



Belgium

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Best Places to Eat

- » Den Gouden Harynck (p146)
- » House of Eliott (p141)
- » L'Ogenblik (p126)

Best Places to Stay

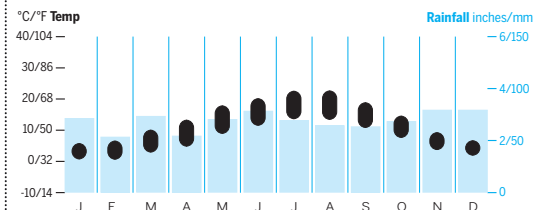
- » Guesthouse Nuit Blanche (p145)
- » Chambres d'Hôtes Verhaegen (p140)
- » Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce (p146)
- » Hotel Julien (p134)

Why Go?

Stereotypes of comic books, remarkable beers and sublime chocolates are just the start in this eccentric little country, whose self-deprecating people have quietly spent centuries producing some of Europe's finest art and architecture. Bilingual Brussels is the dynamic yet personable EU capital, but also sports what's arguably the world's most beautiful city square. Flat, Dutch-speaking Flanders has many other alluring medieval city cores, all easily linked by regular train hops. In hilly, French-speaking Wallonia, the attractions are contrastingly rural – castle villages, outdoor activities and extensive cave systems that prove a major draw for Dutch caravanners but are hard to fully appreciate by public transport. War buffs will find Belgium full of moving battlefield sites from all eras. And anyone with a love of the good life will quickly come to appreciate a country where cafe-culture is king and fine food is almost a birthright.

When to Go

Brussels



Pre-Easter week-ends Belgium hosts many of Europe's weirdest carnivals, not just at Mardi Gras.

Mid-June Scenes from the battle are recreated at Waterloo by uniformed armies of volunteers.

Mid-Aug, even years Brussels' Grand Place hosts an ornate, multi-coloured 'carpet' of flower petals.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** euro (€)
- » **Languages** Dutch, French, German
- » **Money** ATMs common; credit cards widely accepted
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 30,278 sq km
- » **Population** 10.4 million
- » **Capital** Brussels
- » **Telephone** country code ☎32; international access code ☎00
- » **Emergency** ☎112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.74
Canada	C\$1	€0.74
Japan	¥100	€0.87
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.56
UK	UK£1	€1.16
USA	US\$1	€0.67

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel double** under €60
- » **Two-course dinner** from €25
- » **Museum entrance** €2–8.50
- » **Beer** (in a bar) €1.90
- » **City transport ticket** €1.70

Resources

- » **Belgium** (www.belgium.thelaceto.be)
- » **Brussels** (www.visitbrussels.be)

Connections

Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne and London are all under 2½ hours from Brussels by high-speed train. Liège and Antwerp are also on high-speed international routes. Go via Tournai or Ghent to reach France by train if you want to avoid such lines and their compulsory reservations (or if you have a railcard that requires it). Budget airlines offer cheap deals to numerous European destinations particularly from Charleroi.

ITINERARIES

Four Days

Just long enough to get a first taste of Belgium's four finest 'art cities': Bruges, Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp, all easy jump-offs or short excursions while you're train-hopping between Paris and Amsterdam. Bruges is the fairy-tale 'Venice of the north'. Ghent has similar canal-side charms without the tourist hordes, and Brussels' incomparable Grand Place is worth jumping off any train for, even if you have only a few hours to spare. Cosmopolitan Antwerp goes one further, adding in fashion and diamonds. If you're overnighing make sure to hit Brussels on a weekend and Bruges on a weekday to get the best deals on accommodation.

Ten Days

Add an extra night in each of the above and consider stops in the moving WWI sites of historic Ypres, hopping to Antwerp via Leuven, Mechelen and Lier, and possibly driving around rural Wallonia to visit a selection of fascinating caves and castles.

Essential Food & Drink

Classic, home-style Belgian dishes include the following:

- » **Ballekes/bouletten** Meatballs.
- » **Chicons au gratin** Endive rolled in ham and cooked in cheese/béchamel sauce.
- » **Croquettes de crevettes grises** Like fish cakes, but containing tiny, highly flavoured North Sea shrimps.
- » **Filet Américain** A blob of raw minced beef, typically topped with equally raw egg yolk.
- » **Mosselen/moules** Steaming cauldrons of in-the-shell mussels, typically cooked in white wine and served with a mountain of *frites* (chips).
- » **Paling in 't groen** Eel in a sorrel or spinach sauce.
- » **Stoemp** Mashed veg-and-potato dish.
- » **Vlaamse stoverij/carbonade flamande** Semi-sweet beer-based beef casserole.
- » **Waterzooi** A cream-based chicken or fish stew.

BRUSSELS

POP 1.03 MILLION

Like the country it represents, Brussels (Bruxelles, Brussel) is a surreal, multilayered place pulling several disparate identities into one enigmatic core. It subtly seduces with great art, tempting chocolate shops and classic cafes. Meanwhile a confusing architectural smorgasbord pits awesome art-nouveau and 17th-century masterpieces against shabby suburbanism and the disappointingly soulless glass-faced anonymity of the EU area. Note that Brussels is officially bilingual, so all names – from streets to train stations – have both Dutch and French versions, but for simplicity we use only the French versions in this chapter.

Sights

CENTRAL BRUSSELS

Although Brussels is very spread out, most key sights and numerous unmissable cafes are within leisurely walking distance of the fabulous Grand Place.

Grand Place

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Brussels' incomparable central square tops any itinerary. Its splendidly spired Gothic **Hôtel de Ville** was the only building to escape bombardment by the French in 1695, quite ironic considering that it was their main target. Today the pedestrianised square's splendour is due largely to its intact collection of **guildhalls**, rebuilt by merchant guilds after 1695 and fancifully adorned with gilded statues. Several now host tempting **cafes**, though similarly historic drinking spots are somewhat less expensive around the nearby **Bourse** (Map p122). That's Brussels' 1873 stock exchange whose neoclassical stone facade features sculptures by the young Rodin. A block northeast of Grand Place, the 1847 **Galleries St-Hubert** (Map p122; www.galleries-saint-hubert.com) was Europe's first shopping arcade and remains a must-visit. Enchantingly colourful lanes of close-packed fish restaurants lead south from here down the **Rue des Bouchers**, but beware that (with some exceptions) many are notorious tourist traps (see p126).

Manneken Pis

MONUMENT

Making a suitably surreal national symbol, the **Manneken Pis** (Map p122) is a diminutive fountain in the form of a little boy cheerfully taking a leak into a fountain pool. Sexual equality is ensured by his lesser-known squatting sister, the **Jeanneke Pis**

(Map p122; www.jeannekepisofficial.be; Impasse de la Fidélité).

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts ART MUSEUM (Map p122; www.fine-arts-museum.be; Rue de la Régence 3; adult/student/BrusselsCard €8/2/free; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Belgium's premier collection of both ancient and modern art is remarkably well endowed with works by Flemish Primitives, the Breugel (Breughel) family and Rubens. However, many rooms are currently closed for long-term renovation. Headphones (for English explanations) cost an extra €2.50; special exhibitions also cost extra. A €13 combination ticket includes the Magritte Museum next door.

Magritte Museum

ART MUSEUM

(Map p122; www.musee-magritte-museum.be; Place Royale; adult/under 26yr/BrusselsCard €8/2/free; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun) This state-of-the-art 2009 museum celebrates the life and work of Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte, taking visitors well beyond his stereotypically witty canvases of pipes and bowler hats. Consider pre-purchasing tickets online to save queuing.

MIM

MUSEUM

(Map p122; Musical Instrument Museum; www.mim.be; Rue Montagne de la Cour 2; adult/BrusselsCard €5/free; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun) MIM makes one



BRUSSELS CARD

The **BrusselsCard** (www.bitc.be; 24/48/72hr €24/34/40) allows free visits to 32 Brussels-area museums (including those indicated in reviews) and gives a few bar and restaurant discounts, plus unlimited free use of city public transport. Only seriously hyperactive museum fans will save much money, but if you do buy a BrusselsCard, the following (not reviewed) are central and worth adding to your busy schedule:

» **Brewery Museum** (Map p122) On the Grand Place; visit if only for the free beer.

» **Lace Museum** (Map p122)

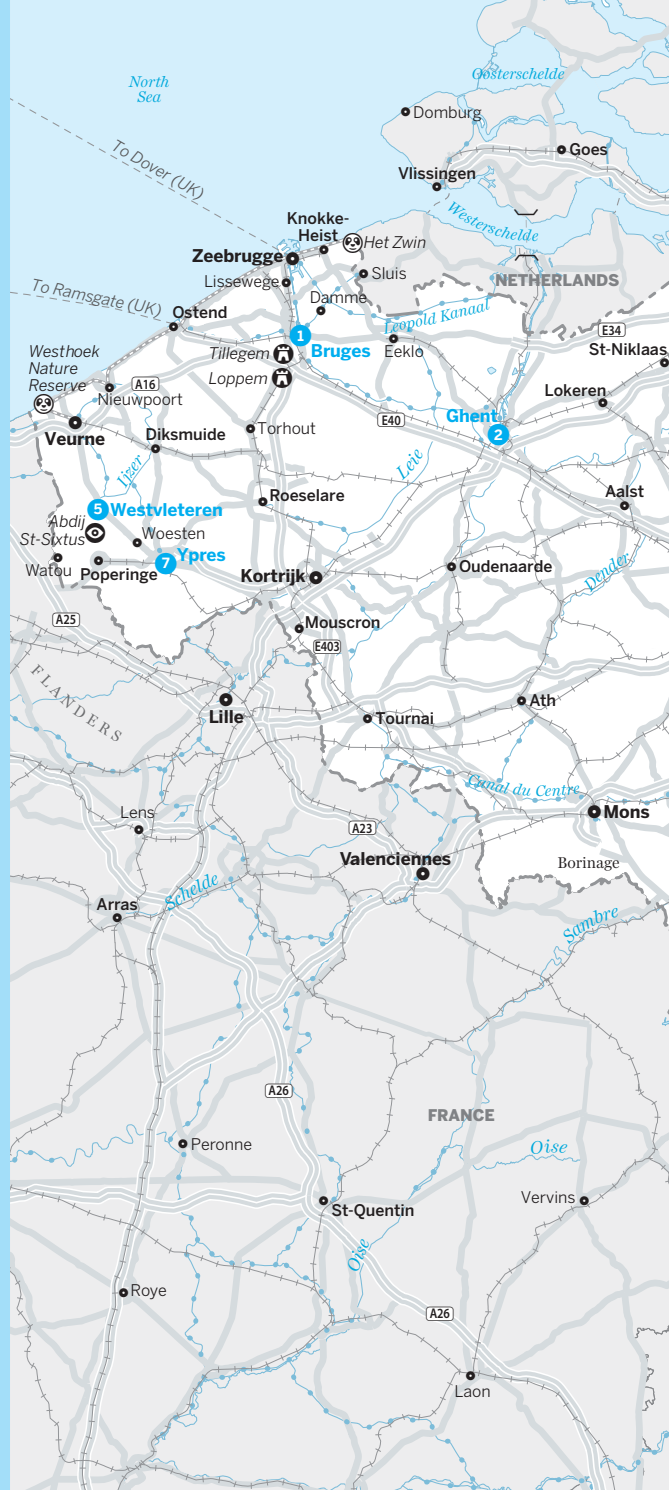
» **Maison du Roi** (Map p122) Includes the Manneken Pis' costumes.

» **Money Museum** (Map p122)

» **Porte de Hal** (Map p118) Ancient city gate-fort.

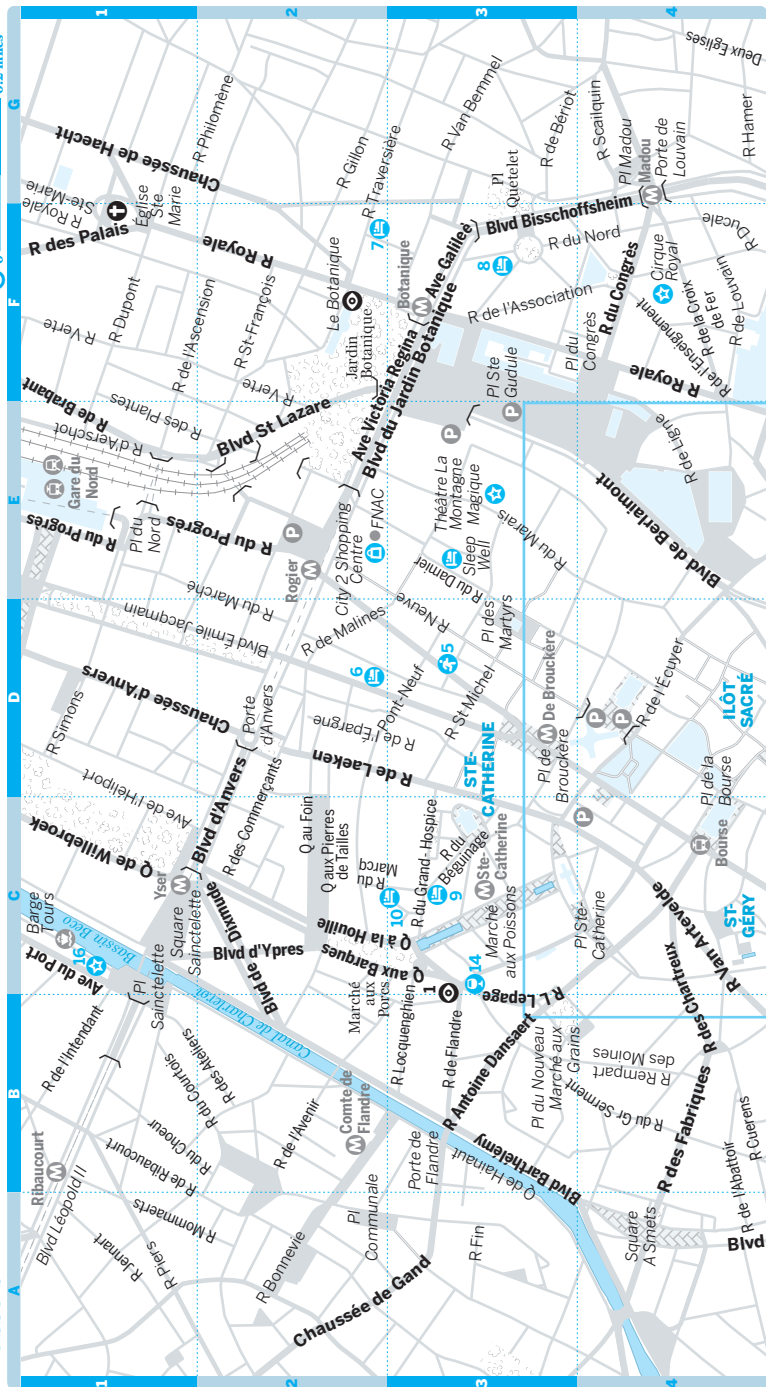
Belgium Highlights

- 1 Come on weekdays off-season to appreciate the picture-perfect canal scenes of medieval **Bruges** (p143), without the tourist overload
- 2 Be wooed by underappreciated **Ghent** (p137), one of Europe's greatest all-round discoveries
- 3 Savour the 'world's most beautiful square', then seek out the remarkable cafes and chocolate shops of the capital, **Brussels** (p115)
- 4 Follow fashion to hip yet historic **Antwerp** (p130)
- 5 Drive Flanders' back lanes to St-Sixtus Abbey in **Westvleteren** (p150) to find the holy grail of beer lovers
- 6 Climb a lion to survey the classic battlefield at **Waterloo** (p130)
- 7 Ponder the heartbreaking futility of WWI in Flanders' fields around meticulously rebuilt **Ypres** (p148)
- 8 Explore the caves and castles of rural Wallonia around **Rochefort** (p152)



Brussels

0 0.2 miles
0 400 m



Brussels

📍 Top Sights

Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze	A6
Palais de Justice	D7

📍 Sights

1 Cubitus Mural	C3
2 Galerie d'Ixelles	F7
3 Porte de Hal	B8
4 Quick & Flupke Mural	C7

Activities, Courses & Tours

5 ARAU	D3
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🛏 Sleeping

6 2Go4	D2
7 Centre Vincent van Gogh	F2
8 Hostel Jacques Brel	F3

9 Hôtel Noga	C3
10 Maison Noble	C3

🍴 Eating

11 Le Soleil d'Afrique	F7
12 L'Ultime Atome	F7
13 Restobières	C7

🍷 Drinking

14 Au Laboureur	C3
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🎪 Entertainment

15 Fuse	C8
16 K-Nal	C1

🛍 Shopping

17 Beermania	G7
18 Flea Market	C7

of the world's biggest collections of musical instruments much more accessible by providing a wordless audioguide that lets you hear how most of them sound. Nonetheless, the museum's particular appeal comes from its setting in a showpiece 1899 art-nouveau building with unparalleled city views from the top-floor cafe terrace.

Place Royale

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Dominating this neoclassical square is a bold equestrian **statue of Godefroid de Bouillon** (Map p122), the Belgian crusader knight who very briefly became the first European 'king' of Jerusalem in 1099. Around the corner you'll find the 19th-century **Palais Royal** (Map p122; www.monarchy.be/palace-and-heritage/palace-brussels; Place des Palais; admission free; ☀️10.30am-4pm Tue-Sun late July-early Sep), which is Belgium's slightly less-inspired cousin to Buckingham Palace. It's the Belgian king's office, but the royals no longer live here.

If you've bought a BrusselsCard, peep into **Musée BELvue** (Map p122; www.belvue.be; Place des Palais 7; adult/BrusselsCard €5/free; ☀️10am-5pm), which introduces Belgian history through a fascinating, if potentially bewildering, overload of documents, images and videos. Then descend into the attached **Coudenberg** (Map p122; adult/under 26yr/BrusselsCard €5/3/free, with Musée BELvue €8/4/free), the subterranean archaeological site of Charles Quint's 16th-century palace complex. You'll emerge eventually near MIM.

Sablon

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Dominated by the flamboyantly Gothic church, **Église Notre-Dame du Sablon** (Map p122; Rue de la Régence; ☀️9am-7pm), the cobbled **Grand Place du Sablon** is lined with upmarket cafes, restaurants and chocolatier boutiques. Nearby streets are dotted with fascinating antique shops, and the **Place du Petit Sablon** (Map p122) features a garden of 48 bronze statuettes representing the medieval guilds. Southeast of here looms the vast **Palais de Justice** (Map p118; Law Court), which was Europe's biggest building when constructed in 1883. A pavement outside offers rooftop panoramas towards the distant **Atomium** (p125) and **Koekelberg Basilica**. A glass **elevator** (☀️7.30am-11.45pm) leads down into the quirky, downmarket (but slowly gentrifying) Marolles quarter.

IXELLES

Southwest of the pentagonal Inner Ring highway, this sizeable inner suburb sports numerous elegant, century-old houses – but is also home to the multicultural, downmarket Matonge district as well as the snooty, upmarket boutiques of Ave Louise.

Musée Horta

MUSEUM

(www.hortamuseum.be; Rue Américaine 25; adult/child €7/3; ☀️2-5.30pm Tue-Sun; 🗺Horta, 📍91 or 92) Architect Victor Horta's 1898 house-museum makes a fine introduction to Brussels' art-nouveau heritage. Decorated with numerous century-old ornaments,

the building's sinuous wrought iron and shaped wood are augmented by a partially stained-glass roof. The ticket stub includes a small map, helping you to seek out other art-nouveau monuments scattered around the surrounding area. For more, see www.brusselsartnouveau.be or buy the €3 Brussels art-nouveau guide from tourist offices.

Matonge

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Nicknamed for a square in Kinshasa, Congo, Matonge is home to Brussels' African community. The architecture includes its fair share of tired old 1960s concrete, but **Chaussée de Wavre** and the dreary **Galerie d'Ixelles** (Map p118) come to life with African hairstylists, exotic groceries, outlets for Congolese CDs and DVDs, and many inexpensive places to sample African foods.

CINQUANTEAIRE

Hop off metro line 1 or 5 at Mérode to see Leopold II's triumphal arch and associated grand museums.

Arcade du Cinquanteaire

MONUMENT

Designed to celebrate Belgium's 50th anniversary, this arch's construction went over-schedule...by 25 years! You can climb it from stairs within the **Military Museum** (www.klm-mra.be; Parc du Cinquanteaire 3; admission/audioguide free/€3; ☉9am-11.45 & 1-4.30pm Tue-Sun), which boasts a vast collection.

Musée du Cinquanteaire

MUSEUM

(www.kmkg-mrah.be; Parc du Cinquanteaire 10; adult/concession/BrusselsCard €5/4/free; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Belgium's most underestimated museum has an astonishingly rich, global collection ranging from ancient Egyptian sarcophagi to Meso-American masks, to icons to wooden bicycles. You'd need days to appreciate it all. The English-language audioguide (€3 extra) is worth considering.

Autoworld

MUSEUM

(www.autoworld.be; adult/concession/BrusselsCard €6/4.70/free; ☉10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) One of Europe's biggest collections of vintage and 20th-century cars.

COMIC-STRIP CULTURE

In Belgium, comic strips (*bande dessinée*) are revered as the 'ninth art' and each September Brussels hosts a major **Comic-Strip Festival** (www.fetedelabd.be) at the splendid St-Gilles town hall. Internationally, the country's best-known comic-book hero is quiff-headed boy-detective Tintin, whose creator is celebrated at the superb **Hergé Museum** (www.museeherge.com; adult/concession €9.50/7; ☉10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), an hour south of Brussels by train in the otherwise uninteresting student town of Louvain-la-Neuve. Changing trains at Ottignies can save time.

Serious comic fans might also enjoy Brussels' comprehensive **Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée** (Map p122; www.comicscenter.net; Rue des Sables 20; adult/concession/BrusselsCard €7.50/6/free; ☉10am-6pm Tue-Sun) in a distinctive Horta-designed art-nouveau building, though relatively little is in English.

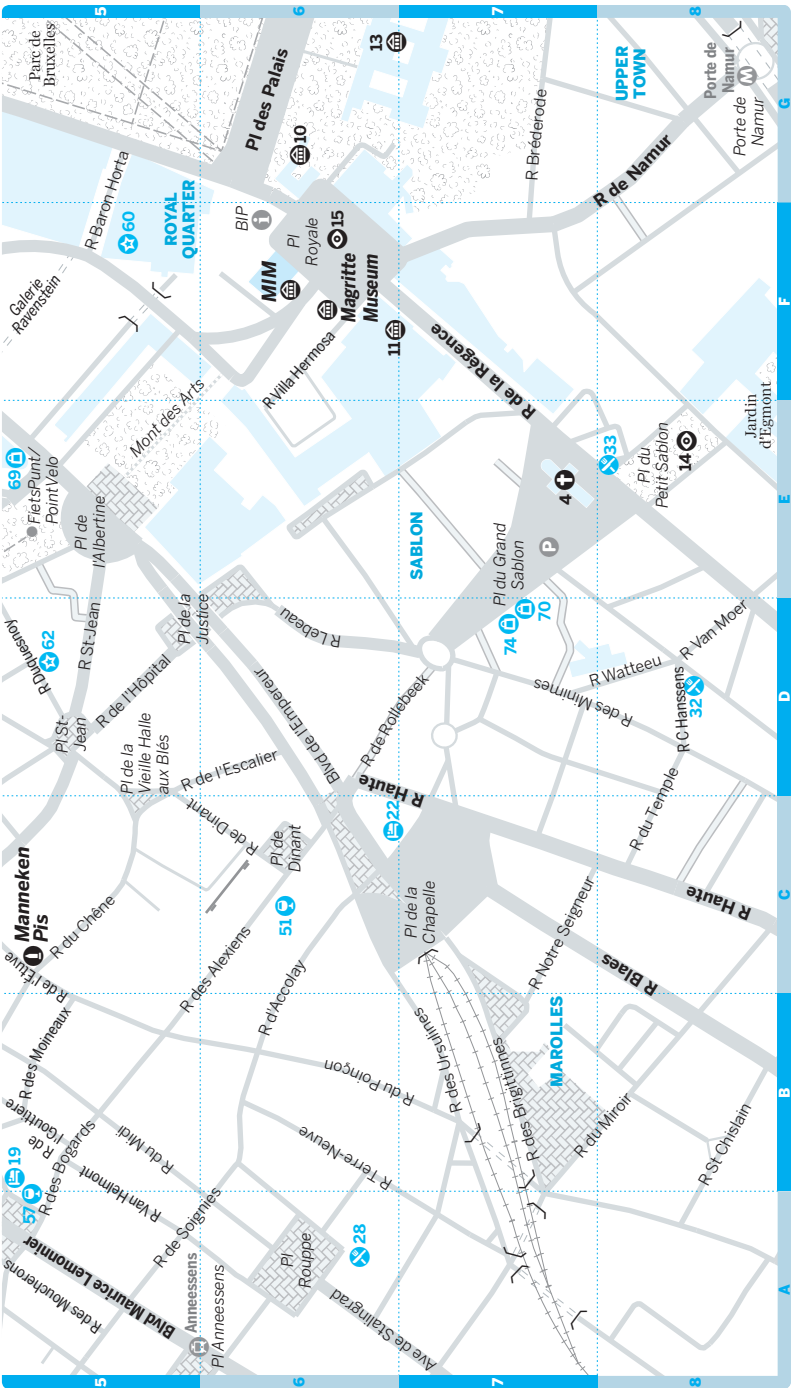
Comic Murals

Over 40 comic-strip murals enliven Brussels buildings. Their locations are mapped on www.visitbrussels.be (look for the 'Walks' section) and on free brochures available from Brussels International tourist office. Our favourites include the following:

- » **Cubitus** (Map p118; Rue de Flandre)
- » **Néron** (Map p122; Place St-Géry)
- » **Quick & Flupke** (Map p118; Rue Haute)
- » **Tibet & Duchâteau** (Map p122; Rue du Bon Secours 9)

Comic Shops

- » **Brüsel** (Map p122; www.brusel.com; Blvd Anspach 100; ☉10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-6.30pm Sun)
- » **La Maison de la BD** (Map p122; www.jije.org; Blvd de l'Impératrice 1; museum admission €2; ☉10am-6pm Tue-Sun)
- » **Multi-BD** (Map p122; www.multibd.com; Blvd Anspach 122-124; ☉10.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-6.30pm Sun)
- » **Nine City** (www.ninecity.be, www.moof-museum.be)



Central Brussels

📍 Top Sights

Grand Place.....	C3
Magritte Museum.....	F6
Manneken Pis.....	C5
MIM.....	F6

📍 Sights

1 Bourse.....	C3
2 Brewery Museum.....	D4
3 Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée.....	F1
Coudenberg.....	(see 10)
4 Église Notre-Dame du Sablon.....	E7
5 Galeries St-Hubert.....	D3
6 Jeanneke Pis.....	D2
7 Lace Museum.....	C4
8 Maison du Roi.....	D3
9 Money Museum.....	F2
10 Musée BELvue.....	G6
11 Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts.....	F6
12 Néron Mural.....	A3
13 Palais Royal.....	G6
14 Place du Petit Sablon.....	E8
15 Place Royale.....	F6
Statue of Godefroid de Bouillon.....	(see 15)
16 Tibet & Duchâteau Mural.....	B4

🛏 Sleeping

17 2Go4 Grand Place Rooms.....	D3
18 Chambres d'Hotes du Vaudeville.....	D3
19 Downtown-BXL.....	B5
20 Hôtel Le Dixseptième.....	D4
21 Hotel Mozart.....	D4
22 JH Bruegel.....	C6
23 The Dominican.....	D2

🍴 Eating

24 A l'Ombra.....	D3
25 Aux Armes de Bruxelles.....	D3
26 Belga Queen Brussels.....	D1
27 Chez Léon.....	D3
28 Comme Chez Soi.....	A6
29 Den Teepot.....	A3
30 Fin de Siècle.....	A2
31 Fritland.....	C3
32 Le Perroquet.....	D8
33 L'Ecailler du Palais Royal.....	E8
34 L'Ogenblik.....	D3

35 Mer du Nord.....	B1
36 Mokafé.....	E3
37 Pitta Street.....	D4
38 Ricotta & Parmesan.....	D2
Scheltema.....	(see 34)
39 Sea Grill.....	E2
Vincent.....	(see 27)

🍷 Drinking

40 À la Bécasse.....	C3
41 À la Mort Subite.....	E2
42 A l'Image de Notre-Dame.....	C3
43 Au Bon Vieux Temps.....	D3
44 Café des Halles.....	B3
45 Chaloupe d'Or.....	D4
46 Délirium Café.....	D2
47 Falstaff.....	C3
48 Floreo.....	B3
49 Gecko.....	A3
50 Goupil le Fol.....	D4
51 La Fleur en Papier Doré.....	C6
52 Le Belgica.....	C4
53 Le Cercle des Voyageurs.....	B4
54 Le Cirio.....	C3
55 Le Roy d'Espagne.....	C3
56 L'Homo Erectus.....	C3
57 Moeder Lambic Fontainas.....	A5
58 Zebra.....	B3

🎪 Entertainment

59 AB.....	B3
60 BoZar.....	F5
Cinamatek.....	(see 60)
61 La Monnaie/De Munt.....	D2
62 Le You.....	D5

🛍 Shopping

63 Beer Planet.....	D3
64 Brûsel.....	B3
65 Corné Port Royal.....	D4
66 De Biertempel.....	D3
67 Délices et Caprices.....	E3
Galeries St-Hubert.....	(see 5)
68 Galler.....	C3
69 La Maison de la BD.....	E5
70 Leonidas.....	D7
Leonidas.....	(see 71)
71 Leonidas.....	D3
72 Multi-BD.....	B3
73 Neuhaus.....	E3
74 Pierre Marcolini.....	D7
75 Stijl.....	A1

TERVUREN**Africa Museum**

MUSEUM

(www.africamuseum.be; Leuvensesteenweg 13; adult/concession/BrusselsCard €5/4/free, audio-guide €2; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun) In a vast formal park of lakes and manicured lawns, this veritable palace of a building was purpose-built by King Léopold II to show off Europe's most impressive array of African artefacts. Of course, much of the collection was plundered from Léopold's then-private 'garden' (Congo) where his rule saw a staggering percentage of the Congolese population die. From Montgomery metro station, take tram 44 to its eastern terminus.

ANDERLECHT

Internationally best known for its **football team** (www.rscab.be, www.anderlecht-online.be; Van den Stock Stadium, Avenue Théo Verbeek 2; MSt-Guidon), this sprawling western suburb now has a grimy, run-down reputation. However, back in 1521 it was still a country village when the world-famous humanist Erasmus came to 'play at farming'.

Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze

BREWERY

(Map p118; www.cantillon.be; Rue Gheude 56; admission €5; ☺9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat; MBruxelles-Midi) In this fascinating working brewery, cobwebs and 19th-century equipment contribute to a curious spontaneous fermentation process that produces ultra-tart lambic beers, a Brussels speciality. Two tasters are included in the price of a self-guided tour. From Bruxelles-Midi station walk 800m north via Place Bara and Rue Linnander.

HEYSEL

A 15-minute metro ride to Brussels' northern edge brings you to an area of trade fairs, the national stadium and curious **Mini Europe** (www.minieurope.com; adult/child €13.40/10, with Atomium €19.90/13.90; ☺10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Dec, 9.30am-8pm Jul-Aug), featuring walk-through recreations of the continent's top tourist sights at 1:25 scale.

Atomium

MONUMENT, MUSEUM

(www.atomium.be; Sq de l'Atomium; adult/concession/BrusselsCard €11/8/9; ☺10am-7pm May-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Apr; MHeyzel, S151) This Brussels icon is a space-age leftover from the 1958 World Fair consisting of nine gigantic gleaming balls impressively representing an iron crystal lattice enlarged 165 billion times. However, the interior exhibitions are less compelling and you might be happy

WANT MORE?

Head to **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/belgium/brussels) for planning advice, author recommendations, traveller reviews and insider tips.

just glimpsing the Atomium distantly from outside the vast Palais de Justice (p120) in central Brussels.

Tours

On the last Saturday of most months, **ARAU** (Map p118; ☎02 219 33 45; www.arau.org; Blvd Adolphe Max 55) tours visit some of Brussels' otherwise private art-nouveau showpieces.

Sleeping

Brussels' countless business hotels drop prices dramatically at weekends, during the July and August summer holidays and whenever the 'Eurocrats' are away. At such times, internet deals can get you a top-end room for little more than a mediocre midrange option, and €69 walk-in deals become possible at several options around the southern entrance of the Galeries St-Hubert. There are various cheap, basic choices around Bruxelles-Midi but, although slowly improving, that area can be somewhat intimidating. Around Rogier and Bruxelles-Nord, several upper-range hotels lie uncomfortably close to a seedy red-light district.

Bed & Brussels (www.bnb-brussels.be) allows you to filter 75 B&Bs by theme and location.

Hôtel Le Dixseptième

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(Map p122; ☎02 502 57 44; www.lexidseptieme.be; Rue de la Madeleine 25; d weekday/weekend from €200/100; ☎) This alluring boutique hotel occupies part of a 17th-century ambassadorial mansion. Its understated opulence reigns in all but the very cheapest rooms.

Dominican

BUSINESS HOTEL €€€

(Map p122; ☎02 203 08 08; www.thedominican.be; Rue Léopold 9; r weekday/weekend from €180/115; ☎@☎) The Dominican combines classic elegance with understated modern chic on the site of a former abbey. The location is brilliantly central, albeit on a side street favoured by beggars.

Downtown-BXL

B&B €€

(Map p122; ☎0475 290721; www.downtownbxl.com, www.lacasabxl.com; Rue du Marché au

Charbon 118-120; r €77-109; 🍷) The excellent-value rooms here feature zebra-striped cushions and Warhol/Marilyn prints in 'Downtown', or Moroccan-Oriental-style decor in the adjacent 'Casa-BXL. Gay-friendly.

Chambres d'Hôtes du Vaudeville B&B €€ (Map p122; ☎0471 473837; www.chambresdhotesdaudeville.be; Galerie de la Reine 11; d from €115; 🍷) This luxury B&B has arty decor and a thrilling location, but, in the bigger front rooms, light sleepers might suffer from noise that reverberates all night around the gorgeous *galeries*. Get the keys from Theatre du Vaudeville next door. Breakfast is delivered at 8am; make your own Nespresso.

Maison Noble B&B €€ (Map p118; ☎02 219 23 39; www.maison-noble.eu; Rue du Marq 10; r €139-159; 🍷🍷🍷) This splendidly refined four-room guest house, in a quiet street near Place St-Catherine, features a steam room and a piano lounge.

Hôtel Noga FAMILY HOTEL €€ (Map p118; ☎02 218 67 63; www.nogahotel.com; Rue du Béguinage 38; r weekday/weekend from €95/70; 🍷🍷🍷) Model yachts, sepia photos of Belgian royalty and assorted random kitsch lead up to rooms that are neat and clean without any particular luxuries. Prices include breakfast and one hour's wi-fi.

Hotel Mozart KITSCH HOTEL €€ (Map p122; ☎02 502 66 61; www.hotel-mozart.be; Rue du Marché aux Fromages 23; s/d/q €80/100/150; 🍷) Mashing Turkish mosaic work, gilt rococo-styled chairs and endless imitation antiques into a kitschy sensory overload, this place is inexpensive, super-central and unforgettable, but expect spongy mattresses, unsophisticated bathrooms and constant street noise if your room faces the 'pitta strip'. Walk-in discounts of around 20% are possible.

Hostel Jacques Brell HOSTEL € (Map p118; ☎02 218 01 87; www.laj.be; Rue de la Sablonnière 30; HI members dm €16.40-20.50, s/d €34/49.60; 🍷🍷) This neat, presentable and reasonably spacious hostel lies in a quiet, pleasant area less than 15-minutes' walk from Grand Place. The sociable bar has occasional live music and there's a 2nd-floor terrace. No lockout.

JH Bruegel HOSTEL € (Map p122; ☎02 511 04 36; www.jeugdherbergen.be; Rue du St-Esprit 2; HI members dm/s/d €21.30/35.50/51.40; 🍷🍷) Brussels' most central hostel has a cellar bar, several sitting

areas and decent, gender-segregated dorms with showers (toilets shared). However, the 10am to 2pm lockout is infuriating; read the regulations carefully and ask for a night key (deposit €20) if staying out beyond 1am.

Centre Vincent van Gogh HOSTEL € (Map p118; ☎02 217 01 58; www.chab.be; Rue Traversière 8; dm €18.50-21.50, s/d/q €33.50/53/86; 🍷) The lobby bar and pool-table veranda here are unusually hip for a hostel, but the rooms are less glamorous, and from some reaching the toilets means crossing the garden courtyard. No membership needed, and no lockout.

2G04 HOSTEL € (☎02 219 30 19; www.2G04.be) Hostel (Map p118; Blvd Émile Jacqmain 99; dm €22-29, s/d/q €55/69/116; 🕒reception 7am-1pm & 4-11pm); Grand Place Rooms (Map p122; rue des Harengs 6; d €59-70) The well-equipped hostel, featuring zany ground-floor furnishings, is toward the slightly sleazier end of town. Check in here even if you're staying in the wonderfully central, if haphazardly decorated, 'Grand Place Rooms'. Rates include coffee but not breakfast or towels (€1). No lockout, no curfew.

Eating CENTRAL BRUSSELS

Several interesting options are dotted along Rue de Flandre, with reliable seafood restaurants around nearby Place Ste-Catherine and Marché aux Poissons. Inexpensive, if rarely authentic, Asian restaurants line Rue J van Praet between the Bourse and Place St-Géry. Restaurants reviewed here focus on value for money, but with formal attire, advance bookings and a plutonium credit card, central gourmet options include **Comme Chez Soi** (Map p122; www.commechezsoi.be), **Sea Grill** (Map p122; www.seagrill.be) and **L'Ecailler du Palais Royal** (www.lecaillerdupalaisroyal.be).

L'Ogenblik SEAFOOD €€€ (Map p122; ☎02 511 61 51; www.ogenblik.be; Galerie des Princes 1; lunch €11, mains €23-28; 🕒noon-2.30pm & 7pm-midnight) This archetypal historic bistro-restaurant has sawdust floors, close-packed tables and feels more convivially casual than most upmarket Brussels fish restaurants. Nonetheless the seafood quality challenges the best, while steaks and duck dishes are also available. Book ahead. Nearby, similarly priced recommendations include **Scheltema**, **Vincent**, **Chez Léon** and **Aux Armes de Bruxelles**. However,

beware of many other outwardly cheaper options that give a brilliant buzz to the Rue des Bouchers and Petite Rue des Bouchers – several have been known to operate sneaky tourist-catching scams.

Fin de Siècle BELGIAN €€
(Map p122; Rue des Chartreux 9; mains €11-19; ☎ 4.30pm-1am, kitchen 6pm-12.30am) A low-lit cult place with rough tables, youthful cafe-ambiance and great-value Belgian favourites, along with meze and tandoori chicken. There's no sign and, with no reservations accepted, you might need to queue.

Belga Queen Brussels BELGIAN €€
(Map p122; ☎ 02 217 21 87; www.belgaqueen.be; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 32; mains €16-25, weekday lunch €16; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7pm-midnight) Belgian cuisine is given a chic, modern twist within a magnificent, if reverberant, 19th-century bank building with classical stained-glass ceilings. There's a good wine and beer list.

A l'Ombra ITALIAN €€
(Map p122; Rue des Harengs 2; pastas €8.50-13, mains €14-18; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Fri & 6.30pm-11.30pm Mon-Sat) Take a tiny, tile-walled 1920s shop-house, keep the original decor, insert a narrow communal table and see if the customers finally communicate over their delicious fresh pasta. Perhaps...at least with the farewell grappa.

Ricotta & Parmesan ITALIAN €
(Map p122; www.ricottaparmesan.com; Rue de l'Écuyer 31; mains €9-15; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6.30pm-11pm Mon-Sat) Reliable, sensibly priced Italian cuisine in a pair of antique buildings decorated with olive-oil bottles and old cooking implements, some fancifully framed.

Mer du Nord SEAFOOD €
(Map p122; Rue Ste-Catherine 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun; ☎ Ste-Catherine) Stand and nibble seafood snacks outside this popular fish-mongers if the numerous nearby fish restaurants seem too pricey.

Den Teepot VEGAN €
(Map p122; Rue des Chartreux 66; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Above an organic food grocery, this macrobiotic eatery serves a one-choice vegetarian lunch of the day (€8.80).

Pitta Street KEBABS €
(Map p122; Rue du Marché aux Fromages; ☎ 11am-3am) Snacks from €3 in a bustling pedestrian street just behind the Grand Place.

Mokafé WAFFLES €
(Map p122; Galerie du Roi; ☎ 7.30am-11.30pm)

This timeless cafe in the awesome Galeries St-Hubert is ideal for coffee and cakes or €2.60 Brussels waffles.

Fritland CHIPS €
(Map p122; Rue Henri Maus 49; ☎ 11am-1am Sun-Thu, 10am-3am Fri & Sat) Sit-down or takeaway *frites* (chips).

MARROLES & SABLON
The Sablon has many interesting, relatively upmarket eateries. Dotted along Rue Haute are several more idiosyncratic choices.

Restobières BELGIAN €€
(Map p118; ☎ 02 502 72 51; www.restobieres.eu; Rue des Renards 32; mains €12-22, menus €18-38; ☎ noon-3pm Tue-Sat, 6.30pm-11pm Thu-Sat, 4pm-11pm Sun) Beer-based Belgian meals served in a Marolles backstreet amid bottles, grinders and countless antique souvenir biscuit tins featuring Belgian royalty.

Le Perroquet CAFE €
(Map p122; Rue Watteau 31; light meals €6.50-11; ☎ noon-1am) This glorious yet relaxed art-nouveau cafe serves drinks, good-value salads and an imaginative range of stuffed pittas, some vegetarian.

IXELLES
Many ever-buzzing options line Rue St-Boniface while numerous inexpensive world cuisines can be found in the neighbouring streets of Matonge. There are many fashion-conscious restaurants further south around Flagey and Place du Châtelain.

Le Soleil d'Afrique AFRICAN €
(Map p118; Rue Longue-Vie 10; meals €5-8; ☎ noon-midnight) Low, low prices for big, big portions of various African favourites – *moambe*, *yassa*, *mafé* – best enjoyed on a summer day at the street-side bench tables, which are colourfully graffitied with hippie colours and motifs.

L'Ultime Atome BELGIAN €€
(Map p118; ☎ 02 513 13 67; www.ultime-atome.com; Rue St-Boniface 14; mains €11-17; ☎ 8.30am-1am Mon-Fri, 10am-1am Sat & Sun; ☎ Porte de Namur) This cavernous brasserie attracts a youthful crowd and the non-stop kitchen turns out great value meals, including mussels, Moroccan *tajines* and cheesy endives.

Drinking

Cafe culture is one of Brussels' greatest attractions. On the Grand Place itself, 300-year-old gems, like **Le Roy d'Espagne**

(Map p122; Grand Place 1) and **Chaloupe d'Or** (Map p122; Grand Place 24) are magnificent but predictably pricey. Somewhat cheaper classics lie around the Bourse, several down easily missed, shoulder-wide alleys. Livelier pubs are ranged around Place St-Géry. The fashion-conscious head further south to Flagey.

Around the Bourse

AREA

Many of Brussels's most iconic cafes are within stumbling distance of the Bourse. Don't miss century-old masterpieces **Falstaff** (Map p122; Rue Henri Maus 17; ☺10am-1am; ☺), with its festival of stained glass ceilings, and **Le Cirio** (Map p122; Rue de la Bourse 18; ☺10am-midnight; ☺), a sumptuous yet affordable 1866 marvel full of polished brasswork and serving great-value pub meals. Three more classics are hidden up shoulder-wide alleys: the medieval yet unpretentious **A l'Image de Notre-Dame** (Map p122; off Rue du Marché aux Herbes 5; ☺noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-1am Sat, 4-10.30pm Sun); the 1695 Rubenseque **Au Bon Vieux Temps** (Map p122; Impasse Saint Michel; ☺11am-midnight), which sometimes stocks ultra-rare Westvletteren beers (albeit charging €10!); and the 1877 lambic specialist **À la Bécasse** (Map p122; Rue de Tabora 11; ☺11am-midnight; ☺), with its vaguely Puritanical rows of wooden tables.

Délirium Café

PUB

(Map p122; www.deliriumcafe.be; Impasse de la Fidélité 4A; ☺10am-4am Mon-Sat, 10am-2am Sun) The smoky main cellar pub has barrel tables, beer-tray ceilings and over 2000 beers. Upstairs, the smoke-free **Tap House** (www.deliriumtaphouse.be) features copper stills, metal panelling and 25 beers on draft. Neighbouring buildings house associated bars (from 8pm) serving hundreds of *jenever*s (Dutch-style gins), vodkas, rums and absinthes. No wonder the little alley's so vibrant. Live music at 10.15pm.

Place St-Géry

AREA

Sip a quiet coffee by day or be buffeted by music at night in youthful yet characterful bars – like **Zebra** (Map p122), **Gecko** (Map p122) and **Floreo** (Map p122) – that ring **Café des Halles** (Map p122; www.cafedeshalles.be), an 1881 market hall that's now part cafe, part exhibition hall and hosts a free weekend nightclub in its cellars.

Moeder Lambic Fontainas

PUB

(Map p122; Place Fontainas 8; ☺10am-4am Mon-Sat, 10am-2am Sun; ☺) A pub with designer decor, dangling trumpet lamps, backlit

wall panels and an incredible 40 brews on draft including Cantillon lambics and gueuze.

À la Mort Subite

CAFE

(Map p122; Rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères 7; ☺11am-midnight; ☺) Unchanged since 1928, with lined-up wooden tables, arched mirror panels and entertainingly brusque service.

Le Cercle des Voyageurs

BAR

(Map p122; www.lecercledesvoyageurs.be; Rue des Grands Carmes 18; ☺8am-11pm Wed-Mon; ☺) This high-ceilinged lounge-bar feels like a gentlemen's club and has a library of travel books for browsing.

Goupil le Fol

BAR

(Map p122; Rue de la Violette 22; ☺9pm-5am) A sensory overload of rambling acid-trip passageways, ragged old sofas and inexplicable beverages mostly based on madly fruit-flavoured wines. Soft French chanson music rules.

La Fleur en Papier Doré

CAFE

(Map p122; www.goudblommekeinpapier.be; Rue des Alexiens 53; ☺11am-midnight Tue-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Once Magritte's local cafe.



Entertainment

AB

LIVE MUSIC

(Map p122; Ancienne Belgique; www.abconcerts.be; Blvd Anspach 110) Great venue for international and home-grown bands.

La Monnaie/De Munt

OPERA

(Map p122; www.demunt.be; Place de la Monnaie) Opera, theatre and dance.

BoZar

LIVE MUSIC

(Map p122; www.bozar.be; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Rue Ravenstein 23) Music, dance, exhibitions, theatre and more.

Cinematek

CINEMA

(Map p122; www.cinematek.be; Rue Baron Horta 9; admission €3; ☺from 5pm) Classic talkies, plus silent movies with live piano accompaniment.

Nightclubs

Fuse

CLUB

(Map p118; www.fuse.be; Rue Blaes 208; admission €5-12; ☺11pm-7am Fri & Sat; ☺Porte de Hal) The Marolles club that 'invented' European techno still crams in the punters. Half-price entry before midnight.

K-Nal

CLUB

(Map p118; www.libertinesupersport.be; Avenue du Port 1; ☺11pm-6am Sat) On Saturday nights

GAY & LESBIAN BRUSSELS

Brussels' compact, thriving Rainbow Quarter is clustered around Rue du Marché au Charbon, where you'll find two LGBT information centres. A dozen gay-oriented bars here include **L'Homo Erectus** (Map p122; www.lhomoerectus.com; Rue des Pierres 57; ☎4pm-dawn) and classic 'brown cafe' **Le Belgica** (Map p122; www.lebelgica.be; Rue du Marché au Charbon 32; ☎10pm-3am Thu-Sun). **Belgian Gay & Lesbian Pride** (www.blgp.be; ☎1st Sat in May) culminates in this area with a vast-scale all-night party. Sunday, it's gay party night at **Le You** (Map p122; www.leyougayteadance.com; entry €9, free before 10pm). Once a month, **La Démence** (www.lademence.com) at Fuse (p128) is one of Europe's major raves for gay men. Try www.noc-tis.com/pages/events/gay.php for more information on events and venues.

from 11pm, K-Nal's Libertine Supersport spins house, disco and lounge music and invites the biggest names in electro. Expect queues.

Le You

CLUB

(Map p122; www.leyou.be; Rue Duquesnoy 18; admission €10; ☎from 11pm Thu-Sat, from 9pm Sun) A central labyrinth of dance floors and chill-out rooms, where Thursday is for under 25s and Sunday is gay night.



Shopping

Tourist-oriented shops selling chocolate, beer, lace and Atomium baubles stretch between the Grand Place and Manneken Pis. For better **chocolate shops** (see the boxed text, p156) in calmer, grander settings, peruse the resplendent **Galleries St-Hubert** or the upmarket Sablon area. In the Marolles, Rue Haute and Rue Blaes are full of quirky **interior design shops** while Place du Jeu-de-Balle has a daily **flea market** (Map p118; ☎6am-2pm). Rue Antoine Dansaert has most of Brussels' **high-fashion boutiques**, with **Stijl** (Map p122; Rue Antoine Dansaert 74) hosting many cutting-edge collections.

Supermarkets sell a range of **Belgian beers** relatively cheaply. For wider selections and the relevant glasses, try the following:

Délices et Caprices (Map p122; www.the-belgian-beer-tasting-shop.be; Rue des Bouchers

68; ☎2-8pm Thu-Mon) Small, friendly and personal.

Beermania (Map p118; www.beermania.be; Chaussée de Wavre 174; ☎11am-9pm Mon-Sat)

De Biertempel (Map p122; www.biertempel.be; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 56b; ☎9.30am-7pm)

Beer Planet (Map p122; www.beerplanet.eu; Rue de la Fourche 45; ☎1-9pm Tue-Sun)

i Information

Internet Access

Free at Use-It (see the boxed text, p130) and upstairs within **Bibliothèque des Riches Claires** (Rue des Riches Claires 24; ☎12.30pm-3.30pm Tue, 12.30-5.30pm Wed, 10am-3pm Thu, 10am-5pm Fri, 9.30-11.30am Sat).

Money

ATMs are widespread. Exchange agency rates are usually best around the Bourse.

Tourist Information

There are info counters at Brussels Airport and Bruxelles-Midi station.

Brussels International (☎02 513 89 40; www.visitbrussels.be; Grand Place; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat, plus Sun in summer) Cramped and often packed city info office within the town hall.

Flanders Info (☎02 504 03 90; www.visitflanders.com; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 61; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ☎)

i Getting There & Away

AIR See p157.

BUS Eurolines (☎02 274 13 50; www.eurolines.be; Rue du Progrès 80; ☎5.45am-8.45pm; ☎Gare du Nord) International buses depart from Bruxelles-Nord train station; see p158.

TRAIN Eurostar, TGV and Thalys high-speed trains stop only at **Bruxelles-Midi** (Brussel-Zuid). Jump on any local service for the four-minute hop to conveniently central **Bruxelles-Central**. All domestic trains (p159), plus some Amsterdam services, stop there anyway. Consult www.b-rail.be for timetable information.

i Getting Around

To/From the Airport

For Brussels-South Charleroi airport, see p157.

TRAIN Four trains depart each hour from 5.30am to 11.50pm. It costs €5.10 and takes 16 minutes from Bruxelles-Central, 20 minutes from Bruxelles-Midi.

TAXI Fares cost around €35. Bad idea in rush hour traffic.

**USE-IT!**

Use-it (Map p122; www.use-it.be; Rue de la Fourche 50; ☎10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) creates brilliant info maps, full of irreverent, spot-on tips from locals. They're available as downloads or free from hostels and tourist info places (ask!). Cities covered so far are Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, Charleroi and Mechelen.

Bicycle

SHORT-TERM HIRE With **Villo!** (www.villo.be; ☎24hrs), you can ride a bike from A to B, drop it off, then take a new one for the next hop. The first 30 minutes is free, but costs, charged automatically to your credit card, rise rapidly if you keep it longer (one/two/three hours €0.50/3.50/7.50). Keep the bike 24hr and you've automatically 'bought' it (€150). Some of the 180 automated rental pick-up/drop-off stations are credit-card equipped for paying the initial membership subscription (per day/week/year €1.50/7/30). High-toll helpline ☎078 05 11 10 works only during office hours.

LONGER HIRE **FietsPunt/PointVelo** (www.recyclo.org; per 1/3 days €7.50/15; ☎7am-7pm Mon-Fri) is located outside Bruxelles-Central's Madeleine exit. You'll need ID, plus a credit card or a €150 cash deposit.

TOURS **Brussels Bike Tours** (www.brusselsbiketours.com; tour incl bicycle rental adult/student €30/25; ☎10am & 3pm Apr-Sep, 11am Oct), with a maximum group size of 12, start from the Grand Place tourist office and take around 3½ hours, including stops for beer and *frites*.

Public Transport

INFORMATION Fare/route information at www.stib.be.

COSTS Tickets, once validated, can be used on any combination of the metro, trams and city buses, with the exception of reaching the airport. A one-hour 'jump' ticket costs €1.70/2 when pre-purchased/bought aboard. Booklets of five/10 tickets cost €7.30/11.20. A one-/three-day unlimited pass costs €4.50/9.50.

OPERATING HOURS From 6am to midnight daily. Limited 'Noctis' buses (€3) run from midnight to 3am Friday and Saturday.

Taxi

Taxis cost €2.40 flag fall plus €1.35 per kilometre in Brussels, €2.70 per beyond city limits (eg airport, Tervuren). Taxis ranks are located at Bruxelles-Midi and Madeleine, or pre-book on ☎02 268 00 00 or ☎02 349 49 49.

AROUND BRUSSELS**Leuven**

POP 92,000

Home to Leffe and Stella Artois, Leuven (Louvain in French; www.leuven.be) is Flanders' premier university town and is a lively, self-confident ancient city. Although the town was heavily damaged in 20th-century wars, Leuven's flamboyant 15th-century **Stadhuis** (Grote Markt 9; admission €2) survived. Covered in statuary, it's one of Europe's most architecturally ornate city halls.

Leuven adds only a minor detour to the train ride between Brussels (€4.80, 30 minutes, five hourly) and Antwerp (€6.60, 45 minutes, hourly). In between also consider stops in historic **Mechelen** or very pretty **Lier**.

Waterloo

POP 31,000

European history changed course in June 1815 when Napoleon was definitively defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, 20km south of Brussels. The battlefield, a vast patchwork of rolling fields, has a hamlet of visitor attractions. Most striking is a grassy hill topped with a great bronze **lion**, which you can climb (€6) to survey the scene. Enter through the large **visitor centre** (www.waterloo1815.be; ☎10am-5pm); the 'Lion Pass' (adult/concession €8.50/6.50) adds in a 20-minute film. Guided truck tours to some outer battle sites cost €5.50 or combine all the above for €12. Check out the hamlet's 19th-century cafes too.

Despite the name, the battlefield-hamlet is some 5km south of Waterloo town (www.waterloo-tourisme.be). Instead of arriving at Waterloo's inconvenient train station, get within 800m of the battlefield by TEC bus W from either Avenue Fonsny (outside Bruxelles-Midi in Brussels) or from the much closer Braine l'Alleud train station on the Brussels-Charleroi line.

FLANDERS**Antwerp**

POP 457,000

Cosmopolitan, confident and full of contrasts, Antwerp (Antwerpen in Dutch, Anvers in French) was one of northern Europe's

foremost cities in the 17th century when it also was home to Pieter Paul Rubens, diplomat, philosopher and northern Europe's greatest baroque artist. Today it once again revels in fame and fortune attracting art lovers and mode moguls, club queens and diamond dealers.

Sights CITY CENTRE

Grote Markt SQUARE
Antwerp's photogenic epicentre, this pedestrianised square is graced by a Renaissance-style **Stadhuis** and the baroque **Brabo Fountain**, featuring a bronze hero throwing the severed hand of a dastardly giant. This illustrates the legend that romantics still use to explain Antwerp's disputed etymology, 'Hand Werpen' (hand throwing) becoming Antwerpen.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal CATHEDRAL
(www.dekathedraal.be; Handschoenmarkt; adult/concession €5/3; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Belgium's largest Gothic cathedral, built between 1352 and 1521, still dominates the city skyline thanks to a steeple that is arguably the most magnificent in Europe. Priceless artworks inside include two world-famous Rubens tableaux.

Museum Plantin-Moretus HISTORIC BUILDING
(www.museumplantinmoretus.be; Vrijdag Markt 22; adult/under 26yr €6/4; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Antwerp has saved numerous historic homes as art-filled museums, but none can compare with this enchanting medieval building that once housed the world's first industrial printing works, which published books including those by Rubens' brother. Highlights include the formal courtyard garden, 1640 library and historic print shop.



ANTWERP MONEYSAVERS

Sold at tourist offices, the two-day **Museumkaart** (€20) provides free city transport and entrance to 15 museums and five significant churches, including all sights reviewed below. Most city-run museums are free anyway if you're under 19 or over 65. Many, including Museum Plantin-Moretus and Rubenshuis, are free for everyone on the last Wednesday of each month.

Rubenshuis HISTORIC BUILDING
(www.museum.antwerpen.be; Wapper 9-11; adult/concession €6/4; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Rubens' Antwerp home and studio has been meticulously restored and rebuilt along original lines and filled with 17th-century artworks, albeit relatively few by the master himself. The full 90-minute audioguide visit may prove overly detailed for many visitors.

Scheldt Riverbank NEIGHBOURHOOD
The Scheldt River (Schelde in Dutch), Antwerp's economic lifeline, offers a riverside stroll along **Zuiderterras**, a raised promenade that runs south from **Het Steen** castle. At the tree-lined square **St-Jansvliet**, a lift descends to the **St-Annatunnel** (free), allowing pedestrians and cyclists to cross 570m beneath the river to the **Linkeroever** (Left Bank) for a city panorama.

Meir NEIGHBOURHOOD
If walking from the main train station to Groenplaats, revel in the grand, statue-draped architecture of pedestrianised Meir and Leystraat. The gilt-overloaded **Stadsfeestzaal** (Meir 76) is one of the world's most indulgently decorated shopping malls. Watch top-quality chocolates being made at **Chocolate Line** (www.thechocolateline.be; ☉10.30am-6.30pm) in the 1745 **Paleis op de Meir** (www.paleisopdemeir.be; Meir 50).

STATION AREA

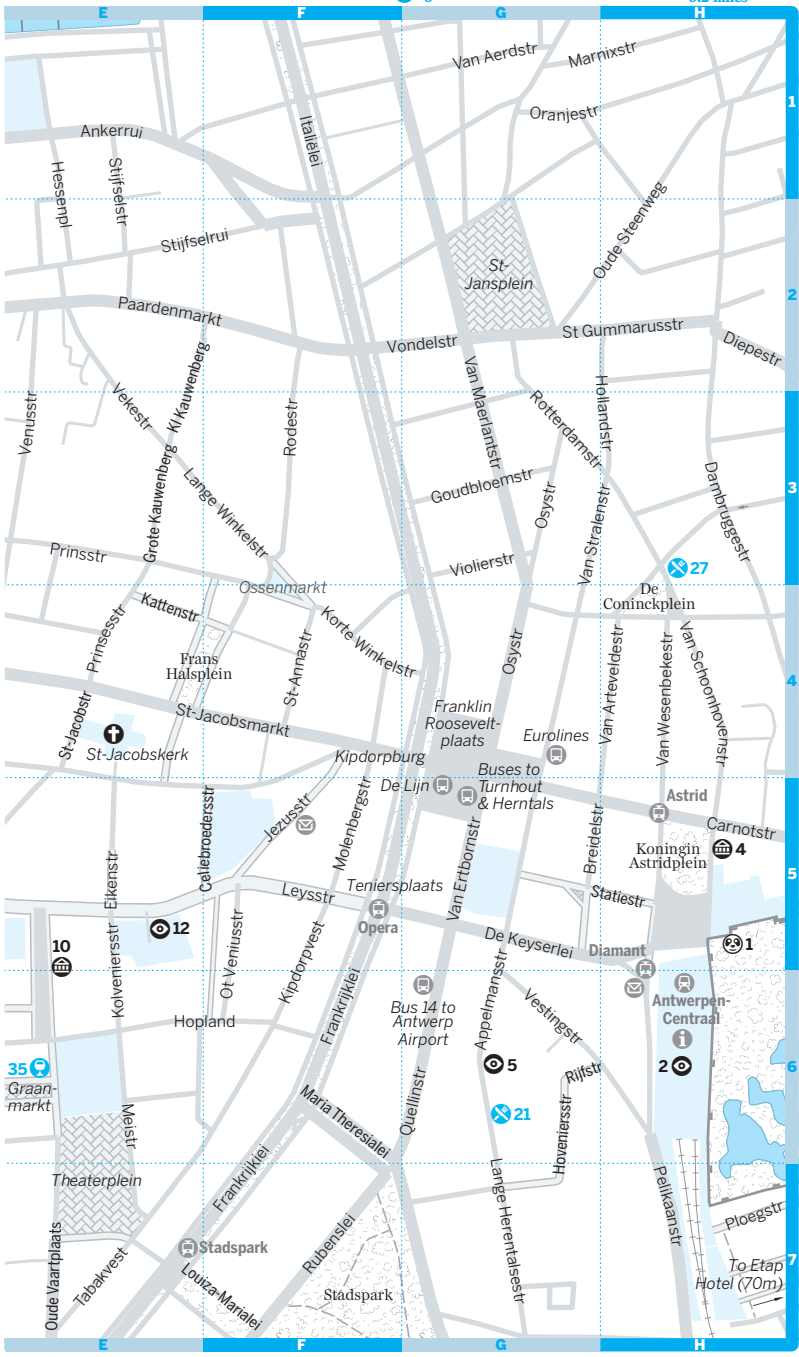
Antwerpen-Centraal train station is an attraction in itself and the famous **Antwerp zoo** is just outside.

The Diamond Quarter NEIGHBOURHOOD
(www.awdc.be) An astounding 80% of all the world's uncut diamonds are traded in Antwerp's architecturally miserable diamond district, immediately southwest of Antwerpen-Centraal station. For the cost of a smile you can see gem polishers at work at **Diamondland** (www.diamondland.be; Appelmansstraat 33a; admission free; ☉9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), which is essentially a zero-pressure lure to get visitors into a diamond salesroom. The well explained **Diamond Museum** (Koningin Astridplein 19-23; adult/concession €8/4; ☉10am-5.30pm Tue-Thu) has changing jewellery 'treasure shows' and similar live gem-polishing demonstrations.

'TZUID

Around 1km south of the fashion quarter, 't Zuid is a conspicuously prosperous area dotted with century-old architecture, hip bars, fine restaurants and interesting museums.





Antwerp

📍 Top Sights

Grote Markt.....	B4
Museum Plantin-Moretus.....	B5
Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal	B4

📍 Sights

1 Antwerp Zoo	H5
2 Antwerpen Centraal Train Station	H6
3 Brabo Fountain	B4
4 Diamond Museum	H5
5 Diamondland.....	G6
6 Het Steen	A3
7 MAS	D1
8 MoMu.....	B6
9 Paleis op de Meir	D5
10 Rubenshuis	E5
11 Stadhuis	B4
12 Stadsfeestzaal	E5

🏠 Sleeping

13 Emperor's 48	D4
14 Den Heksenketel.....	B4
15 Hotel Julien	C4
16 Hotel Les Nuits	D6
17 Matelote Hotel	B4
18 Hotel Postiljon.....	B4
19 Katshuis	A4
20 HI Hostel.....	C6

🍴 Eating

21 Aahaar	G6
22 Chocolatiers	C6
23 De 7 Schaken	B4
24 De Grootte Witte Arend	B5
25 De Kleine Zavel	A5
26 Het Vermoeide Model.....	C4
27 Kubus Permeke.....	H3
28 Lombardia	C6
29 Zuiderterras.....	A5

🍷 Drinking

30 Bierhuis Kulminator	C7
31 De Kat.....	C4
32 De Vagant	B5
33 De Ware Jacob	B4
34 Den Engel.....	B4
35 Oud Arsenaal.....	E6
36 Pelikaan.....	C4
37 't Elfde Gebod	C4

🎬 Entertainment

38 Café d'Anvers	C2
39 Cartoons	B4
40 De Muze	C4
41 Red & Blue	C2

🛍 Shopping

42 Boekhandel 't Verschil Burie.....	D3
43 Fans.....	C6
44 Fish & Chips.....	B6
45 Het Modepaleis	B5

KMSKA

ART MUSEUM

(www.kmska.be; Leopold De Waelplaats; 📍1 or 23) Opened in 1890, the palatial Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten is one of northern Europe's finest art galleries, but wholesale renovations mean it will be largely closed until at least 2012. Highlights of its exceptional collection (yes, plenty of Rubens) should be on show at the brand new city museum, **MAS** (www.mas.be; Hanzestedenplaats), once that opens in May 2011.

🛏 Sleeping

Over 40 B&Bs can be sorted by price or map location on www.bedandbreakfast-antwerp.com, but relatively few are central.



Hotel Julien

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎03 229 06 00; www.hotel-julien.com;

Korte Nieuwstraat 24; r €170-290; 📍📞📧) This very discreet boutique mansion-hotel exudes a tastefully understated elegance and subtle

modernist style. Many of the characterful rooms have exposed beams or old brick-tile floors. Reception feels like a designer's office and there's a library and indulgent dining room with a faceted ceiling.

ABhostel

HOSTEL €

(☎0473 570166; www.abhostel.com; Kattenberg 110; dm/d €21/50; 🕒check-in noon-3pm & 6-8pm;

📞) This adorable family-run hostel has lots of little added extras to make it comfy. Its inner-suburban setting is 20-minutes' walk east of Antwerpen-Centraal station, past inexpensive shops, ethnic restaurants and African wig shops. Across the street is the brilliantly unpretentious local pub **Plaza Real** (🕒from 8pm Wed-Sun), owned by a band member of dEUS.

Hotel Les Nuits

HOTEL €€€

(☎03 225 02 04; www.hotellesnuits.be; Lange Gasthuisstraat; d/ste from €135/215; 📞) Black-

on-black corridors that are fashionable fantasies more than Halloween howlers lead to 24 designer-modernist rooms, each with its own special touches, super-comfy bed and rainforest shower. Sauna and *hamam* (Turkish baths) are free. Breakfast (€12.50) is taken in the casually suave restaurant where you check in; there's no reception.

Hotel Postiljon

FAMILY HOTEL €€

(☎03 231 75 75; www.hotelpostiljon.be; Blauwmoezelstraat 6; s/d €65/75, with shared toilet from €45/60; 🛏️) You can't be closer to the cathedral than this! The 21 older rooms are simple and staid, albeit with partly stained-glass windows. However, the 10 'business rooms' at the back (from s/d €90/120) are new and contrastingly modernist. Free wi-fi; breakfast €10.

Katshuis

GUEST HOUSE €

(☎0476 206947; www.katshuis.be; Grote Pieter Potstraat 18 & 19; s/d/tr €35/50/80) Stairs are steep and rooms vary here. While none are overly polished, some have a microwave, chandeliers and wooden beams and all are remarkably good value. Phone ahead to arrange a check-in time (after 4pm). Check-out is a luxuriously late 2pm. Coffee but not breakfast is included.

HI Hostel

HOSTEL €

(Jeugdherberg; ☎03 238 02 73; www.vjh.be/antwerpen.htm) The old Op Sinjoorke hostel is tatty and very inconveniently located, but, from Easter 2011, a brand new custom-built hostel should (if not delayed again) replace it on helpfully central Bogaardeplein. Most locals haven't a clue where that is, so use our map!

Den Heksenketel

HOSTEL €

(☎0489 395780; www.denheksenketel.com; Pelgrimstraat 22; dm €20; 🛏️) Rough-edged but super-central two-dorm backpacker hostel above a decent bar on a buzzing, pedestrianised street that has an unbeatable cathedral view. Only two toilets. New management plans improvements in 2011.

Matelote Hotel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎03 201 88 00; www.hotel-matelote.be; Haarstraat 11; r €90-190; 📞) Discreet new design hotel on a pedestrianised backstreet in the heart of the city, with 10 contemporary rooms, tastefully arranged in a 16th-century building. Breakfast costs €12.

Emperor's 48

B&B €€

(☎03 288 73 37; www.emperors48.com; Keizerstraat 48; s/d €60/80, apt €150; 📞) If you like

his distinctive photographic art (www.bartmichielsen.net), you'll love Bart Michielsen's stylishly low-lit, gay-friendly B&B in a well-located 1878 town house.

🍴 Eating

For cheap, central snacks, stroll Hoogstraat, near the cathedral. For cosy, pricier options look in parallel Pelgrimstraat (with its 'secret' medieval alley, Vlaaikeusgang) or the picturesque lanes leading to Rubens' wonderful but fire-damaged St-Carolus-Borromeuskerk. For confectioners and **chocolatiers**, try the lanes around Lombardia. In 't Zuid (off our map, to the south) you'll find a great mix of options, both hip and historic, north and west of KMSKA.

De Grootte Witte Arend

BELGIAN €€

(☎03 233 50 33; www.degrootewittearend.be; Braderijstraat 24; snacks €4-9, mains €12-20; ☺10.30am-midnight) Well-cooked Belgian classics, including *stoemp*, eel, shrimp croquettes and rabbit in Westmalle, are served around the open cloister of a partly 16th-century former convent with its own preserved chapel. The bar stocks more than 80 Belgian beers.

FASHION FRENZY

Now snapping at the heels of Milan and New York, Antwerp has emerged as an avant-garde fashion capital thanks to talented alumni of the Flanders Fashion Institute, which now hosts a style museum, **MoMu** (www.momu.be; Nationalestraat 28; adult/concession €7/5; ☺10am-6pm Tue-Sun), featuring regularly changing exhibitions. This is the epicentre of Antwerp's 'fashion district'. Designer boutiques huddle here, around the striking **Toneelhuis** theatre and line Schuttershofstraat. Huidevettersstraat and Nationalestraat, where **Het Modepaleis** (www.driesvannoten.be; Nationalestraat 16) is the elegant flat-iron shaped flagship outlet of Dries Van Noten. Kammenstraat focuses more on street wear (**Fans. Fish'n'Chips**). There's also plenty of choice scattered around 't Zuid, including **Ann Demeulemeester** (www.anndemeulemeester.be; Verlstraat 38) and the cutting-edge multi-designer outlet **Hospital** (www.hospital-antwerp.com; De Burburestraat 4a; ☺1-6.30pm Tue-Sun).

Het Vermoeide Model

BELGIAN €€

(☎03 233 52 61; Lijnwaadmarkt 2; mains €16.50-25, set menu €26; ☎4-10pm Tue-Sun) This atmospheric medieval house-restaurant is full of exposed brickwork and chandeliers, with a creaky stairway leading up to a secret little roof terrace (advance bookings advised in summer). The menu includes steaks, ribs, *waterzooi* (€17.50) and seasonal mussels in Calvados.

Lombardia

ORGANIC, VEGAN €€

(www.lombardia.be; Lombaardenvest 78; sandwiches €7.20-12, vegan/non-veg lunch €13.50/15.50; ☎7.45am-6pm Mon-Sat; 🍴) Experience frothy Ginger Love (www.gingerlove.be; €4) at this legendary health-food shop-cum-cafe, whose owner has cooked for Sting and Moby. The mostly veggie food is 100% organic and the colourful decor has a simple if whacky comic-book feel.

De Kleine Zavel

MEDITERRANEAN €€€

(☎03 231 96 91; www.kleinezavel.be; Stooftstraat 2; mains €23-30; ☎noon-2.30pm & 6-11pm Wed-Sun) The informal bistro-style decor belies this restaurant's high gastronomic standing for fusion cuisine with an accent on fish and Mediterranean flavours.

Zuiderterras

EUROPEAN €€

(☎03 234 12 75; www.zuiderterras.be; Ernest van Dijkstraal 37; mains €16-25; ☎9am-midnight) This bustling contemporary cafe-restaurant is an Antwerp landmark, with summer terrace and year-round river views, if somewhat patchy service. Reservations advised.

De 7 Schaken

BISTRO €€

(www.de7schaken.be; Braderijstraat 24; snacks €7-10, mains €12-22; ☎11am-11pm) Entered through a wood-panelled pub just off Grote Markt, this traditionally styled bistro serves sensibly priced Belgian classics and stays open all day. Multilingual menus.

Aahaar

INDIAN, VEGAN €

(www.aahaar.com; Lange Herentalsestraat 23; mains/buffet €6.80/9; ☎noon-3pm & 6-9.30pm; 🍴) You don't need to be one of the neighbourhood's diamond dealers to afford Aahaar's highly recommended five-dish buffets that are 100% vegetarian.

Kubus Permeke

BUDGET €

(www.casvzw.eu; De Coninckplein 25; sandwiches/mains/set menu from €2.40/8.70/10.50; ☎10am-8.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2.30pm Fri-Sun) This architecturally interesting glass cube serves bargain meals, primarily to low income

families, but they're available to all...And far better than you might anticipate.

**Drinking**

To sound like a local, stride into a pub and ask for a *bolleke*. Don't worry, that means a 'little bowl' (ie glass) of De Koninck, the city's favourite ale. Cheap places to try it include classic, smoky 'brown cafes' **Oud Arsenaal** (Pijpelincxstraat 4; ☎9am-7.30pm Fri-Wed), **De Kat** (Wolstraat 22), **De Ware Jacob** (Vlasmarkt 19) and the livelier **Pelikaan** (Melkmarkt 14).

Den Engel

BAR

(Grote Markt 5; ☎9am-2am) Historic watering hole whose terrace provides perfect views across the main square.

De Vagant

GIN CAFE

(www.devagant.be; Reyndersstraat 25; ☎11am-2am) More than 200 types of *jenever* (Dutch gin; €2.20 to €7.50) served in a bare-boards local cafe or sold by the bottle from their bottle shop, which resembles an old-style pharmacy.

't Elfde Gebod

BAR

(www.kathedraalcafe.be; Torfbrug 10; ☎noon-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun; ☎) This ivy-clad medieval masterpiece has an utterly astounding interior decked with angels, saints, pulpits and several deliciously sacrilegious visual jokes.

Bierhuis Kulminator

BEER PUB

(Vleminkveld 32; ☎8pm-midnight Mon, 11am-midnight Tue-Fri, 5pm-late Sat) Classic pub boasting 700 mostly Belgian brews, including rare vintage bottles.

Bar Tabac

BAR

(www.bartabac.be; Waalsekaai 43; ☎9pm-7am Wed-Sat) Unpretentious, low-lit one-room bar in 't Zuid that tries hard not to try hard. If you prefer smoother lounge-style bars, there's half a dozen close by. Westmalle on tap goes for just €2.40.

GAY ANTWERP

Antwerp's vibrant LGBT scene is widely diffused around town, with relevant places usually flying rainbow flags.

Tourism Antwerp produces a useful multilingual map-guide *Gay Antwerpen*, with more information available from gay-and-lesbian bookshop-cafe **Boekhandel 't Verschil** (www.verschil.be; Minderbroedersrui 33; ☎11am-6pm).

TRAINS FROM ANTWERPEN-CENTRAAL

DESTINATION	FARE (€)	DURATION (MIN)	FREQUENCY (PER HR)
Amsterdam	26.90	190	1
Bruges	14.20	70	1
Brussels	6.30	35-50	5
Ghent	9.90	50	2
Leuven	6.60	45	2
Liège	14.80	125	1
Lier	2.50	15	2
Mechelen	2.90	15	2

★ Entertainment

For listings consult www.weekup.be/antwerpen/week; www.zva.be in summer; and www.gratisinantwerpen.be for free events.

Café Local

CLUB

(www.cafelocal.be; Waalsekaai 25; members/non-members €9/10; ☺10pm-late Thu-Sat; 📺8) This large, unintimidating nightclub in 't Zuid takes a salsa-merengue turn on the first Sunday of each month. Several nearby lounges and music-bars on Waalsekaai and Luikstraat also crank up the music till the wee hours.

De Muze

LIVE MUSIC

(☑03 226 01 26; Melmarkt 15; ☺noon-4am) This two-level cafe is a bastion of live jazz Monday to Saturday from 10pm. There's also a heavy-rock joint across the street and various live-music alternatives a block north.

Cartoons

CINEMA

(www.cartoons-cinema.be; Kaasstraat 4-6) Art-house and quality foreign movies.

Café d'Anvers

CLUB

(www.cafe-d-anvers.com; Verversrui 15; ☺11pm-7.30am Fri & Sat; 📺7) A club not a cafe, this legendary place pumps out funk, house, disco and soul in the city's red-light district. Many of Belgium's top DJs started here.

Red & Blue

CLUB

(www.redandblue.be; Lange Schipperskapelstraat 11; ☺11pm-7am Fri & Sat; 📺7) On Saturday nights it's one of Europe's best-loved gay discos for men. It goes mixed on Fridays.

📍 Information

TOURIST INFORMATION Tourism Antwerp

(☑03 232 01 03; www.visitantwerpen.be; Grote Markt 13; ☺9am-5.45pm Mon-Sat, 9am-

4.45pm Sun) is a central tourist office with a branch on level zero of Antwerpen-Centraal train station.

📍 Getting There & Away

BUS Regional **De Lijn** (www.delijn.be) and international **Eurolines** (☑03 233 86 62; www.eurolines.com; Van Stralenstraat 8; ☺9am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3.15pm Sat) buses both depart from points near Franklin Rooseveltplaats. **Ecolines** (www.ecolines.net) buses for Eastern Europe depart from near Antwerpen-Berchem train station, 2km southeast of Antwerpen-Centraal.

TRAIN Antwerpen-Centraal Station (📺Diamant), 1.5km east of the historic centre, is a veritable cathedral of a building, considered by many to be among the world's most handsome stations. Seven daily high-speed trains run to Paris (from €48, 125 minutes).

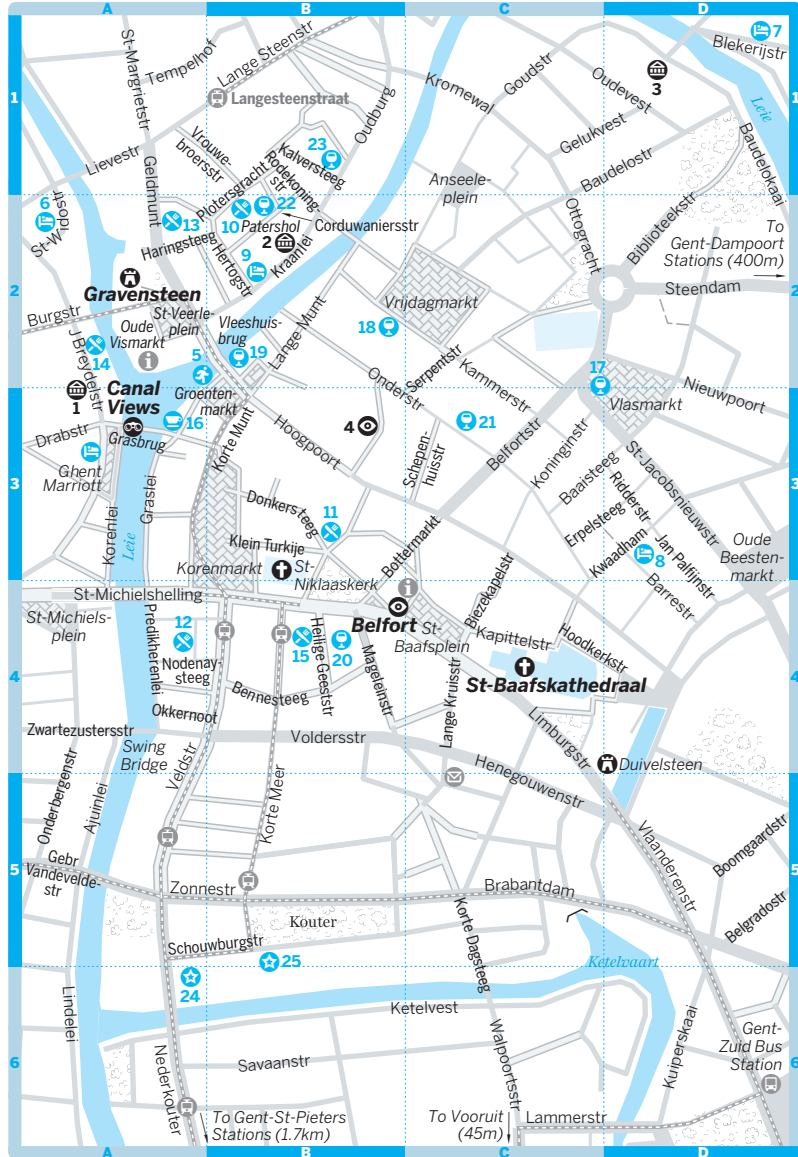
📍 Getting Around

Franklin Rooseveltplaats and Koningin Astridplein are hubs for the integrated network of **De Lijn** (www.delijn.be) buses and trams.

Ghent

POP 235,000

Known as Gent in Dutch and Gand in French, Ghent is Flanders' unsung historic city. Like a grittier Bruges without the crush of tourists, it sports photogenic canals, medieval towers, great cafes and some of Belgium's most inspired museums. Always a lively student city, things go crazy in mid-July during the 10-day **Gentse Feesten** (www.gentsefeesten.be), a citywide party of music and theatre incorporating **10 Days Off** (www.10daysoff.be), one of Europe's biggest techno parties.



Sights CITY CENTRE

The main sights are strolling distance from Korenmarkt, the westernmost of three interlinked squares that form the heart of Ghent's historic core.

Graslei & Patershol NEIGHBOURHOOD

For one of Belgium's most picturesque views, cross **Grasbrug** bridge and look towards **Graslei**, the city's favoured waterfront promenade, lined with archetypal step-gabled warehouses and town houses.

Ghent

📍 Top Sights

Belfort.....	B4
Canal Views.....	A3
Gravensteen.....	A2
St-Baafskathedraal.....	C4

📍 Sights

1 Design Museum.....	A3
2 Huis van Alijn.....	B2
3 MIAT.....	D1
4 Werregarensteeg.....	B3

Activities, Courses & Tours

5 Canal Tours.....	A2
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🛏 Sleeping

6 De Draecke.....	A2
7 Hostel 47.....	D1
8 Hotel Flandria.....	D3
9 Hotel Harmony.....	B2

🍴 Eating

10 Amadeus.....	B2
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11 Amadeus.....	B3
12 Brasserie Pakhuis.....	A4
13 Ethuis Avalon.....	A2
14 House of Eliott.....	A2
15 Soup'r.....	B4

🍷 Drinking

16 Callisto Tearoom.....	A3
17 Charlatan.....	C2
18 Herberg de Dulle Griet.....	B2
19 Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant.....	B2
Hot Club de Gand.....	(see 19)
20 Limonada.....	B4
21 Pink Flamingo's.....	C3
22 Rococo.....	B2
't Caffetse.....	(see 2)
't Dreupelkot.....	(see 19)
23 't Velootje.....	B1

🎭 Entertainment

24 De Vlaamse Opera.....	A6
25 Handelsbeurs.....	B5

Touristy **canal tours** (adult/child €6/3.50; 🕒10am-6pm Mar-mid-Oct, weekends only mid-Oct-Feb) depart regularly from near here or you can stroll aimlessly around the picturesque alleys of the medieval **Patershol district**. If you have a Museumpass, don't miss the delightful **Huis van Alijn** (www.huisvanalijn.be; Kraanlei 65; adult/under 26yr €5/1; 🕒11am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) in a restored 1363 children's hospice. The museum's theme is life in the 20th century and, although little is in English, the engrossing exhibits are self explanatory and family home videos prove unexpectedly moving.

St-Baafskathedraal

CHURCH

(St-Baafsplein; 🕒8.30am-6pm) Massive without magnificence, this vast cathedral is an essential stop for fans of Flemish Primitive art who flock in to see Jan van Eyck's world-famous 1432 masterpiece the **Adoration of the Mystic Lamb** (adult/child €3/1.50; 🕒9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun). To see what the fuss is about without queuing or paying, see the photo replica in side-chapel 30.

Belfort

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Botermarkt; adult/concession €3/2.50; 🕒10am-5.30pm mid-Mar-mid-Nov) Ghent's 14th-century belfry affords spectacular views of the city, while an audioguide provides historical commentary. A lift takes you

most of the way up, but there are still some narrow stairs to negotiate.

Gravensteen

CASTLE

(St-Veerleplein; adult/concession €8/6; 🕒9am-5pm) Lovingly restored, the Gravensteen once more looks like a quintessential 12th-century castle, even though it spent the 19th century recycled as a factory. An imaginative video story-tour compensates for a relative lack of period furnishings.

MIAT

MUSEUM

(www.miat.gent.be; Minnemeers 9; adult/under 26yr €5/1; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun) In a five-floor 19th-century mill-factory building, this innovative museum celebrates Ghent's history of textile production with thought-provoking exhibits about industrialisation's effects on society (mostly in Dutch). Prepare for sensory overload on Tuesday or Thursday mornings when the working machinery is unleashed.

Design Museum

MUSEUM

(www.designmuseumgent.be; J Breydelstraat 5; adult/child €5/free; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun) One of Ghent's lesser-known gems, the Design Museum displays furnishings from the Renaissance through to contemporary styles.

Werregarensteeg

OFFBEAT SIGHTS

Graffiti-filled alley.



GHENT MONEYSAVERS

The good value **Museumpass** (www.visitgent.be; €20) provides three days' free entrance to all the sights reviewed below (except for boat tours), six more attractions and all city transport. It's sold at museums, De Lijn booths and the tourist office.

OUT OF THE CENTRE

Museum Dr Guislain

MUSEUM

(www.museumdrguislain.be; Jozef Guislainstraat 43; adult/under 26yr €5/1; ☎9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun; 🚶1) Hidden away in a spooky 1857 neo-Gothic lunatic asylum, this enthralling museum takes visitors on a trilingual, multicultural journey through the history of psychiatry from gruesome neolithic trepanning to contemporary brain scans via cage beds and phrenology. Tram 1 stops outside.

STAM

MUSEUM

(www.stamgent.be; Bijloke Complex; adult/concession €6/4.50; ☎10am-6pm Tue-Sun; 🚶4) Brand-new interactive museum explaining the city's evolution through history.

SMAK

ART MUSEUM

(www.smak.be; Citadelpark; adult/under 26yr €6/1, 10am-1pm Sun free; ☎10am-6pm Tue-Sun; 🚶5) Regularly changing exhibitions of cutting-edge installation art.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten

ART MUSEUM

(www.mskgent.be; Citadelpark; adult/under 26yr €5/1; ☎10am-6pm Tue-Sun; 🚶5) This stately maze of light, airy rooms houses a good selection of Belgian art from the 14th to 20th centuries.

Sleeping

Complete B&B listings and a booking service are organised by **Bed & Breakfast Ghent** (www.bedandbreakfast-gent.be).

Chambres d'Hôtes Verhaegen

B&B €€€

(☎09 265 07 60; www.hotelverhaegen.be; Oude Houtlei 110; d €195-265; ☎reception 2-6pm) This 1770s rococo mansion is a sumptuous blend of historical restoration and certain well-placed modernist and retro touches. There's a dazzling salon, 18th-century dining room and neatly manicured parterre garden. Superb 'Paola's Room' has hosted Belgian royalty. Breakfast costs €15 extra.

Hotel Harmony

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎09 324 26 80; www.hotel-harmony.be; Kraanlei 37; s/d/ste from €135/150/225; 📞☎) This old-meets-new boutique hotel offers luxuriously heaped pillows, fine white linens, Miró-inspired art and chocolate-and-raspberry colour schemes beneath antique beams. River views from 'exceptional' rooms (s/d €160/185) are possibly the best in Ghent. The rear deck has an 8m-by-4m outdoor pool. Breakfast is included; wi-fi costs €2/10 per hour/day.

Atlas B&B

B&B €€

(☎09 233 49 91; www.atlasbenb.be; Rabotstraat 40; s/d from €57/73; 📞☎) This fine 1865 town house has some gorgeous belle-époque, art-deco and art-nouveau touches and features plentiful maps and globes. Smaller rooms - 'Africa' and retro-colourful 'America' - have mini shower booths. Stylishly exotic 'Asia' is much bigger, while Tuscan 'Europe' (s/d €72/93) comes with four-poster bed and a new jacuzzi bathroom on an intermediate stairway. Free covered parking.

Hostel 47

HOSTEL €

(☎0478 712827; www.hostel47.com; Blekerijstraat 47-51; dm €26.50-29.50, d/tr €71/97.50) With white-on-white fashion decor in a refitted, high-ceilinged classical house, this is one of Europe's calmest and most stylish hostels. Phone ahead as reception is often not staffed.

Limited.Co

GUEST HOUSE €€

(☎09 225 14 95; www.limited-co.be; Hoogstraat 58; s/d/q €55/80/125; 📞) Above a cafe-restaurant of modern pared-back simplicity are five great-value, gently fashionable rooms with lime-green walls, black floors and smart white bathrooms. Call to make arrangements if arriving outside restaurant hours.

Hotel Flandria

BUDGET HOTEL €€

(☎09 223 06 26; www.hotelflandria-gent.be; Barrestraat 3; s/d/tr/q €58/68/100/125; 📞☎) Friendly owners are gradually ironing out the dowdier features of this basic but traveller-friendly hotel with comfy beds and a central location on a dark, narrow lane. The six cheapest rooms (s/d €43/53) share two bathrooms. Reception usually closes at 10pm, although sometimes earlier.

Accipio

B&B

(☎0486 559498; www.accipio.be; St-Elisabethplein 26; s/d/q €80/95/160; 📞) Two super-stylish family-sized suites in an historic house with 19th-century beams and lots

of personality. Each includes a kitchenette with Senseo coffee-maker.

De Draecke

HOSTEL €

(☎09 233 70 50; www.vjh.be; St-Widostraat 11; HI members dm/tw €21.80/52) Behind a traditional pseudo-medieval facade, this modern, HI-affiliated hostel is slightly institutional but ideally central and faces a peaceful willow-lined canal. Breakfast is included; towels, lockers and internet cost extra. No lockout.



Eating

As well as our recommendations, there's an endlessly tempting selection of eateries in the alleys of Patershol, along Graslei's photogenic canal and up Oudburg, where prices fall the further north you walk. Ghent is vegetarian-friendly, encouraging the population to eat meat-free on Thursdays and producing a useful free map, downloadable at www.visitgent.be/documenten/visit_gent/veggie/veggieplan_en.pdf.

House of Eliott

LOBSTER €€

(☎09 225 21 28; www.thehouseofeliott.be; J Breydelstraat 36; mains €15-24; ☉noon-2pm & 6-11pm Thu-Mon, closed Sep) Flapper mannequins and sepia photos exude pseudo-1920s charm in this canal-side gem with an exceptional waterside terrace. The speciality is lobster in multifarious preparations.

Brasserie Pakhuis

EUROPEAN, OYSTERS

(☎09 223 55 55; www.pakhuis.be; Schuurkenstraat 4; mains €13.50-29, set lunch €12.90, set dinners €25-42; ☉lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, bar from lunch to 1am) This hip (if mildly ostentatious) brasserie and bar is set in an elegantly restored former textile warehouse, whose century-old wrought ironwork is well worth admiring, even if you only stop for a drink.

Amadeus

RIBS €€

(www.amadeusspareribrestaurant.be; mains €12.50-17; ☉6.30pm-11pm) Patershol (☎09 225 13 85; Plotersgracht 8/10; Botermarkt (☎09 223 37 75; Goudenleeuwplein 7) Great value all-you-can-eat spare ribs (€13.95) served at two equally enticing addresses, both dressed up like Parisian brasseries, full of mirrors, stained glass, and the bustle of cheerful conversation.

Eethuis Avalon

VEGETARIAN €

(☎09 224 37 24; www.restaurantavalon.be; Geldmunt 32; meals €9-13; ☉lunch Mon-Sat; ☎) Reliably delicious, organic vegetarian food served in a warren of little rooms or outside on a small, tree-shaded terrace.

Soup'r

SOUP €

(St-Niklaasstraat 9; small/large soup €3/4.50, sandwiches €2.70-4; ☉11.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Attractive modern soup kitchen.



Drinking

For character, variety and eccentricity, Ghent's cafes are world-beaters.

't Velootje

BAR

(Kalversteeg 2; beer €4; ☉usually from 9pm) Crammed from floor to ceiling with all manner of junk and riches, from antique bicycles to dusty virgins, this bewildering cafe has dodgy toilets, a temperamental owner and only two types of unreliably chilled beer. But you won't forget it.

Hotsy Totsy

CAFE

(www.hotsytotsy.be; Hoogstraat 1; ☉6pm-1am Mon-Fri, 8pm-2am Sat & Sun; ☎1) This 'artists cafe' sports a classic zinc bar, silver-floral wallpaper and black-and-white film photos. There are chess sets, poetry nights and free live jazz most Thursday evenings, October to April.

Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant

BEER PUB

(www.waterhuisaandebierkant.be; Groentenmarkt 12; ☉11am-1am) Draped in dried hop fronds and serving exclusive house beers, the building is a photogenic sight in its own right. It shares an enticing waterfront terrace with 't Dreupelkot (☉4pm-late) a *jenever* (Dutch gin) specialist.

Rococo

CAFE

(Corduwaniersstraat 5; ☉from 10pm) Brilliantly lavish late-night cafe-bar with carved wooden ceilings and lighting provided entirely by candles.

Pink Flamingo's

PUB, CAFE

(www.pinkflamingos.be; Onderstraat 55; ☉noon-midnight Sun-Thu, 2pm-3am Fri & Sat) Kitsch-overloaded cafe with Barbie-lamps, 1970s wallpaper and oodles of plastic fruit.

Hot Club de Gand

LIVE MUSIC

(www.hotclubdegand.be; Schuddevisstraatje; ☉3pm-late) Around 9pm most nights while uni's in session, you'll hear live acoustic music (jazz, gypsy, blues, flamenco...) at this hidden cafe down a tiny alley behind 't Dreupelkot.

Herberg de Dulle Griet

BEER PUB

(Vrijdagmarkt 50; ☉4.30pm-1am Tue-Sat, noon-7.30pm Mon) Heavy beams, heraldic ceilings, barrel tables, lacy lampshades and the odd boar's head all add character to one of Ghent's best-known beer pubs.

't Caffetse

CAFE

(Kraanlei 65; ☺11am-5pm Tue-Sat) This remarkably inexpensive cafe is set within the cloister of the 14th-century Huis van Alijn (p139). There's lawn seating in summer.

Limonada

LOUNGE

(www.limonada.be; Heilige Geeststraat 7; ☺10pm-3am Mon-Sat) Unthreatening yet hip 70s-retro chill-out lounge with beanbag seats around low luminous tables.

Callisto Tearoom

CAFE

(Hooiaard; ☺varies seasonally) Tourist-oriented perch, with unbeatable waterway views, balloon lanterns, funky colours and traditional glass chandeliers.

Charlatan

PUB

(www.charlatan.be; Vlasmarkt 9; ☺7pm-late Tue-Sun) Lively, late-night music bar with live gigs in virtually any genre starting around 10pm. Several similarly raucous alternatives lie nearby.

★ Entertainment

For listings of what's on, see *Week-Up* (www.weekup.be/gent/week); *Zone 09* magazine (free), which can be found in distribution boxes around town; or www.democrazy.be. All are in Dutch.

Vooruit

THEATRE

(www.vooruit.be; St-Pietersnieuwstraat 23; ☒5) This prominent venue for dance, rock concerts, film and visiting theatre companies occupies a striking 1912 building, whose architecture was a visionary premonition of art deco.

Culture Club

CLUB

(www.cultureclub.be; Afrikalaan 174; ☺Thu-Sat Oct-May) Once rated the 'world's hippest club', themes and cover charges vary (check the website). It's roughly 1.5km north of Gent-Dampoort station via Koopvaardijlaan.

De Bijloke

LIVE MUSIC

(www.debijloke.be; Jozef Kluykensstraat 2) Medieval abbey-hospital recycled into a classical music venue.

De Vlaamse Opera

OPERA

(www.vlaamseopera.be; Schouwburgstraat 3) An 1840 beauty with horseshoe-shaped tiered balconies and elegant salons.

Handelsbeurs

LIVE MUSIC

(www.handelsbeurs.be; Kouter 29) Anything from classics to Latin to blues.

i Information

TOURIST INFORMATION The **tourist office** (☎09 266 52 32; www.visitgent.be; Botermarkt 17; ☺9.30am-6.30pm) should move to the old fish-market building on St-Veerleplein during late 2011.

i Getting There & Away**Bus**

INTERNATIONAL There's a **Eurolines Office** (☎09 220 90 24; www.eurolines.be; Koningin Elisabethlaan 73; ☺8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) near Gent-St-Pieters, but their international buses (eg to London at 11.35pm) currently depart from **Gent-Dampoort**, bus-platform 15.

REGIONAL Many **De Lijn** (www.delijn.be) services currently depart from **Gent-Zuid bus station** (Woodrow Wilsonplein), but a new bus station is under construction beside Gent-St-Pieters.

Train

Gent-Dampoort, 1km west of the old city, is the handiest station, with useful trains to Antwerp (€8.60, fast/slow 42/64 minutes, three per hour), Bruges (€5.90, 35 minutes, hourly) and Lille, France (€15.20, 68 minutes, hourly), via Kortrijk.

Ghent's main station, **Gent-St-Pieters** (2.5km south of centre) has more choice of destinations, including Brussels (€8.10, 36 minutes, twice hourly) and Bruges (fast/slow 24/42 minutes, five per hour).

i Getting Around

Driving a car in Ghent is purgatory. Park it and walk or ride.

Bicycle

HIRE Hire bicycles from Gent-St-Pieters **station luggage room** (bagagekantoor; per day €9.50, deposit €12.50) or **Biker** (Steendam 16; per half/full day €6.50/9; ☺9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Tue-Sat). ID required.

WARNING Police confiscate illegally parked bikes (look for the bicycle parking areas to be safe).

Bus & Tram

TICKETS One-hour/all-day tickets cost €1.20/5 if purchased ahead of time from ticket machines or **De Lijn offices** Gent-St-Pieters Kiosk (☺7am-7pm Mon-Fri); Botermarkt (☺7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat).

TRAM 1 Picks up within the tunnel to the left as you exit Gent-St-Pieters station then runs to Korenmarkt, Gravensteen and beyond.

BUS 5 From Vlasmarkt passing Vooruit, the university quarter and Heuvelpoort (a handy bus stop for accessing the Citadelpark galleries).

Bruges

POP 117,000

Cobblestone lanes, dreamy canals, soaring spires and whitewashed old almshouses combine to make central Bruges (Brugge in Dutch) one of Europe's most picture-perfect historic cities. The only problem is that everyone knows.

Sights

Beyond the sights listed, the real joy of Bruges is simply wandering alongside the canals, soaking up the atmosphere. To avoid the worst crowds, explore east of pretty Jan van Eyckplein. Or maybe seek out the windmills beside the city's eastern 'moat', heading north of the fortified Kruispoort gate-tower at Langestraat's eastern end.

Groeningemuseum ART MUSEUM

(Dijver 12; adult/concession €8/6; ☉9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) This small but extraordinarily valuable collection covers Flemish art from the 14th to 20th centuries, including some priceless Renaissance and Flemish Primitive works. Some gruesome scenes include a flaying in Gerard David's *Judgement of Cambyses* (1498, room 1) and the multiple tortures of *St George* (room 3) – the saint manages to keep his bright white underpants remarkably unsoiled nonetheless. In room 2 are much more meditative works, including Jan Van Eyck's radiant (if rather odd) masterpiece *Madonna with Canon George Van der Paele* (1436) and Hans Memling's *Moreel Triptych*. Later artistic genres include a typically androgynous figure by superstar symbolist Fernand Khnopff, plus a surrealist canvas each from Magritte and Delvaux.

Markt SQUARE

The heart of ancient Bruges, the old market square is lined with pavement cafes beneath step-gabled facades. The buildings aren't always quite as medieval as they look, but together they create a fabulous scene and even the neo-Gothic **post office** is architecturally magnificent. The scene is dominated by the **Belfort**, Belgium's most famous belfry whose iconic octagonal tower is arguably better appreciated from afar than by climbing 366 claustrophobic **steps to the top** (adult/concession €8/6; ☉9.30am-5pm, last tickets 4.15pm).

Burg SQUARE

Bruges' 1420 **Stadhuis** (City Hall; Burg 12) is smothered in statuettes and contains a

BRUGES MONEYSAVERS

A three-day **Musea Brugge Pass** (adult/child €15/5) allows free entry to 16 city-owned attractions. Even if you only visit the Belfort and Groeningemuseum, you'll already save money.

Private attractions like Choco-Story and De Halve Maan (plus an interesting **diamond museum** and a less-successful **chip museum**) aren't included, but you can save a little on each of those using a **Bruges Card** (www.brugescard.be) or **Welkom@Brugge Card** (www.welkom-brugge.be), given free to guests by most hostels and hotels.

breathtaking **Gotische Zaal** (Gothic Hall; adult/concession €2/1; ☉9.30am-4.30pm), featuring dazzling polychromatic ceilings, hanging vaults and historicist murals. Tickets include entry to part of the early baroque **Brugse Vrije** (Burg 11a; ☉9.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30) next door. With its gilt highlights and golden statuettes, this palace was once the administrative centre for a large autonomous territory ruled from Bruges between 1121 and 1794.

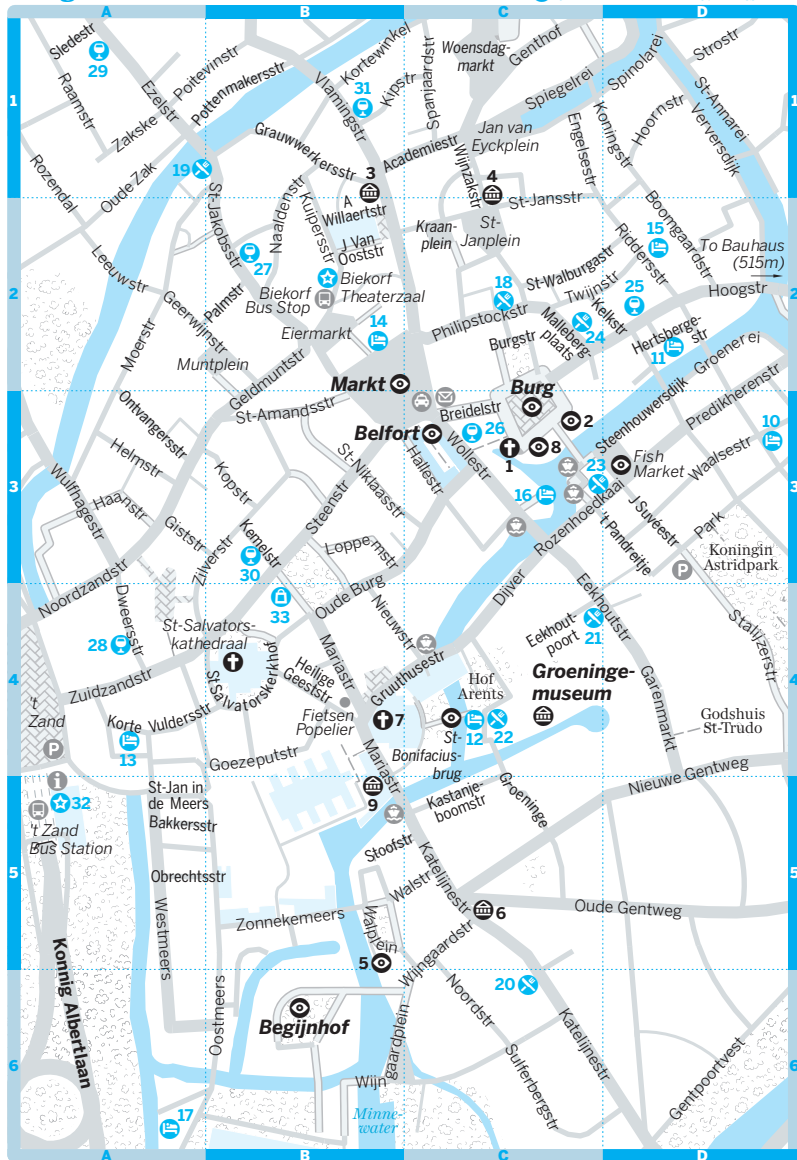
The easily missed **Basilica of the Holy Blood** (Burg 5; ☉9.30-11.50am & 2-5.50pm) is named for its highly revered relic, a few coagulated drops of Christ's blood, venerated daily (usually 2pm). Pay €1.50 to see the one-room treasury housing a reliquary used to display the phial of blood during the elaborate Heilig-Bloedprocessie (Holy Blood Procession) every Ascension Day (17 May 2012, 9 May 2013).

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk CHURCH

(Mariastraat; ☉9.30am-4.50pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-4.50pm Sun) This large, sober 13th-century church is best known for Michelangelo's serenely contemplative 1504 *Madonna and Child* statue. The church's **treasury section** (adult/concession €2/1) houses royal graves plus 15th- and 16th-century artworks

St-Janshospitaal MUSEUM

(Mariastraat 38; adult/concession €8/6; ☉9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) The chapel of a 12th-century hospital displays historical medical implements, medically themed paintings and six masterpieces by 15th-century artist Hans



Memling. Tickets allows visits to a restored 17th-century pharmacy, poorly signposted off a small courtyard beside.

Begijnhof

(admission free; ☉6.30am-6.30pm) This is undoubtedly one of Bruges' quaintest spots.

GARDEN

The walled *begijnhof* (a courtyard surrounded by historic dwellings that was originally built to house lay sisters) is an area of hushed calm found just 10 minutes' walk south of the Markt, and close to the romantic **Minnewater** (Lake of Love).

Bruges

📍 Top Sights

Begijnhof.....	B6
Belfort.....	C3
Burg.....	C3
Groeningemuseum.....	C4
Markt.....	B2

📍 Sights

1 Basilica of the Holy Blood.....	C3
2 Brugse Vrije.....	C3
3 Chip Museum.....	B1
4 Choco-Story.....	C1
5 De Halve Maan.....	B5
6 Diamond Museum.....	C5
7 Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk.....	B4
8 Stadhuis.....	C3
9 St-Janshospitaal.....	B5

🛏 Sleeping

10 B&B Dieltiens.....	D3
11 B&B Huyze Hertsberge.....	D2
12 Guesthouse Nuit Blanche.....	C4
13 Hostel Lybeer.....	A4
14 Hotel Central.....	B2
15 Hotel Patritius.....	D2

16 Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce.....	C3
17 't Keizershof.....	A6

🍴 Eating

18 Cambrinus.....	C2
19 De Bottelier.....	A1
20 De Bron.....	C6
21 De Twijfelaar.....	C4
22 Den Gouden Harynck.....	C4
23 Est Wijnbar.....	C3
24 't Gulden Vlies.....	C2

🍷 Drinking

25 Charlie Rockets.....	D2
26 De Garre.....	C3
27 De Republiek.....	B2
28 Passage.....	A4
29 Snuffel Hostel.....	A1
30 't Brugs Beertje.....	B3
31 't Poatersgat.....	B1

🎪 Entertainment

32 Concertgebouw.....	A5
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🛍 Shopping

33 Chocolate Line.....	B4
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Choco-Story

MUSEUM

(www.choco-story.be; Wijnzakstraat 2; adult/child €6/4; ☺10am-5pm) Trace the cocoa bean's crooked path from Aztec currency to a dieter's dilemma in this absorbing museum that culminates in tasting a praline that's made as you watch. The last demonstration is at 4.45pm.

De Halve Maan

BREWERY

(www.halvermaan.be; Walplein 26) Find where the 'Bruges Fool' (*Brugse Zot*) originated on crowded 45-minute **guided tours** (tour incl 1 drink €5.50; ☺hourly 11am-4pm) of this 1856 brewery. Or just sip a 'Strong Henry' (*Straffe Hendrik*; 9%) in the appealing cafe.

Museum voor Volkskunde

MUSEUM

(Balstraat 43; adult/concession €2/1; ☺9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) In an attractive former almshouse, 18 themed tableaux illustrate Flemish life in times past. Although less engrossing than the Ghent equivalent, the surroundings are relatively free of tourists and the entry fee is quickly offset if you drink enough beer at the museum's time-warp cafe, **De Zwarte Kat** (☺closed 11.45am-2pm): only €1.25 a pop.

🛏 Sleeping

Brilliantly comprehensive, **Hotel Bruges** (<http://hotels.brugge.be/en>) helps you filter around 250 hotels and B&Bs. Nonetheless, all accommodation can prove oppressively overbooked from Easter to September, over Christmas and, especially, at weekends, when two-night minimum stays are commonly required. Cheaper B&Bs often offer discounts of around €10 per room per night for stays longer than one night. In the lowest seasons (early November, late January), midrange options sometimes give big last-minute discounts. An all-night touch-screen computer outside the main tourist office displays hotel availability and contact information.



Guesthouse Nuit Blanche B&B €€€
(☎0494 400447; www.bruges-bb.com;

Groeninge 2; d €175-195) Step into a Van Eyck painting where original gothic fireplaces and period furniture cunningly hide many of the modern fittings. The historic house once hosted Churchill, as well as Belgian royalty, and room rates cover the bottle of bubbly in your minibar. Drink it in the picture-postcard

canal-side garden or on 'lovers bridge', to which Guesthouse Nuit Blanche has a much-prized private entrance.

Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(050 33 79 26; www.relaisbourgondischcruyce.be; Wollestraat 41-47; d €185-375; ☺Mar-Dec) Luxury and history intertwine in this part-timbered medieval house full of designer fittings, genuine antiques, trunks, Persian rugs and even an original Matisse. Watch the tourists drool enviously as they pass in their cruise barges. Room sizes vary significantly.

Hostel Lybeer

HOSTEL €

(050 33 43 55; www.hostellybeer.com; Korte Voldersstraat 31; dm from €15, s/d without bathroom €27.50/55; @☺) 'Clean enough to be healthy, dirty enough to be happy', Lybeer has plenty of tatty edges, but few hostels have such a homely feeling or such congenially good-humoured staff. There's a large common room, small kitchen, free internet and laundry available (€3.50).

Bauhaus

HOSTEL €

(050 34 10 93; www.bauhaus.be; Langestraat 135; dm €15-22, s €30-34, tw €38-50; @☺) This well-run backpacker 'village' incorporates a bustling hostel, apartments, a night club, bike hire, internet cafe and a little chill-out room and garden, well hidden behind the reception and laundrette (at Langestraat 145). The atmospheric bar-restaurant is excellent... except when you're trying to sleep above it. Take bus 6 or 16 from the train station.

Hotel Patritius

FAMILY HOTEL €€

(050 33 84 54; www.hotelpatritius.be; Riddersstraat 11; d €80-122, tr €129-147; P☺☺) This proud 1830s town house has high ceilings, a snug bar-lounge, a historic spiral staircase and a pleasant garden. The 16 guest rooms vary radically in size and style: some new, some with exposed beams, some mildly chintzy. A decent breakfast is included.

B&B Huyze Hertsberge

B&B €€

(050 33 35 42; www.huyzehertsberge.be; Hertsbergestraat 8; r €125-165) Oozing with good taste, this late-17th-century house has a tranquil little canal-side garden and gorgeous period salon decked with antiques and sepia photos. Rooms are comfortably grand.

B&B Deltiens

B&B €€

(050 33 42 94; www.bedandbreakfastbruges.be; Waalsestraat 40; s/d/tr €70/80/100) Art old and new fills this classical house, which

remains an appealingly real home run by charming musician hosts. Central yet quiet.

't Keizershof

FAMILY HOTEL €

(050 33 87 28; www.hotelkeizershof.be; Oostermeers 126; s €25-44, d/tr/q €44/66/80; P) Seven simple rooms with shared bathrooms are remarkably tasteful and well kept for this price. Downstairs, a typical former brasserie-cafe is now used as the breakfast room. Free parking.

Etap Hotel

CHAIN HOTEL €

(050 40 51 20; www.etaphotel.com; Bruges Station; tr €49-59) This brand-new, 184-room hotel has retro fittings that are unexpectedly hip for a budget chain. Reception is manned 24 hours. Parking costs €2.50; wi-fi €4.50/9.90 per hour/day.

Hotel Central

HOTEL €€

(050 33 18 05; www.hotelcentral.be; Markt 30; d €80-100, without bathroom €60-80) Walls are thin, there's no lift and 'reception' means finding a waiter at the typical tourist restaurant downstairs. But, hey, you're right on Markt (though only room 9 has a view towards the belfry).



Eating

Touristy terraces crowd the Markt and line pedestrianised St-Amandsstraat where there are many cheaper eateries. Along eclectic Langestraat (the eastward extension of Hoogstraat), you'll find everything from kebabs to Michelin stars. About town, numerous taverns and bakeries serve snacks and several hostels offer great meal deals.



Den Gouden Harynck

FINE DINING €€€

(050 33 76 37; www.dengoudenharynck.be; Groeninge 25; mains €38-45, set lunch menu €35, 3-4-course menus €74/89; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Jackets or pearls are appropriate garb in this uncluttered Michelin-starred restaurant, where even the set lunch is a faultless exercise in artistic nouveau cuisine.

De Bottelier

MEDITERRANEAN €€

(050 33 18 60; www.debottelier.com; St-Jakobsstraat 63; pasta/veg dishes from €8.80/13.50, other mains from €16; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) Decorated with hats and old clocks, this adorable little restaurant overlooks a handkerchief of canal-side garden. It's consistently popular with local diners, so book ahead.

Est Wijnbar

TAPAS €

(050 33 38 39; www.wijnbarest.be; Braambergstraat 7; mains €9.50-12.50, tapas €3.50-9.50;

☺4pm-midnight Wed-Sun; 🍷) Partly stripped paintwork on heavy 17th-century beams creates an ancient-yet-modern feel in this tiny two-tiered wine bar, whose tempting light meals include seven vegetarian options. Live music Sundays.

Cambrinus BRASSERIE €€
(www.cambrinus.eu; Philipstockstraat 19; snacks €7, mains €17-23; ☺noon-11pm) Cambrinus keeps its kitchen open all day for mussels and other Belgian favourites, including many beer-based meals, and offers hundreds of brews to wash it all down with. It's family friendly, but the decor and service are in stereotypical British pub style.

De Bron VEGETARIAN €
(☺050 33 45 26; Katelijnestraat 82; ☺lunch Mon-Fri; 🍷) This bright, functional vegetarian restaurant essentially serves just soup (€2) or their daily changing lunch-of-the-day (small/medium/large €8.50/9/10.50). Add soy sauce and sesame seeds to taste.

't Gulden Vlies BELGIAN €€
(☺050 33 47 09; www.tguldenvlies.be; Mal-lebergplaats 17; mains €14-22, 2-/3-course menu €16/27; ☺7pm-3am Wed-Sun) Intimate late-night restaurant with old-fashioned decor and good-value Belgian cuisine.

De Twijfelaar BISTRO €€
(Eekhoutstraat 24; lunch €10, dinner mains €16-23; ☺noon-2.30pm & 6-11pm Tue-Sat) Combining a 1717 town house and an art-nouveau shop-building this 'art bistro' serves fair-value meals, including simple, inexpensive lunches.



Drinking & Entertainment

Hostels Bauhaus (p146), **Passage** (www.passagebruges.com), **Charlie Rockets** (www.charlierockets.com) and **Snuffel Hostel** (www.snuffel.be) all have congenial backpacker-oriented pubs, most serving decent yet inexpensive food. Bauhaus also has Bruges' one nightclub. Eiermarkt, just north of Markt, has many plain but lively bars, with DJs and seemingly endless happy hours.

De Garre PUB
(Garre 1; ☺noon-midnight) Hidden down a minuscule alley between candy shops, this antique pub serves dozens of Belgian ales. Served nowhere else, Garre Tripel (€3) is a magnificent 11% mind-blower.

De Republiek PUB
(www.derepubliek.be; St-Jakobsstraat 36; ☺from 11am) Spacious local favourite with can-

dledit tables, backlit bottles and a youthful buzz, it has a garden terrace and cheap food till late.

't Brugs Beertje PUB
(Kemelstraat 5; ☺4pm-1am Thu-Tue) Classic brew pub decorated with time-yellowed beer mats and enamel brewery signs.

't Poatersgat PUB
(Vlaamingstraat 82; ☺5pm-late) With mood-lit vaulted cellars decorated with old pianos and hop fronds, it's popular with 20-something locals. Beers cost from €2.

Concertgebouw CONCERT HALL
(☺050 47 69 99; www.concertgebouw.be; 't Zand 34) The 21st-century architecture is discordantly brash and contemporary, but the acoustics and top-floor views are hard to beat.

Information

TOURIST INFORMATION The **Tourist Office** (☺050 44 46 46; www.brugge.be) Concertgebouw ('t Zand 34; ☺10am-6pm); Train Station (☺10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) has standard city maps for €0.50, but the arguably better *Use-It* maps (www.use-it.be) are free if you ask for one.

WEBSITES **Bruggecentraal** (www.bruggecentraal.be) has events listings.

Getting There & Away

Bruges' train station is about 1.5km south of the Markt, a lovely walk via the Begijnhof. Every hour, trains run twice to Brussels (€12.90, one hour), five times to Ghent (€5.60, fast/slow 23/39 minutes), and once to Antwerp (€12.90, 70 minutes). For Ypres (leper in Dutch), take a train to Roeselare (€4.50, fast/slow 22/33 minutes), then bus 94 or 95: both buses pass key WWI sites en route.

Getting Around

BUS To get from the train station to Markt, take any bus marked 'Centrum'. For the way back, buses stop at Biekorf, just northwest of Markt on Kuiperstraat.

BICYCLE Bauhaus hostel (per half/full day €6/9), **Fietzen Popelier** (Mariastraat 26; per hr/half-day/full-day €3.50/7/10; ☺10am-7pm), and **Rent-a-Bike** (Bruges Station; per day/week €12/72; ☺7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun) all offer bicycle hire.

Quasimundo (☺050 33 07 75; www.quasimundo.eu; adult/student €24/22; ☺mid-Mar-mid-Oct) offers half-day bicycle tours around Bruges and its surroundings, with rental included. Book ahead.

BOAT Canal Tours (adult/child €6.90/3.20; ☉10am-6pm Easter-early Nov) depart every 20 minutes from several jetties, notably on Dijver. Tours last 30 minutes.

HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE Up to five people per carriage (€36) on a well-trodden, 35-minute route from the Markt. Includes a five-minute nosebag stop near the Begijnhof.

Around Bruges

Historic, quaint but often tourist-jammed, the inland port-village of **Damme** (www.toerismedamme.be) makes a popular summer excursion by canal **paddle steamer** (☉10am-5pm Easter-mid-Oct; one-way/return €6/7.50), departing every two hours from Bruges' Noorweegse Kaai (bus 4 from Markt). Consider cycling instead: it's only 5km and, by continuing 2km further along the idyllic canal, you'll escape from the worst of the visitor overload. If you're fit, consider then heading 10km northwest via Dudzele and **Hof Ter Doest** (www.terdoest.be) to sweet little **Lissewege** (www.lissewege.be), an artists village, which runs hourly trains to Bruges.

Quasimodo (☎050 37 04 70, 0800 97525; www.quasimodo.be) visits most of these on **Triple Treat tours** (under/over 26yr €45/55; ☉9am Mon, Wed & Fri Feb-mid-Dec), adding castles at **Loppem** and **Tillegem** and fascinating **WWII coastal defences** near Ostend. The same company's **Flanders Fields tours** (under/over 26yr €45/55; ☉9am Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) visit Ypres Salient.

Ypres

POP 35,500

Especially when viewed from the south-east, Ypres' Grote Markt is one of the most breathtaking market squares in Flanders. It's all the more astonishing once you discover that virtually all of its convincingly 'medieval' buildings are in fact 20th-century copies. The originals had been brutally bombarded into oblivion between 1914 and 1918 when the historic city failed to capitulate to German WWI advances. WWI battles in the surrounding poppy fields, known as the Ypres Salient, killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers. A century later, countless lovingly tended cemeteries remain, along with numerous widely spread WWI-based museums and trench remnants. Together they present a thoroughly moving introduction to the horrors and futility of war.

Sights

CENTRAL YPRES

Grote Markt

SQUARE

The brilliantly rebuilt **Lakenhallen**, a vast Gothic edifice originally serving as the 13th-century cloth market, dominates this very photogenic central square. It sports a 70m-high belfry, reminiscent of London's Big Ben, and hosts the gripping museum **In Flanders Fields** (www.inflandersfields.be; Grote Markt 34; adult/child €8/4; ☉10am-6pm), a multimedia WWI experience honouring ordinary people's experiences of wartime horrors. It's very highly recommended, but will be closed from mid-September 2011 till April 2012 for refitting. The ticket allows free entry to three other minor city museums.

Menin Gate & City Ramparts

NEIGHBOURHOOD

A block east of Grote Markt, the famous **Menin Gate** is a large stone gateway straddling the main road at the city moat. It's inscribed with the names of 54,896 'lost' British and other Commonwealth WWI troops whose bodies were never found. Every evening at 8pm, traffic is halted while buglers sound the **Last Post** (www.lastpost.be) in moving remembrance.

A pleasant 20-minute parkland stroll takes you south atop the hefty city **rampart remnants**, emerging at **Rijselpoort** where there's a pretty moat-side **war cemetery**. Beneath is the intriguing little **Ramparts War Museum** (Rijselestraat 208; admission €3; ☉11am-8pm), which displays WWI mementos through a series of subterranean mannequin scenes. Enter through the inexpensive **'t Klein Rijsel** pub, which serves its own caramel-rich beer (€2) in specially made tankards.

YPRES SALIENT

Many Salient sites are awkward to reach without a car or tour bus. However, the following are accessible by the Ypres-Roeselare bus routes 94 and 95, so could be visited en route to or from Bruges.

Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917

MUSEUM

(www.passchendaele.be; Ieperstraat 5, Zonnebeke; admission €5; ☉10am-6pm Feb-Nov) The highlight of this slick, very informative WWI museum is walking through recreated dug-outs and trench emplacements in the basement. It's in the 1922 'castle' of Zonnebeke village, 6km east of Ypres. Bus 94 stops 200m away.

Tyne Cot

CEMETERY

(admission free; ☎24hrs) The world's largest Commonwealth war cemetery, 11,956 soldiers are buried here in maudlin straight rows. A further 35,000 names of the missing are engraved on the rear wall. The name Tyne Cot was coined by Northumberland Fusiliers who fancied that German bunkers on the hillside here looked like Tyneside cottages (two remain sitting amid the graves). Enter via a sparse but well designed **visitor centre** (☎9am-6pm Feb-Nov). It's 3km beyond Zonnebeke, 500m from the nearest 94 bus stop.

Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof

CEMETERY

The Salient's small, intensely moving German cemetery has up to 10 bodies per grave and is eerily watched over by the silhouettes of four shadowy statues. Enter through a black concrete 'tunnel' that clanks and hisses spookily with distant war sounds while four short video montages commemorate the tragedy of war. Bus 95 stops outside at 'Duits Kerkhof'. That's 1km north of Lange-mark, 17 minutes from Ypres.

**Tours**

There are dozens more WWI sites to seek out. If you have wheels, the tourist office has useful pamphlets. The following two bookshops between Grote Markt and Me nin Gate sell a range of specialist books and offer twice-daily, half-day guided mini-bus tours of selected war sites. Advance booking is wise.

Over the Top (☎057 42 43 20; www.overthetoptours.be; Meensestraat 41; ☎9am-12.30pm, 1.30-5.30pm & 7.30-8.30pm)

British Grenadier (☎057 21 46 57; www.salienttours.com; Meensestraat 5; ☎9.30am-1pm, 2-6pm & 7.30-8.30pm)

**Sleeping & Eating**

The nearest youth hostel is located in Kortrijk.

Yoaké B&B

B&B €€

(☎057 20 35 14; www.yoake-ieper.be/bedhome.htm; Tempelstraat 35; d €85; 🚰🚿) Two smart rooms, one almost an apartment, are attached to a hip wellness centre. At week-ends it's only for guests taking the full €147 wellness package.

Ariane Hotel

HOTEL €€

(☎057 21 82 18; www.ariane.be; Slachthusstraat 58; s/d from €94/120; 🚰🚿) Peaceful, professionally managed larger hotel with

**WWI GRAVESITE SEARCHES**

If your relative died in the region's WWI battles, find out which cemetery or memorial they're commemorated at using www.cwgc.org (for UK and other Commonwealth soldiers), www.ambc.gov (for Americans) or www.volksbund.de (for Germans).

contemporary designer rooms, wartime memorabilia in common rooms and a swish restaurant that's a popular Ypres institution.

B&B Ter Thuyne

B&B €€

(☎057 36 00 42; www.terthuyn.be; Gustave de Stuersstraat 19; s/d €60/75; ☎) The three comfortable rooms are luminously bright, scrupulously clean and modern without fashion consciousness.

Hotel Regina

HOTEL €€

(☎057 21 88 88; www.hotelregina.be; Grote Markt 45; s/d from €70/85) Right on the Markt, the location is ideal. Attempts at 'artistic' decor generally backfire, but the Ensor room is a worthy exception, with an old-world timber interior and unbeatable views.

B&B Zonneweelde

B&B €

(☎057 20 27 23; Adjudant Masscheleinlaan 18; s/d €28/50) Cheap, basic rooms with a hotchpotch of furniture and scrappy shared bathroom facilities in an old-fashioned suburban home. It faces the canal, three blocks north of Grote Markt.

In 't Klein Stadhuis

CAFE, RESTAURANT €€

(www.kleinstadhuis.be; Grote Markt 32; mains €12-21; ☎closed Sun Oct-May) Tucked away in an eccentrically decorated historic guild-hall beside the Stadhuis, this split-level cafe serves gigantic, good-value meals and offers limited options even when the main kitchen is closed.

**Information**

INTERNET ACCESS Temple.com (Tempelstraat 18; per hr €2; ☎11am-7pm Fri-Wed) has computers with internet in a grocery shop run by a Cameroonian princess.

TOURIST INFORMATION The well-equipped tourist office **Toerisme Ieper** (☎057 23 92 20; www.ieper.be; Grote Markt 34; ☎9am-6pm) is located inside the Lakenhallen.

BEER COUNTRY

Dotted with windmills, the almost pan-flat hop fields north and west of Ypres produce many of Belgium's most sought-after beers. **De Dolle** (www.dedollebrouwers.be; ☺brewery visits 2pm Sun) creates **Oerbier** at Esen near attractive Diksmuide which, like Ypres, had its historic core totally rebuilt after WWI. Watou is known for the full-flavoured **St-Bernardus** (www.sintbernardus.be). Like liquid alcoholic chocolate, extraordinary **Panepot** (www.struise.noordhoek.com/eng) is brewed at the dreary-looking **Deca Brewery** in Woesten on the windmill-dotted road between Ypres and the gorgeous medieval town of Veurne. But the 'holy grail' of pubs is **In de Vrede** (www.indevrede.be; Donkerstraat 13, Westvleteren; ☺10am-8pm Sat-Wed), opposite **Abdij St-Sixtus** (St Sixtus Abbey; www.sint-sixtus.be; ☺closed to visitors). While the pub's decor is far from memorable, it's the only place anywhere on earth where there's a reasonably assured chance of drinking (not taking away) the rarest of Trappist beers, **Westvleteren 12°** (€4.50). It's often cited as the world's best brew. Once you've tasted its fruity complexity, you might well agree.

i Getting There & Around

BUS Services pick up passengers in Grote Markt's northeast corner (check the direction of the bus carefully!) including Roeselare-bound routes 94 (roughly twice hourly on weekdays, five daily on weekends) and 95 (hourly on weekdays, five daily on weekends).

TRAIN Services run hourly to Ghent (€9.90, one hour) and Brussels (€15.20, 1½ hours) via Kortrijk (€4.50, 30 minutes), where you could change for Bruges or Antwerp.

BICYCLE Hire bicycles from **Hotel Ambrosia** (☎057 36 63 66; www.ambrosiahotel.be; D'Hondtstraat 54; per day €10; ☺9am-7pm); a credit card is required as a guarantee.

seums, all free on the first Sunday of each month.

The **Auberge de Jeunesse** (☎069 21 61 36; www.laj.be; Rue St-Martin 64; dm/s/d €17.50/31/44) is one of Belgium's friendliest hostels (take bus 7 or 88). Central though hidden, the likeable **Hôtel d'Alcantara** (☎069 21 26 48; www.hotelalcantara.be; Rue des Bouchers St-Jacques 2; s/d from €84/94; 📞📧📶) experiments semi-successfully with '70s-retro design within a regal old town house.

The train station, 1km northeast of the centre, has connections twice hourly to Brussels (€11.70, fast/slow 61/73 minutes) and hourly to Lille-Flandres (€6, 25 minutes).

WALLONIA

Tournai

POP 68,000

Pleasant Tournai (Doornik in Dutch) is Wallonia's oldest city. It was battered by WWII bombs, but the photogenic **Grand Place** has since been convincingly rebuilt. The city might not merit a long detour, but if you want to reach Lille (France) from Brussels by train without paying high-speed supplements, coming this way can save you money.

Sights include the five iconic towers of the striking, if sober and scaffolding-filled, **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (admission free; ☺9.15am-noon & 2-6pm) and the 72m-high **belfry**, which is Belgium's oldest. Both are Unesco World Heritage Sites. Facing the belfry, the **Tourist Office** (☎069 22 20 45; www.tournai.be; Vieux Marché aux Poteries 14) can point you towards a cache of enjoyable mu-

Liège

POP 189,000

Beneath its brutally disfigured, post-industrial surface, sprawling Liège (Luik in Dutch) is a living architectural onion concealing layer upon layer of history. Fine churches abound, as befits a city that spent 800 years as the capital of an independent principality run by bishops. Proudly free-spirited citizens are disarmingly friendly and no Belgian city bubbles with more joie de vivre. Love it or loathe it, Liège is quirky and oddly compulsive.

i Sights

The historic zone and main **museums** (free the first Sunday of each month) are a short walk west of Liège-Palais train station: walk east past the vast, dour former Bishops' Palace (Place St-Lambert) through attractive Place du Marché. For a **panoramic view** of the city, climb to the top of the **Montagne de Buuren stairway**.

Musée de la Vie Wallonne

MUSEUM

(www.viewallonnie.be; Cour des Mineurs; adult/child €5/3; ☎10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) In an adapted convent-cloister building, this quirkily imaginative multimedia experience examines Wallonia's economic rise and fall, from 12th-century Mosan metalwork to 1960s room decor to the late-20th-century post-industrial demise.

Grand Curtius

MUSEUM

(www.grandcurtiusliege.be; Féronstrée 136; adult/concession €5/3; ☎10am-6pm Wed-Mon) This engrossing, ambitious museum has interwoven tales of Liège artists and industries with a wide-ranging history of the visual arts. Allow several hours to do it justice.

Musée de l'Art Wallon

ART MUSEUM

(Féronstrée 86; adult/child €5/3; ☎1-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) Behind a brutally ugly exterior, discover this truly excellent collection of art by Francophone Belgian artists.

Sleeping**Hôtel Hors Château**

GUEST HOUSE €€

(☎04 250 60 68; www.hors-chateau.be; Rue Hors Château 62; s/d/ste €78/95/125, breakfast €12; ☎) Nine stylish new rooms tucked into an old half-timbered building ideally situated in the historic quarter. Call ahead to arrange arrival times.

Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎04 344 56 89; www.laj.be; Rue Georges Simonon 2; HI members dm/s/d €18.80/33/46; ☎) Great hostel across the river in the Outremeuse 'republic'.

Hôtel Les Acteurs

FAMILY HOTEL €€

(☎04 223 00 80; www.lesacteurs.be; Rue des Urbanistes 10; s/d/tr €46/66/83) Simple but cheap, well-maintained old rooms above a very inexpensive cafe.

Eating & Drinking

There are terrace restaurants on Place du Marché, many good-value sandwich shops along Rue Hors Château and an interesting range of little eateries on Rue Roture, hidden away near the hostel in Outremeuse. Tread carefully on Rue du Pot d'Or, which has dozens of (overly) lively late-night bars.

La Maison du Peket/Amon Nanesse

PUB, RESTAURANT €€

(www.maisondupeket.be; Rue de l'Épée 4; meals €10.50-18.50; ☎10am-2am, kitchen noon-2.30pm & 6-10.30pm) Just behind Place du Marché,

this rambling antique house with bare brick walls and heavy beams combines a lively bar specialising in Walloon *genièvre* (*jenever*; Dutch gin) with a restaurant serving satisfying pub meals, including *boulets à la liègeoise* (meatballs in raisin-sweetened gravy).

Le Pot au Lait

PUB

(www.potaulait.be; Rue Sœurs de Hasque; ☎10am-2am Mon-Sat, 2pm-2am Sun; ☎) Watch aliens landing in Liège's wackiest pub-cafe, hidden in an alley 100m east of the cathedral. La Chouffe draft costs only €2.30. No food.

Information**TOURIST INFORMATION** The **Maison de**

Tourisme (☎04 237 92 92; www.liege.be, www.ftpl.be; Place St-Lambert 32; ☎9am-5.30pm) and **Office du Tourisme** (☎04 221 92 21; Féronstrée 92; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) can suggest dozens of additional city attractions.

Getting There & Away**Trains from Liège-Palais**

Brussels (€13.60, 125 minutes, hourly) via **Huy** (€4.40, 29 minutes)

Coo (€7.70, one hour)

Luxembourg City (€38.20, 2½ hours, 18 daily) via **Clervaux** (€20.60, 1½ hours, every two hours)

Trains from Liège-Guillemins

Aachen (€11.70, 54 minutes, every two hours)

Brussels (€13.60, one hour, hourly) via **Leuven** (€9.90, 35 minutes)

Maastricht (€4.30, 30 minutes, hourly)

High-speed Services

Reservations are compulsory for the following:

Cologne (standard/pre-booked €33/19, one hour, six daily) via **Aachen** (€23/14, 23 minutes)

Frankfurt (€94.60/39, 2½ hours, three daily)

Paris (€89/45, 2¼ hours, seven daily)

Bastogne

POP 14,200

In late 1944 allied forces were sweeping east across Europe. But WWII wasn't yet over. Hitler's last gasp was a midwinter counter-attack that devastated the Ardennes and nearby Luxembourg, creating a 'bulge' in the allied frontline. During this pivotal 'Battle of the Bulge', plucky Bastogne was surrounded but refused to capitulate. Today the town isn't lovely, but it's a must-see for

ON THE ROAD IN WALLONIA

Without a car you'll spend longer reaching most of the Wallonia's rural sites than actually enjoying them. But by car, combining a handful of destinations can make for a very enjoyable day out. There's a very wide choice of accommodation, but much is packed full in summer and closed in winter. For in-depth coverage, see Lonely Planet's *Belgium & Luxembourg*.

Kayaking & Outdoor Activities

Durbuy (www.durbuyinfo.be, www.durbuyadventure.be) The 'world's smallest town' is quaint if touristy and is well set up for all manner of sporting fun. Plenty of hotels.

La Roche-en-Ardenne (www.ardenne-aventures.be, www.brandsport.be, www.la-roche-tourisme.com) Water sports and mountain biking from a charmingly compact town nestled around a medieval castle ruin.

Coo (www.coo-adventure.com) The hamlet's famous 15m 'waterfall' is underwhelming but outdoor options are numerous and there's a family amusement park (see www.plopsa.be). Accommodation is limited in Coo but is more plentiful in nearby Stavelot.

Caves

Belgium's publicly accessible cave systems each have their own character. Visits take over an hour with set departure times that vary seasonally (check websites). There's no 'escape' once you've started so don't forget appropriate footwear, warm clothes and a pre-emptive bathroom stop.

Han-sur-Lesse (www.grotte-de-han.be) Belgium's foremost stalactite-rich caves are accessed by a little train ride, but it's often over-stuffed with tourists. Nearby hotels are lacklustre; a hostel is available (see www.gitesdetape.be).

Rochefort (www.valdelesse.be) This attractive town is famous for its Trappist beers. Walking distance from the town centre, the Grotte de Lorette is remarkable for its depth, not its stalagmites. Good choice of accommodation.

WWII buffs. The main square – a car park adorned with a tank – has been renamed Place McAuliffe after the American general whose famous reply to the German call to surrender was one word, 'Nuts!' Here you'll find the **Maison du Tourisme** (☎061 21 27 11; www.paysdebastogne.be; Place McAuliffe 60; ☺9am-6pm).

Of numerous WWII museums, Bastogne's best is 800m northeast of here: **J'avais 20 ans en '45** (☎061 50 20 02; www.bastogne.be/20ansen45; adult/child €6.50/5; ☺10am-6pm, closed Fri Oct-Apr, last entry 5pm) is an imaginative exhibition giving movingly balanced insights into the conflict through dozens of eyewitness video accounts. Keep the entry ticket to get a €1 discount at **Bastogne Historical Centre** (www.bastognehistoricalcenter.be; Colline du Mardasson; entry incl audioguide adult/child €8.50/6; ☺9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Dec), a much more standard war museum full of uniforms, weapons, a couple of dioramas and a movie. It's located on a gentle hilltop 1.5km further northeast and is beside

a big star-shaped **American War Memorial**, beneath which is a chapel-cave with mosaics by Fernand Léger.

Right on Bastogne's main square, the warm and friendly **Hôtel Collin** (☎061 21 48 88; www.hotel-collin.com; Place McAuliffe 8; s/d/tr €67/85/105) is a pleasant family hotel with a pseudo-art-nouveau cafe and a Mediterranean-styled restaurant.

Bus 163b (€3.80, 45 minutes) runs every two hours to Libramont on the Brussels-Luxembourg train line. Buses also run hourly (except Sundays) to Ettelbrück (one hour) in Luxembourg.

UNDERSTAND BELGIUM

History

Bruges, Ghent and Ypres boomed in the 13th and 14th centuries as northern Europe's foremost cloth-trading cities. Crafts-

Hotton (www.grottesdehotton.com, www.si-hotton.be) Great grottoes and a jaw-dropping vertical subterranean chasm, yet relatively uncommercial.

Remouchamps (www.grottes.be; www.ourthe-ambleve.be) Lacks the drama of the three 'greats' above, but you get to ride down an underground river in a boat.

Castles

Wallonia's capital **Namur** (www.namurtourisme.be, www.mtpn.be) is dominated by a massive, sober fortified **citadel** (www.citadelle.namur.be; admission free), but the region has many more romantic castles including the following:

Château de Jehay (www.chateaujehay.be; adult/student €5/2.50, audioguide €1; ☺2-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) A 1550 gingerbread fantasy of alternating brick and stone layers rising from a tree-ringed moat between Liège and patchily historic Huy (bus 85).

Château de Modave (www.modave-castle.be; adult/student €7.50/4; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Nov) Palatial chateau with 20 majestically furnished rooms and 17th-century stucco ceilings.

Château de Lavaux-Sainte-Anne (www.chateau-lavaux.com; adult/child €6.50/4; ☺9am-5.30pm) Partly furnished 1450 moated fortress visible west of the E411 motorway as you pass junction 22a just 10km from Han-sur-Lesse.

Semois Valley

Eccentric loops of river valley flanked by vividly green waterside meadow extend either side of **Bouillon**, whose looming central castle ruin once belonged to the crusader conqueror of Jerusalem. The Ardennes' finest panoramic viewpoints overlook the Semois at **Rochehaut** and at harder-to-reach **Tombeau du Géant**. A relatively short drive south-east is **Orval**, with its highly photogenic, part-ruined abbey, which is most famous for its Trappist beer. A unique if understrength variant of the beer is available at the monastery pub, **Auberge de l'Ange Gardien** (☺11am-8pm).

people established powerful guilds that built elaborate guildhouses around fine market squares, typically adorned with a belfry as a symbol of civic pride.

When Protestantism swept across Europe in the 16th century, the Low Countries (present-day Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) embraced it, much to the chagrin of their ruler, the fanatically Catholic Philip II of Spain. The result, from 1568, was a war that lasted 80 years and in the end roughly laid the region's present-day borders. Holland and its allied provinces victoriously expelled the Spaniards, while Belgium and Luxembourg stayed under their strict Catholic rule.

For the next 200 years Belgium remained a battlefield for successive foreign powers. After the Spaniards came the Austrians, and, in turn, the French. After Napoleon was trounced in 1815 at Waterloo near Brussels, the Dutch took over for 15 years until, in 1830, the Catholic Belgians split from prot-

estant Holland and finally formed their own kingdom.

From the late 19th century, Belgium rapidly grew wealthy, both through industrialisation and through King Léopold II's disgraceful profiting from the Congo, which was brutal even by the colonial standards of that era.

When WWI kicked off in 1914 Belgium was officially neutral, but the Germans invaded anyway. Western Flanders became a blood-soaked killing field and whole towns, including historic Ypres, were bombarded into the mud. Incredibly Ypres' ancient heart has since been meticulously rebuilt and tours of the Ypres Salient offer poignant WWI reminders.

During WWII, the country was taken over within three weeks of a surprise German attack in May 1940 and, even after an initial 1944 liberation, suffered a second devastation during Hitler's last-gasp counter-attack in the Ardennes. A Belgian government in exile was formed in London, but King

Léopold III remained in Nazi-occupied Belgium. Questions over this perceived collaboration led to his abdication in 1950 in favour of his son, King Baudouin. Baudouin's popular reign ended with his abrupt death in 1993. Childless, Baudouin was succeeded by his brother, the present King Albert II.

Despite the wars, for much of the 20th century Wallonia's mining, glassware, steel and other heavy industries made it the powerhouse of one of Europe's strongest economies. However, since the 1970s, the old economic balance has reversed with a serious post-industrial decline affecting much of Wallonia, while formerly agricultural Flanders has boomed with new high-tech industries. A parallel series of political changes have increasingly emphasised the north-south linguistic divide. With ever less communication between the regions, forming a national consensus has proved ever more difficult in recent years. In 2007 the country was without a government for nearly a year. And the 2010 federal elections saw months more deadlock. The immediate sticking point has been the arcane case of BHV, an anomalous boundary question affecting a voting district in Flemish Brabant. But, at a more fundamental level, Flemish politicians want greater autonomy for their wealthy region, while French speakers fear that further separation of powers will reduce subsidies to the struggling south. Politicians' increasing inability to compromise threatens to break the nation irrevocably in two. However, the risk of Flanders rapidly declaring unilateral independence is probably overstated since nobody quite knows what would then become of Brussels. And it would all be very expensive. For many citizens the issues are seen as mere political point scoring and, as a result, public confidence in politics in general has sunk to an all-time low.

People

Belgium's population is split north-south by language. In Flanders (Vlaanderen) the language is the Flemish dialect of Dutch. South of the divide in Wallonia (La Wallonie), people speak French with some Belgian peculiarities, though a tiny enclave of the eastern Ardennes is German speaking. Brussels is officially bilingual, though in day-to-day reality spoken French (and English) predominates there. Politically, the two main

language communities have long been at loggerheads. But they share a low-key form of tolerant Roman Catholicism. Religious-based traditions remain strong but, to a great extent, being Catholic is more a badge of social status than a spiritual dogma. Many Belgian cities have large immigrant communities, notably from Italy and France, but more conspicuously from Morocco, Turkey and the former Belgian colony of Congo. Belgium's small Jewish community is most visible in Antwerp's diamond district.

Arts

Literature

One of Belgium's foremost novelists was Hugo Claus, whose masterpiece, *The Sorrow of Belgium*, weaves a beautifully nuanced examination of Nazi collaboration during WWII. Georges Simenon, the 'shagaholic' creator of Inspector Maigret, was born in Liège.

Music & Dance

Belgium owes its independence to an 1830 revolution that started with an opera at La Monnaie/De Munt, still Brussels' foremost classical venue. Jazz owes much to Belgium's Adolphe Sax who invented the saxophone. Brussels' three-day **Jazz Marathon** (www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be; ☺late May) remains one of the capital's most joyous events.

In the 1950s Flemish-born chanson star Jacques Brel took the French-speaking world by storm and remains widely revered. Among more contemporary names, keep an ear out for Puggy, Arid, Ghinzu and dEUS (alternative rock), Soulwax/2manyDJs (electro/mash-up), Axelle Red (pop-chanson) and Hooverphonic (trip hop).

Foremost in Belgian dance are the **Royal Flanders Ballet** (www.kbv.be) and dynamic contemporary groups **Rosas** (www.rosas.be) and **Danses/Plan K** (www.charleroi-danses.be).

Architecture

Dozens of Belgium's earliest buildings feature on Unesco's World Heritage list, including many a great belfry (belfort, beffroi) and *begijnhof* (courtyard surrounded by historic dwellings built to house lay sisters). Belgium was at the forefront of sinuously beautiful art nouveau, the design wave that swept across Europe at the end of the 19th century. Although later 20th-century neglect put much of this heritage under the demolition

ball, there are still some fine examples in Brussels (Musée Horta, MIM) and Antwerp ('t Zuid and Zurenborg areas).

Apart from the mind-boggling 1958 Atomium, later 20th-century architecture proved far less inspired. Brussels' glass-tower EU quarter tragically wasted a great opportunity for city re-invention, but the last decade has seen a few contemporary masterpieces, such as Santiago Calatrava's Guillemins train station in Liège.

Visual Arts

In the late Middle Ages, sophisticated artists known quite misleadingly as the Flemish Primitives were at the forefront of a secularisation of painting. Key players included Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, whose works are prominent in Belgian art galleries. Brussels' Breugel (Breughel) family created some of the 16th century's most memorable art, from peasant scenes to terrifying Bosch-like allegories of hell and damnation. However, styles changed radically with the 17th-century Counter-Reformation. To remind upstart citizens of the Catholic God's mystical power, baroque altarpieces and giant paintings burst forth with chubby cherubs and angelic awe. That era's foremost artist was Antwerp-based Pieter Paul Rubens, whose works are still an essential feature of numerous Antwerp museums and churches.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Belgian art greats included sculptor and social realist painter Constantin Meunier, expressionist pioneer James Ensor, fauvist Rik Wouters and multitalented Jean Brusselmans. Symbolist Fernand Khnopff produced beguiling work echoing the contemporary pre-Raphaelites and giving a foretaste of surrealism, whose foremost Belgian star was René Magritte, now celebrated in an excellent new Brussels museum.

Amongst Belgium's best-known contemporary artists are Panamarenko, Luc Tuymans and Jan Fabre, notable for covering a ceiling in Brussels' Palais Royal with 1.4 million iridescent beetle wing cases.

Sport

In an unexpected double comeback, Belgium's 'retired' tennis greats, Justine Henin and Kim Clijsters, have returned to the global top twenty, closely followed by up-and-coming star Yanina Wickmayer. However, Belgium's beloved sport, cycling, is in

the doldrums, while the nation's hopes of co-hosting the 2018 soccer World Cup came to nothing.

Food & Drink

Dining is a treat in Belgium, where meals are often described as being French in quality, German in quantity. Though Belgian home-cooking is making a resurgence (see p114 for typical local dishes), many upper-range restaurants still prefer French-influenced cuisine. Here starters regularly include pâtés, garlic snails and possibly scallops. Main courses typically offer relatively unfussy fresh-fish dishes (monkfish, sole or perhaps cod) and quality meats. Steaks are generally served bloodier than English-speaking visitors anticipate: *à point* translates in phrase books as 'medium' but tends to approach what many Anglophones consider as rare. 'Blue' steaks have barely bounced off the grill. Locals show no qualms at tucking into frog's legs, veal, rabbit, foie gras, tripe or horse meat (*paardenfilet/steack de cheval*).

Although restaurants can be pricey, you can save money by taking a weekday lunchtime *dagschotel/plat du jour* (dish of the day) or *dagmenu/menu du jour* (multi-course meal of the day). Or by eating in cafes or Asian places (where rice is generally included in menu prices). A *belegd broodje/sandwich garni* (half a baguette with filling) makes a great, inexpensive quick lunch.

Belgian cafes always serve alcohol, as well as coffee, and are convivial places to sample the nation's amazing range of beers. Belgium's famous lagers (eg Stella Artois) and white beers (Hoegaarden) are now global brands. But what has connoisseurs really drooling are the robust, rich 'abbey' beers (which were originally brewed in monasteries), and the 'Trappist beers' (that still are). Chimay, Rochefort, Westmalle and Orval are the best known, but, for beer maniacs, the one that really counts is Westvleteren 12° (see p150), which, like Chimay Blue and Rochefort 8, should ideally be aged a year or two. A Belgian beer oddity is spontaneously fermented lambic, a startlingly acidic brew made more palatable by aging then blending into gueuze or macerating with cherries to produce *kriek*.

Although tap water is always drinkable, in restaurants it's never served. Buy the bottled stuff – or beer, which is often cheaper.

Note that smoking is banned in restaurants and in cafes that serve meals.

BUYING BELGIAN CHOCOLATES

Mouth-watering Belgian chocolate is some of the world's best as it always uses 100% pure cocoa butter and involves lengthy 'conching' (stirring) to create a silky smooth texture. Within any specialist chocolatier shop, archetypal pralines (filled, bite-size chocolates) cost the same whether you select piece-by-piece or take a pre-mixed ballotin selection pack. However, prices vary radically between brands. So which to pick?

Leonidas (Map p122; www.leonidas.com; per kg €20.20) Ubiquitous. Although maligned by Belgian choco snobs, its price-quality ratio is hard to beat.

Corné Port Royal (Map p122; www.corneportroyal.be; per kg €40) Great *manons* (short-shelf-life pralines filled with flavoured crème-fraîche).

Galler (Map p122; www.galler.com; per kg €48) Innovative Kaori chocolate sticks that you dip in provided flavour pots.

Chocolate Line (Map p144; www.thechocolateline.be; per kg €50) Dominique Persoone's wild experiments have included using chilli, oregano and wasabi: the chocolate shooters were originally created for the Rolling Stones. Antwerp and Bruges only.

Neuhaus (Map p122; www.neuhaus.be; per kg €52) Established in 1857 in Brussels' gorgeous Galerie de la Reine, Neuhaus created Belgium's original pralines.

Pierre Marcolini (off Map p122; www.marcolini.be; per kg €70) Chic chocolatier famed for using exclusive chocolate beans, experimental flavours (eg tea) and fashion-conscious black-box packaging.

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Directory A–Z

Accommodation

In **hotel** rooms under €60 for a double expect shared bathroom facilities. Midrange hotels (under €150) can be fairly functional, but many top-end establishments in Brussels cut prices radically at weekends and in summer.

Rooms rented in local homes (*gastenkamers/chambres d'hôtes*) can be cheap and cheerful (from €35/45 per single/double), but many **B&Bs** offer standards equivalent to a boutique hotel (up to €160 double).

Holiday houses (*gîtes*) are easily rented in Wallonia, but minimum stays apply and there's a hefty 'cleaning fee' on top of quoted rates; see **Belsud** (www.belsud.be).

Dorm beds in **hostels** cost from €15 to 29. Hostels (*jeugdherbergen* in Dutch, *auberges de jeunesse* in French) affiliated with **Hostelling International** (HI; www.jeugdherbergen.be, www.laj.be) charge €3 extra for non-members, and around €2 less for under-26-year-olds (prices include sheets and a basic breakfast). Always read the conditions.

Camping opportunities are plentiful, especially in the Ardennes. For extensive listings see www.campingbelgique.be (Wallonia) and www.camping.be (Flanders).

PRICE RANGES

Our sleeping reviews refer to double rooms with a private bathroom, except in hostels or where otherwise specified. The rates quoted are for **high season**, which is May to September in Bruges, Ypres and the Ardennes, and September to June in business cities.

€€€ more than €150

€€ €60 to €150

€ less than €60

Activities

In **Flanders** (www.fietsroute.org), **bicycles** are a popular means of everyday travel and many roads have dedicated cycle lanes. In **Wallonia** (www.ravel.wallonie.be), the hilly terrain favours mountain bikes (*VTT/vélo tout-terrain* in French). Brussels offers a forward-thinking bike-rental scheme, but its drivers are notorious for disregarding bicycles – beware!

Canoeing and **kayaking** are best in the Ardennes, but don't expect rapids of any magnitude.

Local tourist offices have copious information about footpaths and sell regional **hiking** maps. Hilly Wallonia is more inspiring than flat Flanders.

Many **museums** in Flanders offer €1 tickets for 'youths' under 26 years.

Business Hours

Opening hours given in the text are for high season. Many tourism-based businesses reduce their hours off season.

Banks 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri

Brasseries 11am-1am

Clubs 11pm-6am Fri-Sun

Pubs & cafes till 1am or later

Restaurants 11.30am-2.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm

Shops 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, limited opening Sun; some close for lunch

Supermarkets 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, some open Sundays

Embassies

All are in Brussels.

Australia (☎02 286 05 00; www.eu.mission.gov.au; Rue Guimard 6/8)

Canada (☎02 741 06 11; www.ambassade-canada.be; Ave de Tervuren 2)

Japan (☎02 513 23 40; www.be.emb-japan.go.jp; Sq de Meeûs 5-6)

New Zealand (☎02 512 10 40; www.nzembassy.com; Ave des Nerviens 9-31)

UK (☎02 287 62 11; www.ukinbelgium.fco.gov.uk; Ave Auderghem 10)

US (☎02 811 40 00; <http://belgium.usembassy.gov>; Blvd du Régent 27)

Food

Price ranges for average main courses are as follows:

€€€ more than €25

€€ €14 to €25

€ less than €14

Money

Banks usually offer better exchange rates than **exchange bureaux** (*wisselkantoren* in Dutch, *bureaux de change* in French), though sometimes only for their banking clients.

ATMs are widespread, but often hidden within bank buildings.

Tipping is not expected in restaurants (service and VAT is always included).

Public Holidays

School holidays are July and August; one week in November; two weeks at Christmas; one week around Carnival; two weeks at Easter; one week in May.



ENTERTAINMENT RESOURCES

Nightlife listings www.theclubbing.com, www.noctis.com

Cinema listings www.cinenews.be

Concerts & tickets www.fnacagen.da.be

Public holidays are as follows:

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Ascension Day Fortieth day after Easter

Whit Monday Seventh Monday after Easter

Flemish Community Festival 11 July (Flanders only)

National Day 21 July

Assumption 15 August

Francophone Community Festival 27 September (Wallonia only)

All Saints' Day 1 November

Armistice Day 11 November

German-Speaking Community Festival 15 November (eastern cantons only)

Christmas Day 25 December

Telephone

Dial full numbers: there's no optional area code.

International operator ☎1324

Directory assistance ☎1405; costs a hefty €3

Reverse-charge ☎1224

Toll-free ☎0800

High toll ☎0900, ☎070

Visas

Schengen visa rules apply. See p1217 for more information. Embassies are listed at www.diplomatie.belgium.be/en.

Getting There & Away

Air

Antwerp airport (ANR; www.antwerpairport.be) is tiny with just a few flights to the UK on **CityJet** (www.cityjet.com).

EUROLINES SERVICES

LINE	STANDARD PRICE (€)	SUPER-PROMO PRICE (€)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Brussels–Amsterdam	17	10	3¾–4½	8 daily
Brussels–Frankfurt	44	38	6	1 or 2 daily
Brussels–London	41	22	6–8½	5 daily
Bruges–London	41	22	4¾	2 weekly, daily in summer
Brussels–Paris	29	9	4	12 daily

Brussels airport (BRU; www.brusselsairport.be) is Belgium's main long-haul gateway. Domestic airline **Brussels Airlines** (www.brusselsairlines.com) flies from here to numerous European and African destinations. Brussels is also a European hub for Chinese airline **Hainan Airlines** (www.global.hnair.com), Gulf-based **Etihad** (www.etihadairways.com), and Indian airline **Jet Airways** (www.jetairways.com), with useful connections to North America and throughout Asia.

Budget airlines **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com), **JetAirFly** (www.jetairfly.com) and **Wizzair** (www.wizzair.com) use the misleadingly named **Brussels-South Charleroi Airport** (CRL; www.charleroi-airport.com), which is actually 55km south of Brussels, 6km north of the ragged, post-industrial city of Charleroi. **L'Elan** (www.voyages-lelan.be) runs direct buses to/from a stop near Bruxelles-Midi station roughly every half hour (single/return €13/22, one hour); the last northbound services departs at 11.30pm, the first southbound at 4.30am. Alternatively **buses** (www.infotec.be; €2.70, 18 minutes) run to Charleroi-Sud train station twice hourly on weekdays, hourly at weekends. A combined bus-and-rail ticket purchased before leaving the airport is never more than €11 to anywhere in Belgium. If planning to sleep at the airport, bring a good mat and something warm or use one of eight mostly generic hotels around 2km away, such as the bare-bones Formule 1.

Liège airport (LGG; www.liegeairport.com) has mostly charter flights

Land

BUS

Ecolines (☎02 279 20 57; www.ecolines.net) and **Eurobus** (☎02 527 50 12; www.eurobus.pl) operate from Brussels and Antwerp to various destinations in Eastern Europe.

Eurolines (☎02 274 13 50; www.eurolines.be) telephone booking line 9am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat) is part of the Europe-wide network. Pre-bookings are compulsory but, although nine Belgian cities are served, only Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Liège have ticket offices. Special tickets adding a connecting bus to major cities in England/Scotland (from €15/22 total) are available through ticket offices but not available online. See the boxed text for some examples of standard/'super-promo' (off peak, advance purchase) fares.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Border crossings are not usually controlled. Petrol is cheaper in Luxembourg, so fill up there if passing by. **Car-share EuroStop** (www.taxistop.be; €3 per 100km) matches paying hitchhikers with drivers for long-distance international rides. A **driving licence** from your home country will usually suffice for foreign drivers. As in France, there is **priorité à droite** (give way to the right); see the boxed text, p468.

TRAIN

For comprehensive timetables and international bookings, see www.b-rail.be.

High-speed Trains

International high-speed trains have compulsory pre-booking requirements and charge radically different prices according to availability, so advance booking can save a packet. Operating companies:

Thalys (www.thalys.com) Paris–Brussels–Antwerp–Rotterdam–Schipol–Amsterdam runs eight times daily; the Brussels–Amsterdam section takes 113 minutes. Brussels–Paris takes 80 minutes with summer-only connections to Avignon and Marseille (5¾ hours). Brussels–Liège–

Aachen–Cologne (108 minutes) runs four times daily.

Eurostar (www.eurostar.com) Brussels–Lille–London St Pancras (two hours) runs up to nine times daily.

ICE (www.db.de) Brussels–Liège–Aachen–Cologne–Frankfurt (3¼ hours) runs six times daily via Frankfurt airport (three hours).

TGV (www.sncf.com) Has numerous Belgium–France routes, including Brussels–CDG airport (100 minutes, seven daily), but no service to central Paris.

FYRA (www.fyra.com) The Brussels–Amsterdam high-speed service (1¾ hours) is due to start in 2013.

Other International Trains

NMBS/SNCB trains have fixed fares, accept rail passes without a surcharge and don't require advanced booking. Useful international connections include Brussels–Luxembourg (€34.60, 3¼ hours) every two hours; and Brussels–Antwerp–Amsterdam (€37.80, three hours), currently hourly at least until FYRA services start. There's no NMBS/SNCB Brussels–Paris train but NMBS/SNCB trains run regularly to Lille from Tournai (€6, 30 minutes), Ypres (via Kortrijk) and Antwerp (via Ghent).

Sea

Most UK-bound motorists drive a couple of hours west to Dunkirk (Dunkerque) or Calais in France. However there are two direct options from Belgium:

Zeebrugge–Hull P&O (www.poferries.com) runs the 14-hour overnight service, which costs from €159 one-way. Pedestrians can reach Zeebrugge port on a bus leaving Bruges train station at 7.30pm (€3.50).

Ostend–Ramsgate TransEuropa Ferries (www.transeuropaf ferries.com) runs this service (€55–62 one-way, four hours, four daily). No pedestrians carried.

Getting Around

Bicycle

Cycling is a great way to get around in flat Flanders, less so in chaotic Brussels or undulating Wallonia. The Belgian countryside is riddled with cycling routes (see www.veloroutes.be) and most tourist offices sell helpful regional cycling maps.

Bikes on the train cost €5 one-way (or €8 all day) on top of the rail fare. A few busy city-centre train stations don't allow bicycle transportation.

Bike hire is available from private operators and many major train stations from around €6.50/9.50 per half/full day. A deposit and/or ID is usually required.

Bus & Tram

Regional buses are well coordinated with Belgium's rail network, but in rural regions you can still find that relatively short distances can involve long waits. In Brussels and Antwerp, trams that run underground are marked '*premetro*'. Bus companies:

De Lijn (www.delijn.be, in Dutch) In Flanders.

STIB (www.stib.be) In Brussels.

TEC (www.infotec.be) In Wallonia.

Car & Motorcycle

Motorways are toll free. **Speed limits** are 50km/h in most towns (30km/h near schools), 70km/h to 90km/h on inter-town roads, and 120km/h on motorways. The maximum legal **blood alcohol limit** is 0.05%. **Car hire** is available at airports and major train stations, but is usually cheaper from city centre offices.

Taxi

Taxis must usually be pre-booked but there are ranks near main stations. Tips and taxes are always included in metered fares.

Train

NMBS/SNCB (Belgian Railways; ☎02 528 28 28; www.b-rail.be) trains are completely non-smoking. Special fare categories:

Children After 9am, kids under 12 travel for free if accompanied by an adult.

Seniors People over 65 pay only €5 for a return 2nd-class trip anywhere in Belgium (some exclusions apply).

B-Excursions Good-value one-day excursion fares including return rail ticket plus selected entry fees.

Go Pass/Rail Pass Ten one-way 2nd-class trips to anywhere in Belgium (except frontier points) cost €46/74 for people under/over 26 years.

Weekend Return Tickets Valid from 7pm Friday to Sunday night, for just 20% more than a single.

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