbled streets and beautifully restored buildings, it's almost as if the events of World War I never took place. My stroll around the town took me past the 17th century facades of the guild houses on the Veemarkt to the Gothic gabled Biebuyck House, which miraculously escaped war damage, and finally to the town's ramparts, largely the work of the French engineer Vauban.

The signposted route along the ramparts, the best preserved in Belgium, takes you for 2.6 kilometres past bastions, advanced redoubts, moats and walls, and along the way 23 information panels provide you with the highlights.

If you're looking for a place to eat, Hotel-Restaurant Regina at Grote Markt 45, is a good place to sample typical Belgian food. Nearby, next to the In Flanders Fields Museum, Old Tom at

Grote Markt 5, serves beautifully presented fusion food in quaint surroundings. For shopping Ypres offers a good choice of chocolate shops, high street fashion shops and of course its market held on the Grote Markt every Saturday morning selling local produce.

Battlefield Reminders

Outside Ypres, the Flanders countryside unfolds as pancake-flat as the English Fens. The Ypres salient, which lies to the north east of the town, saw some of the fiercest fighting and it's here where "the poppies grow, between the crosses, row on row" and where many of the 170 war cemeteries can be found. No place is more poignant than the scarred landscape of Hill 60, which has been left untouched since massive mines were detonated in 1915 and again in 1917.

Tyne Cot Cemetery, which has a new visitor centre, is the largest British

Commonwealth war cemetery in the world. Sitting on a plateau with the towers of Ypres clearly visible in the distance, it takes its name from the Northumberland infantrymen who tried to take the ridge and who thought the German bunkers positioned here looked like Tyneside cottages. The screen wall at the back contains the names of 34,957 missing soldiers and the visitor centre is a mini museum with information about the Tyne Cot landscape.

Among other places worth visiting are the Memorial Museum at Passchendaele, where you're guided through the five battles of Ypres through authentic photographs, historical material and several vivid dioramas. The museum, overlooking a lake in the village of Zonnebeke, a few kilometres from Ypres, also has a reconstructed trench in the basement of what was once a chateau.



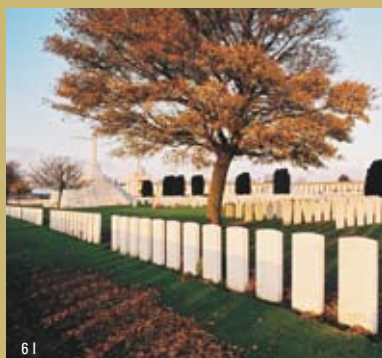
11 In Flanders Field Museum exhibit
21 Poperinge's Talbot House

31 Buglers at the Last Post
41 View of Ypres's Cloth Hall
51 Ypres Ramparts

Cheerful Respite

Talbot House in Poperinge is one of the most emotive sites of the Great War in Flanders. It was here that the Rev. Philip “Tubby” Clayton opened a soldiers club named after Gilbert Talbot, who was killed at Hooge in 1915. More than half a million soldiers visited the club to play the piano and borrow books, thus providing them with a brief escape from the brutality of the war. The Talbot House chapel has remained untouched since 1918. There could be no more fitting tribute to the casualties of the war.... ■

AUTHOR | TIM WARE



61



71

61 Tynecot Cemetery

71 A view from the Menin Gate arch

MUSEUMS

THE IN FLANDERS FIELDS MUSEUM

Cloth Hall
Grote Markt 34
Tel.: +32 57 239 220
www.inflandersfields.be

MEMORIAL MUSEUM PASSCHENDAELE

Ieperstraat 5
B-8980 Zonnebeke
Tel.: +32 51 77 04 41
www.passchendaele.be

TALBOT HOUSE IN POPERINGE

Gasthuisstraat 43
8970 Poperinge
Tel.: +32 57 33 32 28
www.talbothouse.be

TYNECOT CEMETERY AND VISITOR CENTRE

Tyne Cot Cemetery is located 9 kilometres north east of Ieper town centre, on the Tynecotstraat, a road leading from the Zonnebeekseweg (N332).
www.greatwar.be

RAMPARTS WAR MUSEUM

Rijfseestraat 208
8900 Ypres
Tel.: +32 57 20 02 36

MUST SEE

MENIN GATE AND LAST POST CEREMONY

Every day at 8pm. under the Menin Gate in Ypres
www.lastpost.be

YORKSHIRE TRENCH AND DUG OUT

Located in the industrial zone along the Ypres-Yzer canal not far from Boezinge Lock. Always open and free access from sunrise to sunset.

HILL 60

Zwartheleenstraat 40 | 8902 Zillebeke
Scarred landscape with mine craters.

TOURING AROUND YPRES

Cycles can be rented in the municipal camping ground from March to mid November.
Jeugdstadion | Bolwerkstraat 1
Tel.: +32 57 21 72 82
www.jeugdstadion

THE PEACE ROUTE

This is a 45 km cycle route which starts and finishes in Ypres. The route follows the pres Salient, the arched frontline around Ypres and takes you via various battlefield sites including Tyne Cot, Langemark German Cemetery and the Essex Farm Cemetery. Maps are available from the Tourist Office.

THE RAMPARTS ROUTE

This signposted route is 2.6 km long and provides an enjoyable and leisurely 90 minute walk through the city of Ypres and its surrounding areas.

TOURIST OFFICE

YPRES TOURIST OFFICE

Cloth Hall | Grote Markt 34 | 8900 Ypres
Tel.: +32 57 23 92 20
www.ieper.be

Guided group tours can be booked through the tourist office at least a week in advance.

For more information contact toerisme@ieper.be

Opening Hours:

1 April – 30 September

Mon-Fri 9.00 to 18.00

Sat-Sun 10.00 to 18.00

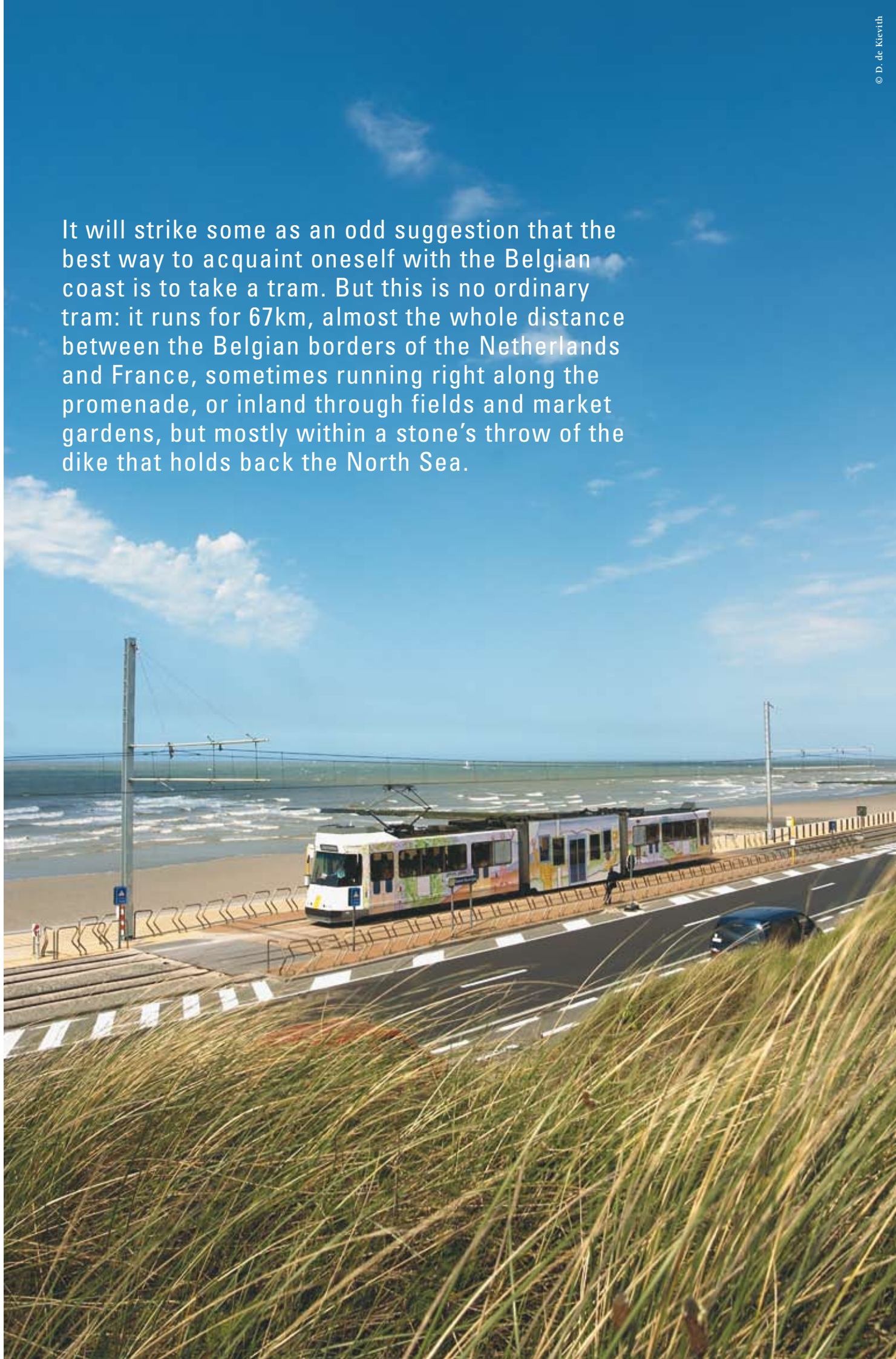
1 October – 31 March

Mon-Fri 9.00 to 17.00

Sat-Sun 10.00 to 17.00

Closed on Christmas and New Years Day.

It will strike some as an odd suggestion that the best way to acquaint oneself with the Belgian coast is to take a tram. But this is no ordinary tram: it runs for 67km, almost the whole distance between the Belgian borders of the Netherlands and France, sometimes running right along the promenade, or inland through fields and market gardens, but mostly within a stone's throw of the dike that holds back the North Sea.



The Flemish Coast

Coastal Gems

At the Flemish Coast....

There are about 70 stops on the coastal tram route and a full journey takes 2 hours 20 minutes so it's best to choose between dozens of reasons to break the journey. Even in winter there's a tram every 20 minutes for most of the day, and in the summer it's much busier, ferrying people to their favourite beach along the coast.

Style at the sea

For the fashion-conscious, the eastern end is a mecca. The resort of Knokke-Heist close to the Dutch border is the most exclusive on the coast, a place to be seen amid shops devoted to the latest clothes and even jewellery for pooches. Property may be expensive, but it's a proud boast that you can pick up designer-labelled items for a fraction of their price in London. Head for the central streets of Lippenslaan, Dumortierlaan and Kustlaan, and you'll be surrounded by 1,500 pretty exclusive shops to choose from. Should you need fortifying for a second round, there are 190 restaurants in the town, three of them with a Michelin star. Knokke-Heist's mayor has been behind the determination to maintain high standards of tidiness, and even the beach is cleaned every morning.

And what beaches they are along the coast – miles of golden, deep sand that make you wish you had a child with you and a good excuse

to buy a bucket and spade and relive childhood sandcastle-building days. For an idea of what the coastline once looked like before the development of resorts, stop off at the Seafront Zeebrugge maritime theme park, formed round the old covered fish market. You can't miss it as the tram passes the park's 100-metre-long Soviet submarine, which children love to explore and see how the 75 crew lived in their cramped metal cigar. The market has a fascinating exhibition about the coast with videos, models and interactive computers, and you can visit the lightship *Westhinder*. By the harbour mole is the St George Memorial to commemorate the British seamen who died during the operation in 1918 to block the entrance to the U-boat base by sinking ships.

Fashionable grandeur

There are some appealing Art Nouveau façades to engage the eye as the tram passes through Blankenberge, winding its way past a metal forest of masts, stays and clanking halyards in the harbour basin. Between Wenduine and De Haan, paths lead north through woods to the sea, accessed by halts with maps of the area to guide walkers to the shore. Some of the houses on the approach to the jewel of De Haan are dead-ringers for a Victorian gamekeeper's house in neo-Tudor style on an English estate.

Trees shade the pavements of the gently curving streets

If you have time to stop only once on the journey, it should be at De Haan. This lovely Belle Epoque resort is unique along the coast and once attracted Einstein for a holiday. A carefully planned development, it was built in the years immediately before and after the First World War, with strict rules about the use of materials, building height and density. It also incorporated English landscaping ideas, and the result remains a delight thanks to the care the town has taken to retain its character. Alight at the 1902 station, now home to a tourist office, and you are immediately taken back almost a century. In front of you are the imposing corner polygonal towers of the triangular Grand Hotel Belle Vue, all faux timber-framing and balconies. Trees shade the pavements of the gently curving streets, which lead up to the pedestrianised promenade along the front. On the other side of the tracks from the station is the excellent L'Espérance Restaurant in a beautifully detailed house of 1903. Beyond you can walk or cycle to the picturesque polder villages of Vlissegem and Klemskerke where you can enjoy a beer sitting outside in wicker chairs among tubs of geraniums. ▶



11 Harbour at Sunset



21 Beachhouses

31 Cafés in Ostend

On the outskirts of Ostend, there's a stop at Duin en Zee beside Earth Explorer where you can see and feel how earth, wind, fire and water have shaped our world, with over 50 interactive experiments. Passing the tall thin lighthouse, the tram twists and turns round the docks and some elegant neoclassical warehouses, recalling Ostend's golden age as both the country's most important port and one of Europe's most stylish resorts. Known as the Queen of the Belgian Resorts, it attracted royalty, including Queen Victoria. The steamer service from Dover inaugurated in 1843 brought in British visitors and the front became lined with chandeliered hotels.

In the inner harbour are two ships open to visitors: the three-masted 1932 sail training ship *Mercator* and the 0.129 *Amandine*, the last Ostend trawler to fish around Iceland. The tram squeezes right through the city centre and out past the monumental Art Deco Thermae Palace Hotel, which opened in 1933 with a gallery 390 metres long.

At Middelkerke the tram turns inland to weave through market gardens to reach Nieuwpoort and the huge memorial to King Albert I, sited here because it was at this canalside town that the German advance was halted in 1914. The British who fell in Belgium during that war are commemorated by a nearby monument, guarded by four lions.

Past a large area of dunes, the tram comes to Oostduinkerke, where a display of shrimp fishing from horseback, hauling triangular nets

through the water, is laid on during the summer months. St Idesbald was home to the surrealist painter Paul Delvaux, whose canvases depicting dreamy nudes amid nocturnal railway landscapes are unforgettable. His house and studio now form a museum of his work.

Journey's end at De Panne brings one to a resort just as popular as Knokke Heist with attractions such as the Plopsaland theme park and its numerous rides. It was from the beaches between De Panne and Dunkirk that the British army was evacuated in 1940.

With happy symmetry, the borders with both the Netherlands and France lie in nature reserves rich in birdlife and reached by footpaths along the sea. ■

AUTHOR | ANTHONY LAMBERT

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE FLEMISH COAST:

www.flemishcoast.co.uk

Tickets for the Coastal tram can be purchased in advance and offer concessionary rates for infants, children and the elderly.



Beach umbrellas adorn the sandy flats

Mussels and More

From chips in a paper cornet to Michelin-starred restaurants you'll always eat well in Flanders. Look at a painting by Breugel and you are almost certain to spot people feasting. In this respect things in Flanders haven't changed much since the Middle Ages.

It is after all a country that has more Michelin stars per capita than France. Perhaps this love of fine cuisine was a result of Dutch, French, Austrian and Spanish invaders bringing with them their favourite dishes and culinary styles, and traders bringing with them spices from the East. Maybe it is the excellent local produce. One thing is for sure you are never far from a good and usually hearty meal in Flanders. Choose from traditional Flemish restaurants or go ethnic. Look out for restaurants offering great value plat du jour or even menu du jour.

Dishes of renown

Belgium is famous for its pork, ham or game dishes frequently featuring on menus in the guise of pates or terrines. There are delicious dishes such as carbonades, made with good Flemish beer, to say nothing of waterzooi – a casserole that seems to have originated in Ghent made from either chicken or fish and enriched with egg yolks and cream. But possibly the dish that most of us associate with the country is a fragrant, steaming bowl of mussels often served with crisp fries/frites.

Produce of Flanders

With the North Sea lapping Flanders shores seafood is an excellent choice. Eels in a chervil sauce are a speciality that must be tried. Visitors to Oostduinkerke are quite likely to see fishermen with their big, strong horses dragging nets to catch the grey shrimp that are often turned into croquettes.

Talented patisserie chefs produce vast arrays of the most glorious looking tarts, waffles and pastries as well as another speciality, speculaas, the cinnamon-flavoured biscuits that were once a Christmas treat but are now enjoyed throughout the year.

After that delicious meal

Some people don't have a sweet tooth but there are some 300 different varieties of local produced handcrafted cheeses to choose from. Keep your eye open for the excellent Passchendaele cheese.

And should, after that delicious meal, you feel like a digestif why not try a glass or two of jenever? But not too many, it can have a powerful kick! ■

Mouthwateringly tempting





Some of the world's leading designers famously originate from Flanders. Antwerp in particular has earned a reputation for being one of Europe's leading fashion capitals. Whether it is "off the peg" or a designer "one off" the perfect outfit is waiting for you to collect!

At the Cutting Edge of Fashion

At the Cutting Edge of Fashion

Not so long ago, 1987 to be precise, six young graduates from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts showed their collections at the London Fashion Week. They took the catwalks by storm and from then on the Antwerp Six, as a British fashion commentator named them – Dries van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, Walter van Beirendonck, Dirk Bikkembergs, Dirk Van Saene and Marina Yee – have been at the cutting edge of fashion putting Antwerp at the top of the list for avant-garde designs.

Five of the Antwerp Six, with the exception of Bikkembergs, have remained in Antwerp. Ann Demeulemeester is noted for her almost timeless, sensuous often monochrome designs whilst Van Beirendonck's clothes are avant-garde to the extreme, being inspired by nature and technology. He has designed clothes for rock musicians U2. Van Noten favours colourful bohemian designs.

A visit to the fashion district mainly located between Nationalestraat and the Het Zuid quarter is a must, even if only to look at the windows of the designer showrooms. But it's not just the "big names" that show their new collections in Antwerp, many other fashion designers and lesser known labels are represented.

In 2001 a year long fashion exhibition was organised taking over Antwerp as one big fashion showcase. It made such an impact that it spawned a permanent fixture on the corner of Drukkerijstraat and Nationalestraat in the ModeNatie complex. It houses the Flanders Fashion Institute, the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and MoMu, the city's fashion museum. MoMu is always worth a visit as the exhibits are changed every six months. Serious fashion lovers should also consider heading for Antwerp in early September when the 10-day event, Vitrine, is held.

It has to be said that it is not only Flemish labels which are on sale in Antwerp, there are lots of good stores full of tantalising new, less avant-garde additions for the wardrobe at a wide range of prices.

Antwerp for serious fashion lovers

Brussels too!

It has to be said, however, that Brussels is making a bid for Antwerp's fashion crown with many boutiques opening up. It is so serious about it that it nominated 2006 as its Year of Fashion and Design. Brussels has also set up Modo Bruxellae, an organisation that is behind the bi-annual Designers' Trail, (next one 2008) displaying fashion shows, boutiques and other events held in Rue Antoine Dansaert over a weekend at the end of October.

Brussels is also home to a number of shops such as Stijl, Rue Antoine Dansaert, where you can still purchase and see examples of the work of some of the Antwerp Six along with other exciting designers. ■

MUSEUM TIP:

ModeNatie, the national fashion centre, comprises the Fashion Museum and the Flanders Fashion Institute.

MODENATIE

Nationalestaat 28
2000 Antwerpen
www.modenatie.com

THE DESIGNERS TRAIL

Brussels
Modo Bruxellae
www.bruxellae.be

11 A Walter van Beirendonck collection

21 Fish and Ships fashion shop in Antwerp



From Beer to Jenever

The historical trend

The quality of Flanders beer and jenever is excellent and with so many different varieties it is difficult to know which to try first.

Flemish beers are big and bold, smooth and silky ranging from well known world wide brands such as Stella Artois lager to the acquired taste of the lambics. The patron saint of brewers, St Arnold, appears to have set the trend for beer when the plague struck in the Middle Ages. He convinced people to drink beer, because it was boiled. It was a trend they quickly grew to enjoy varying the flavour with honey and spices, herbs and flowers.

A guide to beer

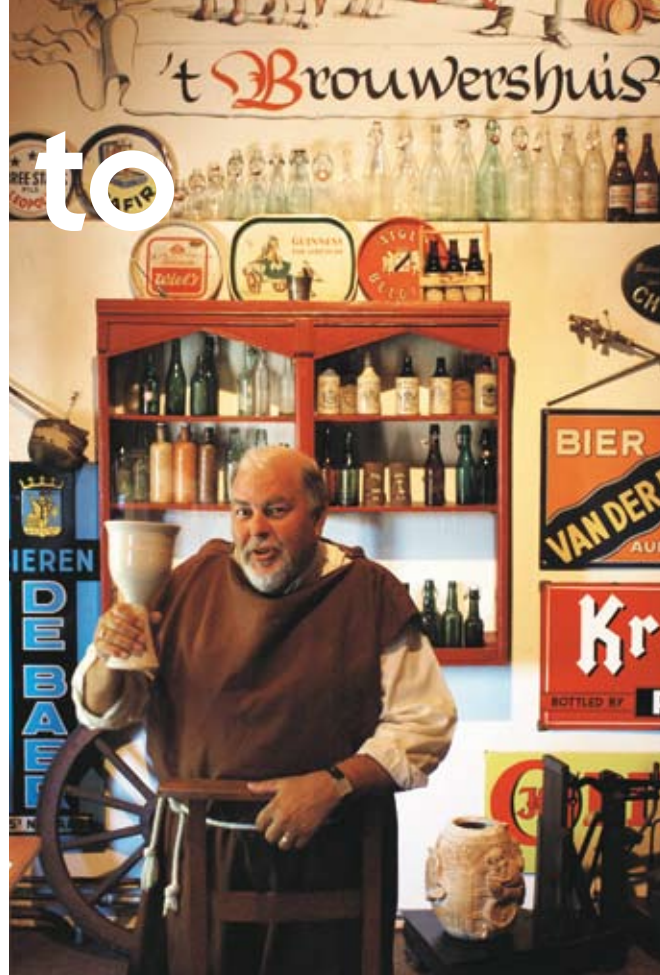
Trappist beers are those made by the monks of the strict Cistercian order. Today there are three abbeys/monasteries in Flanders producing it – Westmalle, Westvleteren and Achel. Look for the hexagonal logo with the words “Authentic Trappist Product”. These beers are top fermented with both high density and alcohol content (up to 12%) and tastes ranging from bitter to amber, hoppy to sweet. Other beers of a similar type are the *Abbey beers*, also delicious and with their own certified logo, but licensed out to breweries.

Bottom-fermented beers include all light-coloured beers of the Pilsner lager-style.

Geuze-Lambic considered to be the champagne of the beer world, is based on the skilled blending of one to three year old lambic beers. These beers are created by spontaneous fermentation when it comes into contact with a natural wild yeast and which produces a sharp, acidic flavour.

White beers are top-fermented made from 45% wheat, malted barley, hops, yeast and water. These thirst-quenching beers are of low alcohol content. It is pale and cloudy and often served iced with a slice of lemon.

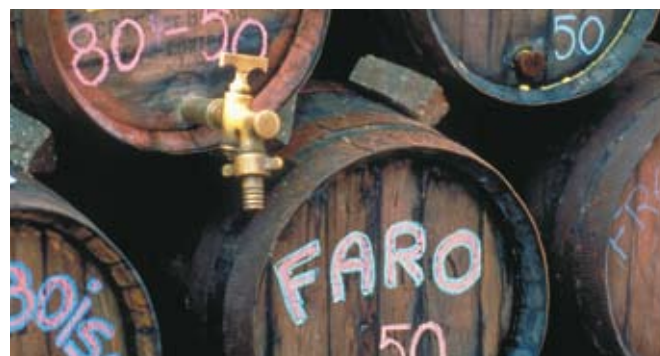
British-style ales are brewed from a UK recipe but adapted to suit local tastes and bear the word “Ale” on the label beside the name of the brewery.



And then there are countless fruit, blond, golden, amber or dark beers too! Not forgetting west Flanders “red” beers. Many beers are served in their own individual style glasses, like Pauwel Kwak, and some have wild and fanciful names such as Morte Subite, which translates into Sudden Death! In one Ghent bar they require customers ordering a glass of Kwak beer to hand over one of their shoes as a deposit. The glass is mounted on a special wooden frame and is much sought after by collectors!

The perfect accompaniment

With so many different styles and flavours the beers are not just for an evening's drinking, they are also to be enjoyed with meals. Indeed there are beers to suit each course, including desserts. Chefs also recognise the value of adding them to various dishes to add to the flavour and richness, such as Vlaamse Stoofkabonaden – a beef stew cooked with beer in much the same way as beef is cooked in red wine in other parts of Europe. The beer, and long, slow cooking makes for a rich and meltingly tender meal. Another example is Mechelen Cuckoo, a chicken dish to which beer is often added to enhance the flavour of its accompanying sauce.



Taste for yourself

Beer is taken so seriously in Flanders that there are many shops where you can purchase it to take home. A number of them even have tasting rooms so you can try before you buy. Some of the shops stock several hundred different varieties along with the appropriate glasses and all kinds of accessories.

A number of breweries welcome visitors, and as most tours end in a tasting room, very enjoyable tours they are too. There is a splendid one in Brussels – Musee Bruxellois de la Geuze – where visitors can make a self-guided tour through the Cantillon brewery to see how lambic beers are produced.

Today visitors to Flanders will find many specialist beer cafés offering extensive beer menus

But there are also some excellent beer museums elsewhere in Flanders. For instance there is the National Hop Museum in Poperinge, a small town close to Ypres used as a posting station for the soldiers heading to or from the Ypres Salient in WWI. Poperinge is also in the middle of the hop-growing region and the museum is housed in a renovated old hop storehouse. In Brussels there is a small museum in the basement of the brewers' guildhall conveniently located in the Grand' Place. Bruges is home to the Brouwerijmuseum, both a brewery and a museum. It was founded in 1856 by Henri Maes and produces Straffe Hendrik and Straffe Hendrik Blonde ales. Evidently the ales get their name from the family tradition of naming the first son of each generation Henri.

Needless to say in a region that produces so many different beers Flanders believes in celebrating and enjoying them in as many ways as possible. Brussels holds a regular beer weekend in the Grand' Place every September whilst Antwerp's celebration is in June.

MUSEUM TIP:

National Hop Museum
Gasthuistraat | 8970 Poperinge | Belgium
www.poperinge.be/hopmuseum
Tel.: +32 57 33 79 22

The Cantillon Brewery
Brussels Geuze Museum
Rue Gheude 56 | 1070 Anderlecht | Belgium
Tel.: +32 25 21 49 28
www.cantillon.be

And so to Jenever

Jenever, the fore-runner of what we call gin, dates back to the Middle Ages. It was traditionally medicinal made from grain spirits flavoured with juniper berries. Today fruit jenever have become increasingly popular and are delicious, though at 35-40% proof should be treated with respect. Look out for specialist jenever cafés, such as De Vagant in Antwerp and 't Dreupelkot in Ghent, and the excellent Flemish brand - Smeets. Hasselt in Eastern Flanders has produced jenever for centuries and houses the National Jenevermuseum, where at the end of the museum and distillery tour visitors can try a free sample. A jenever festival is held every October. ■

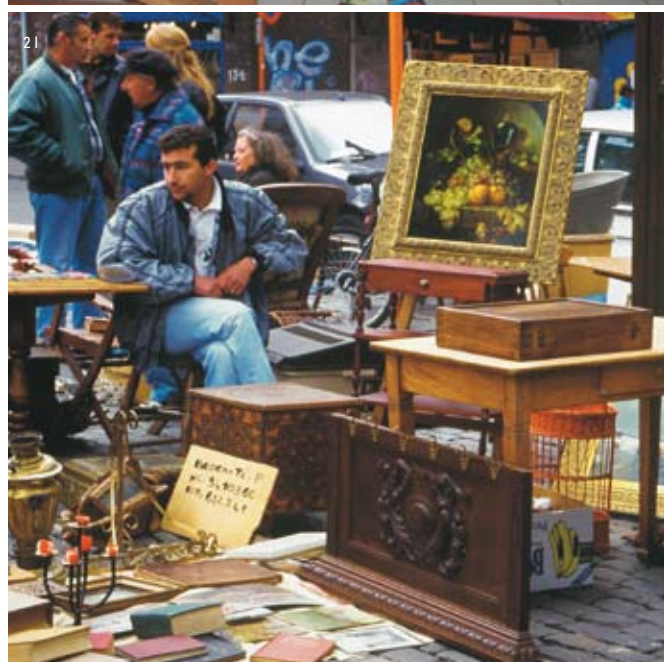


Shop Window

Flanders is a shopaholic's idea of heaven: think chocolate, diamonds, beer, jenever and fashion, to say nothing of the local food delicacies. All make terrific gifts or souvenirs to take back home but there are plenty of other items to look for as well.



11



21

Lace: Flanders, and Bruges in particular, has been famous for exquisite handmade lace for centuries. Kneedlepoint lace was made in the Flemish weaving cities in the 16th century followed a little later by the equally intricate bobbin lace. Both varieties require deft fingers and concentration to achieve the delicate final product. Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen were also centres for lace making and in fact Mechelen was one of the lace towns that developed its own intricate stitch. Not surprisingly handmade lace is very expensive so the majority of lace on sale is machine made. A revival of the traditional lace making skills is taking place and indeed lace making courses are becoming popular.

Tapestry: As with lace making so with tapestries, Flemish weavers led the field, especially those from Brussels and Mechelen. They are produced to this day in Mechelen at the Royal Tapestry Manufacturers De Wit.

Luggage and Leather: For good quality and style look out for handbags and purses bearing the mark "Delvaux". If you need an extra suitcase to bring your purchases home go for Flemish brands like Kipling or Hedgren.

**Markets galore,
with varieties to suit
every wallet, taste
and preference**

Bargain hunters bounty

Antiques: There are many antique shops in Flanders and especially Brussels. Try the shops in the Sablon district, or visit little shops on Rue Haute and Rue Blaes. If you are in Brussels over a weekend it is back to the Sablon district for in the Place du Grand Sablon you will find stall after stall selling anything from antiques to collectables to trinkets. Other weekend antique markets are St Jacobs in Ghent, or the Dijver in Bruges held March to October. The largest market in the Benelux region is held every Sunday in Tongeren, offering a large range of old curiosities and antiques and is a good place to find a bargain.

General Markets: Take your pick from the many permanent markets, touring markets, antique markets and flea markets. Highly recommended and selling lots of interesting food are Ghent's Sunday morning market in St Michielspleien and Antwerp's Vogelmarkt (6am-3pm Sat/Sun). For a really lively flea market don't miss the one on Place du Jeu-de-Balle, Brussels (daily am).

11 | Intricate Tapestries woven by De Wit

21 | Markets offer bargains galore and treasure troves.

Mustard and Sweets: Ghent is the city for anybody who loves sweets of all descriptions or different flavoured tangy mustards. Visit Tierenteyn-Verlent on Groentenmarkt for mustards and Temmerman on Kraanlei for confectionary.

Tintin: Devotees of Tintin should head for the Tintin Shop on Steenstraat, Bruges or Boutique Tintin, Rue de la Colline, Brussels. Many of the flea markets sell Tintin themed objects and collectables and those with a keen eye for this much loved character, can find such items in abundance. ■



Maasmechelen Village Outlet Shopping is an outlet shopping mall offering plenty of famous Flemish brands for discounted prices.

Bargain clothing, luggage and international designer labels are on sale with generous discounts here. Situated near the cities of Hasselt and Tongeren, it can be visited easily by car, train and bus.

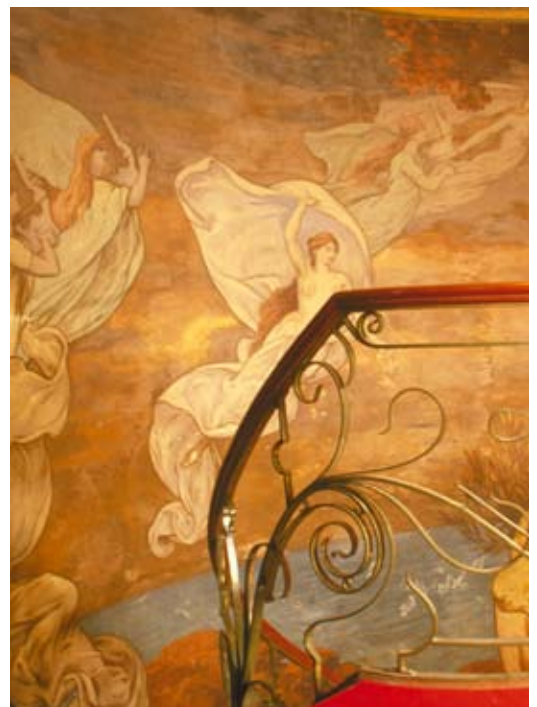
www.maasmechelenvillage.com

An Artistic Legacy

Flanders is noted for its fantastic architecture and artwork, a legacy from its monasteries and wealth created by trade.

Magnificent altarpieces abound, such as *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* by Jan and Hubert van Eyck in Ghent, whilst further examples of their work and other members of the Flemish Primitive school can be seen in Bruges. Many of Pieter Paul Rubens masterpieces are on display in Antwerp, where he lived for many years, founding a studio. Ruben's grand townhouse is open to the public and well worth a visit. More recently Brussels was where Rene Magritte, one of the world's most famous surrealist painters, trained. Excellent introductions to Flemish paintings can be seen in Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges at new permanent exhibitions called the Flemish Art Collection.

As with art, so with architecture and there can be few more beautiful buildings than Leuven's Town Hall, a sublime example of Flanders flamboyant Gothic style. Flemish builders and architects were to adapt Baroque architecture to suit their own tastes and prime examples can still be seen in Antwerp and in the guild houses on Brussels' Grand' Place. Later Brussels was to be at the forefront of the European movement known as Art Nouveau and examples of Victor Horta's works, and others, can be seen in a number of Flemish cities. ■



Chocolate Bliss

The One stop guide to Flemish Chocolate

Even non-chocoholics have been known to go weak at the knee at the sight and aroma of Belgian chocolate. Belgium is renowned world wide for its chocolate. There are so many shops selling chocolate in Flanders, you could almost be forgiven for thinking the streets are paved with this divine substance.

As with most things in life the better the chocolates the more expensive they are, but they are worth it. Belgian chocolates are made from cocoa paste, sugar and cocoa butter. Dark chocolate has the most cocoa, milk chocolate has added milk and white chocolate is when the butter is separated from the cocoa. The purer the cocoa butter the better the chocolate. Also the smoother the chocolate the better it is and it takes skill to recognise the exact point when the chocolate is at its best.

How is chocolate made?

It is said that the best beans are grown in an area a mere 20 degrees either side of the Equator. First of all the imported beans are blended, cleaned and roasted. The temperature of the roasting, to a large extent, has an influential role in the final flavour. From here the beans are ground releasing the cocoa butter along with a liquid pulp, the cocoa mass. This mass is then mixed, kneaded and refined before the conching process takes place. Conching is when the chocolate mass is kept constantly moving under heat and it is this treatment that produces silky smooth chocolate, to which is added cocoa butter.

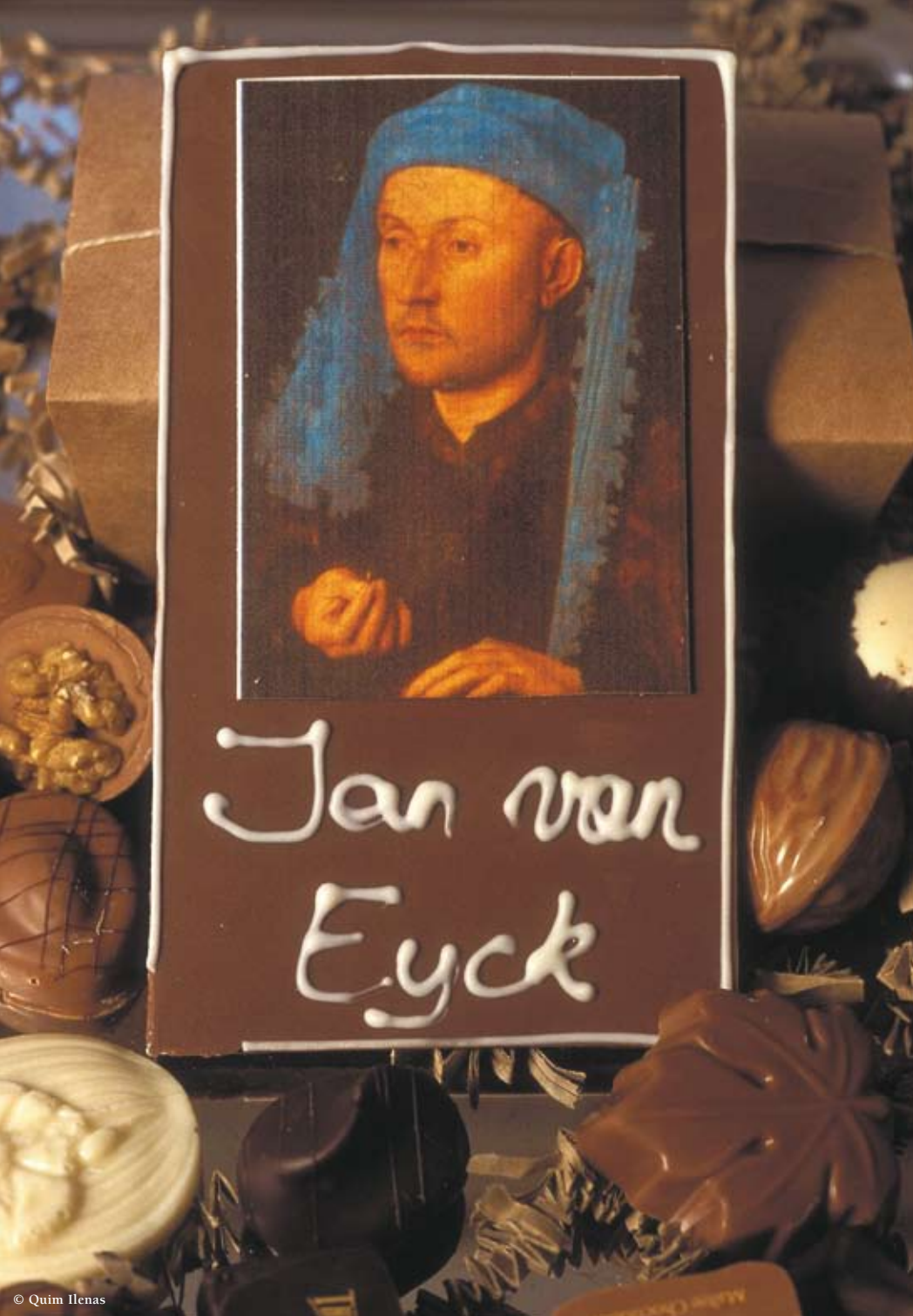
Over the years the fillings have become more and more adventurous and exotic – you might find jasmine tea or even broccoli for instance. However, good quality chocolates must be made with natural ingredients or spirits, no artificial flavourings. Many of the fillings use fresh cream as a base so don't expect these to keep, but that is rarely a problem with something so delicious.



It is fun to wander through the streets and wait until that heavenly aroma hits the nostrils, go into the shop, buy a couple and do your own tasting tests. Look for a smooth texture, good perfume and a lingering taste. If the texture is “gritty”, there is a smoky or rubbery smell or the taste vanishes quickly it is not the best quality.

Chocolates on display

Many chocolates come ready boxed but it is far more exciting to go into a shop and make your own selection. Tell the white-gloved assistant what size box (the boxes are known as ballotins) you require and work your way along the displays telling them which to pick. Apart from shop window displays of pralines it is not unusual to see amazing works of art all created out of chocolate. At Easter time you are quite likely to see giant rabbits or if you are in Brussels there might be a reproduction of part of the Grand' Place.



DID YOU KNOW?

IT IS GOOD FOR YOU TOO!

It is hard to believe that something so sinfully delicious can be good for you. In fact good quality, luxury chocolate is much healthier than ordinary chocolate as the craving is satisfied much more quickly, therefore, consuming less fat and sugar. It is also renowned as a high-energy food and contains useful amounts of potassium and magnesium along with some calcium, sodium and vitamins. It is also claimed that because it doesn't stick to teeth, it does less damage and it could also play a role in preventing and easing some health problems.

WHERE TO BUY

In Antwerp better-known brands to look for are Del Rey, Guylian and Burie. In Brussels Pierre Marcolini and Neuhaus.

In fact, Neuhaus's was the first chocolate shop to open in Brussels and created the first praline in 1912. In Ghent search out Van Hoorbeke. Look out for artisan chocolatiers, like Chocolatier Van Oost and Chocolate Line in Bruges.

MUSEUMS

CHOCO-STORY

THE CHOCOLATE MUSEUM

Wijnzakstraat 2
St Jansplein
B 8000 Bruges
Belgium

Tel.: +00 50 61 22 37
www.choco-story.be

Open daily from 10am. to 5pm. except public holidays and selected dates in January.

Chocolate, thanks to the skilled chocolatiers in Flanders, has moved on a long way from that day in the XVI century when the Aztec Emperor Montezuma, offered a drink of ground cocoa beans and spices to conquistador Cortes! ■



Diamonds Forever

With prices approximately 30% cheaper than in Britain it's not surprising that glittering and beautiful diamonds from Antwerp are "a girl's best friend".

Back in the days when trade routes were being established between India, then the world's only known diamond source, the trading port of Bruges, acquired a reputation for producing the fine gems from uncut stones. A reputation it might have retained but for the silting up of the river Zwin. Without its river, Bruges lost its trading power, which was taken over by Antwerp with its new and better facilities. Diamond cutters took their skills with them to the new city and honed their cutting expertise to such a degree that their services were much in demand from European royal households.

But, by the end of the 17th century, Amsterdam had overtaken Antwerp as Europe's commercial heart and also the centre of the diamond industry. Amsterdam kept the best stones for its own workers passing on the inferior, smaller ones to Antwerp. This, however, was to be the making of Antwerp as the diamond centre of the world for its

craftsmen learnt how to transform small, mediocre stones into exquisitely cut gems. With the discovery of diamonds in other countries and the increasing demand for gemstones, it seemed that Antwerp's future was assured. The 1930s depression and then World War II took their toll on the diamond trade. During the war years Jewish businessmen fled Belgium. 500 diamond dealers arrived in England bringing as much stock with them as they could. Following the city's liberation at the end of the war, the diamonds were returned to their owners and Antwerp's diamond trade and industry was revived.

The Antwerp Diamond Centre, home to 1500 diamond companies and four diamond bourses or exchanges, lies close by the central station in the Jewish Quarter and covers one square mile of the city, where incidentally you can also find some very good and characterful restaurants. Behind the facades of the buildings Antwerp sparkles, for it is

here that 70% of the world's diamonds are cut, polished or traded every year. Mostly we think of diamonds as being "white" but they can also be orange, brown, pink, green or blue in colour. And with prices approximately 30% cheaper than in Britain it makes sense to buy that "girl's best friend" from the city that specialises in the three "c's" of diamonds – cut, clarity and colour.

To learn more about the history of diamonds, the transformation from stone to a glittering piece of jewellery and maybe buy one visit Diamondland on Appelmansstraat. The Diamantmuseum on Koningin Astridplein is also well worth a visit and visitors to Bruges interested in the role that city played in the diamond trade in the Middle Ages should head for the Diamond Museum on Katelijnestraat. ■

Whats on in 2008

Here are some of the “must see” events taking place in 2008. Every year, the region of Flanders is immersed in a cornucopia of festivals, art and cultural exhibitions, special markets, fairs and concerts. The list is simply endless.

MARCH 1 2008

OSTEND

DEAD RAT BALL

This is a tradition that has been taking place for a century. A flamboyant costume ball for music lovers, held annually in the grandeur of the Ostend Casino.

APRIL 27 2008

MECHELEN – CITY CENTRE

HANSWIJK PROCESSION

Mechelen owes this annual procession venerating Our Lady of Hanswijk to a legend. This popular procession has since become an intriguing and colourful spectacle.

MAY 2008

BRUSSELS JAZZ MARATHON

SWING INTO SUMMER

Held every year, summer is hailed in and the whole of Brussels throngs to the pulsating tones of world Jazz!

JULY & AUGUST 2008

LEUVEN

BELEUVENISSEN & MARKTROCK

Internationally famous rock and pop names draw crowds from all over the world to these annual open air concerts. Beleuvenissen takes place on Friday nights throughout July and Markrock takes place in August for a week's festivities.

AUGUST 23-24 2008

BRUSSELS CENTRE

BRUSSELS BEER WEEKEND

Probably the best known of the many beer festivals held in the Flanders Region.

www.weekendelabiere.be

THE BRUSSELS FLOWER CARPET AUGUST 15-28 2008 BRUSSELS, GRAND PLACE WWW.FLOWERCARPET.BE

Every two years this flower display is re-created all over again and Europe's most beautiful square becomes even more alluring! Approximately 800000 flowers are arranged to produce a magnificent display of colour.



AUGUST, 15,16,18,20,22 AND 23 2008

BRUGES, VARIOUS LOCATIONS

CANAL FESTIVAL 2008

The triennial Canal Festival recreates the history of the city by means of eight spectacles along the magically lit Canals and on the Burg in the heart of Bruges.

MID AUGUST 2008

ANTWERP

FESTIVITIES

Antwerp is host to three crowd pullers in August.

The Rubens Market is a colourful "fancy dress" day market with market dwellers in full period costume.

Antwerp Taste Festival is a culinary open air food festival lasting a whole weekend. Held in the Groenplaats area, offerings include special menus from local restaurants and cafes with a chance to eat some authentic dishes from Antwerp.

Antwerp Sings is a chance to participate in a "mega sing-along" attended by an audience of over 40,000. It's like a giant karaoke concert !

SEPTEMBER 21 2008

POPERINGE, WEST FLANDERS

HOP PARADE

Every three years Poperinge organises this unique event which include 65 participating groups, 1,400 extras and 12 floats. It tells the history of the development of the beer industry in this hop growing centre of Flanders. Worth visiting for a cold beer afterwards!
www.poperinge.be/hoppefeesten

SEPTEMBER 21 2008

GHENT HISTORIC CENTRE

FLORALIES PROCESSION

This fabulous new procession through the streets of Ghent's historic centre tells the story of six centuries of ornamental plant cultivation and 200 years of Floralties in Flanders. A processional wonder.
www.floralien.be



© Tomtier

DECEMBER 2008

BRUSSELS, BRUGES, ANTWERP, GHENT, MECHELEN, LEUVEN, YPRES AND OSTEND

THE CHRISTMAS MARKETS

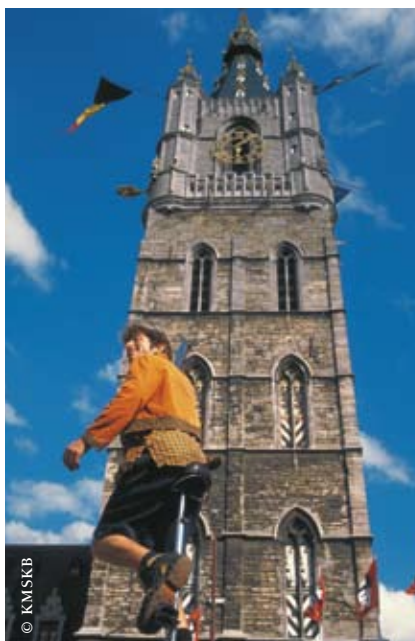
Every year, the whole of Flanders becomes alive with traditional Christmas markets selling gifts, Christmas delicacies and general yuletide shopping opportunities. Sip Gluwine or ice-skate in pretty city squares dazzling with Christmas finery – A truly magical experience!

WINTER 2008

BRUSSELS – PLACE ROYALE

THE OPENING OF THE RENE MAGRITTE MUSEUM

Some 200 works of this Brussels surrealist painter are due to be permanently displayed in a new neo-classical style museum on the Place Royale.



© KMSKB

GHENT FESTIVITIES

JULY 19-28 2008
GHENT

An annual 10 day cultural event in Ghent's city centre featuring international music festivals.

www.gentsefeesten.be

Practical Information

Getting there

By air

Brussels Airlines

www.brusselsairlines.com

VLM Airlines

www.flyvlm.com

British Midland

www.bmi.co.uk

British Airways

www.ba.com

Eastern Airways

www.easternairways.com

Ryanair

www.ryanair.com

Brussels International Airport

The airport is located 8 miles northeast

of the city centre. Taxis to the city centre cost in the region of £10. A train shuttle to Brussels runs every 20 mins costing approximate £2.00 one way.

www.brusselsairport.be

Antwerp Airport

Located approximately 4 miles from central Antwerp. Taxi's to the city centre cost approximately £10.00. A shuttle bus also connects from the airport railway station to the city centre in 20 minutes and costs £1.10 one way.

www.antwerpairport.be

By train from the UK

www.eurostar.co.uk

Eurostar operate from London St Pancras to Brussels South Station (Brussels Midi) at regular intervals on a daily basis. All rail tickets to Brussels are valid to any Belgian destination and

details for onward connections to other destinations in Flanders can be found on www.b-rail.be

London – Brussels via Eurostar:

1hour 51 mins

By Eurotunnel

Eurotunnel operate a channel tunnel rail link between Folkstone, Kent to Calais at regular intervals on a daily basis with up to 3 crossings an hour during peak hours. Journey time is 35 minutes.

To find out more information about Eurotunnel and book crossings see www.eurotunnel.com

By Ferry from the UK

P & O Ferries

A passenger ferry service exists with crossings 25 times daily between Dover and Calais taking approx 90 minutes. Driving time from Calais to Flanders is just 40 minutes. Daily services operate on their overnight mini-cruise ferry service from Hull to Zeebrugge with an approximate journey time of 7 hours www.poferries.com

Norfolk Line

This is a car ferry service with up to 24 daily crossings between Dover and Dunkerque. Journey time is approximately 2 hours. Driving time from Dunkerque to Flanders is just 25 minutes. www.norfolkline.com

Transeuropa Ferries

Operate a car ferry crossing 4 times daily between the ports of Ramsgate and Ostend. Crossing times is approximately 4 hours. www.transeuropaf ferries.com

Superfast Ferries

An overnight car passenger ferry operates 3 times weekly from the Scottish port of Rosyth to Zeebrugge. Crossing time is approximately 18 hours. www.superfast.com ▶



Driving

Major car rental companies request that drivers are a minimum of 25 years of age and the person hiring the car must have held a valid driving licence for at least one year (required on collection of the hire car).

Disabled Travellers

For information and advice for disabled travellers in Belgium see www.access-info.be

Domestic Train Travel

A comprehensive train network connects all of Flanders and Belgium. Regular train services operate between all major Belgian cities. National and international train passes can be purchased from all major stations for first and second class travel. Discounts exist for children under the age of 12 years, senior citizens (over 65 yrs) and off peak travel. For further information see www.b-rail.be

Travelling by Bicycle

Virtually all Flemish citizens own a bike and therefore it is not surprising that extensive cycle routes criss cross vast expanses of the Flemish countryside which offer flat and perfect cycling terrain. Bicycles can be hired inexpensively from most major towns and cities for further exploration of the countryside and towns. For more information about bicycle hire visit the tourist offices located in the centre of each destination. Bicycle route maps can be purchased in advance from www.manymaps.com

Official Holidays in 2008

1 January New Year's Day
23-24 March Easter
1 May Labour Day
2 May Ascension Day
11-12 May Pentacost
11 July Flanders Day Holiday
21 July Independence Day
15 August Assumption
1 November All Saints' Day
11 November Armistice Day
25 December Christmas Day

Time Zone

GMT + 1 Hour

Languages

Dutch (Flemish) but English and French are widely spoken.

Currency

The Euro. Visit our website for the daily exchange rate. Money can be changed in banks, at airports, at main railway stations. Money can be easily withdrawn from the numerous ATMs found in major towns and cities.

Tips

Tips and gratuities are included in the price for all taxis and restaurants. However an additional gratuity is always welcome for exceptional service.

Shopping Hours

Monday to Saturday: 10am – 6pm
Shops are closed on Sundays and public holidays apart from weekend markets

and some popular tourist spots. Smaller shops may close at lunchtime.

Banks and Post Office

Normal banking hours are Monday-Friday 9am to 4pm and closed Saturday, Sundays and Public Holidays. Some banks close during lunch hours.

Post offices are open from 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday Stamps can be purchased from newsagents and souvenir shops.

Telephone and Area codes

To call Belgium from the UK

Dial 00 32 (country code) + City code (without 0) + telephone no.

Calling within Belgium

Always dial (0) + city code + telephone no.

Area Codes

Brussels	2
Antwerp	3
Bruges	50
Ghent	9
Leuven	16
Mechelen	15
Ostend	59
Ypres	57

COLOFON

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Raymonda Verdyck
Grasmarkt 61 – 1000 Brussels

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