

THE ROUGH GUIDE to

Belgium & Luxembourg

About the authors



Martin Dunford is the author of many Rough Guides, and is Rough Guides' Publishing Director. He lives in Blackheath with his wife Caroline and their two daughters, where he watches his local football team, Charlton Athletic, and rehearses for increasingly rare appearances of Rough Guides' house band, the New Cross Dolls.



Phil Lee has been writing for Rough Guides for over fifteen years. His other books in the series include Canada, Norway, Amsterdam, Bruges, Mallorca, England and Toronto. He lives in Nottingham, where he was born and raised.

Author Picks



Throughout this book, we've used the Rough Guides icon to highlight establishments our authors particularly recommend – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant. Each has been sent a "Recommended by Rough Guides" display sticker. The same icon is also used to flag up book recommendations in the Contexts section. Please send us your own nominations, which our authors will be happy to check out for future editions.

Accommodation price codes

All the establishments listed in this book have been categorized according to the price codes outlined below. They represent the price for the cheapest available double room in high season. For more information on accommodation, see p.38.

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ① Up to €60 | ④ €100–€120 | ⑦ €180–€210 |
| ② €60–€80 | ⑤ €120–€150 | ⑧ €210–€250 |
| ③ €80–€100 | ⑥ €150–€180 | ⑨ Over €250 |

Front cover image: Facade detail, Plattesteent St, Brussels
© Photolibary.com

Back cover image: River Our Vianden, Luxembourg © Alamy

Right: Carved wooden signposts at Mechelen © Rough Guides



The **Rough Guide** to

Belgium & Luxembourg



written and researched by

Phil Lee and Martin Dunford

with additional contributions by

Suzanne Morton-Taylor, Loïk Dal Molin and Suzy Sumner



NEW YORK • LONDON • DELHI

www.roughguides.com



Contents

Colour section 1

Introduction	6
Where to go	7
When to go	12
Things not to miss	15

Basics 25

Getting there	27
Getting around	32
Accommodation	37
Food and drink	41
The media	44
Festivals and events	45
Shopping	50
Travel essentials	51

Guide 61

1 Brussels	63
2 Flanders	145
3 Antwerp and the northeast	243
4 Hainaut and the Wallonian Brabant	307

5 The Ardennes	343
----------------------	-----

6 Luxembourg	401
--------------------	-----

Contexts 437

The historical framework	439
An introduction to Belgian art	460
Books	466

Language 473

Flemish and French	475
Glossary	485

Travel store 489

Small print & Index 491

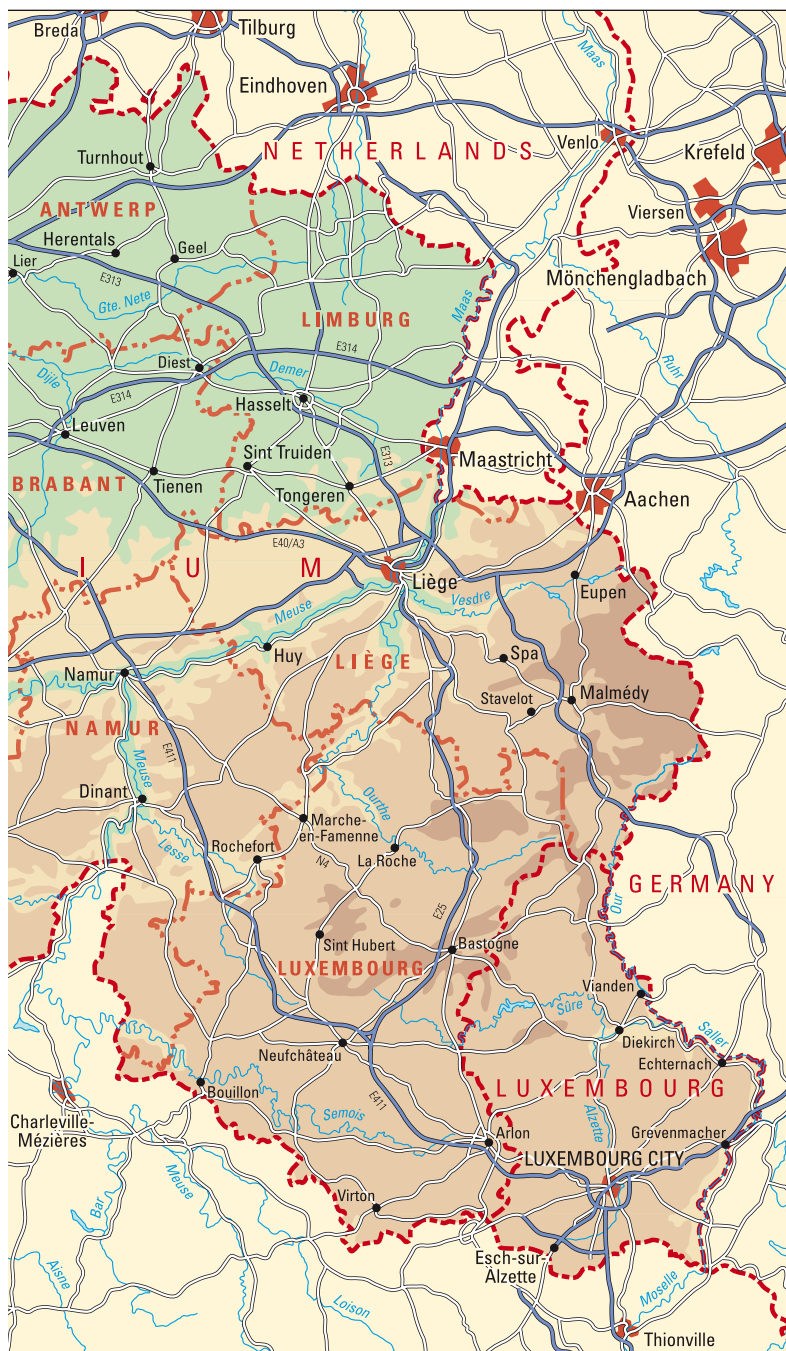


Belgian Beer colour
section following p.152



Belgian Food colour
section following p.376





Introduction to

Belgium & Luxembourg

There isn't a country on earth quite like Belgium. It's one of the smallest nations in Europe, yet it has three official languages and an intense regional rivalry between the Flemish-speaking north and the French-speaking south. Its historic cities – most famously Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp and Ghent – are the equal of any, as is its cuisine, with a host of regional specialities, alongside a marvellous range of beers and sumptuous chocolate. Neighbouring Luxembourg, commonly regarded as a refuge of bankers and diplomats, has surprises in store too: its capital, Luxembourg City, has an especially handsome setting, its tiny centre perched on a plateau above deep green gorges, and the rest of the country – diminutive though it is – boasts steep wooded hills and plunging valleys aplenty.



Many outsiders view Belgium and Luxembourg as good weekend-break material – but not much else, which is a pity, as this is historically one of the most complex and intriguing parts of Europe. Squeezed in between France, Germany and the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg occupy a spot that has often decided the European balance of power. It was here that the Romans shared an important border with the Germanic tribes to the

north; here that the Spanish Habsburgs finally met their match in the Protestant rebels of the Netherlands; here that Napoleon was finally

▲ Interior, Brussels Cathedral



defeated at the Battle of Waterloo; and – most famously – here, too, that the British and Belgians slugged it out with the Germans in World War I. Indeed so many powers have had an interest in this region that it was only in 1830 that Belgium and Luxembourg became separate, independent states.

Where to go

Belgium divides between the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) north of the country, known as **Flanders**, and French-speaking **Wallonia** in the south. There's more to this divide than just language, though: the north and

Fact file

- **Belgium** has a population of around 10 million. Of these, around 5.5 million live in Flemish-speaking Flanders, while 3.5 million dwell in French-speaking Wallonia; there's also a small German-speaking community in the east. The tenacity of regional (and linguistic) feeling is such that Belgium is a federal state: both Flanders and Wallonia have their own regional administrations, as does the capital, Brussels, which is officially bilingual and has a population of around one million. A constitutional monarchy, Belgium has a bicameral parliament, comprising the Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

- The tiny Grand Duchy of **Luxembourg** has a population of around 480,000, a sixth of which lives in the capital, Luxembourg City. Luxembourgers switch comfortably between French, German and their own official spoken language, Lëzemburgesch (Luxembourgish), a dialect of German – all without so much as an intercommunal ripple. French and German are the official languages for all written purposes except governmental administration, which is conducted in French. The Duchy is a constitutional monarchy governed by the Chamber of Deputies, working in tandem with the Council of State.

- The vast majority of Belgians and Luxembourgers classify themselves as Roman Catholics.

Food

The thing about Belgian food is the quality: there are, of course, exceptions, but almost everywhere the care and attention lavished on everything from a sandwich through to a restaurant meal is outstanding. Every province, and often a particular town, prides itself on its specialties, from the hearty fish or chicken stews of the north to the wild boar, hare, venison and pheasant of the south, via mussels and beef served every which way. The sheer creativity of the country's chefs fair takes the breath away – it's hard to imagine any other place where the humble

white leaves of the chicory plant – endives – can spawn no fewer than fifty popular recipes. To help you munch your way across the country, we've given café and restaurant recommendations throughout the guide.



south of the country are visually very different. The **north**, made up of the provinces of West and East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg and the top half of Brabant, is mainly flat, with a landscape and architecture not unlike the Netherlands. **Antwerp** is the largest city here, a sprawling, bustling old port with doses of high fashion and high art in roughly equal measure. Further west, in the two provinces of **Flanders**, are the great Belgian medieval cloth towns of **Bruges** and **Ghent**, with a stunning concentration of Flemish art and architecture. Bruges in particular is the country's biggest tourist pull, and although this inevitably means it gets very crowded, you shouldn't miss it on any account. Beyond lies the **Belgian coast**, which makes valiant attempts to compete with the seaside resorts of the rest of Europe but is ultimately let down by the coldness of the North Sea. Nonetheless, there are a couple of appealing seaside resorts, most notably **De Haan**, and the beaches and duney interludes

along the coast are delightful. Nonetheless, you might be better off spending time in some of the other inland Flanders towns, not least **Ieper**, formerly and better known as Ypres, where every year visitors come to reflect on the stark sights of the nearby World War I battlefields and vast, sad acreages of cemeteries.

Marking the meeting of the Flemish and Walloon parts of Belgium, **Brussels**, the capital, is more exciting and varied than its reputation as a bland Euro-capital would suggest. Central enough to be pretty much unavoidable, it's moreover useful as a base for day-trips, especially given that Belgium isn't a large country and has an excellent public transport system. Bruges and Ghent are easily accessible from here, as is the old university city of **Leuven** to the east, and the cathedral city of **Mechelen**, halfway to Antwerp.

Flemish Brabant encircles Brussels, but to the south of the capital it narrows into a slender corridor beyond which lies Wallonian



▲ Manneken Pis souvenir

Chocolate

Belgians get through a lot of chocolate – several kilograms for each one of them every year – but there again, considering how good the chocolates are, it's a wonder it isn't more. The Belgians picked up their love of chocolate via the most circuitous of historical routes. The Aztecs of Mexico were drink-



ing chocolate, which they believed gave them wisdom and power, when Hernando Cortéz's Spanish conquistadors turned up in 1519. Cortéz took a liking to the stuff and, after butchering the locals, brought cocoa beans back to Spain as a novelty gift for the Emperor Charles V in 1528. Within a few years its consumption had spread across Charles's empire, including today's Belgium and Luxembourg. At first the making of chocolate was confined to a few Spanish monasteries, but eventually Belgians got into the act and they now produce what are generally regarded as the best chocolates in the world. Every Belgian town and city has at least a couple of specialist chocolate shops and the more popular tourist spots – Brussels and Bruges especially – have dozens.

Brabant, distinguished by the splendid church at **Nivelles** and the elegaic abbey ruins at nearby **Villers-la-Ville**. West of here, the Walloon province of Hainaut is dotted with industrial centres like **Charleroi** and more appealing **Mons**, but also home to the handsome old town of **Tournai**. East of here lies Belgium's most scenically rewarding region, the **Ardennes**, spread across the three provinces of **Namur**, **Liège** and **Luxembourg**. This is an area of deep, wooded valleys and heathy plateaux, often very wild and excellent for hiking, cycling and canoeing. Use either Namur or Luxembourg City as a jumping-off point for the heart of the region, at **Bouillon** or **La Roche-en-Ardenne**.

The Ardennes reaches across the Belgian border into the northern part of the **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg**, a green landscape of high hills and wooded ravines topped with crumbling castles overlooking rushing



▶ Het Zwin Nature Reserve



▶ Luxembourg City



ivers. The two best centres for touring the countryside are the quiet little towns of **Vianden** and **Echternach**, featuring an extravagantly picturesque castle and a splendid abbey respectively. Indeed, despite its feeble reputation, the Duchy – or rather its northern reaches – packs more scenic highlights into its tight borders than many other more renowned holiday spots, and is perfect for hiking and, at a pinch, mountain-biking.

Jacques Brel

A legend in his own musical lifetime, Jacques Brel (1929–78) was born and raised in Schaarbeek, a suburb of Brussels, though he lived most of his life in France. Brel's first job was in his father's cardboard factory, but, clearly dissatisfied, he upped sticks in the early 1950s, moving to Paris, where he rapidly established himself as a troubadour, singing



self-penned songs that became increasingly complex as the years rolled by. By 1960, Brel had hit his full musical stride, his rich and gravelly voice ideal for his angst-filled lyrics of love, sorrow and desire. To get the full feeling of the man and his work, visit the Fondation Internationale Jacques Brel in Brussels (see p.91).

The Ardennes fizzles out as you reach the plainer scenery of the south, where the rolling agricultural terrain of the **Gutland** is a pleasant preamble to **Luxembourg City**, whose bastions and bulwarks recall the days when this was one of the strongest fortresses in Europe.

When to go

Belgium enjoys a fairly standard temperate **climate**, with warm, if mild, summers and moderately cold winters. Generally speaking, temperatures rise the further south you go, with Wallonia a couple of degrees warmer than Flanders for most of the year, though in the east this is offset by the more severe climate of continental Europe, and emphasized by the increase in altitude of the Ardennes. Luxembourg, too,

Sandcastles

The Belgian coast may be crowded and short, the weather unreliable and the North Sea decidedly chilly, but it does boast a superb sandy beach, stretching from Knokke-Heist in the north to De Panne, 70km to the south, with very few interruptions.

The Belgians make the most of it, descending in their thousands every summer weekend to play beach sports and build sandcastles – but not just any old sandcastle. Right along the coast, ardent enthusiasts apply themselves with industrial zeal, helped by JCBs and tractors, creating enormous,



imaginative edifices from spaceships to sculpted tableaux of Belgians in some metaphysical mess or another, all cheered on by an appreciative crowd. Almost every resort has at least one sandcastle-building competition each summer, with one of the best held in the tiny resort of Zeebrugge (see p.158) in late August.

Passenger boat from Damme to Bruges



has more extreme temperatures and harsher winters, often accompanied by snow. In both countries rain is always a possibility, though you can expect a greater degree of precipitation in the Ardennes and upland regions than on the northern plains.

The cities of Belgium and Luxembourg are all-year tourist destinations, though you might think twice about visiting Bruges, the region's most popular spot, during August, when things get mighty crowded. Flanders as a

Bicycle, Ghent



whole is best visited any time between early spring and late autumn, though winter time has its advantages too – iced canals and hoarfrost polders – if you don't mind the short hours of daylight. Wallonia, especially the Ardennes, is more seasonal, with many things closing down in the winter, so try to visit between April and October.



▼ Rue du Marché au Charbon, Brussels

Average monthly temperatures and rainfall

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Brussels												
daily max (°C)	4	7	10	14	18	22	23	22	21	15	9	6
daily min (°C)	-1	0	2	5	8	11	12	12	11	7	3	0
monthly rainfall (mm)	66	61	53	60	55	76	95	80	63	83	75	88
Luxembourg City												
daily max (°C)	3	4	10	14	18	21	23	22	19	13	7	4
daily min (°C)	-1	-1	1	4	8	11	13	12	10	6	3	0
monthly rainfall (mm)	61	65	42	47	64	64	60	84	72	53	67	81

27

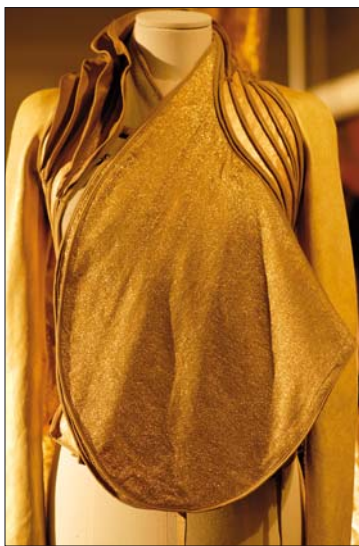
things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Belgium and Luxembourg have to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selective and subjective taste of the two countries' highlights, from wonderful food and striking Gothic architecture to handsome forested hills. They're all arranged in five colour-coded categories to help you find the very best things to see, do and experience. All entries have a page reference to take you straight into the guide, where you can find out more.





02 Luxembourg City Page 411 • The mighty bastions and stern ramparts of the Old Town offer commanding views of the valleys below.



03 Antwerp fashion scene Page 269 • Antwerp has produced a small army of internationally acclaimed fashion designers and their work is showcased at the enterprising MoMu fashion museum.

04 Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies, Namur Page 351 • A fabulous hoard of exquisitely crafted, jewel-encrusted metalwork dating from the early thirteenth century is displayed here in Namur.





05 Moules Page 41 • Belgian cuisine is second to none, but it's not all about rich sauces and fancy preparation – and the national dish, mussels and fries, proves the point.



06 Cycling Page 217 • Pancake-flat northern Belgium is perfect for bicycling; cycle paths are legion, with some of the prettiest running alongside the poplar-lined canals near Bruges.

07 Grand-Place, Brussels Page 78 • There are beautiful, delicately carved guildhouses in many Belgian towns, but none quite reaches the heights of those in the capital's main square.



09 Hotel Die Swaene, Bruges Page 192 • This immaculate hotel has oodles of character, from the antique lounge and reception to the infinitely comfortable bedrooms.



08 Brussels' Art Nouveau Page 119 • The capital's middle class took to this style of architecture like ducks to water; Victor Horta and Paul Hankar are the names to conjure with.



10 Ostend beach Page 154 • The Channel Tunnel may have ended Ostend's days as a busy cross-Channel port, but it's busy reinventing itself as a seaside resort – and it certainly has a smashing beach.



11 Beer Page 43 • With over seven hundred different Belgian beers to choose from, you've got to start somewhere and the brews of the Trappist monks – such as Rochefort (pictured) – will do very nicely.



12 Ghent's St Baafskathedraal
Page 224 • Home to Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, quite simply one of the medieval world's most astonishing paintings.

13 Antwerp's Cathedral
Page 258 • Perhaps the most beautiful Gothic structure in Belgium and, even better, its interior is graced by four fine paintings by Rubens.





14 **Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels** Page 98 • You'd have to go an awfully long way to beat Belgium's best art museum, with superb collections ranging from Jan van Eyck, Bosch and Bruegel to Ensor and Magritte.



15 **Bouillon** Page 369 • Nestling among wooded hills and set beneath the craggy remains of its castle, Bouillon is one of the prettiest resorts in the Ardennes, busy in summer with campers, walkers and kayakers.

16 Place du Jeu de Balle, Brussels Page 92 • Fleamarket-mania overtakes Brussels on a Sunday morning and this is the place to head for, in the Marolles district.



17 Luxembourg's vineyards Page 422 • Many of the Grand Duchy's vineyards, strung along the River Moselle, offer tours and tastings of their deliciously fruity wines.

18 Procession of the Holy Blood, Bruges Page 198 •

Once a sombre religious ceremony, these days it's as much a (rather classy) historical pageant.





19 Vianden Page 427 • This pretty little town, in the middle of wild, wooded countryside, possesses the most impressive of Luxembourg's many hilltop castles.



20 Kayaking and hiking in the Ardennes

Page 366 • A real treat, especially around La Roche, Bouillon or Echternach – you don't have to be a zealous athlete to enjoy it either.



21 Musée René Magritte

Page 123 • Magritte's disconcerting paintings have been reproduced in their millions; he was, without doubt, one of Belgium's most brilliant artists.



22 Het Zwin Page 160 • This nature reserve on the Belgian coast offers a pristine coastal landscape of polders and dykes, marshes and salt flats, which together combine to attract a rich birdlife.



23 The Hautes Fagnes. Page 399 • A high plateau in the Ardennes region, providing some fabulous hiking amid a wild and windswept expanse of wood and moorland.



24 Carnival Page 45 • Nowhere else in Europe celebrates carnival with the vim and gusto of Belgium. For originality, the pick of the carnival crop is at Binche, Eupen and Stavelot.

25 Menin Gate Page 172 • World War I was decided on the plain of Flanders, a point hammered home by the interminable names on the hulking mass of the Menin Gate in leper.



26 Comic strips Page 89 • Brussels' outstanding Comic Strip Centre samples the work of all the country's leading cartoonists, from Hergé's bequipped Tintin through to Peyo's Smurfs.



27 Café society Page 41 • In every town square in Belgium and Luxembourg, locals sip coffee and nibble at cakes and biscuits by day, moving on to the beer and wine in the evening. Nothing could be more hospitable.

Basics

Basics

Getting there	27
Getting around	32
Accommodation	37
Food and drink.....	41
The media	44
Festivals and events	45
Shopping	50
Travel essentials.....	51





Getting there

UK travellers are spoilt for choice when it comes to deciding how to get to Belgium. There are flights to Brussels from London and a string of regional airports; Eurostar trains from London to Brussels; ferries from Rosyth and Hull to Zeebrugge, near Bruges, and from Ramsgate to Ostend; Eurotunnel services from Folkestone to Calais, a short drive from the Belgian coast; and frequent international buses from London to Brussels. Buses are usually the least expensive means of transportation, but Eurostar is faster and often not that much more expensive, and there are all sorts of great deals on flights too. Luxembourg is also easy to get to: there are flights from London and a couple of regional airports, but, perhaps most tempting of all, it's just two and a half hours from Brussels to Luxembourg City by train.

For travellers arriving from North America, the main decision is whether to fly direct to Brussels – though the options are limited – or via another European city, probably London. Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans have to fly via another city – there are no nonstop flights.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

From the UK, Belgium and Luxembourg's two major airports – Brussels and Luxembourg City – are readily reached from London and a number of regional airports. There's also Brussels-Charleroi airport, whose name is somewhat deceptive – it's actually on the edge of Charleroi, an industrial town about 50km south of the capital. As for flight options, British Airways, bmi and SN Brussels Airlines all fly regularly to Brussels from London Heathrow; SN Brussels also flies to Brussels from Gatwick; VLM flies there from London City airport, and may be worth considering both for this flight and the flights it operates to Antwerp. As for **regional airports**, British Airways flies to Brussels from Bristol, Southampton, Birmingham, Newcastle, Manchester, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast, as does the Dutch airline, KLM, which also flies from Cardiff and Norwich; Air France flies to Brussels from Southampton, VLM from Southampton and Liverpool; SN Brussels from Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow,

bmi from East Midlands, Leeds Bradford, Edinburgh, Belfast and Dublin; flybe links Brussels with Manchester and Southampton; and Ryanair flies to Brussels-Charleroi from Glasgow and Stansted. Alternatively, Luxair has flights to Luxembourg City from Manchester and London Heathrow. **Flying times** are insignificant: London to Brussels takes a little over an hour, London to Luxembourg one hour and twenty minutes, the same from Newcastle to Brussels.

Flying from Ireland, there's much less choice, but Ryanair charges very reasonable rates for flights from either Dublin or Shannon to Brussels-Charleroi. Luxair flies between Dublin and Luxembourg City.

Whichever route and carrier you choose, it's hard to say precisely what you'll **pay** at any given time: it depends on when you book and when you fly, what offers are available, and how lucky you get. However, flying to Brussels with one of the low-cost airlines between April and September you'll probably pay around £100 return (including taxes) travelling at convenient times at the weekend, £150 with one of the full-service carriers. Weekday travel will cost £50–60 with a budget carrier, and maybe £100 or so with a full-service airline. Of course if you want more flexibility with your ticket you'll pay more, as you will if you book at the last minute – economy return tickets from London to Brussels can cost anything up to £400. All carriers offer their lowest prices online, rather than with phone booking.

Fly less – stay longer! Travel and climate change

Climate change is the single biggest issue facing our planet. It is caused by a build-up in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which are emitted by many sources – including planes. Already, flights account for around 3–4 percent of human-induced global warming: that figure may sound small, but it is rising year on year and threatens to counteract the progress made by reducing greenhouse emissions in other areas.

Rough Guides regard travel, overall, as a global benefit, and feel strongly that the advantages to developing economies are important, as are the opportunities for greater contact and awareness among peoples. But we all have a responsibility to limit our personal “carbon footprint”. That means giving thought to how often we fly and what we can do to redress the harm that our trips create.

Flying and climate change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂, but planes are particularly bad offenders, releasing large volumes of greenhouse gases at altitudes where their impact is far more harmful. Flying also allows us to travel much further than we would contemplate doing by road or rail, so the emissions attributable to each passenger are greater. For example, one person taking a return flight between Europe and California produces the equivalent impact of 2.5 tonnes of CO₂ – similar to the yearly output of the average UK car.

Less harmful planes may evolve but it will be decades before they replace the current fleet – which could be too late for avoiding climate chaos. In the meantime, there are limited options for concerned travellers: to reduce the amount we travel by air (take fewer trips, stay longer!), to avoid night flights (when plane contrails trap heat from Earth but can't reflect sunlight back to space), and to make the trips we do take “climate neutral” via a carbon-offset scheme.

Carbon-offset schemes

Offset schemes run by www.climatecare.org, www.carbonneutral.com and others allow you to “neutralize” the greenhouse gases that you are responsible for releasing. Their websites have simple calculators that let you work out the impact of any flight. Once that's done, you can pay to fund projects that will reduce future carbon emissions by an equivalent amount (such the distribution of low-energy lightbulbs and cooking stoves in developing countries). Please take the time to visit our website and make your trip climate-neutral.

www.roughguides.com/climatechange

From the US and Canada

From the US, you can fly direct to Brussels from **New York City** (American, Delta, or Continental from Newark) and Chicago (American), but you'll find cheaper deals if you're prepared to stop once, either in the US or mainland Europe. Fares to Brussels can be found for as little as around \$800 if you're prepared to change; otherwise reckon on spending around \$1200–1500 return. **From Chicago**, nonstop fares cost around \$2000, but you can cut this to around \$1200 with one stopover. There are no direct flights **from the West Coast**, but plenty of carriers will get you to Brussels with one stop, for as

little as \$1200 return. There are no direct flights from the US to Luxembourg.

From Canada, the best deals are offered by Air Canada, which flies non-stop to London Heathrow, with onward connections to Brussels. **From Toronto** to Brussels, expect to pay around CDN\$1800 in high season and CDN\$1300 in low season, while typical fares **from Vancouver** are around CDN\$2050 in high season and CDN\$1350 in low season.

From Australia and New Zealand

There are no direct flights from Australia or New Zealand to Brussels or Luxembourg

City. Most itineraries will involve two changes, one in the Far East – Singapore, Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur – and then another in the gateway city of the airline you're flying with: most commonly Paris, Amsterdam or London. You can get tickets to Brussels **from Sydney or Melbourne** for AUS\$1500–2000 if you shop around, and **from Auckland** for slightly more.

From South Africa

There are no direct flights from South Africa to Belgium or Luxembourg City, but KLM does offer direct flights to Amsterdam, a short train ride away from Belgium, from Cape Town and Johannesburg. Alternatively, South African Airways flies direct to London and Frankfurt, from either of which hub city it's a short hop onto Belgium and Luxembourg; Lufthansa also links South Africa with Frankfurt. Flights with KLM from Cape Town to Amsterdam **cost** around R7400, R8200 from Johannesburg. Indirect flights via London or Frankfurt cost around R8000.

By train from the UK

Eurostar trains running through the Channel Tunnel put Belgium within easy striking distance of London's St Pancras plus two stations in Kent–Ashford and Ebbsfleet. Indeed, considering the time it takes to check into any of London's airports, Eurostar is often faster than a flight if, that is, you live in or near London. Eurostar operates around ten services a day from London St Pancras to Bruxelles-Midi, and the journey time is a very competitive, one hour and fifty minutes. **Fares** are not, however, quite as competitive: the cost of a regular second-class return ticket is around £120, though there are myriad deals and, if you book at least 21 days in advance, you can expect to halve the cost. Alternatively, you can get the train to either Hull or Rosyth, from where there are direct car ferries to Zeebrugge, or go to Ramsgate for the car ferry to Ostend; see below for more on car ferries.

If you're visiting Belgium and/or Luxembourg as part of a longer European trip, it may be worth considering a **pan-European rail pass**. There are lots to choose from

and **Rail Europe** (@www.raileurope.com), the umbrella company for all national and international passes, operates a comprehensive website detailing all the options with prices. Note in particular that some passes have to be bought before leaving home, others can only be bought in specific countries. For train travel within Belgium and Luxembourg, see p.32.

Driving from the UK

To reach Belgium by **car or motorbike**, you can either take one of the car ferries mentioned below or use **Eurotunnel's** shuttle train through the Channel Tunnel. Note that Eurotunnel only carries cars (including occupants) and motorbikes, not cyclists and foot passengers. From the Eurotunnel exit in Calais, it's just 50km or so to De Panne, on the Belgian coast, 120km to Bruges and 200km to Brussels.

Eurotunnel

There are up to four **Eurotunnel shuttle trains** per hour (only one per hour midnight–6am), taking 35 minutes (45min for some night departure times); you must check in at Folkestone at least thirty minutes before departure. It's possible to turn up and buy your ticket at the toll booths (exit the M20 at junction 11a), though at busy times booking is advisable. **Fares** depend on the time of year, time of day and length of stay (the cheapest ticket is for a day trip, followed by a five-day return); it's cheaper to travel between 10pm and 6am, while the highest fares are reserved for weekend departures and returns in July and August. Prices are charged per vehicle: short-stay savers between April and October for a car start at around £110. If you wish to stay more than five days, a standard return costs from around £130, while a more flexible "Flexiplus" fare, which entitles you to change your plans at the last minute, costs more still. Some special offers are usually also available.

By ferry from the UK

Three operators currently run **car ferries** from the UK direct to two ports in Belgium. They are Transeuropa Ferries, whose vessels link Ramsgate with Ostend (4hr);

P&O Ferries from Hull to Zeebrugge (13hr); and Superfast Ferries from Rosyth to Zeebrugge (18hr). Zeebrugge is a few kilometres from Bruges. **Tariffs** vary enormously, depending on when you leave, how long you stay, what size your vehicle is and how many passengers are in it; on the two longer routes, there is also the cost of a cabin to consider. As a sample fare, Transeuropa Ferries charges about £55 to transport a car and four passengers from Ramsgate to Ostend in high season – and the return is thrown in free if completed within 48 hours. On the two longer routes, booking ahead is strongly recommended – indeed it's essential in summer.

By train from continental Europe

Belgium and Luxembourg have borders with France, Germany and the Netherlands. A veritable raft of rail lines runs into Belgium from its neighbours – and Luxembourg has good international connections too. Ordinary trains link many cities and towns and there are also the express trains of **Thalys**, a combined project of the Belgian, Dutch, French and German railways. The hub of the Thalys network is Brussels, from where there are trains to – among many destinations – Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Paris and Cologne.

By bus from the UK

Given the low cost of budget-airline fares, travelling by long-distance **bus** from the UK to Belgium may not seem too attractive a proposition, but it is still likely to be the cheapest way of getting there. **Eurolines**, part of National Express, has four daily departures from London's Victoria coach station to Brussels, with a journey time of around eight hours. Return tickets cost about £55–60, and there are small discounts for travellers under 25 and over 60. A company called **Anglia Lines** also has one departure a day from London to Brussels, charging as little as £20 return. Both bus companies offer connecting services to other destinations in both Belgium and Luxembourg.

Airlines, agents and operators

Online booking agents

www.expedia.co.uk (UK), www.expedia.com (US), www.expedia.ca (Canada)
www.lastminute.com (UK)
www.opodo.co.uk (UK)
www.orbitz.com (US)
www.travelocity.co.uk (UK), www.travelocity.com (US), www.travelocity.ca (Canada)
www.zuji.com.au (Australia), www.zuji.co.nz (New Zealand)

Airlines

Air Canada US & Canada ☎ 1-888/247-2262, UK ☎ 0871/220 1111, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/679 3958, Australia ☎ 1300/655 767, New Zealand ☎ 0508/747 767, www.aircanada.com.
Air France US ☎ 1-800/237-2747, Canada ☎ 1-800/667-2747, UK ☎ 0870/142 4343, Australia ☎ 1300/390 190, South Africa ☎ 0861/340 340, www.airfrance.com.
Air India US ☎ 1-800/223-7776, Canada ☎ 1800-625/6424, UK ☎ 020/8560 9996 or 8745 1000, Australia ☎ 02/9283 4020, New Zealand ☎ 09/631 5651, www.airindia.com.
Air New Zealand Australia ☎ 13 24 76, New Zealand ☎ 0800/737 000, UK ☎ 0800/028 4149, US ☎ 1-800/262-1234, Canada ☎ 1-800/663-5494, www.airnz.co.nz.
American Airlines US ☎ 1-800/433-7300, UK ☎ 0845/7789 789, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/602 0550, Australia ☎ 1800/673 486, New Zealand ☎ 0800/445 442, www.aa.com.
bmi US ☎ 1-800/788-0555, UK ☎ 0870/607 0555 or ☎ 0870/607 0222, Ireland ☎ 01/407 3036, www.flybmi.com.
British Airways US & Canada ☎ 1-800/AIRWAYS, UK ☎ 0870/850 9850, Republic of Ireland ☎ 1890/626 747, Australia ☎ 1300/767 177, New Zealand ☎ 09/966 9777, South Africa ☎ 114/418 600, www.ba.com.
Cathay Pacific US ☎ 1-800/233-2742, Canada ☎ 1-800/2686-868, UK ☎ 020/8834 8888, Australia ☎ 13 17 47, New Zealand ☎ 09/379 0861, South Africa ☎ 11/700 8900, www.cathaypacific.com.
CityJet UK ☎ 0845/0845 747, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/605 0383, www.cityjet.com.
Delta US & Canada ☎ 1-800/221-1212, UK ☎ 0845/600 0950, Republic of Ireland ☎ 1850/882 031 or 01/407 3165, Australia

✆ 1300/302 849, New Zealand ✆ 09/9772232,
 🌐 www.delta.com.

easyJet UK ✆ 0905/821 0905, 🌐 www.easyjet.com.

flybe UK ✆ 0871/700 0535, Republic of Ireland/
 International ✆ 0044/13922 68500
 🌐 www.flybe.com.

JAL (Japan Air Lines) US & Canada
 ✆ 1-800/525-3663, UK ✆ 0845/774 7700, Ireland
 ✆ 01/408 3757, Australia ✆ 02/9272 1111, New
 Zealand ✆ 09/379 9906, South Africa ✆ 11/214
 2560, 🌐 www.jal.com or 🌐 www.japanair.com

Lufthansa US ✆ 1-800/3995-838, Canada
 ✆ 1-800/563-5954, UK ✆ 0870/837 7747, Republic
 of Ireland ✆ 01/844 5544, Australia ✆ 1300/655
 727, New Zealand ✆ 0800-945 220, South Africa
 ✆ 0861/842 538, 🌐 www.lufthansa.com.

Luxair UK ✆ 0800/389 9443, Ireland ✆ 0044-
 80038 99443, 🌐 www.luxair.lu.

Malaysia Airlines US ✆ 1-800/5529-264, UK
 ✆ 0870/607 9090, Republic of Ireland ✆ 01/6761
 561, Australia ✆ 13 26 27, New Zealand
 ✆ 0800/777 747, South Africa ✆ 11-8809 614,
 🌐 www.malaysia-airlines.com.

Qantas Airways US & Canada ✆ 1-800/227-
 4500, UK ✆ 0845/774 7767, Republic of
 Ireland ✆ 01/407 3278, Australia ✆ 13 13 13, New
 Zealand ✆ 0800/808 767 or 09/357 8900, South
 Africa ✆ 11/441 8550, 🌐 www.qantas.com.

Ryanair UK ✆ 0871/246 0000, Republic of Ireland
 ✆ 0818/303 030, 🌐 www.ryanair.com.

SN Brussels Airlines US ✆ 1-516/740-5200,
 Canada ✆ 1-866/308-2230, UK ✆ 0870/735 2345,
 Republic of Ireland ✆ 01/844 6006, Australia
 ✆ 02/9767 4305, 🌐 www.flysn.com.

Singapore Airlines US ✆ 1-800/742-3333,
 Canada ✆ 1-800/663-3046, UK ✆ 0844/800
 2380, Republic of Ireland ✆ 01/671 0722,
 Australia ✆ 13 10 11, New Zealand ✆ 0800/808
 909, South Africa ✆ 11/880 8560 or 11/880 8566,
 🌐 www.singaporeair.com.

South African Airways US & Canada
 ✆ 1-800/722-9675, UK ✆ 0870/747 1111, Australia
 ✆ 1800/221 699, New Zealand ✆ 09/977 2237,
 South Africa ✆ 11/978 1111, 🌐 www.flysaa.com.

United Airlines US ✆ 1-800/UNITED-1, UK
 ✆ 0845/844 4777, Australia ✆ 13 17 77,
 🌐 www.united.com.

Virgin Atlantic US ✆ 1-800/821-5438, UK
 ✆ 0870/380 2007, Australia ✆ 1300/727 340,
 South Africa ✆ 11/340 3400, 🌐 www
 .virgin-atlantic.com.

Virgin Express UK ✆ 0870/730 1134,
 🌐 www.virgin-express.com.

VLM Airlines (Vlaamse Luchttransportmaatschappij;
 Flemish Airlines) UK ✆ 0871/666 5050,
 🌐 www.flyvlm.com.

Agents and operators

ebookers UK ✆ 0800/082 3000, Republic of
 Ireland ✆ 01/488 3507, 🌐 www.ebookers.com.
 🌐 www.ebookers.ie. Low fares on an extensive
 selection of scheduled flights and package deals.

North South Travel UK ✆ 01245/608 291,
 🌐 www.northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly,
 competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares
 worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in
 the developing world, especially the promotion of
 sustainable tourism.

Trailfinders UK ✆ 0845/058 5858, Republic of
 Ireland ✆ 01/677 7888, Australia ✆ 1300/780 212,
 🌐 www.trailfinders.com. One of the best-informed
 and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

STA Travel US ✆ 1-800/781-4040, UK
 ✆ 0871/2300 040, Australia ✆ 134 STA, New
 Zealand ✆ 0800/474 400, SA ✆ 0861/781 781.
 Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also
 student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes,
 and more. Good discounts for students and under-
 26s. 🌐 www.statravel.com.

Train contacts

Eurostar ✆ 0870/518 6186, 🌐 www.eurostar.com.

French Railways (SNCF) France 🌐 www.sncf.fr.

German Rail 🌐 www.bahn.de.

International Rail ✆ 08700/841 410,
 🌐 www.international-rail.com.

Netherlands Rail 🌐 www.ns.nl.

Rail Europe ✆ 08708/371 371,
 🌐 www.raileurope.co.uk.

Thalys 🌐 www.thalys.com.

Bus contacts

Anglia Lines ✆ 0870 608 8806,
 🌐 www.anglia-lines.co.uk.

Eurolines ✆ 08705 808080,
 🌐 www.nationalexpress.com/eurolines.

Ferry contacts

P&O Ferries ✆ 08705/980 333,
 🌐 www.poferries.com

Superfast Ferries ✆ 0870/234 0870,
 🌐 www.superfast.com.

Transeuropa Ferries ✆ 01843/595 522,
 🌐 www.transeuropaferries.com.

Eurotunnel contact

Eurotunnel ✆ 08705/35 35 35,
 🌐 www.eurotunnel.com.



Getting around

Travelling around Belgium is almost always easy: it's a small country, and there's an extremely well-organized – and reasonably priced – public transport system in which an extensive train network is supplemented by (and tied in with) a plethora of local bus services. Luxembourg is, of course, even smaller, but here matters are not quite so straightforward: the train network is limited, and the public transport system is largely based around buses, whose timetables often demand careful scrutiny if you're doing much travelling.

Travel **between Belgium and Luxembourg** is a seamless affair – with no border controls and with routine through-ticketing by train and bus. Two main rail lines link the two countries – one from Brussels to Luxembourg City via Namur and Arlon; the other from Liège to Luxembourg City. Journey times are insignificant – Brussels to Luxembourg City takes under three hours – and services are frequent.

For details of how to get to Belgium and Luxembourg by train, see p.29. Note also that in addition to the domestic deals and discounts described below, there is a host of **pan-European rail passes**. Some have to be bought before leaving home while others can be bought only in specific countries; for further details, see p.29.

Belgium by train

The best way of getting around **Belgium** is by train. The system, operated by the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges/ Belgische Spoorwegen (Belgian Railways; @www.b-rail.be, @www.sncb.be or @www.nmbs.be), is one of the best in Europe: trains are fast, frequent and very punctual; the network of lines is comprehensive; and **fares** are relatively low. For example, a standard, second-class ticket (*billet ordinaire/gewone biljet*) from Brussels airport to Bruges, about 100km away, is €13.20, while Bruges to Arlon, one of the longest domestic train journeys you can make, costs just €18 one-way. Standard return tickets are twice the cost of a single, but same-day return tickets knock about ten percent off the price. First-class fares cost about fifty percent on top of the regular fare. There are substantial discounts

for children and seniors (65+). With any ticket, you're free to stop off anywhere en route and continue your journey later that day, but you're not allowed to backtrack. Belgian Railways publishes a comprehensive and easy-to-use **timetable** (*indicateur/spoorboekje*), which is available for €10 at all major stations, as well as mounds of information on its various services, passes and fares. Note, however, that you are not allowed to buy a ticket with a foreign debit card and neither do automatic ticket machines accept foreign credit or debit cards.

Discount train tickets and deals in Belgium

Belgian Railways offers a variety of **discount tickets and deals**, perhaps the most useful of which is the **Rail pass**, which permits ten single journeys between any two train stations (frontier points excluded) for just €69 in second class, €109 in first. The pass is valid for a year from the date of purchase and is transferable – two people travelling together, for example, could use the same pass. There is an under-26 version too, the **Go Pass**, issued for second-class travel only and costing €45. Another useful offering are the special **weekend returns**, which can knock up to fifty percent off the cost of regular travel, though these tickets are non-transferable. For further information, consult Belgian Railways' website.

Luxembourg by train

In **Luxembourg**, the trains are run by the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Luxembourgeois (CFL; @www.cfl.lu in French, details

in English at @www.luxembourg.co.uk). The network comprises just a handful of lines, with the principal route cutting north–south down the middle of the country from Belgium’s Liège to Luxembourg City via Clervaux and Ettelbruck. The **timetable** is simplicity itself, with trains travelling to and from every station hourly at the same time past the hour between 8am and 8pm. A free diagrammatic plan of the country’s bus and train network is available at most train stations, as are individual train and bus timetables, or you can purchase a countrywide bus and train timetable from train stations and major newsagents at minimal cost. **Network tickets**, valid for train and bus travel across the whole of the Grand Duchy, are very reasonably priced with a one-day pass costing €5, €20 for a pack of five. These are valid from the first time you use them (you must punch them in the machines provided to record the time) until 8am the following day. Another option, available between Easter and October, is the **Luxembourg Card**, which permits free travel on the country’s buses and trains and also gives discounted admission to many tourist attractions. It can be bought for one-, two- or three-day periods, and costs €10, €17 or €24 respectively per person. For more details, see p.405.

By bus

With so much of the country covered by the rail network, **Belgian buses** are mainly of use for travelling short distances, and wherever there’s a choice of transportation the train is quicker and not that much more expensive. Indeed, in most of Belgium buses essentially supplement the trains, with services radiating out from the train station and/or connecting different rail lines. That said, local buses are invaluable in some parts of rural Belgium, like the Botte de Hainaut and the Ardennes, where the train network fizzles out. Three **bus companies** provide nationwide coverage: De Lijn (@www.delijn.be) in the Flemish-speaking areas; STIB (@www.stib.be) in Brussels; and TEC (@www.tec-wl.be) in Wallonia.

As regards **Luxembourg’s buses**, the reverse is true: the sparseness of the rail system means that buses are much more important, though again bus and train services are fully integrated. A free diagrammatic plan

of the Grand Duchy’s bus and train network is available at major bus and train stations, as are individual bus timetables; alternatively, for a few euros, you can purchase a countrywide bus and train timetable from train stations and major newsagents. For details of tickets and fares, see “Luxembourg by trains” above.

By car

For the most part, **driving** around Belgium and Luxembourg is pretty much what you would hope: smooth, easy and quick. Both countries have a good road network, with most of the major towns linked by some kind of motorway or dual carriageway, though snarl-ups are far from rare, especially in Belgium. That said, big-city driving, where congestion and one-way systems are the norm, is almost always problematic, particularly as drivers in Belgium, especially in Brussels, are generally considered some of the most pugnacious in Europe. One problem peculiar to Belgium, however, is **signage**. In most cases the French and Flemish names are similar – or at least mutually recognizable – but in others they do not resemble each other at all (see box, p.36 for some of the trickier examples). In Brussels and its environs, all the road signs are bilingual, but elsewhere it’s either French or Flemish and, as you cross Belgium’s language divide (see p.457), the name you’ve been following on the road signs can simply disappear, with, for example, “Liège” suddenly transformed into “Luik”. Whatever you do, make sure you’ve got a good road map (see p.55).

Rules of the road are straightforward: you drive on the right, and **speed limits** are 50kph in built-up areas, 90kph outside, 120kph on motorways; note that speed cameras are commonplace. Drivers and front-seat passengers are required by law to wear seatbelts, and penalties for drunk driving are always severe. Remember also that trams have right of way over any other vehicle, and that, unless indicated otherwise, motorists must give way to traffic merging from the right. There are no toll roads, and although **fuel** is expensive, at around €1.40 per litre (diesel €1.10) in Belgium, slightly less in Luxembourg, the short distances involved mean this isn’t too much of an issue.



Most foreign **driving licences** are honoured in Belgium and Luxembourg, including all EU, Australian, New Zealand, US, Canadian and South African ones. If you're **bringing your own car**, you must have adequate insurance, preferably including coverage for legal costs, and it's advisable to have an appropriate

breakdown policy from your home motoring organization too.

Renting a car

All the major international **car rental agencies** are represented in Belgium and Luxembourg and a scattering of contact



details are given in the “Listings” section at the end of the guide accounts of major towns. To rent a car, you’ll have to be 21 or over (and have been driving for at least a year), and you’ll need a credit card – though some local agencies will accept a hefty cash deposit instead. Rental **charges** are fairly

high, beginning around €300 per week for unlimited mileage in the smallest vehicle, but include collision damage waiver and vehicle (but not personal) insurance. To cut costs, watch for special deals offered by the bigger companies. If you go to a smaller, local company (of which there are many), you

French and Flemish place names

The list below provides the French and Flemish names of some of the more important towns in Belgium where the difference may cause confusion. The official name comes first, the alternative afterwards, except in the case of Brussels where both languages are of equal standing.

French–Flemish

Bruxelles – Brussel
Ath – Aat
Liège – Luik
Mons – Bergen

Namur – Namen
Nivelles – Nijvel
Soignies – Zinnik
Tournai – Doornik

Flemish–French

Antwerpen – Anvers
Brugge – Bruges
De Haan – Le Coq
Gent – Gand
Ieper – Ypres
Kortrijk – Courtrai
Leuven – Louvain
Mechelen – Malines

Oostende – Ostende
Oudenaarde – Audenarde
Ronse – Renaix
Sint Truiden – St-Trond
Tienen – Tirlemont
Tongeren – Tongres
Veurne – Furnes
Zoutleeuw – Léau

should proceed with care: in particular, check the policy for the excess applied to claims and ensure that it includes a collision damage waiver (applicable if an accident is your fault) as well as adequate levels of financial cover.

If you break down in a rented car, you'll get roadside assistance from the particular repair company the rental firm has contracted. The same principle works with your own vehicle's breakdown policy providing you have coverage abroad.

Car rental agencies

Auto Europe US & Canada ☎ 1-888/223-5555, www.autoeurope.com.

Avis US & Canada ☎ 1-800/331-1212, UK ☎ 0870/606 0100, Republic of Ireland ☎ 021/428 1111, Australia ☎ 13 63 33 or 02/9353 9000, New Zealand ☎ 09/526 2847 or 0800/655 111, www.avis.com.

Budget US ☎ 1-800/527-0700, Canada ☎ 1-800/268-8900, UK ☎ 0870/156 5656, Australia ☎ 1300/362 848, New Zealand ☎ 0800/283 438, www.budget.com.

Europcar US & Canada ☎ 1-877/940 6900, UK ☎ 0870/607 5000, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/614 2800, Australia ☎ 393/306 160, www.europcar.com.

Europe by Car US ☎ 1-800/223-1516, www.europebycar.com.

Hertz US & Canada ☎ 1-800/654-3131, UK ☎ 020/7026 0077, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/870 5777, New Zealand ☎ 0800/654 321, www.hertz.com.

Holiday Autos UK ☎ 0870/400 4461, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/872 9366, Australia ☎ 299/394 433, US ☎ 1-866-392 9288, South Africa ☎ 11/2340 597, www.holidayautos.co.uk. Part of the LastMinute.com group.

National US ☎ 1-800/CAR-RENT, UK ☎ 0870/400 4581, Australia ☎ 0870/600 6666, New Zealand ☎ 03/366 5574, www.nationalcar.com.

SIXT Republic of Ireland ☎ 1850/206 088, UK ☎ 0800/4747 4227, US ☎ 1-877/347-3227, www.irishcarrentals.ie.

Suncars UK ☎ 0870/500 5566, Republic of Ireland ☎ 1850/201 416, www.suncars.com.

Thrifty US & Canada ☎ 1-800/847-4389, UK ☎ 01494/751 500, Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/844 1950, Australia ☎ 1300/367 227, New Zealand ☎ 09/256 1405, www.thrifty.com.

Cycling

Cycling is something of a national passion in **Belgium**, and it's also – given the short distances and largely flat terrain – a viable and fairly effortless way of getting around. That said, you do have to be selective: cycling in most of the big cities and on the majority of trunk roads – where separate cycle lanes are far from ubiquitous – is

precarious, verging on the suicidal. On the other hand, once you've reached the countryside, there are dozens of clearly signposted cycle routes to follow – and local tourist offices will invariably have maps and route descriptions, which you can supplement with the relevant IGN (NGI) map (see p.55). The logic of all this means that most Belgian cyclists – from Eddy Merckx lookalikes to families on an afternoon's pedal – carry their bikes to their chosen cycling location by car or train (though not by bus – it's not usually allowed). To aid the process, Belgian Railways transports bicycles with the minimum of fuss and at minimal cost.

If you haven't brought your own bicycle, you can **rent bikes** from fifteen train stations nationwide and from a veritable host of local bike-rental shops. **Prices** start at around €10 per day. There's also the **Train & Bike** (Train & Vélo/Trein & Fiets) package, in which the price of a day-long excursion includes

both a return train ticket and cycle rental. Prices are based on the distance between the departure station and the rental station. For a full list of train stations offering bike rental, consult www.b-rail.be. It's a good idea to reserve your bike ahead of time during the summer.

Cycling in Luxembourg

Luxembourg is popular with **cyclists** and has over 500km of cycle tracks, many of them following old railway lines. You can **rent bikes** at an assortment of campsites, hostels, hotels and tourist offices for around €10 a day (€20–30 for a mountain bike) and local tourist offices have details of locations where they're not mentioned in the guide. Bear in mind also that you can take your bike on trains (but not buses) anywhere in the country at minimal cost. For further details, consult the website of the Luxembourg National Tourist Office (see p.59).



Accommodation

Inevitably, hotel accommodation is one of the major expenses you'll incur on a trip to Belgium and Luxembourg – indeed, if you're after a degree of comfort, it's going to be the costliest item by far. There are, however, budget alternatives, beginning with the no-frills end of the hotel market and B&Bs – though note these are effectively rented rooms in private houses rather than the British-style bed-and-breakfast. Even more of a bargain are the youth hostels, be they **Hostelling International**-affiliated or “unofficial” (private) ones, which are located in the larger cities and/or main tourist spots of both countries.

You can **book ahead** easily enough by calling or emailing the establishment direct; English is almost always spoken. You can also make advance bookings via the tourist-office websites listed on p.59, or through many of the individual tourist offices detailed in this guide. Most tourist offices also operate an on-the-spot service for same-night accommodation for free or at minimal charge. Alternatively, contact Belgium's central reservation agency, **Resotel** (☎0032 2 779

39 39, www.belgium-hospitality.com), which operates an efficient hotel-reservation service, seeking out the best deals and discounts.

Hotels

Across Belgium and Luxembourg (and the Netherlands), a common **Benelux standard** is used to classify all those hotels, guesthouses (*auberges/gasthofs*) and motels that are recognized and licensed by the appropriate government agency. In Belgium,

Accommodation price codes

All the **accommodation** listed in this guide has been graded according to the following price codes, which indicate the price for the **least expensive double room** available during high season excluding special deals and discounts. In the case of **hostels** we've given the code if they have double rooms; otherwise, we've stated the price per dorm bed in euros. Single rooms generally cost between sixty and eighty percent of the double-room rate. These codes are above all a guide to price, and aren't intended to indicate the level of facilities available. You'll also find that many hotels have a wide range of rooms, some with en-suite facilities, some without, some large and luxurious, some small; thus, an establishment graded, for example, as a ③ may also have plenty of more comfortable rooms at ④. Most hotels only charge the full quoted rates at the very busiest times, which means that you'll often pay less than the price quoted in this book; it's certainly always worth asking if there is any discount available either by phone or online, where many of the best deals are posted.

① up to €60

② €60–80

③ €80–100

④ €100–120

⑤ €120–150

⑥ €150–180

⑦ €180–210

⑧ €210–250

⑨ Over €250

there are three such licensing agencies – one each for Brussels and the French- and Flemish-speaking regions; Luxembourg has just one. The Benelux standard grades establishments within general categories – from **one-star to five-star** – and the appropriate number of stars is displayed outside all licensed premises on a blue permit shield; places that fail to obtain a licence are not allowed a shield. The classification system is, by necessity, measured against easily identifiable criteria – lifts, toilets, room service, etc – rather than aesthetics, specific location or even cost. Consequently, they only provide a general guide to both quality and prices: a poky room in a three-star hotel in a mediocre part of Bruges may, for instance, cost more than a comfortable room in a four-star hotel in the centre of a less popular town. That said, one- and two-star places are frequently rudimentary (incidentally, hotel foyers can be deceptively plush compared with the rooms beyond) and, in general, you only begin to hit the real comfort zone at three stars. **Prices** for two-star establishments start at around €60 for a double room without private bath or shower; count on paying at least €80 if you want en-suite facilities. Three-star hotels cost upwards of about €90; for four- and five-star places you'll pay €125-plus. Note, however, that prices fluctuate wildly with demand not

necessarily with the season – indeed summertime is bargain time in Brussels. Typically, the stated price includes breakfast.

B&Bs

In recent years, the number of **Belgian B&Bs** (*chambres d'hôtes/gastenkamers*) has increased rapidly, though “B&B” is perhaps something of a misnomer as guests rarely have much contact with their hosts – it's more like a rented room in a private house. The average B&B in both Belgium and Luxembourg works out at about €60–80 per double per night, a tad more in Brussels and Bruges. The only common snag is that many B&Bs are inconveniently situated far from the respective town or city centre – be sure to check out the location before you accept a room. Note too that as the owners don't usually live on the premises, access often has to be arranged beforehand.

In most places, the tourist office has a list of local B&Bs, which it will issue to visitors, but in the more popular destinations – for instance Bruges – B&Bs are publicized alongside hotels. In **Luxembourg**, B&Bs are less of a feature, though again local tourist offices have the details. Wherever the arrangements are more formalized – again as in Bruges – the B&B premises are inspected and awarded stars in accordance with the Benelux standard (see under “Hotels”, p.37).

Hostels

If you're travelling on a tight budget, a **hostel** is likely to be your accommodation of choice, whether you're youthful or not. They can often be extremely good value, and offer clean and comfortable dorm beds as well as a choice of rooms (doubles and sometimes singles) at rock-bottom prices. Both city and country locations can get very full between June and September, when you should book in advance. If you're planning on spending some nights in hostels, it makes sense to join your home HI organization (see opposite) before you leave in order to avoid paying surcharges.

Belgium has around thirty HI-affiliated **hostels** (*auberges de jeunesse/jeugdherbergen*) operated by two separate organizations, **Vlaamse Jeugdherbergen** (www.vjh.be), covering the Flemish regions, and **Les Auberges de Jeunesse de Wallonie** (www.laj.be) for Wallonia. Both run hostels in Brussels. Dorm beds cost about €15–20 per person per night including breakfast, depending on the season and the hostel's facilities; there are no age restrictions. Accommodation is usually in small **dormitories**, though most hostels have single- and double-bedded rooms. Meals are often available and in some hostels there are self-catering facilities too. Most Belgian hostels accept online bookings. In addition to the HI-affiliated hostels, some of the larger cities – primarily Antwerp, Bruges and Brussels – have several **private hostels**, usually referred to as *logements pour jeunes/jeugdlogies*, offering dormitory accommodation (and invariably double- and triple-bedded rooms, too) at broadly similar prices, though standards vary enormously; we've given detailed reviews in the guide.

Luxembourg has ten **youth hostels**, all members of the Centrale des Auberges de Jeunesse Luxembourgaises (CAJL; www.youthhostels.lu). Rates for HI members are €15–20 per person for a dorm bed, with breakfast and bed linen included; some places also serve meals. Note also that from November to February, most of the hostels are exclusively for the use of groups (school parties and so forth) of ten or more.

Youth hostel associations

US and Canada

Hostelling International-American Youth Hostels US ☎ 1-301/495-1240, www.hiayh.org.
Hostelling International Canada ☎ 1-800/663-5777, www.hihostels.ca.

UK and Ireland

Youth Hostels Association (YHA) England and Wales ☎ 0870/770 8868, www.yha.org.uk.
Scottish Youth Hostel Association ☎ 01786/891 400, www.syha.org.uk.
Irish Youth Hostel Association Republic of Ireland ☎ 01/830 4555, www.irelandyha.org.
Hostelling International Northern Ireland ☎ 028/9031 5435, www.hini.org.uk.

Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

Australia Youth Hostels Association ☎ 02/9565 1699, www.yha.com.au.
Youth Hostelling Association New Zealand ☎ 0800/278 299 or 03/379 9970, www.yha.co.nz.
South African Youth Hostel Association ☎ 021/788 2301, www.hisa.org.za

Camping

Camping is a popular pastime in both Belgium and Luxembourg. In **Belgium**, there are literally hundreds of campsites to choose from, anything from a field with a few tent pitches through to extensive complexes with all mod cons. The country's campsites are regulated by two governmental agencies – one for Flanders and one for Wallonia – and each produces its own camping booklets and operates a **website** – www.camping.be for Flanders, www.campingbelgique.be for Wallonia. Note also that many Belgian campsites are situated with the motorist in mind, occupying key locations beside main roads. **Luxembourg** has around ninety registered campsites, all detailed in the free booklet available from the national tourist board (see p.58) and on www.camping.lu.

The same campsite grading system applies in both Belgium and Luxembourg, with sites classified within a **one- to five-star matrix** (see box, p.40). The majority are one- and two-star establishments, for which a family of two adults, two children, a car

Campsite classifications in Belgium and Luxembourg

Campsites in both countries are graded within the following general categories. They provide a guide as to facilities, but not necessarily to cost.

1-star Must comply with minimum camping regulations by having drinking-water facilities, cold showers, flush toilets, washbasins and power points.

2-star As for previous grade, but must have daytime supervision and more electrical facilities.

3-star Must have hot showers, sports facilities and a shop.

4-star As for previous grade, but must also possess a restaurant, children's playing area and electrical fixtures throughout the site.

5-star As for previous grade, but more facilities per person and a high level of supervision.

and a tent can expect to pay between €15 and €25 per night.

Farm and rural holidays

In both Belgium and Luxembourg, the tourist authorities have developed an imaginative and extensive programme of short-break holidays – anything from cycling tours and gastronomic excursions through to beer and antique-buying weekends. They also co-ordinate **farm and rural holidays**, ranging from family accommodation in a farmhouse, to the renting of rural apartments and country dwellings. In Wallonia and Luxembourg, there are also **gîtes d'étapes** – dormitory-style lodgings situated in relatively remote parts of the country – which can house anywhere between ten and one hundred people per establishment. You can

often choose to rent just part of the gîte d'étape or stay on a bed-and-breakfast basis. Some of the larger gîtes d'étapes (or gîtes de groupes) cater for large groups only, accepting bookings for a minimum of 25 people.

In all cases, advance booking is essential and **prices**, naturally enough, vary widely depending on the quality of accommodation, the length of stay and the season. As examples, a high season (mid-June to Aug), week-long booking of a pleasantly situated and comfortable farmhouse for four adults and three children might cost you in the region of €400, whereas a ten-person gîte d'étape might cost €350. For further details, contact the tourist offices detailed on p.58, or check out @www.hoevetoerisme.be for Flanders, @www.gitesdewallonie.net for Wallonia.



Food and drink

Belgian cuisine, particularly that of Brussels and Wallonia, is held in high regard worldwide, and in most of Europe is seen as second only to French in quality – indeed many feel it's of equal standing. For such a small country, there's a surprising amount of provincial diversity, but it's generally true to say that pork, beef, game, fish and seafood, especially mussels, are staple items, often cooked with butter, cream and herbs, or sometimes beer – which is, after all, the Belgian national drink. Soup is also common, a hearty stew-like affair offered in a huge tureen from which you can help yourself – a satisfying and reasonably priced meal in itself. The better Belgian chefs are often eclectic, dipping into many other cuisines, especially those of the Mediterranean, and also borrowing freely from across their own country's cultural/linguistic divide.

Luxembourg cuisine doesn't rise to quite such giddy heights, though it's still of an excellent standard. The food here borrows extensively from the Ardennes, but, as you might expect, has more Germanic influences, with sausages and sauerkraut featuring on menus, as well as pork, game and river fish.

As for **drink**, beer is one of the real delights of Belgium, and Luxembourg produces some very drinkable white wines along its bank of the River Moselle.

Food

The least expensive places to eat are **cafés** and **bars** – though the distinction between the two is typically blurred. A number of these establishments flank every main square in every small and medium-sized town, offering basic dishes, such as pasta, soups, croque-monsieur (a toasted ham and cheese sandwich with salad) and chicken or steak with chips. Prices are usually very reasonable – reckon on about €8 for the more modest dishes, €12 for the more substantial – though of course you will often pay more in the most popular tourist destinations. In general, and especially in Wallonia, the quality of these dishes will regularly be excellent and portions characteristically substantial. In the big cities, these cafés and bars play second fiddle to more specialist – and equally inexpensive – places, primarily pasta and pizza joints, cafés that cater for the shopper – and specialize in cakes and pastries – and ethnic café-restaurants and so forth.

Though there's often a thin dividing line between the café and the restaurant, the latter are mostly a little more formal and, not surprisingly, rather more expensive. Even in the cheapest restaurant a main course will rarely cost under €12, with a more usual figure being between €17 and €25. Restaurants are usually open at lunchtime (noon–2pm), but the main focus is in the evening. In addition, many restaurants close one day a week, usually Monday or Tuesday, and in the smaller towns kitchens start to wind down around 9.30/10pm. One final point is that many bars, cafés and restaurants offer a good-value *plat du jour/dagschotel*, usually for around €12, and frequently including a drink.

Wallonian cuisine

Wallonian cuisine is broadly similar to French, based upon a fondness for rich sauces and the freshest of ingredients. From the Walloons come *truite à l'Ardennaise*, trout cooked in a wine sauce; *chicorées gratinées au four*, chicory with ham and cheese; *fricassée Liégeois*, basically, fried eggs, bacon and sausage or blood pudding; *tricadelles à la bière*, meatballs in beer; and *carbonnades de porc Bruxelloise*, pork with a tarragon and tomato sauce.

For a menu reader for both French and Flemish (Dutch) terms, see p.477–484.

Vegetarians

Traditional Belgian and Luxembourg cuisine is largely fish- and meat-based, which means **vegetarians** can be in for a difficult time, though all of the larger towns do have at least a couple of vegetarian places, even if these tend to operate limited opening hours. Brussels and Antwerp are the vegetarian high points, not only because of the number of vegetarian places, but also because vegetarian options are available on many a menu.

The **Ardennes**, in particular, is well known for its cured ham (similar to Italian Parma ham) and, of course, its **pâté**, made from pork, beef, liver and kidney – though it often takes a particular name from an additional ingredient, for example *pâté de faisán* (pheasant) or *pâté de lièvre* (hare). Unsurprisingly, game (*gibier*) features heavily on most Ardennes menus. Among the many salads you'll find are *salade de Liège*, made from beans and potatoes, and *salade wallonie*, a warm salad of lettuce, fried potatoes and bits of bacon.

Flemish cuisine

In **Flanders**, the food is more akin to that of the Netherlands, characteristically plainer and simpler. Indeed, for decades traditional Flemish cuisine was regarded with much disdain as crude and unsubtle, but in recent years there's been a dramatic revival of its fortunes, and nowadays Flemish dishes appear on most menus in the north and there are dozens of speciality Flemish restaurants too.

Commonplace **dishes** include *waterzooi*, a soup-cum-stew consisting of chicken or fish boiled with fresh vegetables; *konijn met pruimen*, an old Flemish standby of rabbit with prunes; *paling in 't groen*, eel braised in a green (spinach) sauce with herbs; *stoofvlees*, beef marinated in beer and cooked with herbs and onions; *stoemp*, mashed potato mixed with vegetable and/or meat purée; and *hutsepot*, literally hotchpotch, a mixed stew of mutton, beef and pork.

Luxembourg cuisine

Favourite dishes in **Luxembourg** include smoked pork with beans; liver dumplings with sauerkraut and potatoes; *tripe à la Luxembourgeoise*; *boudin*, black pudding

served with apple sauce and mashed potatoes; and *judd mat gardeboenen*, cooked ham served with sauté potatoes and broad beans in a cream sauce. On the Moselle many restaurants serve *friture de la Moselle* – small fried fish. At many annual celebrations and fairs, lots of restaurants serve *fesch* – whole fish fried in batter.

Foreign cuisines

The quality and diversity of Belgium's native cuisine means that the vast majority of restaurants stick to it, though many supplement their menus with **Italian** and **French** offerings. Indeed, among foreign cuisines, it's the Italian and French restaurants that dominate, both in the major cities and the smaller towns, and the food they offer is almost invariably of good, if not excellent, quality. Other, less commonplace cuisines are to be found in Brussels in abundance, less so in the other conurbations, though Antwerp, in particular, is catching up. Among them, **Chinese** and **Vietnamese** restaurants are fairly widespread, while **Turkish** and **Greek** restaurants are especially good in Brussels. **Balkan** restaurants crop up here and there and Luxembourg's sizeable Portuguese community has spawned a reasonable supply of **Portuguese** places. In Brussels especially there are also a handful of **African** (mostly Congolese) and a goodly selection of **North African** (Moroccan and Tunisian) restaurants – worth sampling, and often very good bargains.

Breakfast and snacks

In most parts of Belgium and Luxembourg you'll **breakfast** in routine fashion with a cup of coffee and a roll or croissant, though the more expensive hotels usually offer sumptuous banquet-like breakfasts with cereals, fruit,

hams and cheeses. Everywhere, **coffee** is almost always first-rate – aromatic and strong, but rarely bitter; in Brussels and the south it's often accompanied by hot milk (*café au lait*), but throughout Belgium there's a tendency to serve it in the Dutch fashion, with a small tub of evaporated rather than fresh milk.

Later in the day, the most common snack is *frites* (chips) – served everywhere in Belgium from *friture/frituur* stands or parked vans, with salt or mayonnaise, or more exotic dressings.

Mussels – *moules/mosselen* – cooked in a variety of ways and served with chips, is akin to Belgium's national dish, and makes a good fast lunch. Just as wholesome are the filled **baguettes** (*broodjes*) that many bakeries and cafés prepare on the spot – imaginative, tasty creations that make a meal in themselves. Many fish shops, especially on the coast, also do an appetizing line in seafood baguettes, while street vendors in the north sell various sorts of toxic-looking sausage (*worst*), especially black pudding (*bloedworst*).

Everywhere there are stands selling **waffles** (*gaufres/wafels*), served up steaming hot with jam and honey. There are two main types of waffle – the more common Liège waffle, sweet, caramelized and with the corners squared off; and the Brussels waffle, larger, fluffier and needing a topping to give added flavour.

Cakes, pastries and chocolate

Belgium and Luxembourg heave with **patisseries**, where you can pick up freshly baked bread and choose from a mouth-watering range of cakes and pastries – from mousse slices through to raspberry tarts and beyond.

As almost everyone knows, Belgium is famous for its **chocolate** and on average each Belgian eats a prodigious 12.5kg of the stuff annually; chocolates are also the favoured gift when visiting friends. The big Belgian **chocolatiers**, for example Neuhaus, Godiva and Leonidas, have stores in all the main towns and cities, but many consider their products too sugary, one of the reasons why all of Belgium's cities now boast at least a couple of small, independent chocolate makers. The small independents almost invariably charge more than their bigger rivals, but few would deny the difference in taste.

Drink

No trip to Belgium would be complete without sampling its **beer**, which is always good, almost always reasonably priced and comes in a bewildering variety of brews. There's a **bar** on almost every corner and most serve at least twenty types of beer; in some the beer list runs into the hundreds. Traditionally, Belgian bars are cosy, unpretentious places, the walls stained brown by years of tobacco smoke, but in recent years many have been decorated in anything from a sort of potty medievalism (wooden beams etc) through to Art Nouveau and a frugal post-modernist style, which is especially fashionable in the big cities. Many bars serve simple food too, while a significant percentage pride themselves on first-rate dishes from small but well-conceived menus.

Luxembourg has a good supply of bars as well, with imported Belgian beers commonplace alongside the fairly modest lagers of the country's three dominant breweries – Diekirch, Mousel and Bofferding – and the white wines from the west bank of the River Moselle. For more on Belgian beer – and a beer lovers' "Top Twenty", see the colour insert.

Wines and spirits

In Belgium, beer very much overshadows **wine**, but the latter is widely available with French vintages being the most popular. **Luxembourg wines** are pleasant whites, fruitier and drier than the average French wine, being more akin to the vintages of Germany. A Luxembourg speciality is its sparkling, **méthode champenoise wine** – very palatable and reasonably priced: try the St-Martin brand, which is excellent and dry. To guarantee quality, all the premium Luxembourg wines are marked with the appellation "Marque Nationale".

There's no one national Belgian spirit, but the Flemings have a penchant – like their Dutch neighbours – for **jenever**, which is similar to gin, made from grain spirit and flavoured by juniper berries. It's available in most ordinary as well as specialist bars, the latter selling as many as several hundred varieties. Broadly speaking, jenever comes in two types, young (*jonge*) and old (*oude*), the

latter characteristically pale yellow and smoother than the former; both are served ice-cold. In Luxembourg, you'll come across locally produced bottles of **eau de vie** –

distilled from various fruits and around fifty percent alcohol by volume – head-thumping stuff. Finally, all the usual spirits – gin, whisky, etc – are widely available.



The media

British newspapers and magazines are easy to get hold of in both Belgium and Luxembourg and neither is there much difficulty in finding American publications. Most hotels in both countries have cable or satellite TV access and, in addition, two of Britain's leading TV channels – BBC1 and BBC2 – are picked up by most hotel TVs in northern Belgium.

The press

British newspapers – from tabloid through to broadsheet – as well as the more popular

English-language magazines are widely available either on the day of publication or the day after right across Belgium and Luxembourg. Internationally distributed **American newspapers** – principally the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and the *International Herald Tribune* – are also easy to come by, though distribution is concentrated in the big cities. Train-station bookstands are usually an excellent bet for English-language newspapers and magazines.

The three main newspapers in **French-speaking Belgium** are the influential, independent *Le Soir*; the right-wing, very Catholic *La Libre Belgique*; and *La Dernière Heure*, which is noted for its sports coverage.

Flemish-speakers rely on the leftist *De Morgen*, traditionally the favourite of socialists and trade unionists; the right-leaning *De Standaard*; and the populist, vaguely liberal *Het Laatste Nieuws*. There's also an **English-language weekly magazine**, *The Bulletin*, which primarily caters for the sizeable expat community resident in Brussels. Its news articles are interesting and diverse, picking up on key Belgian themes and issues, and its listings section is first-rate. It also carries a

fair-sized classified section – useful if you've just arrived for an extended stay and are looking for an apartment or even work. In **Luxembourg**, the biggest circulation newspaper is the middle-of-the-road *Luxemburger Wort*.

TV and radio

British radio stations can be picked up in much of Belgium and Luxembourg: you'll find BBC Radio 4 on 198kHz long wave; the World Service on 648kHz (463m) medium wave; and BBC Radio 5 Live on 909am and 693am. Shortwave frequencies and schedules for BBC World Service (@www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice), Radio Canada (@www.rcinet.ca) and Voice of America (@www.voa.gov) are listed on their respective websites.

As far as **British TV** is concerned, BBC1 and BBC2 television channels are on most hotel-room TVs in Belgium and on some in Luxembourg too. Access to cable and satellite channels is commonplace in hotels and bars across both countries too. **Domestic TV** is largely uninspiring, though the Flemish-language TV1 and Kanaal 2 usually run English-language films with subtitles, whereas the main Wallonian channels – RTBF 1 and ARTE – mostly dub and Luxembourg's RTL channel does both.



Festivals and events

Belgium and Luxembourg are big on festivals and special events – everything from religious processions through to cinema, fairs and contemporary-music binges. These are spread right throughout the year, though, as you might expect, most tourist-oriented events and festivals take place in the summer. Information on upcoming festivals and events is easily obtained from local tourist offices or you can check out the official websites of the national and regional tourist boards (see p.58).

Belgian festivals

Belgium's annual **carnivals** (*carnavals*), held in February and early March, are original, colourful and boisterous in equal measure. One of the most renowned is held in February at Binche, in Hainaut, when there's a procession involving some 1500 extravagantly dressed dancers called Gilles. There are also carnivals in Ostend and Aalst, and in Eupen, where the action lasts over the weekend before Shrove Tuesday and culminates with **Rosenmontag** on the Monday – a pageant of costumed groups and floats parading through the town centre. And, most uniquely, there is Stavelot's carnival where the so-called **Blancs Moussis**, townsfolk clothed in white hooded costumes and equipped with long red noses, take to the streets.

Nominally commemorating the arrival by boat of a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary from Antwerp in the fourteenth century, the Brussels **Ommegang** is the best known of the festivals with a religious inspiration; a largely secular event these days, it's held on the first Tuesday and Thursday of July. If you want to see anything on the Grand-Place, however, where most of the action is, you have to reserve seats months in advance. You might be better off visiting the town of Veurne in Flanders for its annual **Boetprocessie** (Processions of the Penitents), on the last Sunday in July; here, cross-bearers dressed in the brown cowls of the Capuchins process through the town – a truly macabre sight. Among the other religious events perhaps the most notable is

the **Heilig-Bloedprocessie** (Procession of the Holy Blood) held in Bruges on Ascension Day, when the shrine encasing the medieval phial, which supposedly contains a few drops of the blood of Christ, is carried solemnly through the streets.

Among any number of folkloric events and fairs, one of the biggest is Brussels' **Plantation du Meiboom**, in which, on August 9, a maypole is paraded round the streets before being ceremonially planted. Also good fun is the **Gentse Feesten**, a big nine-day knees-up held in Ghent in late July, with all sorts of events from music and theatre through to fireworks and fairs.

Festivals in Luxembourg

Carnival is a big deal in Luxembourg too, with most communities having some kind of celebration – if nothing else, almost every patisserie sells small doughnut-like cakes, *knudd*, during the days beforehand. On Ash Wednesday, a great straw doll is set alight and then dropped off the Moselle bridge in Remich with much whooping-it-up, while on the first Sunday after Carnival bonfires are lit on hilltops all over the country on **Buurgbrennen**. Mid-Lent Sunday sees **Bretzelsonndeg** (Pretzel Sunday), when pretzels are sold in all the duchy's bakeries and there are lots of processions. At Easter, no church bells are rung in the whole of the country between Maundy Thursday and Easter Saturday – folklore asserts that the bells fly off to Rome for confession. Their place is taken by children, who walk the streets with rattles announcing the Masses from about 6am onwards. On Easter Monday

morning, with the bells “back”, the children call on every house to collect their reward – brightly coloured Easter eggs.

Every village in Luxembourg has an annual fair – **kermess** – which varies in scale and duration according to the size of the village, ranging from a stand selling fries and hot dogs to a full-scale funfair. The **Schueber-fouer** in Luxembourg City – over the first three weeks of September – is one of the biggest mobile fairs in Europe, held since 1340 (it started life as a sheep market) and traditionally opened by the royal family. On the middle Sunday, in the **Hammelsmarsch**, shepherds bring their sheep to town, accompanied by a band, and then proceed to work their way round the bars.

Luxembourg's National Day is on June 23, and on the previous evening, at 11 pm or so, there is an enormous fireworks display off the Pont Adolphe in the capital and all the bars and cafés are open through most of the night. On June 23 itself there are parades and celebrations across most of the country.

Selected festivals and events

February

Brussels: Animation and Cartoon Festival Early Feb; ☎ 02 534 41 25, 🌐 www.awn.com/folioscope. A little-known animation festival, which screens as many as 120 new and old cartoons from around the world over the course of the event. Held at Auditorium du Passage 44, just off bd du Jardin Botanique; Métro Botanique or Place Rogier.

Eupen: Carnival Shrove Tues and the preceding four or five days. Eupen Carnival kicks off with the appearance of His Madness the Prince and climaxes with the Rosenmontag (Rose Monday) procession.

Malmédý: Carnival Shrove Tues and the preceding four or five days. In Malmédý carnival is called *Cwarme*, and on the Sun groups of Haguètes, masked figures in red robes and plumed hats, wander around seizing passers-by with wooden pincers.

Luxembourg: Carnival Sund preceding Shrove Tues. Carnival parades take place in several Luxembourg towns, including Diekirch and Remich.

Aalst: Carnival Shrove Tues and the preceding two days. Aalst Carnival begins on the Sunday with a parade of the giants – locals on stilts hidden by elaborate costumes – and floats, often with a contemporary/satirical theme.

Binche: Carnival Shrove Tues and the preceding two days. Binche Carnival builds up to the parade of the Gilles, locals dressed in fancy gear, complete with ostrich-feather hats. See p.328.

March

Ostend: Bal Rat Mort (Dead Rat Ball) First Sat; 🌐 www.ratmort.be. Held in the casino, this is a lavish, fancy-dress carnival ball with a different theme each year. The casino holds two and a half thousand revellers, but you still need to book early.

Brussels: Ars Musica First two weeks; ☎ 02 219 26 60, 🌐 www.arsmusica.be. This contemporary classical music festival has an impressive international reputation and regularly features world-renowned composers such as Argentina's Mauricio Kagel and France's Pascal Dusapin; you can sometimes meet the musicians before the concert too. Performances are held in numerous venues around the city.

Luxembourg: Buurgbrennen (Bonfire Day) Early March (first Sun after Carnival) all over Luxembourg.

Brussels: Festival of Fantasy Film, Science Fiction and Thrillers Last two weeks; ☎ 02 208 03 42, 🌐 www.biff.org. This well-established festival is a favourite with cult-film lovers, and has become the place to see all those entertainingly dreadful B-movies, as well as more modern sci-fi classics, thrillers and fantasy epics. The last day features a vampires' ball – admission by suitable costume only. Held at Auditorium du Passage 44, off bd du Jardin Botanique; Métro Botanique or Place Rogier.

Stavelot: Carnival Refreshment Sun (fourth Sun in Lent). Stavelot Carnival features the famous parade of the Blancs Moussis, all hoods and long red noses.

April

Sint-Truiden: Bloesemfeesten (Blossom festival) Late April; 🌐 www.bloesemfeesten-haspengouw.be. Blessing of the blossoms and other such rural fruitery in Sint-Truiden, at the heart of the Haspengouw fruit-growing region.

May

Flanders and Brussels: Festival van Vlaanderen (Flanders Festival) May – Oct across Flanders; 🌐 www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be. For well over forty years, the Flanders Festival has provided classical music in churches, castles and other impressive venues in over sixty Flemish towns and cities. The festival now comprises more than 120 concerts and features international symphony and philharmonic orchestras. Each of the big

Flemish-speaking cities – Antwerp, Mechelen, Ghent and Bruges – gets a fair crack of the cultural whip, as does Brussels, with the festival celebrated for about two weeks in each city before it moves on to the next.

Brussels: Concours Musical International Reine Elisabeth de Belgique Beginning to late May; ☎ 02 213 40 50, 🌐 www.concours-reine-elisabeth.be. A world-famous classical music competition founded over fifty years ago by Belgium's violin-playing Queen Elisabeth. The categories change annually, rotating piano, voice and violin and the winners perform live in the Grand-Place in July. Tickets for the competition can be difficult to get hold of and can cost as much as €50, but the venues do include the splendid Palais des Beaux Arts and the Conservatoire Royal de Musique.

Mechelen: Hanswijkprocessie (Procession of our Lady of Hanswijk) Sun before Ascension Day; 🌐 www.hanswijkprocessie.org. Large and ancient procession held in the centre of Mechelen. Traditionally focused on the veneration of the Virgin Mary, but more a historical pageant today.

Bruges: Heilig Bloedprocessie (Procession of the Holy Blood) Ascension Day, forty days after Easter; ☎ 05 044 86 86, 🌐 www.holyblood.org. One of medieval Christendom's holiest relics, the phial of the Holy Blood, said to contain a few drops of the blood of Christ, is carried through the centre of Bruges once every year held within an ornate reliquary. Nowadays, the procession is as much a tourist attraction as a religious ceremony, but it remains a prominent event for many Bruggelingen (citizens of Bruges). See p.198.

Echternach, Luxembourg: Springprozeession Whit Tues; 🌐 www.springprozeession.com. Ancient and rather eccentric dancing procession commemorating the eighth-century English missionary St Willibrord.

Brussels: Jazz Marathon Three days in May; ☎ 02 456 04 94, 🌐 www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be. Hip jazz cats can listen to non-stop groove around the city for three whole days (which change each year – check the website), and although most of the sixty-plus bands are perhaps less familiar names, the quality of the vibe is usually very high. Entrance fees vary depending on the venue, but you can buy a three-day pass from the tourist office for around €15. Alternatively head for one of the free jazz concerts on the Grand-Place, place Ste-Catherine or place de la Monnaie.

June

Tournai: Les journées des quatre cortèges (Days of the Four Processions) Second Sat & Sun. Lively carnival mixing modern and traditional themes.

Features include fifteen folkloric giants representing historic figures with local connections, such as Louis XIV and the Merovingian king Childeric, plus flower-decked floats, fireworks and military bands.

Luxembourg: Luxembourg National Day June 23. Fireworks in the capital and celebrations – including much flag-waving – all over the Grand Duchy.

July

Brussels: Ommegang First Tues & Thurs of July; 🌐 www.ommegang.be. One of the capital's best-known annual events, the Ommegang is essentially a grand procession that cuts a colourful course from place du Grand Sablon to the Grand-Place. It began in the fourteenth century as a religious event, celebrating the arrival of a miracle-working statue of the Virgin from Antwerp, but nowadays it's almost entirely secular with a whole gaggle of locals dressed up in period costume. It all finishes up with a traditional dance on the Grand-Place and has proved so popular that it's now held twice a year, when originally it was just once. If you want a ticket for a seat on the Grand-Place for the finale, you'll need to reserve at the Brussels tourist office (see p.70) at least six months ahead.

Brussels: Brussels Festival of European Film First two weeks of July; ☎ 02 533 34 20, 🌐 www.fffb.be. Something of a movable feast – it's previously been held in April and June – this festival promotes the work of young film directors from the 47 countries of the Council of Europe. Admittedly, this is not one of Europe's better-known film festivals, but the organizers have worked hard to establish a solid reputation and it's a great opportunity to catch up on some of the latest European (and Belgian) films. The festival takes place in the capital's Flagey arts centre, in Ixelles (see p.134).

Bruges: Cactusfestival Three days over the second weekend of July; 🌐 www.cactusmusic.be. Going strong for over twenty years, the Cactusfestival is something of a classic. Known for its amiable atmosphere, it proudly pushes against the musical mainstream with rock, reggae, rap, roots and R&B all rolling along together. The festival features both domestic and foreign artists – recent show-stoppers have included Elvis Costello, Patti Smith and Richard Thompson. It's held in Bruges' city centre, in the park beside the Minnewater.

Ghent: Gentse Feesten (Ghent Festival) Mid- to late July, but always including July 21; 🌐 www.gentsefeesten.be. For ten days every July, Ghent gets stuck into partying, pretty much round the clock. Local bands perform free open-air gigs throughout the city and street performers turn up all over the place – fire-eaters, buskers, comedians, actors, puppeteers

and so forth. There's also an outdoor market selling everything from jenever (gin) to handmade crafts.

Werchter, near Leuven: Rock Werchter

Festival Last weekend of July; @www.rockwerchter.be. Belgium's premier rock and pop festival and one of the largest open-air music festivals in Europe. In recent years the all-star line-up has included Massive Attack, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Pulp, Björk, the Beastie Boys, Garbage, Sonic Youth and Tricky. There are special festival buses from Leuven train station to the festival site.

Bruges: Klinkers Two and a half weeks, usually from the last weekend of July; @www.cactusmusic.be. Bruges' biggest annual knees-up, and the chance for city folk to really let their hair down. There are big-time concerts on the Markt and the Burg, the city's two main squares, more intimate performances in various bars and cafés, and film screenings in Astrid Park, plus all sorts of other entertainments. It's Bruges at its best – and most of the events are free.

Knokke-Heist: Internationaal Cartoonfestival

Late July to early Sept; @http://cartoonfestival.otr.be. Established in the 1960s, this summer-season festival in the seaside resort of Knokke-Heist showcases several hundred world-class cartoons drawn from every corner of the globe.

Veurne: Boetprocessie (Penitents' Procession)

Last Sun in July. Morbid and fascinating in equal measure, the Boetprocessie comprises around three hundred participants dressed in the brown cowls of the Capuchins and dragging heavy crosses behind them. See p.166.

Boechout, Antwerp: Sfinks Last weekend in July; @www.sfinks.be. Sfinks is Belgium's best world-music festival, held outdoors in the suburb of Boechout, about 10km southeast of downtown Antwerp.

Bruges: Musica Antiqua Last week of July and first week of Aug; @www.musica-antiqua.com. Part of the Festival van Vlaanderen (see p.214), this well-established and well-regarded festival of medieval music offers an extensive programme of live performances at a variety of historic venues in Bruges. The evening concerts are built around themes, whilst the lunchtime concerts are more episodic. Tickets go on sale in February and are snapped up fast.

August

Brussels: Planting of the Meiboom Aug 9. An annual event in which a meiboom (maypole) is planted at the corner of rue des Sables and rue du Marais amidst a procession accompanied by much boozing, food and general partying. See p.90.

Zeebrugge and the coast: Sand sculpture Aug to late Sept. All sorts of sand sculpture competitions

are popular along the Belgian coast throughout the summer – and Zeebrugge features some of the best. Amazing creations – everything from the bizarre to the surreal and beyond.

Leuven: Marktrock Three days in the middle of Aug; @www.marktrock.be. Leuven's lively Marktrock ("Market Square Rock") is an extremely popular city-centre event showcasing local rock groups and solo artists with a handful of foreign acts thrown in for good measure.

Kiewit, just outside Hasselt: Pukkelpop Three days in the middle of Aug; @www.pukkelpop.be. Large-scale progressive music festival running the gamut from indie through R&B to house.

Ath: Ducasse Fourth Sun; @www.ath.be. Dating back to the thirteenth century, this festival focuses on an exuberant parade in which giant figures – or goliaths – represent historical and folkloric characters.

Luxembourg City: Schueberfouer Last week in Aug & first two weeks of Sept; @www.fouer.lu. A former shepherds' market, this is now the capital's largest funfair.

September

Tournai: La Grande Procession de Tournai

Second Sun in Sept. Part secular shindig in historical costume, part religious ceremony involving the carrying of the reliquary of St Eleuthère through the city's streets, this procession dates back to the eleventh century.

Nivelles: Le Tour Sainte-Gertrude de Nivelles

Last Sun in Sept or first Sun in Oct; @www.toursaintegetrude.be. Beginning in the centre of Nivelles, this is a religious procession in which the reliquary of St Gertrude is escorted on a circular, 15km route out into the countryside surrounding the town. Locals dressed in historical gear and several goliaths join the last leg of the procession when the jollity gets going.

October

Ghent: Ghent Film Festival Twelve days in Oct; @www.filmfestival.be. The Ghent Film Festival is one of Europe's foremost cinematic events. Every year, the city's art-house cinemas combine to present a total of around two hundred feature films and a hundred shorts from all over the world, screening Belgian films and the best of world cinema well before they hit the international circuit. There's also a special focus on music in film.

Hasselt: De Hasseltse Jeneverfeesten Mid- to late Oct; @www.jeneverfeesten.hasselt.be. Two-day celebration of jenever, a gin-like spirit produced in

this part of Belgium. It's all a bit silly, but good fun all the same, with events including the "fastest-running waiter" race. Look out also for the *borrelmanneke* (little jenever man) who toddles round town dispensing free shots of the stuff.

November

Scherpenheuvel, northeast of Leuven Sun after All Saints' Day; 🌐 www.toerismehageland.be.

The basilica at Scherpenheuvel is the site of Belgium's most important annual pilgrimage – the Kaarskensprocessie – in honour of the Virgin Mary. The main event is a candlelight procession that takes place in the afternoon accompanied by the offering of ex votos.

Ghent: Zesdaagse an Vlaanderen (The Six days of Flanders Cycling Event). Six days in mid-Nov; 🌐 www.kuipke.be. This annual cycling

extravaganza takes place in the vélodrome at the Citadelpark in Ghent. It attracts cyclists from all over Europe, who thrash around for dear life in six days of high-speed racing.

Vianden, Luxembourg: Miertchen (St Martin's Fire) Mid-Nov. A celebration of the end of the harvest (and formerly the payment of the levy to the feudal lord), with bonfires and a big open-air market.

December

Nationwide: The Arrival of St Nicholas (aka Santa Klaus) Dec 6. The arrival of St Nicholas from his long sojourn abroad is celebrated by processions and the giving of sweets to children right across Belgium and Luxembourg. In Luxembourg, he's accompanied by "Père Fouettard" (the bogey-man) dressed in black and carrying a whip to punish naughty children.



Shopping

Both Belgium and Luxembourg have flourishing retail sectors and all the large towns and cities are jammed with department stores and international chains. More distinctively, the big cities in general, and Brussels in particular, play host to scores of specialist shops selling everything from comics to secondhand clothes. There are certain obvious Belgian goods – chocolates, beer and lace to name the big three – but it's the Belgian flair for design that is the most striking feature, whether reflected in clothes, fine art or interior design.

Regular **shopping hours** are Monday through Saturday 10am to 6 or 7pm. However, many smaller shops open late on Monday morning and/or close a little earlier on Saturdays, most supermarkets and department stores are likely to have extended hours with late-night opening on Fridays (till 8 or 9pm) especially popular, and tourist-oriented shops everywhere generally open seven days a week until the early evening.

Clothing and shoe sizes

Women's dresses and skirts

American	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
British	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22
Continental	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52

Women's blouses and sweaters

American	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
British	30	32	34	36	38	40	42
Continental	40	42	44	46	48	50	52

Women's shoes

American	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
British	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Continental	36	37	38	39	40	41	42

Men's suits

American	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48
British	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48
Continental	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58

Men's shirts

American	14	15	15.5	16	16.5	17	17.5	18
British	14	15	15.5	16	16.5	17	17.5	18
Continental	36	38	39	41	42	43	44	45

Men's shoes

American	7	7.5	8	8.5	9.5	10	10.5	11	11.5
British	6	7	7.5	8	9	9.5	10	11	12
Continental	39	40	41	42	43	44	44	45	46



Travel essentials

Addresses

In the **French-speaking** part of **Belgium** and in **Luxembourg**, addresses are usually written to a standard format. The first line begins with the category of the street or thoroughfare (rue, boulevard, etc), followed by the name and then the number; the second line gives the area – or zip – code, followed by the town or area. Common abbreviations include *bld* or *bd* for boulevard, *av* for avenue, *pl* for place (square) and *ch* for chaussée. An exception is the hyphenated Grand-Place (main square), written in full. In the **Flemish-speaking** areas, the first line gives the name of the street which is followed by (and joined to) its category – hence Krakeelplein is Krakeel square, Krakeelstraat is Krakeel street; the number comes next. The second line gives the area – or zip – code followed by the town or area. Consequently, Flemish abbreviations occur at the end of words: thus *Hofstr* for Hofstraat. An exception is *Grote Markt* (main square), which is not abbreviated. Common categories include *plein* for square, *plaats* for place, *laan* or *weg* for avenue, *kaai* for quay, and *straat* for street. In bilingual Brussels, all signs give both the French and Flemish versions. In many cases, this is fairly straightforward as they are either the same or similar, but sometimes it's extremely confusing, most notoriously in the name of one of the three principal train stations – in French, *Bruxelles-Midi*; in Flemish *Brussel-Zuid*.

Children

In general terms at least, Belgian/Luxembourg society is sympathetic to its **children** and the tourist industry follows suit. Extra beds in hotel rooms are usually easy to arrange; many restaurants (but not the smartest) have children's menus; concessions for children are the rule, from public transport to museums; and baby-changing stations are commonplace. Pharmacists carry all the kiddie stuff you would expect – nappies, baby food and so

forth. Certain hotels, particularly the better ones on the coast, offer a **babysitting** service, and some resorts operate a municipal service of registered babysitters.

Costs

Accommodation in both Belgium and Luxembourg is moderately costly, and will probably prove to be your **biggest expense**. Public transport and food, on the other hand, are reasonably priced, as is eating out with most main courses costing €15–25, though you can, of course, pay a lot more: a meal in a top restaurant can cost €60 head, and then some.

Travelling by bicycle, eating picnics bought from supermarkets and cooking your own food at campsites, it's possible to keep **costs** down to €25 a day per person. Moving up a notch, if you picnic at lunch, stick to less expensive bars and restaurants, and stay in cheap hotels or hostels, you could get by on around €50–60 a day. Staying in two-star hotels, eating out in medium-range restaurants and going to bars, you should reckon on about €120 a day, the main variable being the cost of your room. On €150 a day and upwards, you'll be limited only by time, though if you're planning to stay in a five-star hotel and have a big night out, this still won't be enough. For further information on accommodation costs, see pp.37–40.

Crime and personal safety

By comparison with other parts of Europe, both Belgium and even more so Luxembourg are relatively free of **crime**, so there's little reason why you should ever come into contact with the either country's police force. However, there is more street crime in Belgium than there used to be, especially in Brussels and Antwerp, and it's advisable to be on your guard against petty theft: secure your things in a locker when staying in hostel

accommodation, and never leave any valuables in a tent or car. If you're on a bike, make sure it is well locked up. If you are robbed, you'll need to go to a police station to report it, not least because your insurance company will require a police report; remember to make a note of the report number – or, better still, ask for a copy of the statement itself. Don't expect a great deal of concern if your loss is relatively small – and don't be surprised if the process of completing forms and formalities takes ages.

As for **personal safety**, it's generally possible to walk around without fear of harassment or assault, but certain parts of all the big cities – especially Antwerp (to the north of the centre) and Brussels (round Gare du Midi) – are decidedly dodgy, and wherever you go at night it's always better to err on the side of caution. Using public transport, even late at night, isn't usually a problem, but if in doubt take a taxi.

Disabilities, travellers with

Luxembourg and more especially Belgium are only just getting to grips with the requirements of people with mobility problems. In all of the major cities the most obvious difficulty you'll face is in negotiating the cobbled streets and narrow, often broken pavements of the older districts, where the key sights are usually located. Similarly, provision for people with disabilities on the **public transport** system is only average, although improving – many new buses, for instance, are now wheelchair-accessible. And yet, while it can be difficult simply to get around, practically all **public buildings**, including museums, theatres, cinemas, concert halls and hotels, are obliged to provide access, and do. Hotels, hostels and campsites that have been certified wheelchair-accessible now bear an International Accessibility Symbol (IAS). Bear in mind, however, that a lot of the older, narrower **hotels** are not allowed to install lifts for reasons of conservation, so check first.

Electricity

The **current** is 220 volts AC, with standard European-style two-pin plugs. British

equipment needs only a plug adaptor; American apparatus requires a transformer and an adaptor.

Entry requirements

Citizens of all EU and EEA countries only need a valid **passport or national identity card** to enter Belgium and Luxembourg, where – with some limitations – they also have the right to work, live and study. US, Australian, Canadian, South African and New Zealand citizens need only a valid passport for visits of up to **ninety days**, but are not allowed to work. Passports must be valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay. Non-EU citizens who wish to visit Belgium and Luxembourg for longer than ninety days must get a special **visa** from a Belgian/Luxembourg consulate or embassy before departure (see below for addresses). Visa requirements do change and it is always advisable to check the current situation before leaving home.

Belgian embassies and consulates abroad

For further information, consult @www.diplomatie.be/en/.

Australia Embassy: 19 Arkana St, Yarralumla, ACT 2600, Canberra @02/6273 2501, @www.diplomatie.be/canberra. Also consular representation in Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne and Perth.

Canada Embassy: 360 Albert St, Suite 820, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7 @613/236 7267, @www.diplomatie.be/ottawa. Also consular representation in Edmonton, Halifax, Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

Ireland 2 Shrewsbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4 @01/205 71 00, @www.diplomatie.be/dublin. Also Honorary Consuls in Cork and Limerick.

Luxembourg Embassy: rue des Girondins 4, 1626 Luxembourg @44 27 46, @www.diplomatie.be/luxembourg.

Netherlands Embassy: Alexanderveld 97, 2585 DB Den Haag @070/312 3456, @www.diplomatie.be/thehague. Honorary consulates in Amsterdam, Groningen, Maastricht, Nijmegen, Rotterdam and Vlissingen.

New Zealand Honorary consul: 15A Rarangi Rd, St. Heliers, Auckland @09/575 6202.

Also consular representation in Wellington and Christchurch.

Poland Embassy: Ulica Senatorska 34, 00-095 Warszawa ☎22/551 28 00, 🌐 www.diplomatie.be/warsaw. Also consular representation in Katowice and Poznan.

South Africa Embassy: Leyds St 625 – Muckleneuk, 0002 Pretoria ☎012/440 32 01, 🌐 www.diplomatie.be/Pretoria. Also consular representation in Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

UK Embassy: 17 Grosvenor Crescent, London SW1X 7EE ☎020/7470 3700, 🌐 www.diplomatie.be/London. Visa Application Centre: 5 Lower Belgrave St, London SW1W 0NR ☎020/7811 3979 🌐 www.vfs-be-uk.com. Also consular representation in ten other UK cities.

USA Embassy: 3330 Garfield St NW, Washington DC 20008 ☎202/333 6900, 🌐 www.diplobel.us. Also consular representation in 32 other US cities.

Luxembourg embassies and consulates abroad

Belgium Embassy: av de Cortenbergh 75, B-1000 Brussels ☎02/737 57 00.

Netherlands Embassy: Nassaulaan 8, 2514 JS The Hague ☎070/360 7516.

UK Embassy: 27 Wilton Crescent, London SW1X 8SD ☎020/7235 6961.

USA Embassy: 2200 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008 ☎202/265 4171, 🌐 www.luxembourg-usa.org.

Gay and lesbian travellers

Gay and lesbian life in both Belgium and Luxembourg does not have a high international profile, especially in comparison with the Netherlands next door. Nonetheless, there's still a vibrant scene in Brussels and Antwerp (though more so for men than women) and at least a couple of gay bars and clubs in every major town. In both countries the gay/lesbian scene is left largely unmolested by the rest of society, a pragmatic tolerance – or intolerance soaked in indifference – that has provided opportunities for legislative change. In 1998 Belgium passed a law granting certain rights to cohabiting couples irrespective of their sex, and civil unions for same-sex couples were legalized, after much huffing and puffing by the political right, in 2003; Luxembourg legalized same-sex civil unions in 2004. The legal **age of consent** for men and women is 16 in both Belgium and Luxembourg.

Contacts for gay and lesbian travellers

In Belgium, there are several local **gay and lesbian organizations** offering information, help and support. Of particular note is Brussels' **Tels Quels** at rue Marché au Charbon 81 (☎02 512 45 87, 🌐 www.telsquels.be), which also organizes events such as the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, held every January at the Botanique (🌐 www.fglb.org), and Gay Pride in May. In Antwerp, the place to head for is Café Den Draak, Draakplaats 1 (Tues–Sun noon till late), a café-bar that is part of a larger gay and lesbian project, the **Het Roze Huis** (☎03 288 00 84, 🌐 www.hetrozehuis.be; see p.278). In Luxembourg, the umbrella organization that should be your first port of call is **Rosa Lëtzebuerg**, rue des Romains, Bonnevoie (☎26 19 00 18, 🌐 www.mambo.gay.lu).

Health

Under reciprocal health care arrangements, all citizens of the EU (European Union) and EEA (European Economic Area) are entitled to **free medical treatment** within the public health care system of both Belgium and Luxembourg. Non-EU/EEA nationals are not entitled to free treatment and should, therefore, take out their own medical insurance. However, EU/EEA citizens may also want to consider private health insurance, both to cover the cost of items not within the EU/EEA scheme, such as dental treatment and repatriation on medical grounds, and to enable them to seek treatment within the private sector. Note also that the more worthwhile insurance policies promise to sort matters out before you pay (rather than after) in the case of major expense; if you do have to pay upfront, get and keep the receipts. For more on insurance, see p.54. No **inoculations** are currently required for either Belgium or Luxembourg.

The **public health care system** in Belgium and Luxembourg is of a good standard and widely available, with clinics and hospitals in all the larger towns. If you're seeking treatment **under EU/EEA reciprocal health arrangements**, it may be necessary to double-check that the medic you see is

working within (and seeing you as) a patient of the public system. That being the case, you'll receive subsidized treatment just as the locals do. Technically you should have your passport and your **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)** to hand to prove that you are eligible for EU/EEA health care, but often no one bothers to check. English-speaking medical staff are commonplace in Brussels, Luxembourg City and the Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium, but elsewhere, you'll be struggling unless you have some rudimentary grasp of French. Your hotel will usually be able to arrange – or help to arrange – an appointment with a doctor, but note that he/she will almost certainly see you as a private patient.

Minor complaints can often be remedied at a **pharmacy** (French *pharmacie*, Flemish *apotheek*): pharmacists are highly trained, willing to give advice (often in English), and able to dispense many drugs which would only be available on prescription in many other countries. Pharmacies are ubiquitous and are listed in the Yellow Pages.

Insurance

Prior to travelling, you'd do well to take out an **insurance policy** to cover against theft, loss and illness or injury. Before paying for a new policy, however, it's worth checking whether you already have some degree of cover: for instance, EU health care privileges apply in both Belgium and Luxembourg (see p.53), some all-risks home insurance policies may cover your possessions when overseas, and many private medical schemes include cover when abroad.

After exhausting the possibilities above, you might want to contact a **specialist travel insurance company**. A typical travel insurance policy usually provides cover for loss of baggage, tickets and – up to a certain limit – cash or cheques, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey and medical costs. Most of them exclude so-called **dangerous sports** – climbing, horse-riding, rafting, windsurfing and so forth – unless an extra premium is paid. Many policies can be chopped and changed to exclude coverage you don't need – for example, sickness and accident benefits can often be excluded or included

at will. If you do take medical coverage, ascertain whether benefits will be paid as treatment proceeds or only after your return home, and whether there is a 24-hour medical emergency number. When securing baggage cover, make sure that the per-article limit will cover your most valuable possessions. If you need to make a claim, keep **receipts** for medicines and medical treatment. In the event you have anything stolen, you must obtain a **crime report** statement or number.

Rough Guides has teamed up with Columbus Direct to offer you **travel insurance** that can be tailored to suit your needs. Products include a low-cost **backpacker** option for long stays; a **short break** option for city getaways; a typical **holiday package** option; and others. There are also annual **multi-trip** policies for those who travel regularly. Different sports and activities (trekking, skiing, etc) can be usually be covered if required.

For eligibility and purchasing options see our website (@www.roughguidesinsurance.com). Alternatively, UK residents should call ☎0870/033 9988; Australians should call ☎1300/669 999 and New Zealanders should call ☎0800/55 9911. All other nationalities should call ☎+44 870/890 2843.

The Internet

Belgium and Luxembourg are well geared up for **Internet access**. There are Internet cafés in all the big cities, and most hotels and hostels provide Internet access for their guests either free or at minimal charge.

The useful website @www.kropla.com gives details of how to plug your laptop in when abroad, phone country codes around the world, and information about electrical systems in different countries.

Mail

Both Belgium and Luxembourg have an efficient **postal system**. Post offices are fairly plentiful and mostly open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm or 5pm, though some big-city branches also open on Saturday from 9am to noon. **Stamps** are sold at a wide range of outlets including many shops and hotels. Mail to the US takes seven days or so, within Europe two to three days. **Mail**

boxes are painted red in Belgium and yellow in Luxembourg.

Maps

The **maps** provided in this guide should be sufficient for most purposes, but drivers will need to buy a good road map and prospective hikers will need specialist hiking maps. One very good-value **national road map** is the clear and easy-to-use Geocart (🌐 www.geocart.be) *Belgium and Luxembourg* (1:250,000) map, which comes complete with an index. An alternative is the 1:350,000 Michelin (🌐 www.michelintravel.com) *Belgium and Luxembourg* map, which also has an index but isn't quite as clear as the Geocart version. Michelin does, however, publish the best map of Luxembourg (1:150,000), with an index and marking the most scenic roads. It also publishes an excellent Benelux road map in book form at 1:150,000.

As regards **regional and provincial maps**, Geocart chips in with a first-rate series, all with an index, at the 1:100,000 scale, as well as a very competent map of Wallonia at the 1:200,000 scale, again with an index and including several more detailed city insets. It also turns out a number of excellent **city maps** – for example *Ghent* and *Bruges*, both at 1:15,000 and with an index – as well as several tourist-oriented, city-centre maps, for example *Antwerp*, at 1:10,000. Finally, if you're after a **city map of Brussels**, look no further than our own Rough Guide city map (1:10000 to 1:6000), which has the added advantage of being rip-proof and waterproof. It also marks all the key sights as well as many of the best hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs, and what's more it's only in French, whereas most of its competitors carry both French and Flemish signage, which makes them very cluttered.

The most authoritative Belgian **hiking maps** (1:25,000) are published by the Institut Géographique National/Nationaal Geografisch Instituut (IGN/NGI; 🌐 www.ngi.be). IGN maps cover the whole of Belgium and the equivalent organization in Luxembourg – Luxembourg Survey – does a similarly thorough job in Luxembourg with two series of Ordnance Survey maps, one at 1:50,000 (2 sheets), the other at 1:20,000 (30 sheets).

With the exception of the Rough Guide *Brussels* map, all the maps mentioned above should be easy enough to track down in Belgium or Luxembourg, but to be sure (and to check what's currently on the market) you might consider ordering from or at least consulting the website of a leading bookseller before departure – 🌐 www.stanfords.co.uk is hard to beat.

Money and exchange

In both Luxembourg and Belgium, the currency is the **euro** (€). Each euro is made up of 100 cents. Euro notes and coins feature a common EU design on one face, but different country-specific designs on the other. There are seven euro notes – in denominations of €500, €200, €100, €50, €20, €10 and €5, each a different colour and size – and eight different coins, including €2 and €1, then 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents. All Euro notes and coins can be used in any of the twelve euro-zone – sometimes “euroland” – states. At time of writing the **rate of exchange** for one € is £0.67, US\$1.35, CDN\$1.45, AUS\$1.60, NZ\$1.75, SAR9.56. For the most up-to-date rates, check the currency converter website 🌐 www.oanda.com

ATMs are liberally dotted around every major city and town in both Belgium and Luxembourg – and they accept a host of **debit cards** without charging a transaction fee. **Credit cards** can be used in ATMs too, but in this case transactions are treated as loans, with interest accruing daily from the date of withdrawal. All major credit cards, including American Express, Visa and MasterCard, are widely accepted in both countries. Typically, ATMs give instructions in a variety of languages.

All well-known brands of **traveller's cheques** in all major currencies are widely accepted in both countries, and you can change them as well as foreign currency into euros at most **banks** and **savings banks**, which are ubiquitous; **banking hours** are usually Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm, with a few banks also open on Saturday mornings. Outside regular banking hours, most major hotels, many travel agents and some hostels will change money at less generous rates and with variable

commissions, as will the **foreign exchange kiosks** (*bureaux de change/wisselkantoren*) to be found in key locations in the big cities.

Mosquitoes

These pesky blighters thrive in the watery environment of northern Belgium and can be particularly irritating at campsites. An antihistamine cream such as Phenergan is the best antidote, although this can be difficult to find – in which case preventative sticks like Autan or Citronella are the best bet.

Opening hours and public holidays

Business hours (ie office hours) normally run from Monday to Friday 9.30/10am to 4.30/5pm. Normal **shopping hours** are Monday through Saturday 10am to 6pm, though many smaller shops open late on Monday morning and/or close a tad earlier on Saturdays. In addition, in some of the smaller towns and villages many places close at lunchtime (noon–2pm) and for the half-day on Wednesdays or Thursdays. At the other extreme, larger establishments – primarily supermarkets and department stores – are increasingly likely to have extended hours, often on Fridays when many remain open till 8pm or 9pm. In the big cities, a smattering of convenience stores (*magasins de nuit/avondwinkels*) stay open either all night or until 1am or 2am daily; other than these, only die-hard money

makers – including some souvenir shops – are open late or on Sunday.

Almost all Belgian towns and most of the larger villages have a **museum** of some description, and the same applies in Luxembourg. Most museums are open Tuesday to Saturday from 9.30am or 10am to 4.30pm or 5pm, and frequently on Sunday, with some of the smaller concerns closing for lunch, sometime between noon and 2pm. Opening hours are often more restrictive outside the April–September period.

The most important and frequently visited **churches** are normally open Monday to Saturday from around 9am to 5pm, with more restrictive opening hours on Sunday. However, visiting many of the less distinguished but still significant churches can be problematic, particularly those which are rarely, if ever, open for worship. In these cases gaining access is really hit or miss – even the local tourist office may be unaware of their opening times. As a general rule of thumb, try around 5 or 6pm when the priest and the occasional worthy might drop by.

In Belgium, there are ten national **public holidays** per year, and, with two exceptions, they are the same as those in Luxembourg. For the most part, they are keenly observed with most businesses and many attractions closed and public transport reduced to a Sunday service.

Public holidays in Belgium and Luxembourg

New Year's Day

Easter Monday

Labour Day (May 1)

Ascension Day (forty days after Easter)

Whit Monday

Luxembourg National Day (June 23)

Flemish Day (Flemish-speaking Belgium only; July 11)

Belgium National Day (July 21)

Assumption (mid-August)

Walloon Day (French-speaking Belgium only; Sept 27)

All Saints' Day (November 1)

Armistice Day – Belgium only (November 11)

Christmas Day

(Note that if any one of the above falls on a Sunday, the next day becomes a holiday.)

Phones

All but the remotest parts of Belgium and Luxembourg are on the **mobile phone (cell phone)** network at **GSM900/1800**, the band common to the rest of Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Mobile/cell phones bought in North America need to be of the **triband** variety to access this GSM band. If you intend to use your mobile/cell phone in Belgium and Luxembourg, note that call charges can be excruciating – particularly irritating is the supplementary charge that you often have to pay on incoming calls – so check with your supplier before you depart. **Text messages**, on the other hand, are usually charged at ordinary rates.

In both Belgium and Luxembourg, domestic and international phone cards – **télecards** – for use in public phones can be bought at many outlets, including post offices, some supermarkets, railway stations and newsgagents. They come in several specified denominations, beginning at €5. To make a **reverse-charge** or collect call, phone the international operator (they almost all speak English). Remember also that although virtually all hotel rooms have phones, there is almost always an exorbitant surcharge for their use.

There are no **area codes** in either Belgium or Luxembourg, but Belgian numbers mostly begin with a zero, a relic of former area codes, which have now been incorporated into the numbers themselves. Telephone numbers beginning 0900 or 070 are premium-rated, 0800 are toll-free. Within both countries, there's no distinction between local and long-distance calls – in other words calling Ostend from Brussels costs the same as calling a number in Brussels.

Useful telephone numbers

Operator numbers

Belgium Domestic directory enquiries Flemish 01207; French 01307.

International directory enquiries & operator assistance Flemish 01204; French 01304.

Luxembourg Domestic, International directory enquiries & International operator assistance 012410.

Emergencies

In Belgium

Fire brigade & emergency medical assistance 0100; Police 0101.

In Luxembourg

Fire brigade & emergency medical assistance 0112; Police 0113.

Sports and outdoor activities

Most visitors to Belgium confine their exercise to **cycling** (see p.36) and **walking**, both of which are ideally suited to the flatness of the terrain and, for that matter, the excellence of the public transport system. The same applies to Luxembourg except that the land is much hillier and often more scenic. Both also offer all the sporting facilities you would expect of prosperous, European countries, from golf to gymnasia, swimming pools to horse riding. More individual offerings include **Korfbal** (0 www.korfbal.be), a home-grown sport popular in the Netherlands and Flemish-speaking Belgium, cobbled together from netball, basketball and volleyball, and played with mixed teams and a high basket; **canal ice skating**, again in the Flemish-speaking areas, though this is of course dependent on the weather being cold enough; and, in the Ardennes, canoeing and kayaking plus mountaineering. Belgium also possesses some great sandy **beaches** on its western seaboard, although it has to be admitted that the weather is notoriously unreliable and the North Sea rather murky. There are a number of fully fledged seaside resorts – like Blankenberge and Knokke-Heist – but there are nicer, quieter stretches of coast, most notably amongst the wild dunes and long beaches around the pretty little resort of De Haan (see p.156).

The chief spectator sport is **football** and the teams that make up the two divisions – one professional, one semi-professional – of the country's national league attract a fiercely loyal following. Big-deal clubs include RSC. Anderlecht of

International calls

Phoning home from Belgium and Luxembourg

To make an international phone call from within Belgium and Luxembourg, dial the appropriate international access code as below, then the number you require, omitting the initial zero where there is one.

Australia ☎0061

Canada ☎001

Republic of Ireland ☎00353

New Zealand ☎0064

South Africa ☎0027

UK ☎0044

USA ☎001

Phoning Belgium and Luxembourg from abroad

To call a number in Belgium or Luxembourg, dial the local international access code, then ☎32 for Belgium or ☎352 for Luxembourg, followed by the number you require, omitting the initial zero where there is one.

Brussels (@www.rscs.be), Club Brugge (@www.clubbrugge.be), and Standard Liège (@www.standardliege.be). The football season runs from early August to May with a break over the Christmas period.

Time

Both Belgium and Luxembourg are on **Central European Time (CET)** – one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, six hours ahead of US Eastern Standard Time, nine hours ahead of US Pacific Standard Time, nine hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time and eleven hours behind New Zealand except for periods during the changeovers made in the respective countries to and from daylight saving. Both Belgium and Luxembourg operate daylight saving time, moving their clocks forward one hour in the spring and one hour back in the autumn.

Tippling

Tippling is, of course, never obligatory, but a ten- to fifteen-percent tip is expected by taxi drivers and expected by restaurant waiters where and whenever a service charge is not included in the final bill.

Toilets

Public toilets remain comparatively rare in both Belgium and Luxembourg, but many big-city cafés and bars operate what

amounts to an ablutionary sideline, charging a €0.20–0.40 fee for the use of their toilets; you'll spot the plate for the money as you enter.

Tourist information

Belgium has two official tourist boards, one covering the French-speaking areas, the other the Flemish-speaking regions; they share responsibility for Brussels. These boards are respectively the **Office de Promotion du Tourisme (OPT) Wallonie-Bruxelles** and **Toerisme Vlaanderen** (Tourism Flanders). Both operate all-encompassing websites (see p.59) covering everything from hotels and campsites to forthcoming events. Both also publish a wide range of glossy, free booklets of both a general and specific nature, available at tourist offices throughout Belgium. A similarly excellent set of services is provided by the **Office National du Tourisme Luxembourg** (Luxembourg National Tourist Office) – for website details see box, p.59.

In both Belgium and Luxembourg, there are **tourist offices** in every large village, town and city and most are located on or near the main square. Staff are nearly always enthusiastic and helpful, and many speak excellent English, but more so in Luxembourg and Flemish-speaking Belgium than in French-speaking Belgium. In addition to

Tourist-office websites

Belgian Tourist Office for North America @ www.visitbelgium.com.

Toerisme Vlaanderen @ www.visitflanders.com.

Office de Promotion du Tourisme (OPT) Wallonie-Bruxelles

@ www.belgiumtheplaceto.be.

Office National du Tourisme Luxembourg @ www.ont.lu.

Also @ www.luxembourg.co.uk and, for the North American market,

@ www.visitluxembourg.com.

handing out basic maps and information on the main sights (usually for free), tourist offices almost always keep a list of local accommodation, which they can book for you either free or for a minimal fee (say €3.50). Quite often, these lists include B&B accommodation, either from a published list (as in Bruges) or from a list kept by

themselves (as in Kortrijk). For further details, see “Accommodation” on p.37. Larger urban tourist offices – like those in Bruges, Brussels and Luxembourg City – also offer all sorts of supplementary services, from money exchange to co-ordinating guided tours. Individual opening hours for tourist offices are specified in the guide.

Guide

Guide

1	Brussels.....	63
2	Flanders	145
3	Antwerp and the northeast	243
4	Hainaut and the wallonian Brabant.....	307
5	The Ardennes	343
6	Luxembourg	401



Brussels



CHAPTER 1

Highlights

* **The Grand-Place**

Extraordinarily beautiful, this is one of Europe's most perfectly preserved Gothic-Baroque squares. **See p.78**

* **The Fondation****Internationale Jacques**

Brel Devotees of *chanson* should make their way to the Fondation to hear Brel in full voice. **See p.91**

* **The cathedral** This

handsome church has some of the country's most beautifully executed medieval stained-glass windows.

See p.93

* **The Musée d'Art Ancien**

Holds an exquisite sample of early Flemish paintings.

See p.98

* **Victor Horta Museum**

Horta's old house and studio are now a fascinating museum of the work of this leading exponent of Art Nouveau. **See p.118**

* **Bars** Brussels has some wonderful bars; two of the oldest and most atmospheric are À l'Image de Notre-Dame and Au Bon Vieux Temps. **See p.128**

* **Comic strips** The Belgians love their comics and the Brüssel comic shop has the best range in the city. **See p.136**

* **Flea markets** The pick of the bunch is held daily on place du Jeu de Balle. **See p.137**



△ The Grand-Place

Brussels

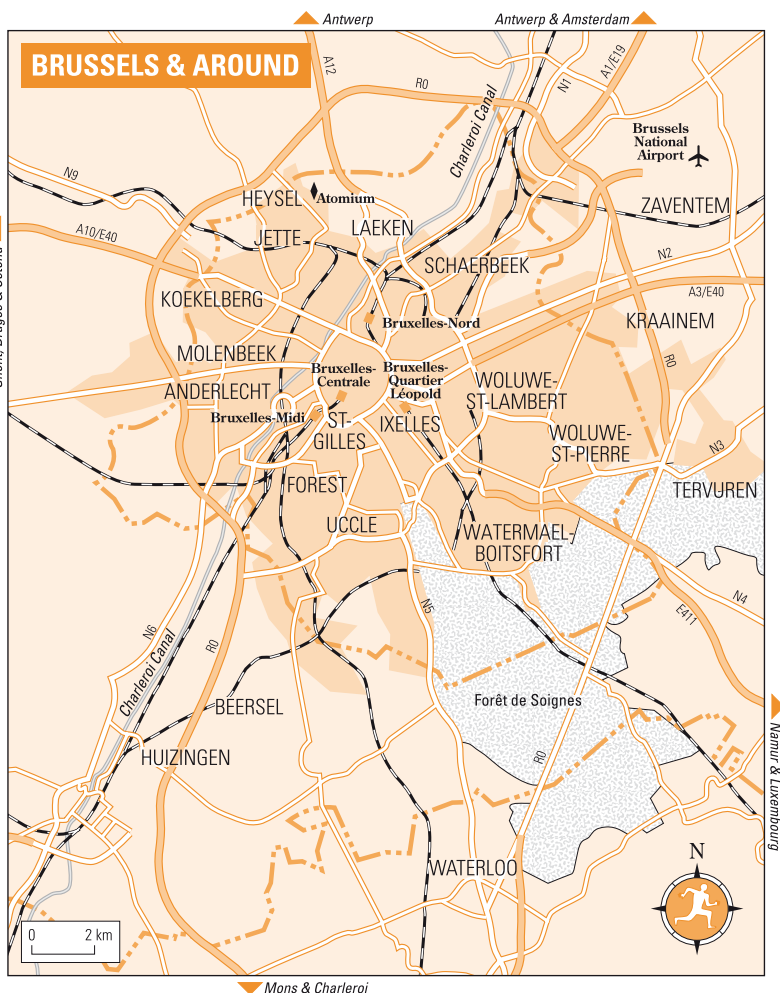
Wherever else you go in Belgium, allow at least a little time for **BRUSSELS**, which is by any standard one of Europe's premier cities. Certainly, don't let its unjustified reputation as a dull, faceless centre of EU bureaucracy deter you: in postwar years, the city has become a thriving, cosmopolitan metropolis, with top-flight architecture and museums, not to mention a well-preserved late seventeenth-century centre, a superb restaurant scene and an energetic nightlife. Moreover, most of the key attractions are crowded into a centre that is small enough to be absorbed over a few long days, its boundaries largely defined by a ring of boulevards – the “**petit ring**”, or less colloquially, the “petite ceinture”.

First-time visitors to Brussels are often surprised by the raw vitality of the **city centre**. It isn't neat and tidy, and many of the old tenement houses are shabby and ill-used, but there's a buzz about the place that's hard to resist. The city centre is itself divided into two main areas. The larger westerly portion comprises the **Lower Town**, fanning out from the marvellous **Grand-Place**, with its exquisite guildhouses and town hall, while up above to the east lies the much smaller **Upper Town**, home to the finest art collection in the country in the *Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts*.

Since the eleventh century, the ruling elite has lived in the Upper Town, keeping a beady eye on the workers and shopkeepers below – a state of affairs which is still in part true. This fundamental class division, so obvious in the layout of the centre, has in recent decades been further complicated by discord between Belgium's two main linguistic groups, the Walloons (the French-speakers) and the Flemings (the Dutch- or Flemish-speakers). To add to these communal complexities, the Walloons and the Flemings now share their city with many other groups, with EU civil servants, diplomats, and immigrants from North and Central Africa, Turkey and the Mediterranean currently constituting a quarter of the population. Each of these communities tends to live a very separate, distinct existence; there's a sharp contrast between, say, the internationalism of the centre and EU zone, to the east of the city centre

Language

As a cumbersome compromise between Belgium's French- and Flemish-speaking communities, Brussels is the country's only officially **bilingual** region. This means that every instance of the written word, from road signs and street names to the Yellow Pages, has by law to appear in both languages. For simplicity we've used the French version of street names, sights, etc throughout this chapter.



– beyond the “petit ring” – and the sharp trendiness of the district round Ste-Catherine or Turkish St-Josse. The city’s compact nature heightens the contrasts: in five minutes you can walk from a designer shopping mall into an African bazaar, or from a depressed slum quarter to a resplendent square of antique shops and exclusive cafés. This is something which only increases the city’s allure, not least in the number and variety of affordable ethnic **restaurants**. But, even without these, Brussels would still be a wonderful place to eat: its gastronomic reputation rivals that of Paris, and though traditional meals in home-grown restaurants are rarely cheap, there is great-value food to be had in many of the **bars**. The bars themselves can be sumptuous, basic, traditional or very fashionable – and are one of the city’s real delights.

The city’s **specialist shops** are another pleasure. Everyone knows about Belgian chocolates, but here in the capital there are also huge, sprawling, open-air

markets, contemporary art galleries, and establishments devoted to anything from comic books to costume jewellery and clubland fashion. Belgium is such a small country, and the rail network so fast and efficient, that Brussels also makes the perfect **base** for a wide range of day-trips. An obvious target is the battlefield of **Waterloo**, one of the region's most visited attractions.

Some history

Brussels takes its name from Broekzele, or “village of the marsh”, the community which grew up beside the wide and shallow River Senne in the sixth century, allegedly around a chapel built here by St Géry, a French bishop turned missionary. A tiny and insignificant part of Charlemagne's empire at the end of the eighth century, it was subsequently inherited by the dukes of **Lower Lorraine** (or Lotharingia – roughly Wallonia and northeast France), who constructed a fortress here in 979. Protected, the village benefited from its position on the trade route between Cologne and the burgeoning towns of Bruges and Ghent to become a significant trading centre in its own right. The surrounding marshes were drained to allow for further expansion, and in 1229 the city was granted its first charter by the **dukes of Brabant**, the new feudal overlords who controlled things here, on and off, for around two hundred years. In the early fifteenth century, marriage merged the interests of the Duchy of Brabant with that of Burgundy, whose territories passed to the **Habsburgs** in 1482, when Mary, the last of the Burgundian line, died; she was succeeded by her husband, Maximilian I, who was anointed Holy Roman Emperor in 1494.

The first Habsburg rulers had close ties with Brussels, and the **Emperor Charles V** (1519–55) ran his vast kingdom from the city for over a decade, making it wealthy and politically important in equal measure. By contrast, his successor **Philip II** lived in Spain and ruled through a governor (for the whole of the Low Countries) resident in Brussels. It could have been a perfectly reasonable arrangement, but Philip's fanatical Catholicism soon unpicked the equilibrium of Charles's reign. He imposed a series of anti-Protestant edicts which provoked extensive **rioting** across the Low Countries, and in response he dispatched a hardline reactionary, the Duke of Albe, to Brussels with an army of ten thousand men. Albe quickly restored order and then, with the help of the Inquisition, set about the rioters with gusto, his Commission of Civil Unrest soon nicknamed the “**Council of Blood**” after its habit of executing those it examined. Goaded into rebellion by Albe's brutality, Brussels, along with much of the Low Countries, exploded in revolt, and, in 1577, the one-time protégé of the Habsburgs, **William the Silent**, made a triumphant entry into the city and installed a Calvinist government. Protestant control lasted for just eight years, before Philip's armies recaptured the city. The Protestants left in their hundreds and the economy slumped, though complete catastrophe was averted by the conspicuous consumption of the (Brussels-based) Habsburg elite, whose high spending kept hundreds of workers in employment. Brussels also benefited from the digging of the Willebroek Canal, which linked it to the sea for the first time in its history.

By the 1580s, the Habsburgs had lost control of the northern part of the Low Countries (now the Netherlands) and Brussels was confirmed as the capital of the remainder, the **Spanish Netherlands** (broadly modern Belgium). Brussels prospered more than the rest of the country, but it was always prey to the dynastic squabbling between France and Spain; in 1695, **Louis XIV** bombarded Brussels for 36 hours merely to teach his rivals a lesson. (The guilds, those

associations of skilled merchants and workers who were crucial to the economy of Brussels, rapidly rebuilt their devastated city, and it's this version of the Grand-Place that survives today.)

In 1700 Charles II, the last of the Spanish Habsburgs, died without issue. The ensuing **War of the Spanish Succession** dragged on for over a decade, but eventually the Spanish Netherlands were passed to the Austrian Habsburgs, who ruled – as had their predecessors – through a governor based in Brussels. It was during this period as capital of the **Austrian Netherlands** (1713–94) that most of the monumental buildings of the Upper Town were constructed and the Neoclassical avenues and boulevards laid out – grand extravagance in the context of an increasingly industrialized city crammed with a desperately poor working class.

The **French Revolutionary army** brushed the Austrians aside at the Battle of Fleurus in 1794 and the Austrian Netherlands promptly became a *département* of France. This lasted until the defeat of Napoleon when, under the terms of the Congress of Vienna which ended hostilities, the great powers decided to absorb the country into the new **Kingdom of the Netherlands**, ruled by the Dutch King William I. Brussels took turns with The Hague as the capital, but the experiment was short-lived, and in 1830 a Brussels-led rebellion removed the Dutch and led to the creation of an **independent Belgium** with Brussels as capital.

The nineteenth century was a period of modernization and expansion, during which the city achieved all the attributes of a modern European capital under the guidance of Burgomaster Anspach and **King Léopold II**. New boulevards were built; the free university was founded; the Senne – which by then had become an open sewer – was covered over in the city centre; many slum areas were cleared; and a series of grand buildings were erected. The whole enterprise culminated in the golden jubilee exhibition celebrating the founding of Belgium state in the newly inaugurated Parc du Cinquantiennaire.

Following the German occupation of Belgium in World War II, the modernization of Brussels has proceeded inexorably, with many major development projects – not least the new métro system – refashioning the city and reflecting its elevated status as the headquarters of both NATO and the EU.

Arrival

Brussels has the country's busiest international **airport** and is on the main routes heading inland from the Channel **ports** via Flanders. **Trains** arrive here direct from London via the Channel Tunnel and, in addition, the city is a convenient stop on the railway line between France and Holland. Brussels itself has an excellent public transport system which puts all the main **points of arrival** – its airport, train and bus stations – within easy reach of the city centre.

By air

Most flights to Brussels land at the city's **international airport** in the satellite suburb of Zaventem, 13km northeast of the city centre. You'll find a **Tourisme Information Brussels (TIB) information desk** (daily 8am–9pm) in the arrivals hall, with a reasonable range of blurb on the city, including free maps. It shares its space with **Espace Wallonie**, representing OPT, the Wallonian tourist board.

From the airport, trains run every ten to twenty minutes to the city's three main stations. The journey to Bruxelles-Centrale, the nearest station to the Grand-Place, takes about twenty minutes and costs €3 one-way. Tickets can be bought at the airport train station. Trains run from around 5.30am until midnight, after which you'll need to take a **taxi** into the city centre – reckon on paying around €40 for the trip. The airport also has its own **bus station** with a number of services to the capital, including hourly bus #12 running to Métro Schuman in the EU Quarter.

Some airlines – principally Ryanair – fly to **Brussels (Charleroi) airport**, which is also sometimes called Brussels South, though it is in fact some 50km south of central Brussels. This secondary airport is rapidly expanding and has a reasonable range of facilities, including an **Espace Wallonie tourist information desk** (daily 9am–9pm). From the airport, there is an hourly bus service (9.30am–11.30pm) to Brussels departing from outside the terminal building and dropping passengers just outside Bruxelles-Midi train station; double-check pick-up arrangements, as several of our readers have missed the bus back to the airport. Depending on traffic, the journey takes about an hour and costs €11 one-way, €20 return. Alternatively, you can take a local bus (every 30min–1hr; 15min) from the airport to **Charleroi Sud train station**, from where there are regular services to all three of Brussels' main stations (every 30min; 50min); the combined train and bus fare is €10.50 one-way, €21 return.

By train

Brussels has three main **train stations** – Bruxelles-Nord, Bruxelles-Centrale and Bruxelles-Midi. Almost all **domestic** trains stop at all three, but the majority of **international** services only stop at Bruxelles-Midi, including Eurostar trains from London and Thalys express trains from Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne and Aachen.

Bruxelles-Centrale is, as its name suggests, the most central of the stations, a five-minute walk from the Grand-Place; **Bruxelles-Nord** lies among the bristling tower blocks of the business area just north of the main ring road; and **Bruxelles-Midi** is located in a depressed area to the south of the city centre. Note that on bus timetables and on maps of the city transit system, Bruxelles-Nord appears as “Gare du Nord”, Bruxelles-Centrale as “Gare Centrale” and Bruxelles-Midi as “Gare du Midi”, taking the names of their respective métro stops. If you arrive late at night, it's best to take a taxi to your hotel or hostel – and you should certainly avoid the streets around Bruxelles-Midi.

If you need to **transfer** from one of the three main train stations to another, simply jump on the next available mainline train; there are services between the three stations every ten minutes or so, the journey only takes minutes and all you'll have to do (at most) is swap platforms. In addition, Bruxelles-Midi and Bruxelles-Nord are linked by underground tram – the **prémétro** – with several services shuttling underneath the city centre between these two stations. Thus, there are two ways to reach the

Visitors to Brussels soon adjust to the city's bilingual signage (see p.65), but **on arrival** it can be very confusing, especially with regard to the names of the three main **train stations**: Bruxelles-Nord (in Flemish it's Brussel-Noord), Bruxelles-Centrale (Brussel-Centraal), and, most bewildering of the lot, Bruxelles-Midi (Brussel-Zuid). To add to the puzzle, each of the three adjoins a métro station – respectively the Gare du Nord (Noordstation), Gare Centrale (Centraal Station) and Gare du Midi (Zuidstation).

Grand-Place from either Bruxelles-Nord or Bruxelles-Midi: take either a mainline train to Bruxelles-Centrale, or the prémétro to the Bourse station; from either it's a brief walk to the Grand-Place.

By bus

Most **international bus** services to Brussels, including those from Britain, are operated by Eurolines, whose terminal is in the Bruxelles-Nord station complex. Belgium's comprehensive rail network means that it's unlikely that you'll arrive in the city by long-distance domestic bus, but if you do, Bruxelles-Nord is the main terminal for these services too.

Information

In addition to the tourist information desks at the airports (see p.68), there is an extremely useful **Tourisme Information Brussels (TIB) office** right in the city centre, in the Hôtel de Ville on the Grand-Place (Jan to Easter Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Easter to Sept daily 9am–6pm; Oct–Dec Mon–Sat 9am–6pm & Sun 10am–2pm; ☎02 513 89 40, 🌐www.brusselsinternational.be). This stocks a wide range of handouts, including free city maps, has details of forthcoming events and concerts, makes reservations on guided tours (for more on which, see p.73), and sells a variety of general- and specialist-interest guides, the most useful of which is the detailed *Brussels Guide and Map* (€3). Furthermore, TIB also issues a free booklet detailing all the city's (recognized) hotels and can make last-minute **hotel reservations** for free – the deposit is subtracted from your final hotel bill. It can help with public transport too, selling the 24-hour *carte d'un jour* pass (see p.71) and handing out free public transport maps. Finally, TIB sells the **Brussels Card** (see box, below).

TIB also operates a **tourist information desk** in the main concourse at Bruxelles-Midi train station (May–Sept daily 8am–8pm; Oct–April Mon–Thurs 8am–5pm, Fri 8am–8pm, Sat 9am–6pm & Sun 9am–2pm), whilst **Tourism Flanders**, which services the northern, Flemish-speaking half of Belgium, has an office metres from the Grand-Place at rue Marché aux Herbes 63 (May, June, Sept & Oct Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm & 2–6pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm & 2–7pm; Nov–April Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–1pm & 2–6pm, Sun 9am–1pm; ☎02 504 03 00, 🌐www.visitflanders.com), and provides information on the whole of Belgium, leaving Brussels largely to TIB. Tourism Flanders also operates a hotel room reservation service, but it's for Flemish Belgium, not Brussels.

If you need a large city **map**, buy the *Girault Gilbert* (1:10,000) map, which comes complete with an index; it's available at most city-centre bookshops for about €6, though you can pay up to €13 at a souvenir shop. Even better,

The Brussels Card

The **Brussels Card** (🌐www.brusselcard.be) provides free access to most of the city's key museums, unlimited travel on the STIB public transport network, and discounts of up to 25 percent at specified restaurants and bars. There are three versions – 24hr (€20), 48hr (€28), and 72hr (€33) – and each is valid from the first time it is used, rather than the day of issue. The card is on sale online via the website and at the tourist office, on the Grand-Place (see above); there are no concessionary rates for seniors or children.

though you'll need to get a copy before leaving home, is the *Rough Guide Brussels* map, which has an index, marks lots of bars, shops and restaurants and is waterproof. For wider coverage – including the city's outlying suburbs – stick to the *Falkplan* map of Brussels (1:12,500–31,500), which is available at better bookshops and again has an index.

For local news and reviews, the weekly **Bulletin** (€3; www.thebulletin.be) is the city's main English-language magazine, containing a thorough **entertainment listings** section, detailing what's on where and when; it's on sale at most downtown newsagents.

City transport

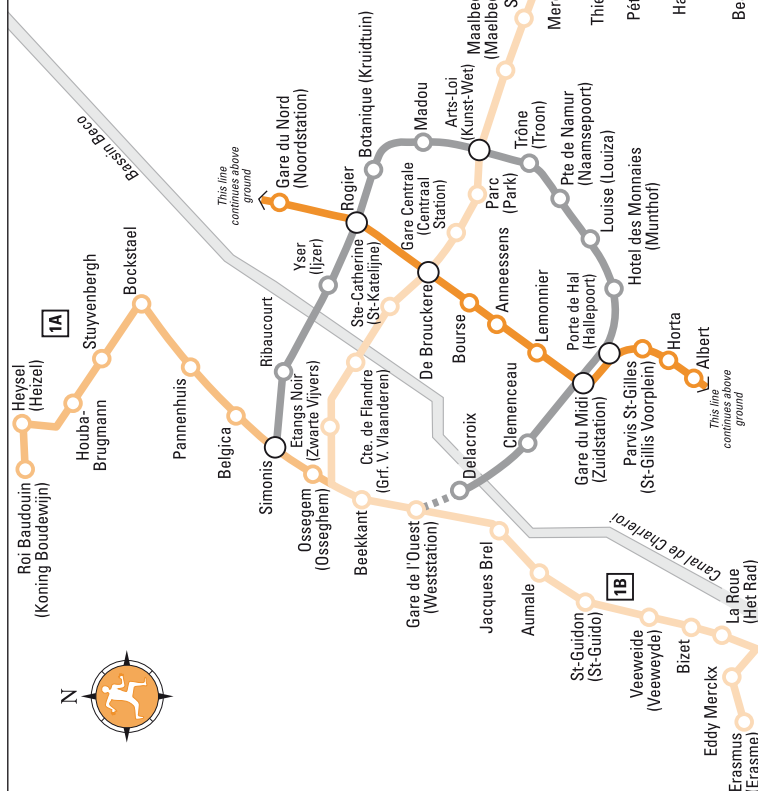
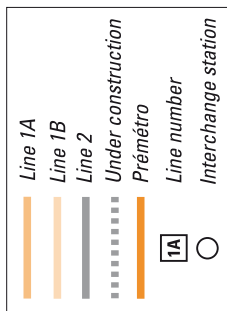
The easiest way to get around the city centre, within the petit ring, is to **walk**, but to get from one side of the centre to the other, or to reach some of the more widely dispersed attractions, you will need to use **public transport**. Operated by **STIB** (information line ☎0900 10 310, www.stib.be), the urban system runs on an integrated mixture of bus, tram, underground tram (*prémétro*) and métro lines that covers the city comprehensively. It's a user-friendly network, with every métro station carrying métro system diagrams, **route maps** available free from the TIB tourist office and from most major métro stations, and timetables posted at most bus and tram stops. Furthermore, the STIB has information kiosks at Porte de Namur, Rogier and Midi métro stations.

Tickets, which can be used on any part of the STIB system, are available from métro kiosks, automatic machines at métro stations and from newsagents displaying the STIB sign; tram and bus drivers will only issue single-journey tickets. Prices are very reasonable: a single ticket costs €1.50 if pre-paid, €2 from the driver; five tickets (*a carte jump de 5 voyages*) €6.70, and ten (*a carte jump de 10 voyages*) €11. A go-as-you-please **carte d'un jour**, for €4, allows for 24 hours of city-wide travel on public transport; on the weekend, it covers two passengers. At the beginning of each journey, you're trusted to **stamp tickets** yourself, using one of the machines on every métro station concourse or inside every tram and bus. After that, the ticket is valid for an hour, during which you can get on and off as many trams, métros and buses as you like (note that **doors** on métros, trams and buses mostly have to be opened manually). The system can seem open to abuse, as ticket controls at the métro stations are almost non-existent and you can get on at the back of any tram without ever showing a ticket. Bear in mind, however, that there are roving inspectors who impose hefty on-the-spot fines for anyone caught without a valid ticket.

Métro and trams

The **métro** system consists of two underground lines – #1 and #2. Line #1 runs west–east through the centre, and splits into two branches (#1A and #1B) at either end to serve the city's suburbs. Line #2 circles the centre, its route roughly following that of the petit ring up above. Brussels also has a substantial **tram** system serving the city centre and the suburbs. These trams are at their speediest when they go underground to form what is sometimes called the **prémétro**, that part of the system which runs underneath the heart of the city from Bruxelles-Nord, through De Brouckère and Bourse, to Bruxelles-Midi, Porte de Hal and on underneath St-Gilles.

BRUSSELS MÉTRO & PRÉMÉTRO



Brussels is bilingual. Where métro stations have a French and a Flemish name, the Flemish name is given in parentheses.

Guided tours

Guided tours are big business in Brussels; on offer is everything from a quick stroll or bus ride round the city centre to themed visits, and the TIB has the details of – and takes bookings for – about twenty operators. As a general rule, the more predictable tours can be booked on the day, while the more exotic need to be booked ahead of time, either direct with the company concerned or with the TIB, who normally require at least two weeks' advance notice. Among the many more straightforward options, **Brussels City Tours**, rue de la Colline 8 (☎02 513 77 44, 🌐www.brussels-city-tours.com), operates a breathless, three-hour bus tour round the city and its major sights for €27 between two and three times daily. It also runs the rather more agreeable *Visit Brussels Line*, a hop-on, hop-off bus service which loops round the city, visiting twelve of its principal sights (daily 10am–5pm; tickets, valid for 24hr, cost €16).

More promising still is **ARAU** (Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines), bd Adolphe Max 55 (☎02 219 33 45, 🌐www.arau.org), a heritage action group which provides tours exploring the city's architectural history – with particular emphasis on Art Nouveau – from April through to November; prices vary with the length of the tour and the itinerary, but average about €15 per person. Alternatively, cyclists are catered for by **Pro Vélo**, rue de Londres 15 (☎02 502 73 55, 🌐www.provelo.org), which operates several half-day cycle tours round the city and its environs; the charge is €8 per tour, with bike rental costing an extra €7.

Times of operation and frequency vary considerably among the multitude of routes, but key parts of the system operate from 6am until midnight. Lone travellers should avoid the métro late at night.

Buses, local trains and taxis

STIB **buses** supplement the trams and métro. In particular, they provide a limited and sporadic **night bus** service on major routes. In addition, De Lijn (☎070 220 200, 🌐www.delijn.be) runs **buses** from the city to the Flemish-speaking communities that surround the capital, while TEC (☎010 230 53 53, 🌐www.infotec.be) operates services to the French-speaking areas. Most of these buses run from – or at least call in at – the Gare du Nord complex. Both companies also run services to other Belgian cities, but they can take up to four times longer than the train.

Supplementing the STIB network are **local trains**, run by Belgian Railways, which shuttle in and out of the city's four smaller train stations and connect different parts of the inner city and the outskirts, but unless you're living and working in the city, you're unlikely to need to use them.

Taxis don't cruise the streets but can be picked up at stands spread around the city – notably on De Brouckère, at Porte de Namur, at train stations and outside smarter hotels. There is a **fixed tariff** consisting of two main elements – a fixed charge of €2.40 (€4.40 at night) and the price per kilometre (€1.25 inside the city). If you can't find a taxi, phone Taxis Verts (☎02 349 49 49), Taxis Orange (☎02 349 43 43), or Autolux (☎02 411 12 21).

Bicycles


The city council is currently trying out a **public bicycle scheme** (🌐www.cyclocity.be; premium line ☎0900 11 000) in which bikes can be taken from stands dotted across the city centre, in the manner of supermarket trolleys, and returned after use to another. There are twenty-three stands at present, though more are planned, and 250 bikes. Costs are very reasonable – €0.5 for the first thirty minutes – and the tourist office on the Grand-Place (see p.70) has all the latest information.

Accommodation

1

BRUSSELS

Accommodation

With over seventy hotels and several hostels dotted within its central ring of boulevards, Brussels has no shortage of **places to stay**. Some of the most opulent places – as well as some of the most basic – are scattered amongst the cobbled lanes on and around the **Grand-Place** and there's another equally convenient cluster round the **Bourse**. Nearby, the groovy **Ste-Catherine** district weighs in with a good selection of low- to mid-range hotels, or you can venture out of the Lower Town, south to the smart chain hotels of **avenue Louise**. Nevertheless, despite the number and variety of hotels and hostels, finding accommodation can still prove difficult, particularly in the **spring** and **autumn** when the capital enjoys what amounts to its **high seasons** – July and August are much slacker as the business trade dips when the EU (pretty much) closes down for its summer recess. At peak times, it's prudent to **reserve a bed** at least for your first night, either by contacting the establishment direct – language is rarely a problem as most receptionists speak at least some English – or via the TIB (Brussels tourist office) website,  www.brusselsinternational.be, where you'll also find a free downloadable hotels booklet. If you arrive in the city with nowhere to stay, the TIB office on the Grand-Place (see p.70) operates a free **same-night hotel booking service**.

Prices in the capital's hotels vary hugely. Many have both deluxe and more standard rooms, with charges adjusted accordingly, and regular **special and weekend discounts** bring prices down by about fifteen percent, with some places occasionally halving their rates. Almost everywhere, **breakfast is included** in the overnight rate; where this isn't the case, reckon on paying an extra €10. An increasing number of hotels will accommodate children for free if they stay in their parents' room; others require you to pay the cost of an extra bed.

Hotels

The Grand-Place and around


The listings below are marked on the map on p.79.



Amigo rue de l'Amigo 1–3  02 547 47 47,


 www.roccofortehotels.com. This lavish, five-star hotel is Brussels' finest, boasting impeccable service, a central location just around the corner from the Grand-Place, and supremely elegant furnishings, from Flemish tapestries and paintings to Oriental rugs. The building itself, which dates back to the sixteenth century, has seen several incarnations – it was once the town prison – and only became a hotel in the 1950s. Rooms are decorated in tasteful, contemporary style, all natural hues enhanced with splashes of red, blue and green, and begin at a very reasonable €190 on the weekend. Métro Gare Centrale.  7

Aris Grand-Place rue du Marché aux Herbes 78  02 514 43 00,  www.arishotel.be. Aesthetically not the most pleasing of buildings, despite the nineteenth-century stone façade, but the 55 modern rooms are clean and functional and it's just 20m or so from the Grand-Place. Prices are slightly inflated

during the week. Facilities include a/c and wheelchair access. Prémétro Bourse or Métro Gare Centrale.  6

Le Dixseptième rue de la Madeleine 25  02 517 17 17,  www.ledixseptieme.be. Arguably the most charming small hotel in Brussels, located in a tastefully renovated seventeenth-century mansion a couple of minutes' walk from the Grand-Place. Parquet flooring, crystal chandeliers and pastel-painted woodwork all add to the flavour. Doubles average around €250, but there's usually a hefty discount at the weekend. Métro Gare Centrale.  7

La Madeleine rue de la Montagne 22  02 513 29 73,  www.hotel-la-madeleine.be. A competent budget hotel with fifty squeaky-clean, modern rooms, most of which are en suite. Great location just down the hill from Gare Centrale. Métro Gare Centrale.  4

Le Méridien carrefour de l'Europe 3  02 548 42 11,  www.lemeridien.com/brussels. Modern and expansive 224-room, five-star chain hotel in a convenient location, a couple of minutes' walk down from Gare Centrale. Not overloaded with character, but the rooms are large and pleasant with all mod cons and the building itself is in an

attractive retro style that blends well with its surroundings. Discounts of around 50 percent are routine at the weekend. Métro Gare Centrale. ⑦

Mozart rue du Marché aux Fromages 23 ☎02 502 66 61, www.hotel-mozart.be. A gem of a hotel nestled amongst the fast-food joints that line "Pitta Street". The seventeenth-century building features a grand lobby dripping with fine art, painted tiles and rich ormolu furnishings, and an ornate staircase leading to 47 characterful rooms, some with exposed beams, and all with shower. There's a drawing-room-style breakfast area and a small terrace. A snip, with en-suite doubles at €95. Métro Gare Centrale. ③

Novotel Brussels off Grand-Place, rue du Marché aux Herbes 120 ☎02 514 33 33, www.novotel.com. This well-presented chain hotel occupies a modern block tastefully designed to blend in with its architectural surroundings. The 138 rooms are decorated in brisk modern style and have been recently refurbished. Métro Gare Centrale. ④

Saint-Michel Grand-Place 15 ☎02 511 09 56, www.hotelsaintmichel.be. The only hotel to look out over the Grand-Place, this small, friendly establishment occupies an old guildhouse on the east side of the square. The hotel's prime location and handsome facade belie a rather humble interior, the fourteen en-suite rooms, complete with chintz bedspreads and cushioned headboards, offering a sort of faded elegance. The seven front-facing rooms must be booked in advance, and they're not for light sleepers – revellers on the Grand-Place can make a real racket. Breakfast is taken in your room or at the café across from the hotel. Prémétro Bourse. ④

Elsewhere in the Lower Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

Atlas rue du Vieux Marché-aux-Grains 30 ☎02 502 60 06, www.atlas.be. Modern, three-star hotel behind the handsome stone facade of a nineteenth-century mansion in the heart of the Ste-Catherine district, a five-minute walk or so from the Grand-Place. The 88 rooms are a (slight) cut above those of the average chain and the hotel is wheelchair accessible. Métro Ste-Catherine. ④

 **Brussels Welcome Hotel** quai au Bois à Brûler 23 ☎02 219 95 46, www.brusselswelcomehotel.com. Friendly, family-run two-star hotel well positioned in the heart of the Ste-Catherine district. Each of the seventeen themed rooms is decorated in the style of a particular country or region, for instance Bali, Japan and Tibet. The Silk Road suite is a particularly sumptuous affair, and there's an

attractive wood-panelled breakfast room too. Glowing recommendations from several of our readers. Métro Ste-Catherine. ④

Comfort Art Hotel Siru place Rogier 1 ☎02 203 35 80, www.comforthotelsiru.com. It may not look like much from the outside – just another skysire overlooking place Rogier – but the interior of this medium-sized hotel is encouragingly original. In the late 1980s, a team of Belgian art students was given carte blanche to decorate the hotel's corridors and bedrooms. They opted for a broadly modernist style with all manner of figurines, mini polystyrene effigies, murals and cartoon strips – everything from Tintin to Marilyn Monroe – popping up just about everywhere. It's all good fun, and hopefully the hotel chain which now owns the place will keep to the same arty message, though they could do with making many of the rooms much larger. Métro Rogier. ③

Ibis Brussels Centre Ste-Catherine rue Joseph Plateau 2 ☎02 513 76 20, www.ibishotel.com. The giant Ibis chain hardly lights the fires of the imagination, but it does provide perfectly adequate accommodation at affordable prices. There are five Ibis hotels in and around Brussels and this has the best location, at the heart of the enjoyable Ste-Catherine district, the briefest of walks from Métro Ste-Catherine. Over 230 sprucely decorated modern rooms. ③

Métropole place de Brouckère 31 ☎02 217 23 00, www.metropolehotel.com. Dating from 1895, this grand hotel, one of Brussels' finest, boasts exquisite Empire and Art Nouveau decor in its public areas, and although some of the rooms beyond are comparatively routine, albeit very spacious, others retain their original fittings. The rack rate for a double starts at €390, but substantial discounts are commonplace. Métro De Brouckère. ⑤

Mirabeau place Fontainas 18 ☎02 511 19 72, www.hotelmirabeau.be. This medium-sized hotel has thirty small and plainly decorated en-suite rooms. Surrounded by office blocks, it occupies the corner of an early twentieth-century, seven-storey block, complete with long slender windows and wrought-iron grilles, but overlooks an uninspiring square edging onto boulevard Anspach. Windows are not currently sound-proofed, so interior rooms are quieter than those on the square. There's a large, modern breakfast room at the front with a small bar. Prémétro Anneessens. ③

 **NH Atlanta** bd Adolphe Max 7 ☎02 217 01 20, www.nh-hotels.com. The NH chain has moved in on Brussels with gusto and it now operates four hotels in and around the city centre. This is the pick of the bunch, decorated in the

Bed and Breakfasts

1

BRUSSELS

Accommodation

For those on a tight budget, staying at a **B&B** can prove an economic alternative to a hotel, and the standard of accommodation can be just as good. The tourist office on the Grand-Place can make reservations for free; alternatively, contact one of the budget accommodation agencies listed below. Rooms are often comfortable although location is sometimes a problem – don't expect to be in the centre of things.

Bed & Brussels rue Kindermans 9 ☎02 646 07 37, 🌐www.bnb-brussels.be. Agency with a good reputation and an English-language website: the standard of rooms is usually high and they can generally obtain a double in the city centre for around €75, or further out for less. Reduced rates available for longer stays.

Taxistop Bed & Breakfast ☎070 22 22 92 (premium line; Mon–Fri 9am–6pm), 🌐www.taxistop.be. One of the best-known B&B agencies, with a wide range of budget accommodation in the city and its suburbs. Doubles anywhere between €40 and €80.

chain's trademark style of sleek modern furnishings and fittings matched by pastel-painted walls – very IKEA. All the *Atlanta's* 241 rooms are pleasantly comfortable and similarly well-appointed, though those on the front, overlooking the boulevard, can be a tad noisy. Otherwise, it's a good location, immediately to the north of place de Brouckère – and Métro De Brouckère. Special deals and discounts are commonplace. ④

Noga rue du Béguinage 38 ☎02 218 67 63, 🌐www.nogahotel.com. Not the grandest of the city's hotels by a long chalk, but this pleasant two-star offers nineteen comfortable, en-suite rooms decorated in a clean modern style. Competitive rates and a handy location close to Métro Ste-Catherine. ③

The Upper Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

Du Congrès rue du Congrès 38–42 ☎02 217 18 90, 🌐www.hotelducongres.be. Pleasant, three-star hotel occupying a set of attractive late nineteenth-century town houses in an especially good-looking corner of the Upper Town. Each of the hotel's seventy-odd en-suite rooms is spacious, airy and decorated in plain, modern style. Métro Madou. ③

Jolly Hotel du Grand Sablon rue Bodenbroeck 2, place du Grand Sablon ☎02 518 11 00, 🌐www.jollyhotels.com. This large, plush chain hotel, with spotless modern bedrooms, overlooks the appealing place du Grand Sablon with its terraced cafés and designer shops. A 5- to 10-min walk from Métro Louise. Rack rate starts at a steep €270 per double, but discounts are common. ③

Sabina rue du Nord 78 ☎02 218 26 37, 🌐www.hotelsabina.be. Basic two-star hotel in an

attractive late nineteenth-century town house with 24 workaday, en-suite rooms. Located in an appealing residential area a five- to ten-minute walk from Métro Madou. ②

St-Gilles, avenue Louise and Ixelles

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.116–117.

Argus rue Capitaine Crespel 6 ☎02 514 07 70, 🌐www.hotel-argus.be. Not in the city centre, but a good location nonetheless, just to the south of the boulevards of the petit ring, a five-minute walk from place Louise. The hotel's forty modern and modest rooms are a bit on the small side, but they're cosy enough and the service is impeccable. A nice alternative to the gargantuan – and expensive – hotels that pepper this district. Métro Louise. ②

Les Bluets rue Berckmans 124 ☎02 534 39 83, 🌐www.bluets.be. Charming, family-run hotel with just ten en-suite rooms in a large, handsome old stone terrace house. Immaculate decor in rich fin-de-siècle style. One block south of the petit ring – and métro station Hôtel des Monnaies. A very popular choice, so advance reservations are strongly recommended. ②

Conrad Brussels av Louise 71 ☎02 542 42 42, 🌐www.conradhotels.com. One of the capital's top hotels, the *Conrad* was former US president Clinton's top choice when in town. Housed in an immaculate tower block, with all sorts of retro flourishes, the hotel boasts over 250 large and lavish rooms, comprehensive facilities and impeccable service. It's situated near the north end of the avenue, a five-minute walk from Métro Louise. Prices are arm-and-a-leg stuff, from €250 and counting, but discounts are frequent. ③

EU quarter

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.110–111.

Leopold rue du Luxembourg 35 ☎02 511 18 28, www.hotel-leopold.be. If you're staying in the EU quarter, it's easy to get stuck beside a thundering boulevard, but this smart, four-star hotel has a first-rate location – on a quiet(ish) side-street, a brief walk from place du Luxembourg. Has over a hundred guest rooms, all kitted out in no-nonsense, modern chain-hotel style. Métro Trône. **B**

Monty bd Brand Whitlock 101 ☎02 734 56 36, www.monty-hotel.be. Well-regarded, pocket-sized boutique hotel, where every fixture and fitting has been carefully designed in crisp, modernist style. Each of the eighteen guest rooms is imaginatively designed too – no bland, chain-hotel colours here. Métro Georges-Henri. **B**

Hostels

Bruegel rue du Saint-Esprit 2 ☎02 511 04 36, www.vjh.be. This official HI hostel, housed in a pleasantly designed modern building, has 135 beds in one-, two-, three- and four-berth rooms. A basic breakfast is included in the overnight fee – €31 singles, €22.60 per person in a double room, €18.60 in a room for four. Good location too, by the church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle, close to the Upper Town and just 300m south of Gare Centrale. See map, pp.84–85. **B**

Le Centre Vincent Van Gogh – CHAB rue Traversière 8 ☎02 217 01 58, www.chab.be. A rambling, spacious hostel with a good reputation and friendly staff, though it can seem a bit chaotic. Sinks in all rooms, but showers and toilets are shared. Breakfast is included in the cost of an overnight stay – singles €33, doubles €26 per person, quads €21. Launderette and kitchen facilities. Métro Botanique. See map, pp.84–85. **B**

Jacques Brel rue de la Sablonnière 30 ☎02 218 01 87, www.laj.be. This official HI hostel is modern and comfortable, and has a hotel-like atmosphere. Breakfast is included in the price: singles €31, doubles €22.60 per person, €18 for quads. There's no curfew (you get a key), inexpensive meals can be bought on the premises and there's a shower in every bedroom. Very close in comfort to some of the capital's cheaper hotels. Check-in 7.30am–1am. Métro Madou or Botanique. See map, pp.84–85. **B**

Sleep Well rue du Damier 23 ☎02 218 50 50, www.sleepwell.be. Bright and breezy hostel close to the city centre and only a five-minute walk from place Rogier. Hotel-style facilities include a bar-cum-restaurant and Internet access. Sinks in every room, and shared showers. Prices, including breakfast, are €29 for singles and €26 for doubles per person, down to €17.50 for a berth in an eight-bedded room. Métro Rogier. See map, pp.84–85. **B**

The Lower Town

One of Europe's most beautiful squares, the **Grand-Place** is the unquestionable centre of Brussels, a focus for tourists and residents alike, who come here to admire its magnificent guildhouses and Gothic town hall. It's also the focus of the **Lower Town**, whose cramped and populous quarters spread out in all directions, bisected by one major north–south boulevard, variously named Adolphe Max, Anspach and Lemonnier. Setting aside the boulevard – which was ploughed through in the nineteenth century – the **layout** of the Lower Town remains essentially medieval, a skein of narrow, cobbled lanes and alleys in which almost every street is crimped by tall and angular town houses. There's nothing neat and tidy about all of this, but that's what gives it its appeal – dilapidated terraces stand next to prestigious mansions and the whole district is dotted with superb buildings, everything from beautiful Baroque churches through to Art Nouveau department stores.

The Lower Town is at its most beguiling to the **northwest** of the Grand-Place, where the churches of Ste-Catherine and St-Jean-Baptiste au Béguinage stand amid a cobweb of quaint streets and tiny squares. By comparison the streets to the **north and northeast** of the Grand-Place are of less immediate appeal, with particularly dreary rue Neuve, a pedestrianized main street that's home to the city's mainstream shops and stores, leading up to the clumping skyscrapers that surround the place Rogier and the Gare du Nord. This is an

uninviting part of the city, but relief is at hand in the precise if bedraggled Habsburg symmetries of the place des Martyrs and at the Belgian Comic Strip Centre, the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée. To the **south** of the Grand-Place lie the old working-class streets of the Marolles district, then the careworn area in the vicinity of the Gare du Midi.

The Grand-Place

The obvious place to begin any tour of Brussels is the **Grand-Place**, which sits among a labyrinth of narrow, cobbled alleys and lanes at the heart of the Lower Town. Here, the Gothic extravagance of the Hôtel de Ville (town hall) presides over the gilded facades of a full set of late seventeenth-century **guildhouses**, whose columns, scrolled gables and dainty sculptures encapsulate Baroque ideals of balance and harmony. Inevitably, such an outstanding attraction draws tourists and expats in their droves, but the square is still stunning; indeed, there's no better place to get a taste of Brussels' past and Eurocapital present – though the paltry flower market that occupies the square every day except Monday is a pale reflection of earlier markets.

Originally marshland, the Grand-Place was drained in the twelfth century, and by 1350 covered markets for bread, meat and cloth had been erected, born of an economic boom that was underpinned by a flourishing cloth industry. Later, the Grand-Place's role as the commercial hub of the emergent city was cemented when the city's guilds built their headquarters on the square, and, in the fifteenth century, it also assumed a civic and political function with the construction of the Hôtel de Ville. The ruling dukes visited the square to meet the people or show off in tournaments; official decrees and pronouncements were proclaimed here; and justice was meted out with public executions, drawing large, excited crowds.

During the religious wars of the sixteenth century, the Grand-Place became as much a place of public execution as trade, but thereafter the square resumed its former role as a market place. Of the square's medieval buildings, however, only parts of the Hôtel de Ville and one or two guildhouses have survived, the consequence of an early example of the precepts of total war, a 36-hour **French artillery bombardment** which pretty much razed Brussels to the ground in 1695; the commander of the French artillery gloated, "I have never yet seen such a great fire nor so much desolation." After the French withdrew, the city's guildsmen dusted themselves down and speedily had their headquarters rebuilt, adopting the distinctive and flamboyant Baroque style that characterizes the square today.

The Hôtel de Ville

From the south side of the Grand-Place, the scrubbed and polished **Hôtel de Ville** (Town Hall) dominates proceedings, its 96-metre spire soaring above two long series of robust windows, whose straight lines are mitigated by fancy tracery and an arcaded gallery. The edifice dates from the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the town council decided to build itself a mansion that adequately reflected its wealth and power. The first part to be completed was the **east wing** – the original entrance is marked by the twin lions of the Lion Staircase, though the animals were only added in 1770. Work started on the **west wing** in 1444 and continued until 1480. Despite the gap, the wings are of very similar style, and you have to look hard to notice that the later wing is slightly shorter than its neighbour, allegedly at the insistence of Charles the Bold who – for some unknown reason – refused to have the adjacent rue de la



△ The Hôtel de Ville

Tête d'Or narrowed. The niches were left empty and the statues seen today, which represent leading figures from the city's past, were added as part of a heavy-handed nineteenth-century refurbishment.

By any standard, the **tower** of the Hôtel de Ville is quite extraordinary, its remarkably slender appearance the work of Jan van Ruysbroeck, the leading spire specialist of the day who also played a leading role in the building of the

cathedral (see p.93) and Sts Pierre et Guidon in Anderlecht (see p.121). Ruysbroeck had the lower section built square to support the weight above, choosing a design that blended seamlessly with the elaborately carved facade on either side – or almost: look carefully and you’ll see that the main entrance is slightly out of kilter. Ruysbroeck used the old belfry porch as the base for the new tower, hence the misalignment, a deliberate decision rather than the miscalculation which, according to popular legend, prompted the architect’s suicide. Above the cornice protrudes an octagonal extension where the basic design of narrow windows flanked by pencil-thin columns and pinnacles is repeated up as far as the pyramid-shaped **spire**, a delicate affair surmounted by a gilded figure of **St Michael**, protector of Christians in general and of soldiers in particular. The tower is off-limits, and **guided tours** in English (Tues 3.15pm, Wed 3.15pm & April–Sept Sun 12.15pm; €3) are confined to a string of lavish official rooms used for receptions and town council meetings. The most dazzling of these is the sixteenth-century **Council Chamber**, decorated with gilt moulding, faded tapestries and an oak floor inlaid with ebony. Tours begin at the reception desk off the interior quadrangle; be prepared for the guides’ overly reverential script.

The west side of the Grand-Place

Flanking and facing the Hôtel de Ville are the **guildhouses** that give the Grand-Place its character, their slender, gilded facades swirling with exuberant, self-publicizing carvings and sculptures. Each guildhouse has a name, usually derived from one of the statues, symbols or architectural quirks decorating its facade. On the west side of the Grand-Place, at the end of the row, stands **no. 1: Roi d’Espagne**, a particularly fine building which was once the headquarters of the guild of bakers; it’s named after the bust of King Charles II of Spain on the upper storey, flanked by a Moorish and a Native American prisoner, symbolic trophies of war. Balanced on the balustrade are allegorical statues of Energy, Fire, Water, Wind, Wheat and Prudence, presumably meant to represent the elements necessary for baking the ideal loaf. The guildhouse now holds the most famous of the square’s bars, *Le Roy d’Espagne*, a surreal (but somewhat dingy) affair with animal bladders and marionettes hanging from the ceiling – and repro halberds in the toilets. More appealing is the café next door, *La Brouette*, in **nos. 2–3: La Maison de la Brouette**, once the tallow makers’ guildhouse, though it takes its name from the wheelbarrows etched into the cartouches. The figure at the top is St Gilles, the guild’s patron saint. Next door, the three lower storeys of the **Maison du Sac**, at **no. 4**, escaped the French bombardment of 1695. The building was constructed for the carpenters and coopers, with the upper storeys being appropriately designed by a cabinet-maker, and featuring pilasters and caryatids which resemble the ornate legs of Baroque furniture.

The adjacent **Maison de la Louve**, at **no. 5**, also survived the French artillery, and was originally home to the influential archers’ guild. The pilastered facade is studded with sanctimonious representations of concepts like Peace and Discord, and the medallions just beneath the pediment carry the likenesses of four Roman emperors set above allegorical motifs indicating their particular attributes. Thus, Trajan is shown above the Sun, a symbol of Truth; Tiberius with a net and cage for Falsehood; Augustus with the globe of Peace; and Julius Caesar with a bleeding heart for Disunity. Above the door, there’s a charming if dusty bas-relief of the Roman she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, while the pediment holds a relief of Apollo firing at a python; right on top, the Phoenix rises from the ashes.

The health of Charles II

Philip IV of Spain (1605–65) had no fewer than fourteen children, but only one of his sons – **Charles II** (1661–1700) – reached his twenties. With women banned from the succession, the hapless, sickly Charles became king aged just four and, much to everyone's surprise, survived to adulthood. After his first marriage in 1679, there were great hopes that he would sire an **heir**, but none arrived, allegedly because Charles suffered from premature ejaculation. A second marriage, twenty years later, was equally fruitless and, as it became increasingly clear that Charles was unable to procreate, Europe focused on what was to happen when Charles died and the Spanish royal line died out. Every ambassador to the Spanish court wrote long missives home about the health of Charles, none more so than the English representative, **Stanhope**, who painted an especially gloomy picture: "He (Charles) has a ravenous stomach and swallows all he eats whole, for his nether jaw stands out so much that his two rows of teeth cannot meet...His weak stomach not being able to digest the food, he voids it in the same (whole) manner."

In the autumn of 1700, it was clear that Charles was dying and his doctors went to work in earnest, replacing his pillows with freshly killed pigeons and covering his chest with animal entrails. Not surprisingly, this didn't work and Charles **died** on November 1, an event which triggered the **War of the Spanish Succession** (see p.448).

At **no. 6**, the **Maison du Cornet** was the headquarters of the boatmen's guild and is a fanciful creation of 1697, sporting a top storey resembling the stern of a ship. Charles II makes another appearance here too – it's his head in the medallion, flanked by representations of the four winds and of a pair of sailors.

The house of the haberdashers' guild, **Maison du Renard** at **no. 7**, displays animated cherubs in bas-relief playing at haberdashery on the ground floor, while a scrawny, gilded fox – after which the house is named – squats above the door. Up on the second storey a statue of Justice, flanked by figures symbolizing the four continents, suggests the guild's designs on world markets – an aim to which St Nicholas, patron saint of merchants, glinting above, clearly gives his blessing.

The south side of the square

Beside the Hôtel de Ville, the arcaded **Maison de l'Étoile**, at **no. 8**, is a nineteenth-century rebuilding of the medieval home of the city magistrate. In the arcaded gallery, the exploits of one **Everard 't Serclaes** are commemorated: in 1356 the Francophile Count of Flanders attempted to seize power from the Duke of Brabant, occupying the magistrate's house and flying his standard from the roof. 't Serclaes scaled the building, replaced Flanders' standard with that of the Duke of Brabant, and went on to lead the recapturing of the city, events represented in bas-relief above a reclining **statue** of 't Serclaes. His effigy is polished smooth from the long-standing superstition that good luck will come to those who stroke it – surprising really, as 't Serclaes was hunted down and hacked to death by the count's men in 1388.

Next door, the mansion that takes its name from the ostentatious swan on the facade, **Maison du Cygne** at **no. 9**, once housed a bar where Karl Marx regularly met up with Engels during his exile in Belgium. It was in Brussels in February 1848 that they wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, before they were deported as political undesirables the following month. Appropriately enough, the Belgian Workers' Party was founded here in 1885, though nowadays the building shelters one of the city's more exclusive restaurants.

The adjacent **Maison de l'Arbre d'Or**, at **no. 10**, is the only house on the Grand-Place still to be owned by a guild – the brewers' – not that the equestrian figure stuck on top gives any clues: the original effigy (of one of the city's Habsburg governors) dropped off, and the present statue, picturing the eighteenth-century aristocrat Charles of Lorraine, was moved here simply to fill the gap. Inside, the small and mundane **Musée de la Brasserie** (daily 10am–5pm; €5) has various bits of brewing paraphernalia; a beer is included in the price of admission.

The east side of the square

The seven guildhouses (**nos. 13–19**) that fill out the east side of the Grand-Place have been subsumed within one grand facade, whose slender symmetries are set off by a curved pediment and narrow pilasters, sporting nineteen busts of the dukes of Brabant. Perhaps more than any other building on the Grand-Place, this **Maison des Ducs de Brabant** has the flavour of the aristocracy – as distinct from the bourgeoisie – and, needless to say, it was much admired by the city's Habsburg governors.

The north side of the square

The guildhouses and private mansions (**nos. 20–39**) running along the north side of the Grand-Place are not as distinguished as their neighbours, though the **Maison du Pigeon** (**nos. 26–27**), the painters' guildhouse, is of interest as the house where Victor Hugo spent some time during his exile from France – he was expelled for his support of the French insurrection of 1848. The house also bears four unusual masks in the manner of the “green man” of Romano-Celtic folklore. The adjacent **Maison des Tailleurs** (**nos. 24–25**) is appealing too, the old headquarters of the tailors' guild, adorned by a pious bust of St Barbara, their patron saint.

Maison du Roi

Much of the northern side of the Grand-Place is taken up by the late nineteenth-century **Maison du Roi**, a fairly faithful reconstruction of the palatial Gothic structure commissioned by Charles V in 1515. The emperor had a point to make: the Hôtel de Ville was an assertion of municipal independence, and Charles wanted to emphasize imperial power by constructing his own building directly opposite. Despite its name, no sovereign ever lived here permanently, though this is where the Habsburgs installed their tax men and law courts, and held their more important prisoners – the counts of Egmont and Hoorn (see p.106) spent their last night in the Maison du Roi before being beheaded just outside. The building now holds the **Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €3), comprising a wide-ranging albeit patchy collection whose best sections feature medieval fine and applied art.

The first of the rooms to the right of the entrance boasts superb **altarpieces** – or retables; from the end of the fourteenth century until the economic slump of the 1640s, the city produced hundreds of them, in a manner similar to a production line, with panel- and cabinet-makers, wood carvers, painters and goldsmiths (who did the gilding) working on several altarpieces at any one time. The standard format was to create a series of mini-tableaux illustrating Biblical scenes, with the characters wearing medieval gear in a medieval landscape. It's the extraordinary detail – a Brussels speciality – that impresses: look closely at the niche carvings on the whopping **Saluzzo** altarpiece (aka *The Life of the Virgin and the Infant Christ*) of 1505 and you'll spy the candlesticks, embroidered pillowcase and carefully draped coverlet of Mary's bedroom in the *Annunciation*



scene. Up above, in a swirling, phantasmagorical landscape (of what look like climbing toadstools), is the *Shepherds Hear the Good News*. Also in this room is Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Wedding Procession*, a good-natured scene with country folk walking to church to the accompaniment of bagpipes.

The second room to the right is devoted to four large-scale **tapestries** from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The earliest of the four – from 1516 – relates the legend of *Notre Dame du Sablon*, the tedious tale of the transfer of a much revered statue of the Virgin from Antwerp to Brussels (see p.106) – though fortunately the tapestry is much better than the story. Easily the most striking tapestry here is the Solemn Funeral of the Roman Consul Decius Mus, based on drawings by Rubens. This is an extraordinary work, crowded with classical figures of muscular men and fleshy women surrounding the consul, who won a decisive victory against the Samnites, securing Roman control of Italy in the third century BC. Decius is laid out on a chaise-longue and even inanimate objects join in the general mourning – with the lion head of the chaise-longue, for instance, glancing sorrowfully at the onlooker.

The museum's upper floors are less diverting; the first floor has scale models of the city and various sections on aspects of its history, the second continuing in the same vein. On the second floor also is a goodly sample of the **Manneken Pis**' (see below) vast wardrobe, around one hundred sickeningly saccharine costumes ranging from Mickey Mouse to a maharajah, all of them gifts from various visiting dignitaries.

Around the Grand-Place – the Manneken Pis

In the 1890s, burgomaster **Charles Buls** spearheaded a campaign to preserve the city's ancient buildings. One of his rewards was to have a street named after him, running south from the Grand-Place – from beside the Everard 't Serclaes statue. The first street on the left of rue Charles Buls is **rue des Brasseurs**, and it was on this corner, in 1873, that the French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine shot and wounded his fellow poet and lover Arthur Rimbaud, a rash act that earned him a two-year prison sentence – and all because Rimbaud had dashed from Paris to dissuade him from joining the Spanish army. The second turn on the left is rue de la Violette, and here at no. 6, the **Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle** (Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 10am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm, Sat & Sun 2–5pm; €30) has many examples of antique and contemporary lace mixed in with various temporary displays on costume.

From the foot of rue de la Violette, rue de l'Etuve runs south to the **Manneken Pis**, a diminutive statue of a pissing urchin stuck high up in a shrine-like affair protected from the tourists by an iron fence. There are all sorts of folkloric tales about the origins of the lad, from lost aristocratic children recovered when they were taking a pee to peasant boys putting out dangerous fires and – least likely of the lot – kids slashing on the city's enemies from the trees and putting them to flight. More reliably, it seems that Jerome Duquesnoy, who cast the original bronze statue in the 1600s, intended the Manneken to embody the "irreverent spirit" of the city; certainly, its popularity blossomed during the sombre, priest-dominated years following the Thirty Years' War. The statue may have been Duquesnoy's idea, or it may have replaced an earlier stone version of ancient provenance, but whatever the truth it has certainly attracted the attention of thieves, notably in 1817 when a French ex-convict swiped it before breaking it into pieces. The thief and the smashed Manneken were apprehended, the former publicly branded on the Grand-Place and sentenced to a life of forced labour, while the fragments of the latter were used to create the mould in which the present-day Manneken was cast. It's long been the

custom for visiting VIPs to donate a costume, and the little chap is regularly kitted out in different tackle – often military or folkloric gear, but occasionally stetsons and chaps, golfers' plus fours and Mickey Mouse outfits.

From the Manneken Pis, it's a short walk southeast to the Jacques Brel Foundation (see p.91) and the slope that leads to the Upper Town (see pp.92–107). Alternatively, you can double back to the Grand-Place and head northwest into the Ste-Catherine district (see below).

Northwest of the Grand-Place

Walking **northwest** out of the Grand-Place along rue au Beurre, you soon reach the church of **St-Nicolas** (Mon–Fri 8am–6.30pm, Sat 9am–6pm & Sun 9am–7.30pm; free), dedicated to St Nicholas of Bari, the patron saint of sailors, or as he's better known, Santa Claus. The church dates from the twelfth century, but has been heavily restored on several occasions, most recently in the 1950s when parts of the outer shell were reconstructed in a plain Gothic style. The church is unusual in so far as the three aisles of the nave were built at an angle to the chancel in order to avoid a stream. Otherwise, the interior hardly sets the pulse racing, although – among a scattering of *objets d'art* – there's a handsome reliquary shrine near the entrance. Of gilded copper, the shrine was made in Germany in the nineteenth century to honour a group of Catholics martyred by Protestants in the Netherlands in 1572.

Opposite St Nicolas rises the grandiose **Bourse**, formerly the home of the city's stock exchange, a Neoclassical structure of 1873 caked with fruit, fronds, languishing nudes and frolicking putti. This breezily self-confident structure sports a host of allegorical figures (Industry, Navigation, Asia, Africa, etc) which both reflect the preoccupations of the nineteenth-century Belgian bourgeoisie and, in their easy self-satisfaction, imply that wealth and pleasure are synonymous. The Bourse is flanked by good-looking though dilapidated town houses, the setting for two of the city's more famous cafés, the Art Nouveau *Falstaff*, on the south side at rue Henri Maus 17–23, and the fin-de-siècle *Le Cirio*, on the other side at rue de la Bourse 18.

The square in front of the Bourse – **place de la Bourse** – is little more than an unsightly, heavily trafficked pause along boulevard Anspach, but the streets on the other side of the boulevard have more appeal, with tiny **place St-Géry** crowded by high-sided tenements, whose stone balconies and wrought-iron grilles hark back to the days of bustles and parasols. The square is thought to occupy the site of the sixth-century chapel from which the medieval city grew, but this is a matter of conjecture – no archaeological evidence has ever been unearthed. Place St-Géry has one specific attraction in the recently refurbished, late nineteenth-century covered market, the **Halles St-Géry**, an airy glass, brick and iron edifice.

Rue Antoine Dansaert and place Ste-Catherine

From place St-Géry, it's a couple of minutes' stroll north to **rue Antoine Dansaert**, where several of the most innovative and stylish of the city's fashion **designers** have set up shop amongst the dilapidated old townhouses that stretch up to place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains. Among several outstanding boutiques, three of the best are Oliver Strelli, at no. 46; Lodge, at no. 44; and Stijl, which showcases a bevy of big-name designers, at no. 74. There's strikingly original furniture here too, at Max, at no. 90.

Take a right turn off rue Antoine Dansaert along rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains for **place Ste-Catherine** which, despite its dishevelled appearance,

lies at the heart of one of the city's most fashionable districts, not least because of its excellent seafood restaurants. Presiding over the square is the **church of Ste-Catherine** (Mon–Sat 8.30am–5.30pm & Sun 8.30am–noon; free) a battered nineteenth-century replacement for the Baroque original, of which the creamy, curvy belfry beside the west end of the church is the solitary survivor. Venture inside the church and you'll spy – behind the glass screen that closes off most of the nave – a fourteenth-century Black Madonna and Child, a sensually carved stone statuette that was chucked into the Senne by Protestants, but fished out while floating on a fortuitous clod of peat.

Quai aux Briques

Quai aux Briques and the parallel quai au Bois à Brûler extend northwest from place Ste-Catherine on either side of a wide and open area that was – until it was filled in – the most central part of the city's main **dock**. Strolling along this open area, you'll pass a motley assortment of nineteenth-century warehouses, shops and bars which together maintain an appealing canalside feel – an impression heightened in the early morning when the streets are choked with lorries bearing trays of fish for local restaurants. The fanciful **Anspach water fountain** at the end of the old quays, with its lizards and dolphins, honours Burgomaster Anspach, a driving force in the move to modernize the city during the 1880s.

St-Jean-Baptiste au Béguinage

Lying just to the east of quai au Bois à Brûler, **place du Béguinage** is an attractive piazza dominated by **St-Jean-Baptiste au Béguinage** (normally Tues–Sun 10am–5pm, but currently closed by fire damage; free), a supple, billowing structure dating from the second half of the seventeenth century. This beautiful church is the only building left from the Béguine convent founded here in the thirteenth century. The convent once crowded in on the church and only since its demolition – and the creation of the star-shaped place du Béguinage in 1855 – has it been possible to view the exterior with any degree of ease. There's a sense of movement in each and every feature, a dynamism of design culminating in three soaring gables where the upper portion of the central tower is decorated with pinnacles that echo those of the Hôtel de Ville. The church's light and spacious interior is lavishly decorated, the white stone columns and arches dripping with solemn-faced cherubs intent on reminding the congregation of their mortality. The nave and aisles are wide and open, offering unobstructed views of the high altar, but you can't fail to notice the enormous wooden **pulpit** featuring St Dominic preaching against heresy – and trampling a heretic underfoot for good measure.

From place du Béguinage, it's a brief walk southeast to place de la Monnaie (see p.89).

North and northeast of the Grand-Place

Take rue des Harengs **north** from the Grand-Place and at the end, across the street, you'll see the (signed) ancient alley that leads through to the **Théâtre Royal de Toone**, at Impasse Schuddeveld 6. Very much a city institution, the theatre puts on puppet shows in the Bruxellois dialect known as Brussels Sproek or Marollien, with performances five nights a week (see p.134) – and there's an excellent bar here too (see p.130). Another little alley leads west out of the Toone theatre into pedestrianized **petite rue des Bouchers**, which,

along with **rue des Bouchers**, is the city's pocket-sized restaurant ghetto, where the narrow cobblestone lanes are transformed at night into fairy-lit tunnels where establishments vie for custom with elaborate displays of dull-eyed fish and glistening seafood; it's all very tempting, but these restaurants have a reputation for charging way over the odds.

Footsteps away are the **Galleries St-Hubert**, whose glass-vaulted galleries – du Roi, de la Reine and the smaller des Princes – cut across rue des Bouchers. Opened by Léopold I in 1847, the galleries were one of Europe's first shopping arcades, and the pastel-painted walls, classical pilasters and cameo sculptures still retain an air of genteel sophistication.


Théâtre de la Monnaie and place des Martyrs

At the north end of the Galerie du Roi, it's a brief walk down rue de l'Écuyer to **place de la Monnaie**, the drab and dreary modern square that's overshadowed by the huge **centre Monnaie**, housing offices and shops. The only building of any interest here is the **Théâtre de la Monnaie**, Brussels' opera house, a Neoclassical structure built in 1819 and with an interior added in 1856 to a design by Poelaert, the architect of the Palais de Justice (see p.107). The theatre's real claim to fame, however, is as the starting point of the revolution against the Dutch in 1830: a nationalistic libretto in Auber's *The Mute Girl of Portici* sent the audience wild, and they poured out into the streets to raise the flag of Brabant, signalling the start of the rebellion. The opera told the tale of an Italian uprising against the Spanish, with such lines as "To my country I owe my life, to me it will owe its liberty"; as a furious King William I pointed out, one of the Dutch censors – of whom there were many – should really have seen what was coming.

From place de la Monnaie, **rue Neuve** forges north, a workaday pedestrianized shopping street that is home to the big chain stores and the City 2 shopping mall. About halfway up, turn east along rue St-Michel for the **place des Martyrs**, a cool, rational square imposed on the city by the Habsburgs in the last years of Austrian control. The only stylistic blip is the nineteenth-century centrepiece, a clumsy representation of the Fatherland Crowned rising from an arcaded gallery inscribed with the names of those 445 rebels who died in the Belgian revolution of 1830.

The Grand Magasin Waucquez and the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée

East of place des Martyrs, it's an unremarkable five-minute walk through offices and warehouses to rue des Sables, where, at no. 20, you come to the city's only surviving Horta-designed department store, the **Grand Magasin Waucquez**. Recently restored after lying empty for many years, it's a wonderfully airy, summery construction, with light filtering down from the glass ceiling above the expansive entrance hall. Completed in 1906, it was built for a textile tycoon, and exhibits all the classic features of Victor Horta's work (see p.118), from the soft lines of the ornamentation to the metal grilles, exposed girders and balustrades.

The building now holds the **Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée** (Belgian Comic Strip Centre) with a café, reference library and bookshop downstairs and the enjoyable **comic-strip "museum"** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €6;  www.comicscenter.net) on the floor above. The labelling of the displays is almost exclusively in French and Dutch, but a free and very thorough English guidebook is available at the ticket desk. The first exhibits trace the development of the Belgian comic strip from its beginnings in the

Tintin

Tintin was the creation of Brussels-born **Georges Remi**, aka Hergé (1907–83). Remi's first efforts (non-Tintin) were sponsored by a right-wing Catholic journal, *Le XXième Siècle*, and in 1929 when this same paper produced a kids' supplement – *Le Petit Vingtième* – Remi was given his first major break. He was asked to produce a two-page comic strip and the result was *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, a didactic tale about the evils of Bolshevism. Tintin's Soviet adventure lasted until May 1930, and to round it all off the director of *Le XXième Siècle* decided to stage a PR-stunt reception to celebrate Tintin's return from the USSR. Remi – along with a Tintin lookalike – hopped on a train just east of Brussels and when they pulled into the capital they were mobbed by scores of excited children. Remi and Tintin never looked back. Remi decided on the famous **quiff** straight away, but other features – the mouth and expressive eyebrows – only came later. His popularity was – and remains – quite phenomenal: *Tintin* has been translated into sixty languages and over twenty million copies of the comic *Le Journal de Tintin*, Remi's own independent creation first published in 1946, have been sold – and that's not mentioning all the *Tintin* TV cartoon series.

1920s up until 1960 with examples of the work of all the leading practitioners, including Georges Remi (see “Tintin” box, above), Jijé and Edgar-Pierre Jacobs, whose theatrical compositions and fluent combination of genres – science fiction, fantasy and crime – are seen to good effect in his *Blake and Mortimer* series. A subsequent section looks at new trends and themes. The comic strip has long ceased to be primarily aimed at children, and now focuses on the adult (sometimes very adult) market. A series of regularly rotated displays ably illustrates some of the best of this new work and there's also a programme of temporary exhibitions.

Le Botanique

Heading north from the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée along **rue du Marais**, you soon hit the petit ring and, on the other side, an attractive **park**, whose carefully manicured woods, lawns and borders are decorated by statues and a tiny lake. The park slopes up to **Le Botanique**, an appealingly grandiose greenhouse dating from 1826. The building once housed the city's botanical gardens, but these were moved out long ago and the place has been turned into a Francophone cultural centre. Despite the proximity of the traffic-congested boulevards of the ring road, it's a pleasant spot, though be warned that dodgy characters haunt its precincts in the evening. From the park, it's a quick walk west to place Rogier, from where glistening new office blocks march up **rue du Progrès** to the **Gare du Nord**.

Maypole planting

Every year, on August 9, the corner of rue des Sables and rue du Marais is the site for the **Plantation du Meiboom** (Planting of the Maypole) – following a procession that involves much boozing, food and general partying. The story goes that in 1213 a wedding party was celebrating outside the city gates when a street gang from Leuven attacked it. The marauders were beaten off (with the help of a group of archers, who just happened to be passing by), and in thanks, the local duke gave them permission to plant a maypole on the eve of their patron saint's feast day.

South of the Grand-Place

The labyrinth of cobbled lanes immediately to the **southwest of the Grand-Place** make for an enjoyable stroll, but almost inevitably you'll soon stumble across the two uninteresting, dead straight boulevards that run down from the Bourse towards the **Gare du Midi**, which lies just beyond the petit ring. The area round the station is home to many of the city's North African immigrants, a severely depressed and, in places, seedy quarter with an uneasy undertow by day and sometimes overtly threatening at night. The only good time to visit is on a Sunday morning, when a vibrant souk-like **market** is held under the station's rail arches and along boulevard du Midi.

Far better to avoid the Midi and instead walk **south** from the Grand-Place down rue de l'Étuve and then – a block before the Mannekin Pis (see p.86) – turn left up rue du Lombard for **place Saint Jean**, where the memorial in the middle of the square commemorates the remarkable **Gabrielle Petit**. Equipped with a formidable – some say photographic – memory, Petit played a leading role in the Resistance movement during the German occupation of World War I. Caught, she refused to appeal even though (as a woman) she would almost certainly have had her sentence commuted; instead she declared that she would show the Germans how a Belgian woman could die. And that is precisely what she did: the Germans executed her by firing squad in 1916.

Just to the south of the square, place de la Vieille-Halle aux Blés holds the **Fondation internationale Jacques Brel** (Tues–Sat 10.15am–6pm; €5), a small but inventive museum celebrating the life and times of the Belgian singer Jacques Brel (1933–78), who became famous in the 1960s as a singer of mournful *chansons* about death and love. Inside, a sequence of life-size tableaux give the impression that you have just missed Brel – a cigarette still burns in the replica bar – and you watch films of the man in concert in the small and cosy theatre-cum-cinema. It's all good fun (if you like this type of music), though the labelling of the exhibits is only in French and Dutch.

Notre Dame de la Chapelle

From the Fondation, it's a short walk south up the slope to **boulevard de l'Empereur**, a wide carriageway that slices through this part of the centre. Across the boulevard, you'll spy the crumbly brickwork of **La Tour Anneessens**, a chunky remnant of the medieval city wall, while to the south soars the spire of **Notre Dame de la Chapelle** (June–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–5pm & Sun 11.30am–4.30pm; Oct–May daily 12.30–4.30pm; free). The city's oldest church, founded in 1134, it's a sprawling, broadly Gothic structure that boasts an attractive if somewhat incongruous Baroque bell tower added after the French artillery bombardment of 1695 had damaged the original. Inside, the well-proportioned **nave** is supported by heavyweight columns with curly-kale capitals and bathed in light from the huge clerestory windows. The **pulpit** is an extraordinary affair, a flashy, intricately carved hunk featuring the Old Testament prophet Elijah stuck out in the wilderness. The prophet looks mightily fed up, but then he hasn't realised that there's an angel beside him with a loaf of bread (manna). Also of note is the statue of **Our Lady of Solitude**, in the second chapel of the north aisle – to the left of the entrance. It was the Spaniards who first dressed their statues in finery (the Flemings were accustomed to religious statues whose clothing formed part of the original carving), and this is an example, gifted to the church by the Spanish Infanta in the 1570s. Yet the church's main claim to fame is the **memorial plaque to Pieter Bruegel the Elder**, made by his son Jan and located high up on the wall of the south side-aisle's fourth chapel; the other plaque and

bronze effigy in the chapel were added in the 1930s. Pieter is supposed to have lived and died just down the street at rue Haute 132.

Notre Dame de la Chapelle is on the northern edge of the Quartier Marolles (see below), whose narrow terraces are stacked on the slopes below the Palais de Justice. Frankly, there isn't too much reason to press on into the Marolles and a better bet is to backtrack towards La Tour Anneessens, just before which is **rue de Rollebeek**, a pleasant pedestrian lane that climbs up to the place du Grand Sablon in the Upper Town (see p.106).

The Quartier Marolles

South of Notre Dame de la Chapelle, **rue Blaes**, together with the less appealing **rue Haute**, form the double spine of the **Quartier Marolles**, which grew up in the seventeenth century as a centre for artisans working on the nearby mansions of the Sablon. Industrialized in the eighteenth century, it remained a thriving working-class district until the 1870s, when the paving-over of the Senne led to the riverside factories closing down and moving to the suburbs. The workers and their families followed, initiating a long process of decline, which turned the district into an impoverished slum. Things finally started to change in the late 1980s, when outsiders began to snaffle up property here, and although the *quartier* still has its rougher moments, rue Blaes – or at least that part of it from Notre Dame de la Chapelle to place du Jeu de Balle – is now lined with antique and interior-design shops. It's a good location as **place du Jeu de Balle**, the square at the heart of Marolles, has long been home to the city's best **flea market** (daily 7am–2pm). The market is at its most hectic on Sunday mornings, when the square and its immediate surroundings are swamped by pile after pile of rusty junk alongside muddles of eccentric bric-à-brac – everything from a chipped Buddha or rococo angel to horn-rimmed glasses, a top hat or a stuffed bear.

The neighbourhood is one of the few places in the city where you can still hear older people using the traditional dialect, **Brusselse Sproek** or Marollien, a brand of Flemish which is now in danger of dying out. The locals, who have set up an academy to preserve it, propose – to add to the capital's linguistic complexities – that all newcomers to Brussels should learn one hundred words of this colourful, ribald language. You could make a start with *dikenek*, “big mouth”; *schieve lavabo*, “idiot” (literally “a twisted toilet”); or *fieu* – “son of a bitch”.

If you've ventured as far south as the place du Jeu de Balle, then you're within easy striking distance of St-Gilles (see p.115), a five- to ten-minute walk to the south.

The Upper Town

From the heights of the **Upper Town**, the Francophile ruling class long kept a watchful eye on the proletarians down the hill, and it was here they built their palaces and mansions, churches and parks. Political power is no longer concentrated hereabouts, but the wide avenues and grand architecture of this aristocratic quarter – the bulk of which dates from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – has survived pretty much intact, lending a stately, dignified feel that's markedly different from the bustle of the Lower Town below.

The Lower Town ends and the Upper Town begins at the foot of the **sharp slope** which runs north to south from one end of the city centre to the other,

its course marked – in general terms at least – by a traffic-choked boulevard that's variously named Berlaumont, L'Impératrice and L'Empereur. This slope is home to the city's recently restored **cathedral**, but otherwise is little more than an obstacle to be climbed by a series of stairways. Among the latter, the most frequently used are the covered walkway running through the **Galerie Ravenstein** shopping arcade behind the Gare Centrale, and the open-air stairway that climbs up through the stodgy, modern buildings of the so-called **Mont des Arts**. Léopold II gave the area its name in anticipation of a fine art museum he intended to build, but the project was never completed, and the land was only properly built upon in the 1950s.

Above the rigorous layout of the Mont des Arts lie the **rue Royale** and **rue de la Régence**, which together make up the Upper Town's spine, a suitably smart location for the outstanding **Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts**, probably the best of Belgium's many fine art collections, and the surprisingly low-key **Palais Royal**. Further south, rue de la Régence soon leads to the well-heeled **Sablon** neighbourhood, whose antique shops and chic bars and cafés fan out from the medieval church of **Notre Dame du Sablon**. Beyond this is the monstrous **Palais de Justice**, traditionally one of the city's most disliked buildings.

The Cathedral

It only takes a couple of minutes to walk from the Grand-Place to the east end of rue de la Montagne, where a short slope climbs up to the **Cathedral** (daily 8.30am–6pm; free), a splendid Gothic edifice whose commanding position has been sorely compromised by a rash of modern office blocks. Begun in 1215, and three hundred years in the making, the cathedral is dedicated jointly to the patron and patroness of Brussels, respectively St Michael the Archangel and St Gudule, the latter a vague seventh-century figure whose reputation was based on her gentle determination: despite all sorts of shenanigans, the devil could never make her think an uncharitable thought.

The cathedral sports a striking, twin-towered, white stone **facade**, with the central double doorway trimmed by fanciful tracery as well as statues of the Apostles and – on the central column – the Three Wise Men. The facade was erected in the fifteenth century in High Gothic style, but the intensity of the decoration fades away inside with the cavernous triple-aisled nave, completed a century before. Other parts of the interior illustrate several phases of Gothic design, the chancel being the oldest part of the church, built in stages between 1215 and 1280 in the Early Gothic style.

The interior is short on furnishings and fittings, reflecting the combined efforts of the Protestants, who ransacked the church (and stole the shrine of St Gudule) in the middle of the seventeenth century, and the French Republican army, who wrecked the place a century later. Unfortunately, neither of them dismantled the ponderous sculptures that are attached to the columns of the nave – clumsy seventeenth-century representations of the Apostles, which only serve to dent the nave's soaring lines. Much more appealing – and another survivor – is the massive oak **pulpit**, an extravagant chunk of frippery by the Antwerp sculptor Hendrik Verbruggen. Among several vignettes, the pulpit features Adam and Eve, dressed in rustic gear, being chased from the Garden of Eden, while up above the Virgin Mary and some helpful cherubs stamp on the head of the serpent.

The cathedral also boasts some superb sixteenth-century **stained-glass windows**, beginning above the main doors with the hurly-burly of the Last



△ Statue of Cardinal Mercier at the Cathedral

Judgement. Look closely and you'll spy the donor in the lower foreground with an angel on one side and a woman with long blonde hair (symbolizing Faith) on the other. Each of the main colours has a symbolic meaning, green representing hope, yellow eternal glory and light blue heaven. There's more remarkable work in the **transepts**, where the stained glass is distinguished by the extraordinary clarity of the blue backgrounds. These windows are eulogies

to the Habsburgs – in the north transept, Charles V kneels alongside his wife beneath a vast triumphal arch as their patron saints present them to God the Father, and in the south transept Charles V's sister, Marie, and her husband, King Louis of Hungary, play out a similar scenario. Both windows were designed by Bernard van Orley (1490–1541), long-time favourite of the royal family and the leading Brussels artist of his day.

Chapelle du Saint Sacrement de Miracle

Just beyond the north transept, flanking the choir, the cathedral treasury (see below) is displayed in the Flamboyant Gothic **Chapelle du Saint Sacrement de Miracle**, named after a shameful anti-Semitic legend whose key components were repeated again and again across medieval Christendom. Dating back to the 1360s, this particular version begins with a Jew from a small Flemish town stealing the consecrated Host from his local church. On Good Friday, he presents the Host at the synagogue; his fellow Jews stab it with daggers, whereupon it starts to bleed and they disperse, terrified. Shortly afterwards, the thief is murdered in a brawl and his fearful wife moves to Brussels, taking the Host with her. The woman then decides to try to save her soul by giving the Host to the city's cathedral – hence this chapel, which was built to display the retrieved Host in the 1530s. The four stained-glass **windows** of the chapel retell the tale, a strip cartoon that unfolds above representations of the aristocrats who paid for the windows. The workmanship is delightful – based on designs by van Orley and his one-time apprentice Michiel van Coxie (1499–1592) – but the effects of this unsavoury legend on the congregation are not hard to imagine.

Le trésor (treasury)

Inside the Chapelle du Saint Sacrement de Miracle, the cathedral **treasury** (Le trésor; Mon–Fri 10am–12.30pm & 2–5pm, Sat 10am–12.30pm & 2–3.30pm, Sun 2–5pm; €1) is smartly turned out, but the exhibits themselves are, for the most part, a fairly plodding assortment of monstrosities and reliquaries. The main exception is a splendid Anglo-Saxon reliquary of the **True Cross** (Item 5), recently winkled out of the ornate, seventeenth-century gilded silver reliquary Cross (Item 4) that was made to hold it. There's also a flowing altar painting, *The Legend of Ste Gudule* (Item 3), by Michiel van Coxie, who spent much of his long life churning out religious paintings in the High Renaissance style he picked up when visiting Italy early in his career. Coxie was arguably a better engraver than a painter, so it was something of a surprise when Philip II asked him to make a copy of van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (see p.224) for his personal collection – but then again it was better than the king just taking it. Behind the chapel's high altar, look out also for the more than usually ghoulish **skull** of St Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–31).

Galerie Ravenstein and the Palais des Beaux Arts

Just to the southwest of the cathedral, along boulevard de l'Impératrice, the carrefour de l'Europe roundabout is dominated by the curving stonework of *Le Meridien Hotel* (see p.74), one of the city's most successful modern buildings. Opposite is the **Gare Centrale**, a bleak and somewhat surly Art Deco creation seemingly dug deep into the slope where Lower and Upper Town meet. Behind the station, on the far side of rue Cantersteen, is the **Galerie Ravenstein** shopping arcade, traversed by a particularly pleasant covered walkway that clammers up to rue Ravenstein. A classic piece of 1950s

design, the arcade carries cheerfully bright decorative panels and has an airy atrium equipped with a water fountain. At the far end of the walkway, on rue Ravenstein, the **Palais des Beaux Arts** (now called BOZAR) is a severe, low-lying edifice designed by Victor Horta during the 1920s. The building holds a theatre and concert hall and hosts numerous temporary exhibitions, mostly of modern and contemporary art. From here, you can either climb the steps up to rue Royale and the *Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts* (see p.98), or stroll south along rue Ravenstein to the top of the Mont des Arts and the *Musée des Instruments de Musique* (see p.97).

Place de l'Albertine and the Mont des Arts

The wide stone **stairway** that cuts up through the sombre 1940s and 1950s government buildings of the steeply sloping **Mont des Arts** also climbs the slope marking the start of the Upper Town, thereby serving as an alternative to the *Galerie Ravenstein* (see above). The stairs begin on **place de l'Albertine**, which is overlooked by a large and imposing statue of **King Albert I**, depicted in military gear on his favourite horse. Easily the most popular king Belgium has ever had, Albert became a national hero for his determined resistance to the Germans in World War I and there was a genuine outpouring of popular grief when he died in a climbing accident near Namur, in southern Belgium, in 1934. Opposite him, across the square, is a statue of his wife, Queen Elizabeth.

The stairway clammers up the hill to a wide **piazza**, equipped with water fountains, footpaths and carefully manicured shrubbery, and then it's on up again, offering splendid **views** over the Lower Town with the fanciful tower of the *Hôtel de Ville* soaring high above its surroundings. Beyond, at the top of the stairs, is rue Ravenstein and MIM (see p.97) and on the right, up a short flight of steps, is the place du Musée.

The place du Musée and Palais de Charles de Lorraine

Metres from the top of the Mont des Arts stairway, the **place du Musée** is a handsome cobbled square edged by a crisp architectural ensemble of sober Habsburg symmetry, whose sweeping stonework dates back to the eighteenth century. The elongated facade that bends round the square was originally covered with a jungle of Neoclassical decoration – cherubs, statues, military insignia in the Roman style and trailing garlands – and although much has disappeared, enough remains to suggest its original appearance. Two sides of the square are now part of the *Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts* (see p.98), as is the hole in the middle, which allows light to reach the museum's subterranean floors, but on the north side are the five salons of the **Palais de Charles de Lorraine** (Tues–Fri 1–5pm & Sat 10am–5pm; €3), the surviving portion of the lavish suite of apartments designed for Charles de Lorraine, the Austrian who served as Brussels' governor-general from 1749 to 1780. The salons reflect Charles's avowed enthusiasm for the Enlightenment: he viewed himself as the epitome of the civilized man and fully supported the reforms of his emperor, Joseph II (1741–90), though these same reforms – especially the move towards a secular society – created pandemonium amongst his fiercely Catholic subjects.

The *palais* begins in style with a statue of **Hercules**, the symbol of strength and courage, guarding a sweeping staircase. There's no false modesty here: if any of his guests bothered to look – and they certainly did – they'd see that Charles

was at pains to associate himself with Hercules, whose club is inscribed with the Cross of Lorraine and the letter “C” (after his name). At the top of the staircase behind Hercules, the **doorway** has its own guardian, a cherub with a finger to his lips, sitting on a sphinx – as in silence and secrets – and just beyond is a lavish **rotunda** decorated with stucco Roman military insignia to emphasize Charles’s military prowess. The rotunda boasts an intricate marble floor with chequer-board tiles surrounding a star-shaped central feature consisting of lots of different types of marble, but here again it’s all about Charles, who prided himself on his knowledge of geology. The rotunda leads to five interconnecting **salons**, each holding a miscellany of eighteenth-century bygones illustrative of one or other of Charles’s many interests. The first room is mechanical, the second horological and geographical, the third is devoted to hunting and leisure, the fourth is musical and the fifth has a cabinet of porcelain. Few of these bygones were actually owned by Charles, but it is an enjoyable collection, the most interesting pieces being his Masonic trinkets and baubles.

Charles had his own private chapel next door – he was a well-known rake, so presumably it was handy for confession – and this could once be reached from the rotunda, but today you have to go back outside to gain access to what is now the **Eglise Protestante de Bruxelles** (only open Sun 10.30–11.30am, during services). Charles decorated the chapel in suitably ornate style, and the delicate stuccowork and glitzy chandeliers have survived the transition to the city’s Protestants in 1804.

The Musée des Instruments de Musique (MIM)

Footsteps from the place du Musée, at rue Montagne de la Cour 2, the **Old England building** is a whimsical Art Nouveau confection, all glass and wrought iron, that started life as a store, built by the eponymous British company as its Brussels headquarters in 1899. It has recently been refurbished to house the entertaining **Musée des Instruments de Musique** (Tues–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €5; www.mim.fgov.be), a prestige development that works very well. Spread over three main floors, the museum’s permanent collection features several hundred musical instruments, with an international assortment of traditional folk-music instruments on the ground floor and European instruments – from antique trumpets and trombones to eighteenth-century Italian violins and clavichords – up above. The special feature is the **infrared headphones**, which are cued to play music to match the type of instrument you’re looking at. This is really good fun, especially in the folk-music section where you can listen, for example, to a Tibetan temple trumpet or, amongst all sorts of bagpipes, a medieval Cornemuse, as featured in the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Younger. One word of caution, however: middle-aged parents will no doubt spot the dreaded ocarina, a slug-shaped instrument that was once popular with children and drove many an adult to despair.

Aside from the permanent collection, one floor of the museum holds a concert hall, while the top-floor **restaurant** affords smashing views over the Lower Town.

Place Royale

Composed and self-assured, **place Royale** forms a fitting climax to rue Royale, the dead straight backbone of the Upper Town, which runs the 2km

north to the Turkish inner-city suburb of St-Josse. Precisely symmetrical, the square is framed by late eighteenth-century mansions, each an exercise in architectural restraint, though there's no mistaking their size or the probable cost of their construction. Pushing into this understated opulence is the facade of the church of **St-Jacques sur Coudenberg** (Tues–Sat 1–5.30pm, Sun 9am–5.30pm; free), a fanciful, 1780s version of a Roman temple with a colourfully frescoed pediment representing Our Lady as Comforter of the Depressed. Indeed, the building was so secular in appearance that the French Revolutionary army had no hesitation in renaming it a Temple of Reason. The French also destroyed the statue of a Habsburg governor that once stood in front of the church; its replacement – a dashing equestrian representation of **Godfrey de Bouillon**, one of the leaders of the first Crusade – dates from the 1840s. It was an appropriate choice as this was the spot where Godfrey is supposed to have exhorted his subjects to enlist for the Crusade, rounding off his appeal with a thunderous “*Dieu li volt*” (God wills it).

The Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts

A few metres from place Royale, at the start of rue de la Régence, the **Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5; @www.fine-arts-museum.be) comprises two interconnected museums, one displaying modern art from the nineteenth century onwards, the other older works. Together they make up Belgium's most satisfying all-round collection of fine art, with marvellous collections of work by – amongst many – Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Rubens and the surrealists Paul Delvaux and René Magritte.

Both museums are large, and to do them justice you should see them in separate visits. Finding your way around is made easy by the English-language, colour-coded **museum plan** issued at the information desk behind the entrance. The older paintings – up to the beginning of the nineteenth century – are exhibited in the **Musée d'Art Ancien**, where the **blue** area displays paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including the Bruegels, and the **brown** area concentrates on paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the collection of Rubens (for which the museum is internationally famous) as the highlight. The **Musée d'Art Moderne** has a **yellow** area devoted to Magritte and his contemporaries, though at time of writing this is not yet open, as well as a **green** area whose six subterranean levels cover both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Both museums also have **red** areas, which are used to host a prestigious programme of **temporary exhibitions** for which a supplementary admission fee is usually required. For the most popular you'll need to buy a ticket ahead of time; the ticket may specify the time of admission. The larger exhibitions inevitably cause disruption to the permanent collection, so treat the room numbers we've given with a degree of caution. Inevitably, the account below just scratches the surface; the museum's bookshop sells a wide range of detailed texts including a well-illustrated guide to the collections, and an English **audioguide** is available at the ticket desk for an extra €3.

Musée d'Art Ancien

Well presented, if not exactly well organized, the **Musée d'Art Ancien** is saved from confusion by its colour-coded zones – blue, brown and red. It's a large collection and it's best to start a visit with the **Flemish primitives** in the **blue** section.

Rogier van der Weyden and Dieric Bouts

Rooms 11 and 12 hold several paintings by **Rogier van der Weyden**. (1399–1464), who moved to Brussels from his home town of Tournai (in today's southern Belgium) in the 1430s, becoming the city's official painter shortly afterwards. When it came to portraiture, Weyden's favourite technique was to highlight the features of his subject – and tokens of rank – against a black background. His *Portrait of Antoine de Bourgogne* (Room 11) is a case in point, with Anthony, the illegitimate son of Philip the Good, casting a haughty, tight-lipped stare to his right while wearing the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece and clasping an arrow, the emblem of the guild of archers.

In **Room 13**, the two panels of the *Justice of the Emperor Otto* are the work of Weyden's contemporary, Leuven-based **Dieric Bouts** (1410–75). The story was well known: in revenge for refusing her advances, the empress accuses a nobleman of attempting to seduce her. He is executed, but the man's wife remains convinced of his innocence and subsequently proves her point by means of an ordeal by fire – hence the red-hot iron bar she's holding. The empress then receives her just desserts, being burnt on the hill in the background.

Hans Memling and the Master of the Legends of St Lucy

Room 14 has some fine portraits by **Hans Memling** (1430–94) as well as his softly hued *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*. Legend asserts that Sebastian was an officer in Diocletian's bodyguard until his Christian faith was discovered, at which point he was sentenced to be shot to death by the imperial archers. Left for dead by the bowmen, Sebastian recovered and Diocletian had to send a bunch of assassins to finish him off with cudgels. The tale made Sebastian popular with archers across Western Europe, and Memling's picture, which shows the trussed-up saint serenely indifferent to the arrows of the firing squad, was commissioned by the guild of archers in Bruges around 1470. In the same room, the **Master of the Legend of St Lucy** weighs in with a finely detailed, richly allegorical *Madonna with Saints* where, with the city of Bruges in the background, the Madonna presents the infant Jesus for the adoration of eleven holy women. Decked out in elaborate medieval attire, the women have blank, almost expressionless faces, but each bears a token of her sainthood, which would have been easily recognized by a medieval congregation. St Lucy, whose assistance was sought by those with sight problems, holds two eyeballs in a dish.

The Master of the Legend of St Barbara

In **Room 15**, there's more early Flemish art in the shape of the *Scenes from the Life of St Barbara*, one panel from an original pair by the **Master of the Legend of St Barbara**. One of the most popular of medieval saints, Barbara – so the story goes – was a woman of great beauty, whose father, Dioscurus, locked her in a tower away from her admirers. The imprisoned Barbara became a Christian, whereupon Dioscurus tried to kill her, only to be thwarted by a miracle that placed her out of his reach – a part of the tale that's ingeniously depicted in this painting. Naturally, no self-respecting saint could escape so easily, so later parts of the story have Barbara handed over to the local prince, who tortures her for her faith. Barbara resists and the prince orders Dioscurus to kill her himself, which he does, only to be immediately incinerated by a bolt of lightning.

School of Hieronymus Bosch

Moving on, Room 17 boasts a copy of the Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516) *Temptations of St Anthony* that's in the Museu Nacional in Lisbon. No one is quite sure who painted this triptych – it may or may not have been one of

Bosch's apprentices – but it was certainly produced in Holland in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The painting refers to St Anthony, a third-century nobleman who withdrew into the desert, where he endured fifteen years of temptation before settling down into his long stint as a hermit. It was the temptations that interested Bosch – rather than the ascetic steeliness of Anthony – and the central panel has an inconspicuous saint sticking desperately to his prayers surrounded by all manner of fiendish phantoms. The side panels develop the theme – to the right Anthony is tempted by lust and greed, and on the left Anthony's companions help him back to his shelter after he's been transported through the skies by weird-looking demons.

Cranach, Gerard David and Matsys

Next door, **Room 18** holds works by Martin Luther's friend, the Bavarian artist **Lucas Cranach** (1472–1553), whose *Adam and Eve* presents a stylized, Renaissance view of the Garden of Eden, with an earnest-looking Adam on the other side of the Tree of Knowledge from a coquettish Eve, painted with legs entwined and her teeth marks visible on the apple. Room 21 displays a couple of panels by **Gerard David** (1460–1523), a Bruges-based artist whose draughtsmanship may not be of the highest order, but whose paintings do display a tender serenity, as exhibited here in his *Adoration of the Magi* and *Virgin and Child*.

In **Room 22**, **Quentin Matsys** (1465–1530) is well represented by the *Triptych of the Holy Kindred*. Matsys' work illustrates a turning point in the development of Flemish painting, and in this triptych, completed in 1509, Matsys abandons the realistic interiors and landscapes of his Flemish predecessors in favour of the grand columns and porticoes of the Renaissance. Each scene is rigorously structured, its characters – all relations of Jesus – assuming lofty, idealized poses.

The Bruegels

The museum's collection of works by the Bruegel family, notably **Pieter the Elder** (1527–69), is focused on **Room 31**. Although he is often regarded as the finest Netherlandish painter of the sixteenth century, little is known of Pieter the Elder's life, but it's likely he was apprenticed in Antwerp, and he certainly moved to Brussels in the early 1560s. He also made at least one long trip to Italy, but judging by his oeuvre, he was – unlike most of his “Belgian” contemporaries – decidedly unimpressed by Italian art. He preferred instead to paint in the Netherlandish tradition and his works often depict crowded Flemish scenes in which are embedded religious or mythical stories. This sympathetic portrayal of everyday life revelled in the seasons and was worked in muted browns, greys and bluey greens with red or yellow highlights. Typifying this approach, and on display here, are two particularly absorbing works, the *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Census at Bethlehem* – a scene that Pieter (1564–1638), his son, repeated on several occasions – in which the traditionally momentous events happen, almost incidentally, among the bustle of everyday life. The versatile Pieter the Elder also dabbled with the lurid imagery of Bosch, whose influence is seen most clearly in the *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, a frantic panel painting which had actually been attributed to Bosch until Bruegel's signature was discovered hidden under the frame. The *Fall of Icarus* is, however, his most haunting work, its mood perfectly captured by Auden in his poem “Musée des Beaux Arts”:

In Bruegel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

Rubens and his contemporaries

Apprenticed in Antwerp, **Rubens** (1577–1640) spent eight years in Italy studying the Renaissance masters before returning home, where he quickly completed a stunning series of paintings for Antwerp Cathedral (see p.258). His fame spread far and wide, and for the rest of his days he was inundated with work, receiving commissions from all over Europe. The museum holds a wide sample of Rubens' work, mostly concentrated in **Rooms 52 through 54** and including a sequence of exquisite portraits, each drawn with great care and attention, which soon dispel the popular misconception that he painted nothing but chubby nude women and muscular men. In particular, note the exquisite ruffs adorning the Archduke Albert and Isabella and the wonderfully observed *Studies of a Negro's Head*, a preparation for the black magus in the *Adoration of the Magi*, a luminous work that's one of several huge canvases usually displayed in **Room 53**. Here you'll also find the *Ascent to Calvary*, an intensely physical painting, capturing the confusion, agony and strain as Christ struggles on hands and knees under the weight of the cross. There's also the bloodcurdling *Martyrdom of St Lieven*, whose cruel torture – his tongue has just been ripped out and fed to a dog – is watched from on high by cherubs and angels.

Two of Rubens' pupils, **Anthony van Dyck** (1599–1641) and **Jacob Jordaens** (1593–1678), also feature in this part of the museum, with the studied portraits of the former dotted along the length of **Room 63** and the big and brassy canvases of Jordaens dominating **Room 66**. Like Rubens, Jordaens had a bulging order book, and for years he and his apprentices churned out paintings by the cart load. His best work is generally agreed to have been completed early on – between about 1620 and 1640 – and there's evidence here in the two versions of the *Satyr and the Peasant*, the earlier work clever and inventive, the second a hastily cobbled-together piece that verges on buffoonery.

Close by, in **Room 54**, is a modest sample of Dutch painting, including a couple of sombre and carefully composed **Rembrandts** (1606–69). One of them – the self-assured *Portrait of Nicolaas van Bambeeck* – was completed in 1641, when the artist was finishing off his famous *Night Watch*, now exhibited in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. Rembrandt's pupils are displayed in the same room, principally **Nicolaes Maes** (1634–93), who is well represented by the delicate *Dreaming Old Woman*. In this room also are several canvases by Rembrandt's talented contemporary, **Frans Hals** (1580–1666), notably his delightful *Three Children and a Cart drawn by a Goat*.

Musée d'Art Moderne

To reach the **Musée d'Art Moderne**, you'll need to use the underground passageway which leads from behind the museum entrance to **Level -2** of the **yellow** area, whose five small floors – two underground and three above – are devoted to Magritte and his contemporaries, or at least will be: at the time of going to print, this section is not yet open. Another stairway, on this same Level -2 of the yellow area, then proceeds down to the six subterranean half-floors that constitute the **green** area of nineteenth- and twentieth-century works. The green area is comparatively small and has an international flavour, with the work of Belgian artists supplemented by the likes of Dalí,

Picasso, Chagall, Henry Moore, Miró, Matisse and Francis Bacon. When the yellow section opens, most of the paintings in the green section will be moved around, so the account below points out general highlights rather than identifying exact locations.

Magritte and the Surrealists

The gallery possesses several of **René Magritte's** (1898–1967; see below) key paintings, perplexing works whose weird, almost photographically realized images and bizarre juxtapositions aim to disconcert. Magritte was the prime mover in Belgian surrealism, developing – by the time he was 30 – an individualistic style that remained fairly constant throughout his entire career. It was not, however, a style that brought him much initial success and, surprising as it may seem today, he remained relatively unknown until the 1950s. Three of the more intriguing canvases are the baffling *Secret Player*, the subtly discordant *Empire of Lights*, and the threatening, frightening *L'Homme*

René Magritte

René Magritte (1898–1967) is easily the most famous of Belgium's modern artists, his disconcerting, strangely haunting images a familiar part of popular culture. Born in a small town just outside Charleroi, he entered the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1915, and was a student there until 1920. His appearances were, however, few and far between as he preferred the company of a group of artists and friends fascinated with the **Surrealist movement** of the 1920s. Their antics were supposed to incorporate a serious intent – the undermining of bourgeois convention – but the surviving home movies of Magritte and his chums fooling around don't appear very revolutionary today.

Initially, Magritte worked in a broadly Cubist manner, but in 1925, influenced by the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, he switched over to Surrealism and almost immediately stumbled upon the themes and images that would preoccupy him for decades to come. The **hallmarks** of his work were striking, incorporating startling comparisons between the ordinary and the extraordinary, with the occasional erotic element thrown in. Favourite images included men in bowler hats, metamorphic figures, enormous rocks floating in the sky, tubas, fishes with human legs, bilboquets (the cup and ball game), and juxtapositions of night and day – one part of the canvas lit by artificial light, the other basking in full sunlight. He also dabbled in word paintings, mislabelling familiar forms to illustrate (or expose) the arbitrariness of linguistic signs. His canvases were devoid of emotion, deadpan images that were easy to recognize but perplexing because of their setting – perhaps most famously, the man in the suit with a bowler hat and an apple for a face.

He broke with this characteristic style on two occasions, once during the War – in despair over the Nazi occupation – and again in 1948, to revenge long years of neglect by the French artistic establishment. Hundreds had turned up to see Magritte's first **Paris exhibition**, but were confronted with crass and crude paintings of childlike simplicity. These so-called **Vache** paintings created a furore, and Magritte beat a hasty artistic retreat behind a smokescreen of self-justification. These two experiments alienated Magritte from most of the other Surrealists but in the event this was of little consequence as Magritte was picked up and popularized by an American art dealer, Alexander Iolas, who made Magritte very rich and very famous.

Magritte and his family lived in Jette, a suburb of Brussels, until the late 1950s, and the house is now the **Musée René Magritte** (see p.123). He died in 1967, shortly after a major retrospective of his work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York confirmed his reputation as one of the great artists of the century.

du Large, which may well have been inspired by the novels of Joseph Conrad. The other leading light amongst the Belgian Surrealists was **Paul Delvaux** (1897–1994; see p.161), whose trademark themes of trains and stations and/or ice-cool nudes set against a disintegrating backdrop are displayed in the *Evening Train* and the *Public Voice*. The museum also owns a fine **Dalí**, *The Temptation of St Anthony*, a hallucinatory work in which spindly legged elephants tempt the saint with fleshy women, and a couple of haunting **de Chirico** paintings of dressmakers' dummies.

Jacques-Louis David

One obvious highlight of the collection is **Jacques Louis David's** much celebrated *Death of Marat*, a propagandist piece of 1793 showing Jean-Paul Marat, the French revolutionary hero, dying in his bath after being stabbed by Charlotte Corday. David (1748–1825) has given Marat a perfectly proportioned, classical torso and a face which, with its large hooded eyes, looks almost Christ-like, the effect heightened by the flatness of the composition and the emptiness of the background. The dead man clasps a quill in one hand and the letter given him by Corday in the other, inscribed "my deepest grief is all it takes to be entitled to your benevolence". As a counterpoint, to emphasize the depth of Corday's betrayal, David has added another note, on the wooden chest, written by Marat and beginning, "You will give this warrant to that mother with the five children, whose husband died for his country". The painting was David's paean to a fellow revolutionary for, like Marat, he was a Jacobin – the deadly rivals of the Girondins, who were supported by Corday – and both had voted for the execution of Louis XVI. David was also a leading light of the Neoclassical movement and became the new regime's Superintendent of the Fine Arts. He did well under Napoleon, too, but after Waterloo David, along with all the other regicides, was exiled, ending his days in Brussels.

Social Realists

The museum is strong on Belgium's **Social Realists**, whose paintings and sculptures championed the working class. One of the early figures in this movement was **Charles de Groux** (1825–70), whose paternalistic *Poor People's Pew* and *Benediction* are typical of his work. Much more talented was **Constantin Meunier** (1831–1905; see p.119), who is well represented here by one particularly forceful bronze, the *Iron Worker*. Look out also for the stirring canvases of their mutual friend **Eugene Laermans** (1864–1940), who shifted from the Realist style into more Expressionistic works, as in the overtly political *Red Flag* and *The Corpse*, a sorrowful vision which is perhaps Laermans' most successful painting.

Impressionism and Post-Impressionism

French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists – Monet, Seurat, Gauguin – make an appearance here too, along with their Belgian imitators, one of the most talented of whom was Émile Claus (1849–1924), well represented here by his charmingly rustic *Cows Crossing the River Leie*. From the same period comes **Théo van Rysselberghe** (1862–1926), a versatile Brussels artist and founder member of Les XX (see p.464), whose most interesting canvases exhibit a studied pointillism – as in his *Portrait of Mrs Charles Maus*. **Henry van de Velde** (1863–1957), another member of Les XX, changed his painting style as often as Rysselberghe, but in the late 1880s he was under the influence of Seurat – hence *The Mender*.

Symbolists and Expressionists

Amongst the **Symbolists**, look out for the disconcerting canvases of **Fernand Khnopff** (1858–1921), who painted his sister, Marguerite, again and again, using her refined, almost plastic, beauty to stir a vague sense of passion – for she’s desirable and utterly unobtainable in equal measure. His haunting *Memories of Lawn Tennis* is typical of his oeuvre, a work without narrative, a dream-like scene with each of the seven women bearing the likeness of Marguerite. In *Caresse* Marguerite pops up once more, this time with the body of a cheetah pawing sensually at an androgynous youth. **Antoine Wiertz**, who has a museum all to himself near the EU Parliament building (see p.109), pops up too, his *La Belle Rosme* a typically disagreeable painting in which the woman concerned faces a skeleton.

There is also a superb sample of the work of **James Ensor** (1860–1949). Ensor, the son of a Flemish mother and an English father, spent nearly all of his long life working in Ostend, his home town. His first paintings were demure portraits and landscapes, but in the early 1880s he switched to a more Impressionistic style, delicately picking out his colours as in *La Dame Sombre*. It is, however, Ensor’s use of masks which sets his work apart – ambiguous carnival masks with the sniff of death or perversity. His *Scandalized Masks* of 1883 was his first mask painting, a typically unnerving canvas that works on several levels, while his *Skeletons Quarrelling for a Kipper* (1891) is one of the most savage and macabre paintings you’re ever likely to see.

Léon Spilliaert (1881–1946) also hailed from Ostend, and made it the setting for much of his work – typically evocations of intense loneliness, from monochromatic beaches to empty rooms and trains; a good example is his piercing *Woman on the Dyke*. Another noteworthy Belgian is **Constant Permeke** (1886–1952), whose grim, gritty Expressionism is best illustrated here by *The Potato Eater* of 1935.

Contemporary art

The museum holds a diverse, sometimes challenging collection of contemporary art and sculpture featuring an international range of artists in regularly rotated displays and installations. All the same, you’re likely to spot an eerie **Francis Bacon**, *The Pope with Owls*, as well as the tongue-in-cheek work of **Marcel Broodthaers** (1924–76), famously his *Red Mussels Casserole*, and the swirling abstracts of Brussels-born and Paris-based **Pierre Alechinsky** (b. 1927). A painter and graphic artist, Alechinsky was briefly a member of the CoBrA group, but left in 1951. Thereafter, his work picked up on all sorts of international themes and movements, from Japanese calligraphy through to Nordic Expressionism, with a good dose of Surrealism (and Ensor) thrown in.

The Palais Royal – and Le Musée Belvue

Around the corner from place Royale, the long and rather cumbersome **Palais Royal** (late July to mid-Sept Tues–Sun 10.30am–4.30pm; free) is something of a disappointment, consisting of a sombre nineteenth-century conversion of some late eighteenth-century town houses, begun by King William I, the Dutch royal who ruled both Belgium and the Netherlands from 1815 to 1830. The Belgian rebellion of 1830 polished off the joint kingdom, and since then the kings of independent Belgium haven’t spent much money on the palace. Indeed, although it remains their official residence, the royals have lived elsewhere (in Laeken, see p.124) for decades and it’s

hardly surprising, therefore, that the **palace interior** is formal and unwelcoming. It comprises little more than a predictable sequence of opulent rooms – all gilt trimmings, parquet floors, and endless royal portraits, though the tapestries designed by Goya and the magnificent chandeliers of the Throne Room make a visit (just about) worthwhile.

Much better, one of the mansions that makes up the Palais Royal, the **Hôtel Bellevue**, at the corner of place des Palais and rue Royale, has been turned into **Le Musée Belvue** (June–Sept Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–May Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; museum €3, Coudenberg Palace €4; combined ticket €5; www.belvue.be), which tracks through the brief history of independent Belgium. It's all very professionally done, with the corridor displays concentrating on the country's kings, the rooms on Belgium as a whole. Juicing up the displays is a wide range of original artefacts – photographs, documents, letters and so forth – but pride of place goes to the climbing jacket that King Albert II was wearing in 1934 when he fell to his death. One particularly interesting display focuses on those Flemish nationalists who collaborated with the Germans during the occupation of World War II, another is devoted to the protracted conflict between the Catholics and the anti-clericalists that convulsed the country for much of the nineteenth century. It's an appropriate location for the museum too, as it was in this building that the rebellious Belgians fired at the Dutch army, which was trying to reach the city centre across the Parc de Bruxelles (see below) in 1830.

Dating from the 1770s, the Hôtel Bellevue was built on top of the subterranean remains of the **Coudenberg Palace** (same times as museum), which stretched right across to what is now place Royale. A castle was first built here in the eleventh century and was enlarged on several subsequent occasions, but it was badly damaged by fire in 1731 and the site was cleared forty years later, leaving only the foundations. These have recently been cleared of debris, revealing a labyrinth of tunnels that can only be reached from the Hôtel Bellevue. Further restorative work is planned, but at the moment visitors can wander round these foundations, the most notable feature of which is the massive **Magna Aula**, or great hall, built by Philip the Good in the 1450s. A map of the layout of the palace is provided at reception, but you still need a vivid imagination to get much out of a visit. Finally, don't leave without visiting the excellent café (see p.131) – easily the best museum café in the city.

Parc de Bruxelles and place du Trône

Opposite the Palais Royal, the **Parc de Bruxelles** is the most central of the city's larger parks, along whose tree-shaded footpaths civil servants and office workers stroll at lunchtime, or race to catch the métro in the evenings. They might well wish the greenery was a bit more interesting. Laid out in the formal French style in 1780, the park undoubtedly suited the courtly – and courting – rituals of the times, but today the straight footpaths and long lines of trees merely seem tedious, though the classical statues dotted hither and thither do cheer things up a tad.

From the east side of the royal palace, rue Ducale leads to **place du Trône**. The whopping equestrian statue of Léopold II overlooking this square was the work of Thomas Vinçotte, whose skills were much used by the king – look out for Vinçotte's chariot on top of the Parc du Cinquantenaire's triumphal arch (see p.113). Place du Trône is a short walk from the EU Parliament building and the EU Quarter – see p.108.

Sablon and place Louise

Anchoring the southern end of the Upper Town, the **Sablon neighbourhood** holds **place du Petit Sablon**, a small rectangular area which was laid out as a public garden in 1890 after previous use as a horse market. The wrought-iron fence surrounding the garden is decorated with 48 statuettes representing the medieval guilds while inside, near the top of the slope, are ten slightly larger statues honouring some of the country's leading sixteenth-century figures. The ten are hardly household names in Belgium, never mind anywhere else, but one or two may ring a few bells – Mercator, the geographer and cartographer responsible for Mercator's projection of the earth's surface; and William the Silent (see p.445), to all intents and purposes the founder of the Netherlands. Here also, on top of the fountain, are the figures of the counts **Egmont and Hoorn**, beheaded on the Grand-Place for their opposition to the Habsburgs in 1568.

Count Egmont is further remembered by the **Palais d'Egmont** (no entry) at the back of the square. An elegant structure originally built in 1534 for Françoise of Luxembourg, mother of the executed count, it has been remodelled on several occasions.

Notre Dame du Sablon and the place du Grand Sablon

Opposite the foot of the park, the fifteenth-century church of **Notre Dame du Sablon** (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; free) began life as a chapel for the guild of archers in 1304. Its fortunes were, however, transformed when a statue of Mary, purportedly with healing powers, was brought here from Antwerp in 1348. The chapel soon became a centre of pilgrimage and a proper church – in high Gothic style – was built to accommodate its visitors. The church endured some inappropriate tinkering at the end of the nineteenth century, but it remains a handsome structure, the sandy hues of its exterior stonework enhanced by slender buttresses and delicate pinnacles. The **interior** no longer holds the statue of Mary – the Protestants chopped it up in 1565 – but two carvings of a boat and its passengers, one in the nave, the other above the inside of the rue de la Régence entrance, recall the story; the woman in the boat is one Béatrice Sodkens, the pious creature whose visions prompted her to procure the statue and bring it here. The occasion of its arrival in Brussels is still celebrated annually in July by the **Ommegang** procession (see below).

Behind the church, the **place du Grand Sablon** is one of Brussels' most charming squares, a sloping wedge of cobblestones flanked by well-proportioned town houses with the occasional Art Nouveau facade thrown in

The Ommegang

Brussels has several first-rate festivals, amongst which the **Ommegang** (literally “walkabout”; infoline ☎02 512 19 61, @www.ommegang.be) is one of the best known. A grand procession from Grand Sablon to the Grand-Place, it began in the fourteenth century as a religious event, celebrating the arrival by boat of a statue of the Virgin from Antwerp. The celebration became increasingly secular – an excuse for the nobility, guilds and civic bigwigs to parade their finery – and was witnessed by no less than the Emperor Charles V in 1549. Today's Ommegang, which finishes up with a dance on the Grand-Place, is so popular that it is now held twice a year, on the first Tuesday and Thursday of July. If you want a **ticket** for the finale, you'll need to reserve (at the tourist office) at least six months ahead.

for good measure. The square serves as the centre of one of the city's wealthiest districts, and is busiest at weekends, when it hosts an **antiques market**. Many of the shops hereabouts are devoted to antiques and art, and you could easily spend an hour or so browsing – or you can soak up the atmosphere in one of Sablon's many cafés.

Palais de Justice and place Louise

From halfway down place du Grand Sablon, rue Ernest Allard slopes up to **place Poelaert**, named after the architect who designed the immense **Palais de Justice**, a monstrous Greco-Roman wedding cake of a building, dwarfing the square and everything around it. It's possible to wander into the building's sepulchral main hall, but it's the size alone that impresses – not that it pleased the several thousand townsfolk who were forcibly evicted so that the place could be built. Poelaert became one of the most hated men in the capital and, when he went insane and died in 1879, it was widely believed a *steekes* (witch) from the Marolles had been sticking pins into an effigy of him. A stone's throw from the Palais de Justice, **place Louise**, part square, part traffic junction, heralds the start of the city's most exclusive shopping district. Here and in the immediate vicinity you'll find designer boutiques, jewellers and glossy shopping malls. The glitz spreads east along boulevard de Waterloo and south down the first part of avenue Louise, which is described on p.115.

Outside the petit ring

Brussels by no means ends with the **petit ring**. Léopold II pushed the city limits out beyond the course of the old walls, grabbing land from the surrounding *communes* to create the irregular boundaries that survive today. To the **east**, he sequestered a rough rectangle of land across which he ploughed two wide boulevards to link the city centre with **Le Cinquantenaire**, a self-glorifying and markedly grandiose monument erected to celebrate Belgium's golden jubilee, and now housing three sprawling museums. There's no disputing the grandness of Léopold's design, but in recent decades it has been overlaid with the uncompromising office blocks of the EU. These high-rises coalesce hereabouts to form the loosely defined **EU quarter**, not a particularly enjoyable area to explore, though the strikingly flashy European Parliament building is of passing interest, especially as it is just footsteps from the fascinating paintings of the Musée Antoine Wiertz. If, however, you've an insatiable appetite for the monuments of Léopold, then you should venture further east to **Tervuren**, where the king built the massive Musée Royal de L'Afrique Centrale on the edge of the woods of the Forêt de Soignes.

Léopold's hand doesn't lie so heavily on the *communes* to the **south** of the city centre. Here, the northern reaches of the cosmopolitan **St-Gilles** district are animated and enjoyable, while neighbouring **Ixelles** has become the trendiest part of Brussels, its old, well-worn streets much favoured by artists, intellectuals and students. These two *communes* also boast the best of the city's **Art Nouveau** architecture, including the sinuous virtuosity of the one-time house and studio of **Victor Horta**. Ixelles is cut into two by **avenue Louise**, a prosperous corridor that is actually part of the city – a territorial anomaly inherited from Léopold II – and one which merits a visit for the Musée Constantin Meunier.

West of the city centre, the partly industrialized suburb of **Anderlecht** is famous for its soccer team, but it's actually an ancient *commune* in possession of the fascinating Maison d'Erasmus, where the polyglot scholar and church reformer Desiderius Erasmus lodged in 1521, and the Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze, a museum in an operational brewery. Finally, **north** of the city centre, beyond the tough districts of St-Josse and Schaerbeek, are the suburbs of **Jette**, home to the René Magritte Museum; **Laeken**, city residence of the Belgian royal family; and **Heysel**, with its trademark Atomium, a distinctive leftover from the 1958 World's Fair.

East of the centre: the EU quarter and Le Cinquantenaire

To enjoy a visit to the **EU quarter** and **Le Cinquantenaire**, you'll need to follow a clear itinerary, one which avoids the parts where the streets groan with traffic and a vast building programme has turned whole blocks into dusty construction sites. Essentially, this means dodging – as far as possible – **rues de la Loi** and **Belliard**, the two wide boulevards that serve as the area's main thoroughfares. The best place to start is in the vicinity of **Parc Léopold**, where – just a few minutes' stroll from the petit ring – you'll find the intriguing **Musée Antoine Wiertz**, exhibiting the huge and eccentric paintings of the eponymous artist, as well as the **European Parliament building**. From here, it's a ten-minute walk to **Le Cinquantenaire**, one of Léopold's most excessive extravaganzas, a triumphal arch built to celebrate the golden jubilee of Belgian independence and containing three museums, the pick of which is the wide-ranging **Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire**.

Place du Trône to the European Union Parliament building

Part of the petit ring and on the métro line, **place du Trône** is distinguished by its double lion gates and life-size statue of Léopold II, perched high on his horse. From here, **rue du Luxembourg** heads east to bisect a small park whose northern half contains a modest memorial to **Julien Dillens**, a popular nineteenth-century sculptor responsible for the effigy of Everard 't Serclaes on the Grand-Place (see p.82).

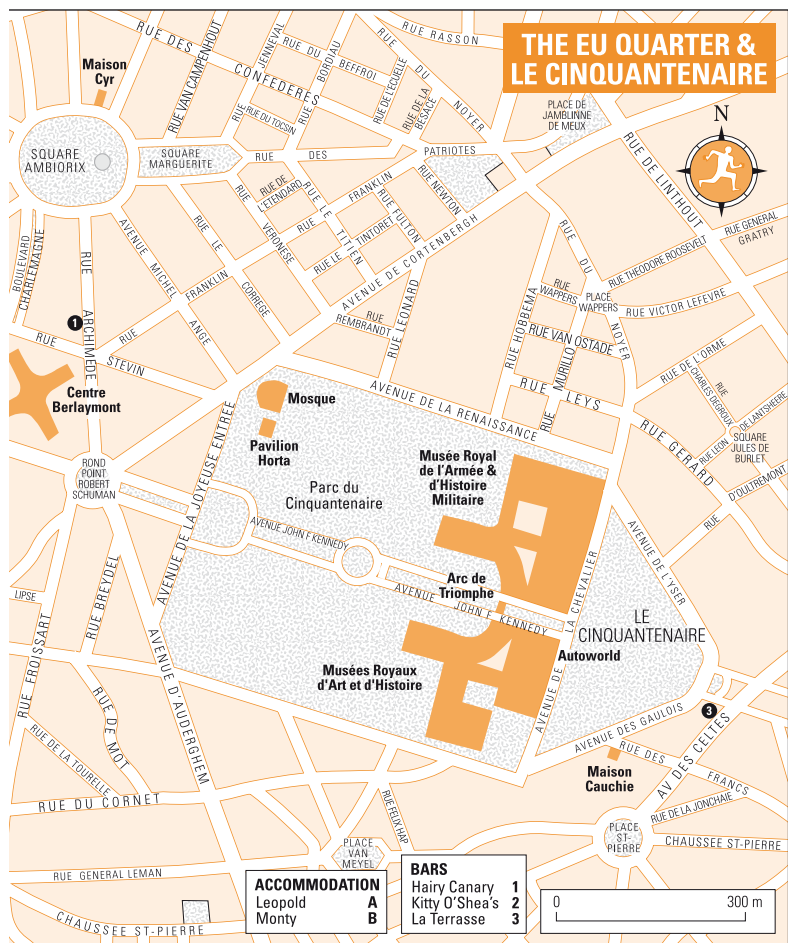
Just along the street, the **place du Luxembourg** has had varying fortunes, but now it's on the up, with bustling cafés moving in as the stone-trimmed townhouses lining three of its sides are refurbished. The far side of the square is, however, very different, with the old Gare du Quartier Léopold train station now dwarfed by a gargantuan EU office block, whose undulating lines sweep down towards rue Belliard. Fortunately, there's a breach in this edifice dead ahead from the square and just beyond it – through the passageway and down the steps – is the striking **European Union Parliament building**, another glass, stone and steel behemoth equipped with a curved glass roof that rises to a height of 70m. Completed in 1997, the building contains a large, semicircular assembly room as well as the offices of the President of the Parliament and their General Secretariat. The building has its admirers, but is known locally as the "*caprice des dieux*". Free, audio-guided visits to the building's debating chamber are permitted from Monday to Thursday at 10am and 3pm, and on Friday at 3pm; prospective visitors have to report, with photo ID, to the visitors' entrance about fifteen minutes beforehand; it's also possible to watch an EU plenary sitting – for further details see @www.europarl.eu.int.



△ The European Parliament

Musée Antoine Wiertz

Behind the European Parliament building at rue Vautier 62 – head right from the entrance, then swing left up the slope – the **Musée Antoine Wiertz** (Tues–Fri 10am–noon & 1–5pm; weekends, call ☎02 508 32 11 for times; free) is a small museum devoted to the works of one of the city's most



Premature Burial and (the most appalling of them all) his *Hunger, Folly, Crime* – in which a madwoman is pictured shortly after hacking off her child's leg and throwing it into the cooking pot. Mercifully, there is some more restrained stuff here too, including several portraits and more saucy girls in various states of undress. Wiertz eventually came to believe that he was a better painter than his artistic forebears, Rubens and Michelangelo; judge for yourself.

Muséum des Sciences Naturelles

Follow rue Vautier up the hill from the Wiertz museum and you soon come to the **Muséum des Sciences Naturelles**, at rue Vautier 29 (Tues–Fri 9.30am–4.45pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €2, but extra for temporary exhibitions; www.sciencesnaturelles.be), which holds the city's natural history collection. It's a large, sprawling museum in a building dating back to the late

The EU in Brussels

The **European Union** is operated by three main institutions, each of which does most of its work in Brussels.

The **European Parliament** sits in Strasbourg, but meets in Brussels for around twelve, three-day plenary sessions per year. It's the only EU institution to meet and debate in public, and has been directly elected since 1979. There are currently 785 MEPs, and they sit in political blocks rather than national delegations; members are very restricted on speaking time, and debates tend to be well-mannered consensual affairs, strictly controlled by the President, who – along with fourteen Vice-Presidents – is elected for two and a half years, by Parliament itself. The President (or a Vice-President) meets with the leaders of the political groups to plan future parliamentary business. Supporting and advising this political edifice is a complex network of committees, mostly based in Brussels.

The **European Council** consists of the heads of government of each of the member states and the President of the European Commission; they meet regularly in the much-publicized “European Summits”. Most Council meetings are not, however, attended by the heads of government themselves, but by a delegated minister. There are complex rules regarding decision-making: some subjects require only a simple majority, others need unanimous support. This political structure is underpinned by scores of Brussels-based committees and working parties, made up of both civil servants and political appointees.

The **European Commission** acts as the EU's executive arm and board of control, managing funds and monitoring all manner of agreements. The 27 Commissioners are political appointees, nominated by their home countries, but once in office they are accountable to the European Parliament. The president of the Commission is elected by the European Parliament for a two- and a half-year period of office. Over ten thousand civil servants work for the Commission, whose headquarters are in Brussels, in the Berlaymont and adjacent Charlemagne building on rue de la Loi.

nineteenth century, and is currently undergoing a much-needed restoration. When fully open, you can expect to find sections devoted to crystals and rocks, rodents and mammals, insects and crustaceans, and, perhaps most impressive of all, a man and dinosaur section with a fine set of **iguanodon** skeletons – two-legged herbivores discovered in the coal mines of Hainaut in the late nineteenth century. Other museum highlights include a first-rate collection of tropical shells and a whale gallery featuring eighteen well-preserved skeletons, including the enormous remains of a blue whale.

Parc Léopold

On rue Vautier, almost opposite the Musée Wiertz, a scruffy back entrance leads into the rear of **Parc Léopold**, a hilly, leafy enclave landscaped around a lake. The park is pleasant enough, but its open spaces were encroached upon years ago when the industrialist Ernest Solvay began constructing the educational and research facilities of a prototype science centre here. The end result is a string of big, old buildings that spreads along the park's western periphery. The most interesting – and one of the first you'll come to-is the newly refurbished **Bibliothèque Solvay** (no set opening times), a splendid barrel-vaulted structure with magnificent mahogany panelling overlaying a cast-iron frame. Down below the library and the other buildings, at the bottom of the slope, is the main entrance to Parc Léopold, where a set of stumpy stone gates bears the legend “Jardin royal de zoologie” – Léopold wanted the park to be a zoo, but for once his plans went awry.

Parc du Cinquantenaire

From Parc Léopold's front entrance, it takes a little less than ten minutes to walk east along **rue Belliard** to the **Parc du Cinquantenaire**, whose wide lawns slope up towards a gargantuan **triumphal arch** surmounted by a huge and bombastic bronze entitled *Brabant Raising the National Flag*. The arch, along with the two heavyweight stone buildings it connects, comprise **Le Cinquantenaire**, which was erected here by Léopold II for an exhibition to mark the golden jubilee of the Belgian state in 1880. By all accounts the exhibition of all things made in Belgium and its colonies was a great success, while the buildings themselves – a brief walk from the Métro Merode – now contain extensive collections of art and applied art, weapons and cars, displayed in three separate museums.

Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire

The **Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire**, on the south side of the south wing of the Cinquantenaire complex (Tues–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €5; www.kmkg-mrah.be), is made up of a maddening and badly labelled maze of pottery, carvings, furniture, tapestries and lacework from all over the world. There's almost too much to absorb in even a couple of visits, and there's no plan, which makes it even harder to select the bits that interest you most. There are enormous galleries of mostly run-of-the-mill Greek, Egyptian and Roman artefacts, an assortment of Far Eastern art and textiles, medieval and Renaissance carving and religious tackle, and a decent collection of glasswork from all eras. Perhaps the best thing to do in a large, disorganized museum like this is to wander freely and stop when something catches your eye.

To the right of the entrance hall, the **European decorative arts** sections have perhaps the most immediacy, featuring everything from Delft ceramics, altarpieces, porcelain and silverware through to tapestries, and Art Deco and Art Nouveau furnishings. It's all a little bewildering, however, with little to link one set of objects to another. The ground level also has glassware from Roman times to the nineteenth century alongside a Gothic-style cloister, next to which are some striking fifteenth- and sixteenth-century **altarpieces** from Brussels and Antwerp churches, notably the *Passion Altarpiece* (Level 1, Room 57), animated with a mass of finely detailed wooden reliefs. Carved in Brussels in the 1470s, it's quite different from the *Passion Altarpiece* in the next room, made in Antwerp some fifty years later and much more extravagant, sporting a veritable doll's house of figures. Finally, don't leave without poking your nose round the **Art Nouveau** sections, where the display cases were designed by Victor Horta for a firm of jewellers, and now accommodate the celebrated *Mysterious Sphinx* (Level 1, Room 50), a ceramic bust of archetypal Art Nouveau design, the work of Charles van der Stappen in 1897. **Upstairs** there's more glassware, including some nice twentieth-century pieces, all presided over by a giant equestrian statue of Léopold II.

Autoworld

Housed in a vast hangar-like building in the south wing of Le Cinquantenaire, **Autoworld** (April–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct–March daily 10am–5pm; €6; www.autoworld.be) is a chronological stroll through the short history of the automobile, with a huge display of vintage vehicles, beginning with early twentieth-century motorized cycles and Model Ts. Perhaps inevitably, European varieties predominate: there are lots of vehicles from Peugeot, Renault and Benz, and homegrown examples, too, including a Minerva from 1925 which

once belonged to the Belgian royals. American makes include early Cadillacs, a Lincoln from 1965 that was also owned by the Belgian king, and some great gangster-style Oldsmobiles; among the British brands, there's a mint-condition Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost from 1921, one of the first Austins, and, from the modern era, the short-lived De Lorean sports car. Upstairs is a collection of assorted vehicles that don't fit into the main exhibition. It's a bit of a mish-mash, but worth a brief look for some early Porsches and Volvos, classic 1960s Jags and even a tuk-tuk from Thailand.

Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire

In the north wing of Le Cinquantenaire, on the other side of the triumphal arch from the other two museums, the **Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire** (Tues–Sun 9am–noon & 1–4.45pm; free; ⓘ www.klm-mra.be) traces the history of the Belgian army from independence to the present day by means of weapons, uniforms and paintings. It's a great museum in its way, with large and well – if rather stuffily – displayed collections. There are also sections dealing with “Belgian” regiments in the Austrian and Napoleonic armies, and, more interestingly, the volunteers who formed the nucleus of the 1830 revolution. The hall devoted to World War I is excellent, with uniforms and kit from just about every nationality involved in the conflict, together with a fearsome array of field guns, tanks and a German Fokker replica. The courtyard outside has a squadron of tanks from the 1940s – British, American and German – while the largest hall is devoted to aviation. A second hall covers World War II, and depicts the build-up to the war, including the Belgian experience of fascism and Flemish collaboration along with some great blown-up photographs of the end of the conflict and liberation. Finally, a nice bonus to the museum is the fact that you can get out onto the **triumphal arch** and enjoy extensive views over the city from its terrace.

Tervuren's Musée Royal de L'Afrique Centrale

The ten-kilometre-long **avenue de Tervuren** leads east from the Parc du Cinquantenaire to the suburb of **Tervuren**, lined with embassies and mansions in its upper reaches and then delving through the wooded peripheries of the Forêt de Soignes. It's a pleasant journey and one that is best completed on **tram** #44 (1–2 hourly; 25min) from place (and Métro) Montgomery. Tervuren's main attraction is the **Musée Royal de L'Afrique Centrale** (Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €4), across the avenue a couple of minutes' walk from the tram terminus, and housed in a grandiose custom-built pile constructed on the orders of King Léopold II early in the twentieth century.

Personally presented with the vast **Congo River basin** by a conference of the European Powers in 1885, Léopold made the most of his colonial assets, becoming one of the world's richest men. His initial attempts to secure control of the area were abetted by the explorer – and ex-Confederate soldier – **Henry Stanley**, who went to the Congo on a five-year fact-finding mission in 1879, just a few years after he had famously found the missionary David Livingstone. Even by the standards of the colonial powers, Léopold's regime was too chaotic and too extraordinarily cruel to stomach, and in 1908, one year before the museum opened, the Belgian government took over the territory, installing a marginally more liberal state bureaucracy. The country gained independence as the Republic of Congo in 1960, and its subsequent history (as Zaire from the 1970s until quite recently) has been one of the most bloodstained in Africa.

Curiously enough, a British diplomat by the name of **Roger Casement** (1864–1916) played a leading role in exposing the barbarity of Léopold's regime, but he is much better remembered today as one of the Irish Republicans executed by the British in 1916.

The museum was Léopold's own idea, a blatantly colonialist and racist enterprise, which treated the Africans as a naive and primitive people and the Belgians as their paternalistic benefactors. However, the **collection** is undeniably rich and the curators have done their best to ameliorate this unpleasant subtext with an honest display on the evils of the colonial regime in Rooms 7 and 9. Elsewhere, pride of place goes to the superb collection of African masks, shields, musical instruments, totems and weapons exhibited in Rooms 2 and 4, and there's a magnificent 22-metre dugout canoe in Room 21. Room 8 is also of interest for its old – and thoroughly unreconstructed – tributes to those “noble” Belgians who died in the Congo and for the PR display (of 1934) claiming that Belgium's main concern in the Congo was the extirpation of the Arab-run slave trade.

The museum's **grounds** are also well worth a stroll, with formal gardens set around a series of geometric lakes, all flanked by wanderable woods.

South of the centre: St-Gilles, avenue Louise and Ixelles

Cobwebbed by tiny squares and narrow streets, home to a plethora of local bars and some of the capital's finest Art Nouveau houses, the neighbouring areas of St-Gilles and Ixelles, just south of the petit ring, make a great escape from the hustle and bustle of the city centre. This is Brussels without the razzmatazz, and tourists are few and far between, especially in **St-Gilles**, the smaller of the two *communes*, which is often regarded as little more than an example of inner-city decay. Frankly, this is true enough of its most westerly section, comprising the depressing immigrant quarters of Gare du Midi and the downtrodden streets of Porte de Hal, but St-Gilles gets more beautiful the further east it spreads, its run-down streets soon left behind for refined avenues interspersed with dignified squares.

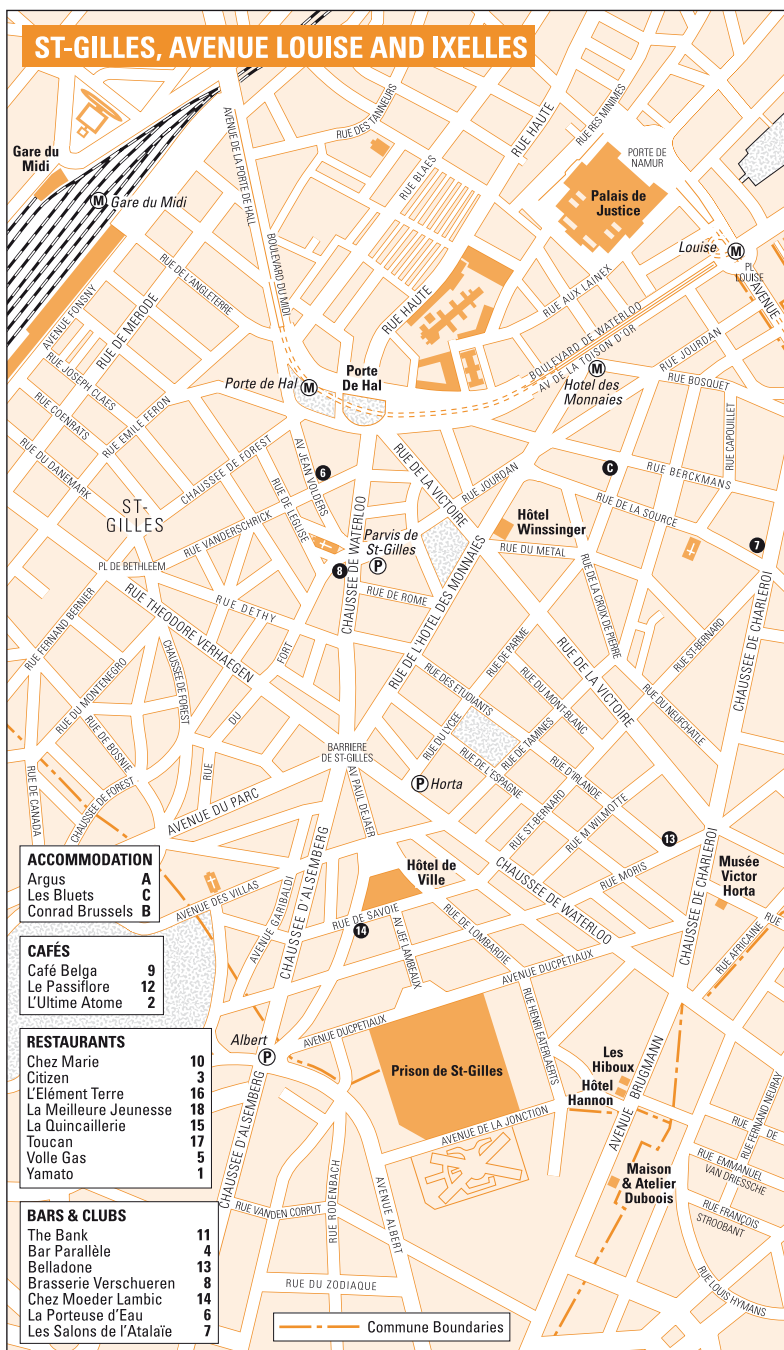
Ixelles, for its part, is one of the capital's most interesting and exciting outer areas, with a diverse street-life and café scene. Historically something of a cultural crossroads, Ixelles has long drawn artists, writers and intellectuals – Karl Marx, Auguste Rodin and Alexandre Dumas all lived here – and today it retains an arty, sometimes Bohemian feel. Ixelles is divided into two by **avenue Louise**, named after the eldest daughter of its creator, King Léopold II, and home to the haute bourgeoisie ever since it was laid out in the 1840s. The avenue's beginnings are lined by some of the city's most expensive hotels, shops and boutiques and further along is the enjoyable **Musée Constantin Meunier**, sited in the sculptor's old house.

More than anything else, however, it's the superb range of **Art Nouveau** buildings clustering the streets of St-Gilles and Ixelles which really grab the attention. Many of the finest examples are concentrated on and around the boundary between the two *communes* – in between chaussée de Charleroi and avenue Louise. Here you'll find Horta's own house, now the glorious **Musée Horta**, one of the few Art Nouveau buildings in the country fully open to the public, as well as examples of the work of Paul Hankar. Access to most of the city's Art Nouveau buildings is restricted, so you can either settle for the view from outside, or enrol on one of ARAU's specialist Art Nouveau tours (see p.73).

ST-GILLES, AVENUE LOUISE AND IXELLES

1

BRUSSELS





Musée Victor Horta

The best place to start a visit to St-Gilles is the delightful **Musée Victor Horta** (Tues–Sun 2–5.30pm; €7; www.hortamuseum.be), just off the chaussée de Charleroi at rue Américaine 25, and reachable by tram #91 or #92 from place Louise. The museum occupies the two houses Horta designed as his home and studio at the end of the nineteenth century, and was where he lived until 1919. From the outside the building is quite modest, a dark, narrow terraced structure with a fluid facade and almost casually knotted and twisted ironwork, but it is for his interiors that Horta is especially famous. Inside is a sunny, sensuous dwelling exhibiting all the architect's favourite flourishes – wrought iron, stained glass, ornate furniture and panelling made from several different types of timber. The main unifying feature is the **staircase**, a dainty spiralling affair

Horta's progress

The son of a shoemaker, **Victor Horta** (1861–1947) was born in Ghent, where he failed in his first career, being unceremoniously expelled from the city's music conservatory for indiscipline. He promptly moved to Paris to study architecture, returning to Belgium in 1880 to complete his internship in Brussels with Alphonse Balat, architect to King Léopold II. Balat was a traditionalist, partly responsible for the classical facades of the Palais Royal – among many other prestigious projects – and Horta looked elsewhere for inspiration. He found it in the work of William Morris, the leading figure of the English Arts and Crafts movement, whose designs were key to the development of **Art Nouveau**. Taking its name from the Maison de l'Art Nouveau, a Parisian shop which sold items of modern design, Art Nouveau rejected the imitative architectures which were popular at the time – Neoclassical and neo-Gothic – in favour of an innovative style characterized by sinuous, flowing lines. In England, Morris and his colleagues had focused on book illustrations and furnishings, but in Belgium Horta extrapolated the new style into architecture, experimenting with new building materials – steel and concrete – as well as traditional stone, glass and wood.

In 1893, Horta completed the curvaceous **Hôtel Tassel**, Brussels' first Art Nouveau building ("hôtel" meaning town house). Inevitably, there were howls of protest from the traditionalists, but no matter what his opponents said, Horta never lacked work again. The following years – roughly 1893 to 1905 – were Horta's most inventive and prolific. He designed over forty buildings, including the **Hôtel Solvay** (see opposite) and his own beautifully decorated house and studio, now the **Musée Victor Horta** (see above). The delight Horta took in his work is obvious, especially when employed on private houses, and his enthusiasm was all-encompassing – he almost always designed everything from the blueprints to the wallpaper and carpets. He never kept a straight line or sharp angle where he could deploy a curve, and his use of light was revolutionary, often filtering through from above, with skylights and as many windows as possible. Horta felt that the architect was as much an artist as the painter or sculptor, and so he insisted on complete stylistic freedom; curiously, he also believed that originality was born of frustration, so he deliberately created architectural difficulties, pushing himself to find harmonious solutions. It was part of a well-thought-out value system that allied him with both Les XX (see p.464) and the Left; as he wrote, "My friends and I were reds, without however having thought about Marx or his theories."

Completed in 1906, the **Grand Magasin Waucquez** (see p.89) department store was a transitional building signalling the end of Horta's Art Nouveau period. His later works were more Modernist constructions, whose understated lines were a far cry from the ornateness of his earlier work. In Brussels, the best example of his later work is the Palais des Beaux Arts (now renamed BOZAR) of 1928 (see p.96).

which runs through the centre of the house illuminated by a large skylight. Decorated with painted motifs and surrounded by mirrors, it remains one of Horta's most magnificent and ingenious creations, giving access to a sequence of wide, bright rooms. Also of interest is the modest but enjoyable selection of paintings, many of which were given to Horta by friends and colleagues, including works by Félicien Rops and Joseph Heymans.

The Art Nouveau buildings of western Ixelles and avenue Louise

From the Musée Victor Horta, it's a five-minute walk north to **rue Defacqz**, the site of several charming Art Nouveau houses. Three were designed by **Paul Hankar** (1859–1901), a classically trained architect and contemporary of Horta, who developed a real penchant for **sgraffiti** – akin to frescoes – and multicoloured brickwork. Hankar was regarded as one of the most distinguished exponents of Art Nouveau and his old home, at **no. 71**, is marked by its skeletal metalwork, handsome bay windows and four sgraffiti beneath the cornice – one each for morning, afternoon, evening and night. Hankar designed his home in the early 1890s, making it one of the city's earliest Art Nouveau buildings. **Number 50** is a Hankar creation too, built for the painter René Janssens in 1898 and noteworthy for its fanciful brickwork. Next door, at **no. 48**, the house Hankar constructed for the Italian painter Albert Ciamberlani in 1897 sports a fine, flowing facade, decorated with rapidly fading sgraffiti representing the Ages of Man.

There are more Art Nouveau treats in store on neighbouring **rue Faider**, where **no. 83** boasts a splendidly flamboyant facade with ironwork crawling over the windows and frescoes of languishing pre-Raphaelite women, all to a design by **Armand Van Waesberghe** (1879–1949). Directly opposite is rue Paul Émile Janson, at the bottom of which, at no. 6, is the celebrated **Hôtel Tassel** (no public access), the building that made **Horta's** reputation. The supple facade is appealing enough, with its clawed columns, stained glass and spiralling ironwork, but it was with the interior that Horta really made a splash, an uncompromising fantasy featuring a fanciful wrought-iron staircase and walls covered with linear decoration.

At the end of rue Paul Émile Janson you hit **avenue Louise**, where a right turn will take you – in a couple of hundred metres – to the **Hôtel Solvay** (no public access), at no. 224 – another Horta extravagance which, like the Musée Horta, contains most of the original furnishings and fittings. The 33-year-old Horta was given complete freedom and unlimited funds by the Solvay family (they made a fortune in soft drinks) to design this opulent town house, whose facade is graced by bow windows, delicate metalwork and contrasting types of stone.

Also on avenue Louise, five minutes further along at no. 346, is Horta's **Hôtel Max Hallet** (no public access), a comparatively plain structure of 1904 where the straight, slender facade is decorated with elegant doors and windows plus an elongated stone balcony with a wrought-iron balustrade. Just beyond, the modern **sculpture** stranded in the middle of the traffic island, named **Phénix 44**, looks like a pair of elephant tusks, but is in fact a representation by Olivier Strebelle of the “V” for Victory sign of World War II.

From the Max Hallet residence, it's a five- to ten-minute stroll south to the Musée Constantin Meunier.

Musée Constantin Meunier

The **Musée Constantin Meunier** (Tues–Fri 10am–noon & 1–5pm; weekends by advance request only on ☎02 648 44 49; free) is located just off

avenue Louise at rue de l'Abbaye 59 – about 500m beyond Victor Horta's Hôtel Max Hallet (see above). The museum is housed on the ground floor of the former home and studio of Brussels-born Constantin Meunier (1831–1905), who lived here from 1899 until his death at the age of 74 just six years later. Meunier began as a painter, but it's as a sculptor that he's best remembered, and the museum has a substantial collection of his dark, brooding bronzes. The biggest and most important pieces are in the old studio at the back, where a series of muscular men with purposeful faces stand around looking heroic – *The Reaper (Le Moissonneur)* and *The Sower (Le Semeur)* are typical. There are oil paintings in this room too, gritty industrial scenes like the coalfield of *Black Country Borinage* and the gloomy dockside of *The Port*, one of Meunier's most forceful works.

Meunier was angered by the dreadful living conditions of Belgium's working class, particularly (like Van Gogh before him) the harsh life of the coal miners of the Borinage. This anger fuelled his art, which asserted the dignity of the worker in a style that was to be copied by the Social Realists of his and later generations. According to historian Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Empire*, "Meunier invented the international stereotype of the sculptured proletarian".

To get to the museum by public transport from the city centre, take **tram** #93 or #94 from place Louise, rue de la Régence or rue Royale.

Abbaye de la Cambre

The postcard-pretty **Abbaye de la Cambre** (open access; free) nestles in a lovely little wooded dell just to the east of avenue Louise not far from the Meunier Museum – and most readily approached via rue de l'Aurore. Of medieval foundation, the abbey was suppressed by the French Revolutionary army at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but its eighteenth-century brick buildings survived pretty much untouched and, after many toings and froings, have ended up as government offices. An extensive complex, the main courtyard is especially attractive and it serves as the main entrance to the charming **abbey church** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 3–6pm; free), whose nave, with its barrel vaulting and rough stone walls, is an exercise in simplicity. The church is an amalgamation of styles, but Gothic predominates except in the furnishings of the nave, where beautifully carved Art Deco wooden panelling frames a set of religious paintings of the Stations of the Cross. The church also holds one marvellous **painting**, Albert Bouts' *The Mocking of Christ*, an early sixteenth-century work showing a mournful, blood-spattered Jesus. Around the abbey's buildings are walled and terraced gardens plus the old abbatial pond, altogether an oasis of peace away from the hubbub of avenue Louise. To **get to** the abbey, take tram #93 or #94 along avenue Louise.

Bois de la Cambre

Beyond the abbey, at the end of avenue Louise, lies the wooded parkland of the **Bois de la Cambre**. The park's upper reaches are crisscrossed by busy commuter roads, but things are much more agreeable around the lake further to the south. This is Brussels' most popular park, bustling with joggers, dog-walkers, families and lovers on the weekend, and is the northerly finger of the large **Forêt de Soignes**, whose once mighty forests are chopped up by a clutch of dual carriageways, and, more promisingly, scores of quiet footpaths.

Eastern Ixelles: place Fernand Cocq

Eastern Ixelles radiates out from the petit ring to the east of avenue Louise, its busy streets zeroing in on the assorted shops and stores of the **chaussée**

d'Ixelles. It's the general flavour of the area that appeals rather than any specific sight, but you might target **place Fernand Cocq**, a small, refreshingly leafy square named after a one-time Ixelles burgomaster and equipped with a good selection of bars. The square's centrepiece is the **Maison communale**, a sturdy Neoclassical building erected in 1833 for the opera singer Maria Malibran, née Garcia (1808–36), and her lover, the Belgian violinist Charles de Bériot. Maria's father, one Manuel Garcia, trained her and organized her tours, and she became one of the great stars of her day, but he also pushed her into a most unfortunate marriage in New York. Mr Malibran turned out to be a bankrupt and Maria pluckily left husband and father behind, returning to Europe to pick up her career. After her death, the house lay uninhabited until it was bought by the Ixelles *commune* in 1849; the gardens in which Maria once practised have been reduced to the small park which now edges the house.

Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles

The **Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles** (Tues–Fri 1–6.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €7), rue Jean van Volsem 71, is located about ten minutes' walk southeast of place Fernand Cocq – via rue du Collège. Established in an old slaughterhouse in 1892, the museum has recently been revamped and is well known for its temporary exhibitions. The **permanent collection** is mainly nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French and Belgian material, but there's a small sample of earlier paintings, most notably *Tobie and the Angel* by Rembrandt (1606–69). There's also a wonderful collection of haunting works by **Charles Herman**, one of a group of Belgian realists who struggled to get their work exhibited in the capital's salons: until the late 1870s the salons would contemplate only Romantic and Neoclassical works. Look out also for the large collection of posters featuring the work of **Toulouse Lautrec** (1864–1901) – thirty of his total output of thirty-two are owned by the museum.

The paintings are supplemented by a smattering of **sculptures**, the main event being **Rodin's** (1840–1917) *La Lorraine* and *J.B. Willems*. Rodin used to have a studio nearby at rue Sans Souci 111, in the heart of Ixelles, and this was where he designed his first major work, *The Age of Bronze*. When it was exhibited in 1878, there was outrage: Rodin's naturalistic treatment of the naked body broke with convention and created something of a scandal – he was even accused of casting his sculptures round live models.

To **get to** the museum by public transport, take **bus #71** linking Bruxelles-Centrale station with place Eugène Flagey via the chaussée d'Ixelles.

West of the centre: Anderlecht

It's small surprise that the gritty suburbs to the immediate west of the petit ring are little visited by tourists. For the most part, the area is distinctly short on charm, but **Anderlecht** does weigh in with the fascinating Maison d'Erasmus, where Erasmus holed up for a few months in 1521, as well as the Musée Gueuze, devoted to the production of the eponymous brew. Anderlecht is also, of course, home to one of Europe's premier football teams – Royal Sporting Club Anderlecht (see p.138).

Sts Pierre et Guidon

No one could say Anderlecht was beautiful, but it does have its attractive nooks and crannies, particularly in the vicinity of **Métro St-Guidon** on line 1B. Come out of the station, turn left and it's a few metres down the slope

to **place de la Vaillance**, a pleasant triangular plaza flanked by cafés and the whitestone tower and facade of the church of **Sts Pierre et Guidon** (Mon–Fri 2–5pm; free). The church's facade, which mostly dates from the fifteenth century, is unusually long and slender, its stonework graced by delicate flourishes and a fine set of gargoyles. Inside, the church has a surprisingly low and poorly lit nave, in a corner of which is a vaulted chapel dedicated to **St Guido**, otherwise known as St Guy. A local eleventh-century figure of peasant origins, Guido entered the priesthood but was sacked after he invested all of his church's money in an enterprise that went bust. He spent the next seven years as a pilgrim, a sackcloth-and-ashes extravaganza that ultimately earned him a sainthood – as the patron saint of peasants and horses. The chapel contains a breezy *Miracle of St Guido* by Gaspard de Crayer, a local, seventeenth-century artist who made a tidy income from religious paintings in the style of Rubens.

Maison d'Erasme

From Sts Pierre et Guidon, it's just a couple of minutes' walk to the **Maison d'Erasme** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €1.25), at rue du Chapitre 31 – walk east along the front of the church onto rue d'Aumale and it's on the right behind the distinctive red-brick wall. Dating from 1468, the house was built to accommodate important visitors to the church. Easily the most celebrated of these was the reforming theologian **Desiderius Erasmus** (1466–1536), who lodged here for five months in 1521. The house contains none of Erasmus's actual belongings, but features a host of contemporaneous artefacts, all squeezed into half a dozen, clearly signed rooms. The Cabinet de Travail (study) holds original portraits of Erasmus by Holbein, Dürer and others, as well as a mould of his skull, but the best paintings are concentrated in the Salle Renaissance, which boasts a charmingly inquisitive *Adoration of the Magi* by Hieronymus Bosch, a gentle *Nativity* from Gerard David, and a hallucinatory *Temptation of St Anthony* by Pieter Huys. The Salle Blanche (white room) contains a good sample of first editions of Erasmus's work, alongside an intriguing cabinet of altered and amended texts: some show scrawled comments made by irate readers, others are the work of the Inquisition and assorted clerical censors.

Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze

The **Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze**, at rue Gheude 56 (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm; €4; @www.cantillon.be), is ten minutes' walk north of the Gare du Midi métro station, via avenue Paul Henri Spaak and rue Limnander; to get here direct from the Maison d'Erasme, take tram #56 from the St-Guidon métro station to the Gare du Midi. Founded in 1879, the museum is home to the **Cantillon Brewery**, the last surviving **Gueuze** brewery in Brussels. Gueuze beer is a speciality of the city, and it's still brewed here according to traditional methods: the beer, made only of wheat, malted barley, hops and water, is allowed to ferment naturally, reacting with the yeasts peculiar to the Brussels air, and is bottled for two years before it's ready to drink. The museum gives a fairly dry explanation of the brewing process, but the brewery itself is mustily evocative, with huge vats in which the ingredients are boiled before being placed in large oak barrels where the fermentation process begins. The results can be sampled at the **tasting session** at the end of your visit – and of course bought to take home and enjoy.

By any measure, **Desiderius Erasmus** (1466–1536) was a remarkable man. Born in Rotterdam, the illegitimate son of a priest, he was orphaned at the age of 13 and defrauded of his inheritance by his guardians, who forced him to become a monk. He hated monastic life and seized the first opportunity to leave, becoming a student at the University of Paris in 1491. Throughout the rest of his life Erasmus kept on the move, travelling between the Low Countries, England, Italy and Switzerland, and everywhere he went, his rigorous scholarship, sharp humour and strong moral sense made a tremendous impact. He attacked the abuses and corruptions of the Church, publishing scores of polemical and satirical essays which were read all over Western Europe. He argued that most monks had “no other calling than stupidity, ignorance . . . and the hope of being fed”. These attacks reflected Erasmus’s determination to reform the Church from within, both by rationalizing its doctrine and rooting out hypocrisy, ignorance and superstition. He employed other methods too, producing translations of the New Testament to make the Scriptures more widely accessible, and co-ordinating the efforts of like-minded Christian humanists. The Church authorities periodically harassed Erasmus but generally he was tolerated, not least for his insistence on the importance of Christian unity. Luther was less indulgent, bitterly denouncing Erasmus for “making fun of the faults and miseries of the Church of Christ instead of bewailing them before God”. The quarrel between the two reflected a growing schism amongst the reformers that eventually led to the Reformation.

North of the centre: Jette, Laeken and Heysel

To the north of the city centre lies **Jette**, a well-heeled suburb that wouldn’t merit a second glance if it weren’t for the former home of René Magritte, now turned into the engaging **Musée René Magritte**, which pays detailed tribute to the artist, his family and friends. East of here is leafy **Laeken**, where the Belgian royal family hunker down, and next door again is **Heysel**, with its trademark Atomium, a hand-me-down from the 1958 World’s Fair.

Jette - Musée René Magritte

Jette’s **Musée René Magritte**, rue Essegheem 135 (Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; €7; www.magrittemuseum.be), contains a plethora of the surrealist’s paraphernalia, as well as a modest collection of his early paintings and sketches. Magritte lived with his wife Georgette on the ground floor of this modest house for 24 years, from 1930 to the mid-1950s, an odd location for what was effectively the headquarters of the **Surrealist** movement in Belgium, most of whose leading lights met here every Saturday to concoct their trademark books, magazines and images.

The **ground floor** of the museum has been faithfully restored to recreate the artist’s studio and living quarters, using mostly original ornaments and furniture, with the remainder carefully replicated from photographs. Hung behind a glass display near the indoor studio is the famous bowler hat which crops up in several of Magritte’s paintings. Many features of the house itself also appear in his works: the sash window, for instance, framed *The Human Condition*, while the glass doors to the sitting room and bedroom appeared in *The Invisible World*. Magritte built himself a **studio** – which he named Dongo – in the garden, and it was here he produced his bread-and-butter work, such as graphics and posters, though he was usually unhappy working on such

mundane projects, and his real passions were painted in the dining-room studio, where the only work of art by another artist he possessed at the time – a photo by Man Ray – is still displayed.

You have to take off your shoes to visit the house's **first and second floors**, which were separate apartments when the Magrittes lived here, but now are taken up by letters, photos, telegrams, lithographs, posters and sketches pertaining to the artist and his time here, all displayed in chronological order. On display are two marvellous posters announcing the World Film and Fine Arts festivals which took place in Brussels in 1947 and 1949, as well as Magritte's first painting, a naive landscape he produced as a twelve-year-old. Finally, there are a number of personal objects displayed in the **attic**, which he also rented, including the easel he used at the end of his life. Overall, it's a fascinating glimpse into the life of one of the most important artists of the twentieth century.

To get to the museum, take the **metro** (Line 1A) to Belgica and then **tram** #18.

Laeken

Beginning some 4km north of the Grand-Place, **Laeken** is the royal suburb of Brussels, home of the Belgian royal family, who occupy a large, out-of-bounds estate and have colonized the surrounding parkland with their monuments and memorials. From the city centre, Laeken is best approached on **tram** #52 (from the Gare du Nord among other locations). Get off at the Araucaria tram stop to see the sedate **Château Royal** (no entry), the principal home of the royals, set beside traffic-congested avenue du Parc Royal. Built in 1790, the palace's most famous occupant was Napoleon, who stayed here on a number of occasions and signed the declaration of war on Russia here in 1812. In front of the château are the **Serres Royales**, several enormous greenhouses built for Léopold II, covering almost four acres. The problem is that they're only open to the public from late April to early May (admission €2; @www.monarchie.be), when the queues can be daunting; for opening times, consult the tourist office (see p.70).

Opposite the front of the royal palace, a wide footpath leads up to the fanciful neo-Gothic monument erected in honour of Léopold I. It's the focal point of the pretty **Parc de Laeken**, whose lawns and wooded thickets extend northwest for a couple of kilometres to Heysel.

Heysel

Heysel, a 500-acre estate bequeathed to the city by Léopold II in 1909, is best described as a theme park without a theme. Its most famous attraction is the **Atomium** (daily 10am–6pm; €9; @www.atomium.be), a curious model of an iron molecule expanded 165 billion times, which was built for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. Poking its knobbly – and very distinctive – head high into the sky, the structure has become something of a symbol of the city and the interior has recently been revamped to showcase temporary, mostly interactive exhibitions on fashion, contemporary art and so forth.

The Atomium borders a large trade fair area – the **Parc des Expositions** – and the **Stade du Roi Baudouin**, formerly the infamous Heysel soccer stadium in which 39 – mainly Italian – football fans were crushed to death when a sector wall collapsed in 1985; rebranded, it's now the Belgian national stadium.

The **Bruparck** (@www.bruparck.com) leisure complex is also close by, its child-oriented attractions including **Océade** (@www.oceade.be), a water

funpark; a gigantic cinema complex called **Kinepolis** (☎02 474 26 00); and **Mini-Europe** (📧www.minieurope.com), where you can see scaled-down models of selected European buildings. Fortunately, the proximity of the Heysel metro station makes an early exit easy.

Eating and drinking

Brussels has an international reputation for the quality of its cuisine, and it's richly deserved. Even at the dowdiest snack bar, you'll almost always find that the food is well prepared and generously seasoned – and then there are the city's **restaurants**, many of which equal anywhere in Europe, although those in the much-vaunted restaurant area of rue des Bouchers get very mixed reviews. Traditional Bruxellois dishes feature on many restaurant menus, canny amalgamations of Walloon and Flemish ingredients and cooking styles – whether it be rabbit cooked in beer, steamed pigs' feet or *waterzooi* (see p.479 for more on Belgian specialties). The city is also among Europe's best for sampling a wide range of different cuisines – from ubiquitous Italian places and the Turkish restaurants of St-Josse, at the north end of rue Royale, through to Vietnamese, Japanese and vegetarian restaurants. You can also eat magnificent fish and seafood, especially in and around the fashionable district of Ste-Catherine.

For the most part, eating out is rarely inexpensive, but **prices** are almost universally justified by the quality. As a general rule, the less formal the restaurant, the less expensive the meal; indeed it's hard to distinguish between the less expensive restaurants and the city's **cafés and café-bars**, many of which provide some of the tastiest food in town.

Drinking in Brussels, as in the rest of the country, is a joy. The city boasts an enormous variety of **bars**: sumptuous Art Nouveau establishments, traditional bars with ceilings stained brown by a century's smoke, bars whose walls are plastered with sepia photographs and ancient beer ads, speciality beer bars with literally hundreds of different varieties of ale, and, of course, more modern hangouts. Many of the more distinctive bars are handily located within a few minutes' walk of the Grand-Place, but there are smashing places all over the city. In addition, many bars also serve food, often just spaghetti, sandwiches and *croque-monsieurs*, though many offer a much more ambitious spread.

Restaurants

Restaurant **opening times** are pretty standard – a couple of hours at lunchtime, usually noon to 2pm or 2.30pm and again in the evening from 7pm to around 10pm; precise hours are given with the reviews below. Advance **reservations** are recommended for many Brussels restaurants, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings. Since the beginning of 2007 all restaurants in Belgium are **no-smoking**.

The Grand-Place and around

The listings below are marked on the map on p.70.

Brasserie de la Roue d'Or rue des Chapeliers 26 ☎02 514 25 54. Just south of the Grand-Place, this eminently appealing old brasserie, with wood panelling, stained glass and brass fittings, serves

generous portions of Belgian regional specialties, such as *poulet à la Bruxelles*. Also recommended are the delicious lamb with mustard and, if you can face it, pig's trotter and snails. Main courses hover around €19. Daily noon–midnight, but closed for one month in the summer, usually July.
Katya's Kitchen rue Marché au Charbon 87 ☎0497 473 337. A short walk from the Grand-Place, in a

vibrant part of the city, gastronomes will relish the mixture of cuisines – Tuscany meets Asia meets Belgium. The menu changes regularly and there are always vegetarian options amongst the main dishes which range from €10–16. The owner has an impressive collection of vinyl and will treat you to some great jazz moments while you kick back. Wed–Sun 6–11pm.

Elsewhere in the Lower Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

La Belle Maraîchère place Ste-Catherine 11 ☎02 512 97 59. Smart bistro-style restaurant with superbly prepared Belgian cuisine, attracting an older clientele. Seafood, especially lobster, is the house speciality with main courses averaging €20–25. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm; closed most of July.



Bij den Boer quai aux Briques 60 ☎02 512 61 22. Unpretentious neighbourhood café-restaurant with tiled floors and old posters and photos on the wall. The menu features a wide range of delicious seafood with main courses averaging around €20–30, though the daily specials cost much less. Metres from place Ste-Catherine. Mon–Sat noon–3pm, 6–11pm.

Bonsoir Clara rue Antoine Dansaert 22 ☎02 502 09 90. One of the capital's trendiest restaurants, on arguably the hippest street in Brussels, a short

walk west of the Bourse. Moody, atmospheric lighting, 1970s geometrically mirrored walls and zinc-topped tables set the tone. Expect to find a menu full of Mediterranean, French and Belgian classics, all excellent, and make sure you reserve. Mains start at €20. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 7–11.30pm, Sat 7–11.30pm.

Les Brigittines aux Marchés de la Chapelle

place de la Chapelle 5 ☎02 512 68 91. Behind the church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle, this large and well-established restaurant boasts Art Nouveau furnishings and fittings and is popular with a mixed clientele, it's true that the place lacks intimacy, but the quality of the food more than compensates, with a choice selection of meat and seafood dishes prepared in the French style but without an over-reliance on creams for the sauces. Main courses €15–25. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 7–10.30pm, Sat 7–10.30pm; closes for two weeks in the summer.

La Cantina rue du Jardin des Olives 13–15 ☎02 513 42 76. All the warmth and exuberance of Brazil awaits in this colourful restaurant just west of the Grand-Place, off bd Ansapach. The menu is small but filled with exotic ingredients and naturally there are one or two cocktails to wash everything down. Buffet available at lunchtimes when you pay by weight, otherwise main courses around €14.

Chez Vincent rue des Dominicains 8–10 ☎02 511 26 07. The entrance to this lively restaurant is through the kitchen, which gives customers a good view of the action. Keep going for the restaurant beyond, which specializes in Belgo-French cuisine with meat and seafood dishes both prominent. The waiters in their long aprons will flambée at your table, which is always good fun. It's near the Grand-Place, a minute's walk from the depressingly touristy rue des Bouchers. Main dishes €12–25. Daily noon–3pm, 6.30–11pm.

Domaine de Lintillac rue de Flandre 25 ☎02 511 51 23. Delicious cuisine from the southwest of France at this characterful, easy-going restaurant that's perfect for family outings. The prices are ridiculously affordable for what might just be some of the best *foie d'oie* and *foie gras* in Brussels (€8–10). Near place Ste-Catherine. Mon 7.30–10.30pm, Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 7.30–10.30pm.

La Iberica rue de Flandre 8 ☎02 511 79 36. Spanish restaurant much favoured by Spanish expats at the place Ste-Catherine end of rue de Flandre. The decor verges on the tacky – red flock wallpaper and mock Tudor beams – but the paella is second to none. Tapas cost around €7, main courses €10–17. Daily except Wed 11.30am–2.30pm & 6.30–10pm.



△ The Bonsoir Clara restaurant

La Manufacture rue Notre Dame du Sommeil 12–20 ☎ 02 502 25 25. A good 10min walk from the Bourse down rue du Chartreux, this converted factory makes an impressive setting for an evening out. High ceilings and industrial architecture inside, and outside a green courtyard for those balmy nights. Food is fusion with variations on some Belgian staples and prices range from €9 for the daily special to €12–22 for a main dish. Especially good for groups. Mon–Fri noon–2pm, Mon–Sat 7–11pm.

La Marée rue de Flandre 99 ☎ 02 511 00 40. There's another *La Marée* on rue au Beurre, so don't get confused – this one is a pocket-sized bistro specializing in fish and mussels in the Ste-Catherine district. The decor is pretty basic, but the place still manages a cosy feel, and the food is creatively made and reasonably priced. The menu includes eight different types of mussels dishes from €12.



Orphyse Chaussette rue Charles Hanssens 5, Marolles ☎ 02 502 75 81. Chef and owner Philippe Renoux prides himself on simple dishes with excellent ingredients and, despite the heavy French influence, vegetarians are not neglected. The setting is candlelit and cosy, and the staff are willing to help you navigate your way around the extensive wine menu. Main dishes €12–25. Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm & 7–10pm.

La Papaye Verte rue Antoine Dansaert 53 ☎ 02 502 70 82. Tasty and inexpensive Thai and Vietnamese food, with a good range of vegetarian options, served in smart, authentically Southeast Asian surroundings in a handy location near the Bourse. Main courses from as little as €5. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6.30–11.30pm, Sun 6.30–11.30pm; closed for one month in summer.

Le Pré Salé rue de Flandre 16 ☎ 02 513 43 23. Friendly, old-fashioned, very Bruxellois neighbourhood restaurant, just off place Ste-Catherine, providing a nice alternative to the swankier restaurants nearby. Great mussels, fish dishes and Belgian specialties. Daily specials plus a fixed-price menu (from around €25). Wed–Sun noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

Resource rue du Midi 164 ☎ 02 514 32 23. A short walk west of the Grand-Place, this creative restaurant signs up to the slow food movement, and a four-course set menu, guaranteed to last a few hours, will set you back a very competitive €38. Portions are on the small side, very nouvelle, but the quality of ingredients is second to none. Lunch menu available for €15, otherwise mains from €20. Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm & 7–10pm.



Soul rue de la Samaritaine 20 ☎ 02 513 52 13. An evening at *Soul*, on the edge of the Marolles, is both a gastronomic delight and an

education. The underpinning philosophy is that we are what we eat – but there's nothing ascetic about the mainly organic menu, with delights such as sesame-encrusted salmon and quinoa with Brie, courgette and seaweed. There's a weekly "mood menu" – maybe aphrodisiac or low cholesterol – for €25. Open Wed–Sun 7–11pm.

Upper Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

Artipasta place de la Liberté 1 ☎ 02 217 07 37. Real Italian homemade pasta – much, much more than the usual suspects – served in this corner café-restaurant that, as the name suggests, doubles up as an art gallery. Great variety of antipasti on offer too. Both the menu and the art change regularly. Salads and pasta are between €11–13 and you can eat in or take away and enjoy on the square. Mon–Fri 11am–4pm, Fri 7–11pm.

Agastache & Tonka rue Royale 290 ☎ 02 217 58 02. Agastache is a rare but robust plant with a slight taste of aniseed; Tonka a sweet-smelling Venezuelan bean. Put them together and you get the highly original "happy cooking!" restaurant of Claude Pohlig. Tastes are subtle and unusual, combining fine ingredients with a creative flair, and served up in a brightly coloured, rather chic setting. Main courses and starters all around €20. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm, Thurs–Sat 7–10.30pm.

Aux Bons Enfants place du Grand Sablon 49 ☎ 02 512 40 95. A well-established, cosy old Italian place, housed in a seventeenth-century building on the attractive place du Grand Sablon. Expect to find rustic-style decor, classical music and a menu of simple but tasty Italian dishes – steaks, pasta, hearty soups, pizza – at very reasonable prices (€6–9 for pasta, €8 for pizza, meat dishes €11–14). Daily except Wed noon–3pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

St-Gilles and Ixelles

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.116–117.

Chez Marie rue Alphonse de Witte 40 ☎ 02 644 30 31. Just south of place Flagey, this well-known and long-established Ixelles haunt serves impressive, mostly French, cuisine in lavish but never snobbish surroundings. There's also an extensive wine list. You can get a lovely two-course lunch for a very reasonable €16.50, but in the evenings prices are considerably inflated (main dish €24–30). You'll need to reserve in advance. Tues–Fri noon–2pm & 7.30–10.30pm, Sat 7.30–10.30pm.

Citizen place St-Boniface 4, Ixelles ☎ 02 502 00 08. The handy one-, two- or three- chilli guide on the menu at this predominantly Thai and Vietnamese restaurant gives you a good idea of what to expect – mild to hot. Decor is black and white with a distracting big screen running a classic film throughout the evening – OK if your conversation isn't up to much. Main dishes €9–14. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm, Mon–Sat 7–11pm.

L'Élément Terre chaussée de Waterloo 465, St-Gilles ☎ 02 649 37 27. One of the few entirely vegetarian restaurants left in Brussels, serving imaginative food from a creative menu. Combines local vegetables with sauces and spices from around the world – enough to seduce the most determined carnivore. Great garden open as weather allows, and friendly staff. Tues–Fri noon–2.30pm, Tues–Sat 7–10.30pm

La Meilleure Jeunesse rue de l'Aurore 58 ☎ 02 640 23 94. Hidden away near the Abbaye de la Cambre (see p.120), this chic and polished restaurant is decorated in an idiosyncratic version of the Baroque. The food is a real exotic mix – African, Asian and European – though service can be tardy, perhaps a trick to lure you into drinking the fruity house cocktails. Main dishes (meat and fish only) between €16–26. Daily noon–3pm, 7pm–midnight.

La Quincaillerie rue du Page 45, Ixelles ☎ 02 533 98 33. Mouth-watering Belgian and French cuisine in this delightful restaurant, occupying an imaginatively converted old hardware shop with all sorts of splendid Art Nouveau flourishes. Especially good for fish and fowl. A three-course set meal at lunchtime costs as little as €15, but at night the à la carte is

pricey with main courses weighing in at €25. West of av Louise. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 7pm–midnight, Sat & Sun 7pm–midnight.

Toucan av Louis Lepoutre 1 ☎ 02 345 30 17. The name of this brasserie may come from the tropical bird, but the theme inside is more about clocks: there is a massive clockwork sculpture on the wall and a projected image of a clock behind the bar. The food is excellent with a varied menu divided into ocean and farm with good options for vegetarians, and there's an admirable wine list too. Main dishes range from €10–33, but save some space for the delicious desserts, including crème brûlée with acacia honey and saffron. At the south end of Ixelles – take bus #60 from, amongst other stops, Gare Centrale. Daily noon–2.30pm & 7–11pm.

Volle Gas place Fernand Cocq 21, Ixelles ☎ 02 502 89 17. This traditional, wood-panelled, bar-brasserie serves classic Belgian cuisine in a friendly, family atmosphere. The Brussels specialities on offer include the delicious *carbonnades de boeuf à la Gueuze* and *lapin à la krieg* – beef or rabbit cooked in beer, but there is also regular pasta and salads. Main dishes between €12–20. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight.

Yamato rue Francart 11, Ixelles ☎ 02 502 28 93. A tiny and busy Japanese restaurant with minimalist decor just round the corner from place St-Boniface. Authentic Japanese food at affordable prices, with mains for as little as €8. Vegetarians mustn't be fooled by the noodles with vegetables – there's a big bone simmering in the pot. Not the place for a leisurely lunch – it's eat and go Tokyo-style. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 7–10pm, but closed Thurs lunchtime.

Bars and cafés

Belgians make little – or no – distinction between their **bars** and **cafés** – both serve alcohol, many stay open till late (until 2am or even 3am) and most sell food. **Opening hours** are fairly elastic, but most bars, café-bars and cafés are open by 11am or noon and few are closed much before 1am.

The Grand-Place and around

The listings below are marked on the map on p.79.



À l'Image de Notre-Dame rue du Marché aux Herbes 6. A welcoming, quirky little bar, decorated like an old Dutch kitchen, and situated at the end of a long, narrow alley. Good range of speciality beers.



Au Bon Vieux Temps rue du Marché aux Herbes 12. Cosy place dating back to 1695, tucked down an alley just a minute's

walk from the Grand-Place. The building boasts tile-inlaid tables and a handsome seventeenth-century chimney piece; the stained-glass window depicting the Virgin Mary and St Michael was originally in the local parish church. Popular with British servicemen just after the end of World War II, the bar still has comforting old-fashioned signs advertising Mackenzie's port and Bass pale ale. Mon–Thurs 1pm–12.30am, Fri & Sat 1pm–2am
Au Soleil rue Charbon 86. A short walk west from the Grand-Place, this popular bar, formerly a men's clothing shop, quenches the



△ The Au Bon Vieux Temps bar

thirst of a young and arty Brussels clientele. Cheap bar snacks are on offer and there's a pavement terrace where you can while away the day over a coffee or something stronger. A laid-back atmosphere, but it's often difficult to get a seat come nightfall. Mon–Thurs & Thurs 10am–1am, Fri & Sat 10am–2am.

La Bécasse rue de Tabora 11. Just to the northwest of the Grand-Place – and metres from St-Nicolas. Old-fashioned bar with neo-baronial decor; has long wooden benches, ancient blue and white tiles on the walls and serves beer in earthenware jugs. The beer menu is excellent – this is one of the few places in the country you can drink

authentic lambic and Gueuze. Mon–Thurs 2pm–midnight, Fri–Sun 2pm–2am.



Le Cercle des Voyageurs rue des Grandes Carmes 18. This colonial-style lounge bar with deep leather chairs and atmospheric lighting is a perfect place to begin any journey. Browse through the brochures on the tables or pop next door to the travel bookshop (Wed–Sun 1–7pm). A brief walk southwest of the Grand-Place. Daily 11am–midnight.

Le Roy d'Espagne Grand-Place 1. Supremely touristy café-bar in a seventeenth-century guild-house with a collection of marionettes and inflated animal bladders suspended from the ceiling, and naff pikes in the boys' toilet. You get a fine view of the Grand-Place from the rooms upstairs, as well as from the pavement-terrace, and the drinks aren't too expensive. Daily 10am–midnight.

Théâtre de Toone Impasse Schuddevelde 6, off petite rue des Bouchers. Largely undiscovered bar belonging to the Toone puppet theatre, just north of the Grand-Place. Two small rooms with old posters on rough plaster walls, a reasonably priced beer list, a modest selection of snacks and a classical and jazz soundtrack make it one of the centre's more congenial watering-holes.

Elsewhere in the Lower Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

Arcaï rue d'Arenberg 1B ☎02 511 33 43. At the north end of the Galeries St-Hubert, this hard-to-beat café is a perfect spot for lunch, afternoon tea or a bite before the cinema. The menu offers lots of choices, but the salads, quiches and fruit tarts are particularly delicious and cost only a few euros each. Can get a little too crowded for comfort at lunchtimes. Mon–Fri 7am–11pm, Sat–Sun 10am–11pm.



Café Central rue Borgval 14 ☎0486 72 26 24, @www.lecafecentral.com. Cool bar just off place St-Géry, with the excellent D-Geranium (yes, named after the flower) as resident DJ. You have to battle at the bar for a drink but there's a great atmosphere and clientele. Regular film shows too – see website for details. Sun–Thurs 4pm–1am, Fri & Sat 4pm–4am.

Chaff place du Jeu de Balle 21, Marolles ☎02 502 58 48. There's no better place to take in the hustle and bustle of the city's biggest and best flea market than this amenable café-bar. There are some real bargains at lunchtime with the menu listed on the blackboard. Also open in the evening just for a drink Tues–Sat 6am–midnight, Sun & Mon 6am–7pm.

Le Cirio rue de la Bourse 18. On the north side of the Bourse is one of Brussels' oldest bars, originally opened in 1886 as a shop-cum-eatery by Francesco Cirio, a pioneer of canned fruit and vegetables. Sumptuously decorated in *fin-de-siècle* style, though now somewhat frayed round the edges. Once frequented, they say, by Jacques Brel. The speciality is “half and half”, a mix of Italian spumante and white wine.

Le Greenwich rue des Chartreux 7. A short walk west of the Bourse, this is the city's traditional chess café, with a lovely old wood-panelled, mirrored interior and, in the men's, a fabulous antique ceramic urinal.

Le Java rue St-Géry 31. Close to the attractive place St-Géry, this small triangular bar seems perpetually thronged with city slickers living it large on schnapps and cocktails. If you like Gaudi-inspired decor, groovy music, and a kicking atmosphere, you're home. Sun–Thurs 5.30pm–1am, Fri & Sat 5.30pm–4am.

Métropole place De Brouckère 31. Ritzy *fin-de-siècle* café, belonging to an equally opulent hotel. Astonishingly, many people prefer to sit outside, for a view of flashing ads and zipping traffic. If you've got cash to spare, indulge in a brunch of smoked salmon or caviar.

Monk rue Ste-Catherine 42. Just off place St-Catherine, this dark and deep bar, with its high ceilings and wooden panelling, attracts a young and largely Flemish-speaking crew. It's named after the jazz musician Thelonious Monk – hence the grand piano. Unusually for Brussels, the service is at the bar. Mon–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 4pm–1am.

À la Mort Subite rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères 7. Famous/notorious 1920s bar that loaned its name to a popular bottled beer. Occupies a long, narrow room with nicotine-stained walls, long tables and lots of mirrors. On a good night it's inhabited by a dissolute-arty clientele, but on others by large groups of young, college-aged tourists. Snacks served, or just order a plate of cheese cubes to accompany your beer. Just northeast of the Grand-Place opposite the far end of the Galeries St-Hubert. Mon–Fri 10am–1am, Sat 11am–1am, Sun 1pm–1am.

Het Warm Water rue des Renards 25, Marolles. At the top of this cobbled street filled with galleries and shops, *Warm Water* is a very typical Marolles café. One evening a week there is also a political debate when you're bound to hear a spot of Brusselsleir, the local lingo. Food is simple and it's one of the few Belgian originals that's great for veggies. Mon, Tues & Sun 8am–7pm, Thurs–Sat 8am–10pm.

Upper Town

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.84–85.

Belvue Café at Le Musée Belvue (see p.104), place des Palais 7. The best museum café in town, offering a creative modern menu with main courses averaging €14–16. The salads are especially good. In a pleasant, high-ceilinged room overlooking place Royal. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm.

L'Orangerie du Parc d'Egmont parc d'Egmont ☉ 02 513 99 48. Hidden away near the Palais de Justice, the parc d'Egmont features on few itineraries, but it's a pleasant slice of greenery and an enjoyable setting for the *Orangerie*, which makes the most of the location with a large terrace. Soups and quiches, as well as more substantial main dishes (€11–15) are available, but it's also ideal for tea and cakes on a sunny afternoon. Mon–Fri & Sun 10.30am–6pm; closed Sat.

Le Pain Quotidien rue des Sablon 11. One of an extremely successful chain of bakery-cafés, this agreeable place comes decked out with long wooden tables, and offers wholesome salads, various types of brown bread, soup, cakes, pastries and snacks, all at very reasonable prices. Also at rue Antoine Dansaert 22. Mon–Fri 7.30am–7pm, Sat & Sun 8am–7pm.

Le Perroquet rue Watteuu 31. Busy semi-circular café-bar occupying attractive Art Nouveau premises close to the place du Grand Sablon. Imaginative range of stuffed pitta and salads and other tasty snacks – though you'll find it difficult to get a seat Fri or Sat night. Excellent beer menu.

St-Gilles and Ixelles

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.116–117.

The Bank rue du Bailli 79, Ixelles. Champions league and international football on Saturday afternoon, live music in the evening, and rugby Sunday afternoon, all intermittently aided by full Irish breakfast (€10.50), bowls of Irish stew and a good few pints of Guinness – hell for some, heaven for others, but it's all here. Off av Louise. Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–1am, Fri & Sat noon–2am.

Bar Parallèle place Fernand Cocq 27, Ixelles. Next to the Maison Communale d'Ixelles, this simple café gets the balance of good-value food, relaxed atmosphere and cool music just right. Also has a nifty outdoor terrace to enjoy those sunny afternoons with a chilled beer. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight, Sun 5pm–midnight.

Belladone rue Moris 17A, Ixelles. East European bar whose menu sports all kinds of interesting bits of information – “Belladone” is, for instance, the

plant used by women to bring about success in love or business, or bad luck to an enemy. Pilsner Urquell on tap and available by the litre, flavoured vodkas, specialist teas, including Hot Attila (tea with schnapps) and many tasty sweet and savoury bites to eat. Off the chaussée de Charleroi. Mon–Fri 2pm–midnight, Sat 6pm–1am.

Brasserie Verschueren parvis de St-Gilles 11–13, St-Gilles. Art Deco neighbourhood bar with a laid-back atmosphere and football league results on the wall – essential in those days before television. You can buy your croissant in the bakery opposite and just come here for the coffee to dip it in. A good range of Belgian beers too. Not far from the petit ring, off the chaussée de Waterloo. Daily 8am–1am.

Café Belga place Flagey 18, Ixelles. This is a bar for any time of day: coffee and croissant on the terrace after visiting the market, buffet lunch or a bite to eat in the evening before a film or concert at the cultural centre next door, or boozing into the early hours with the mixed crowd who flock here from all over the city. Mon–Thurs & Sun 8am–2am, Fri & Sat 8am–3am.



Chez Moeder Lambic rue de Savoie 68. A small bar in upper St-Gilles, just behind the Hôtel de Ville. Has over a thousand beers available, including 500 Belgian varieties. Often very busy. Daily 4pm–3am.

Le Passiflore rue du Bailli 97, Ixelles. Overlooking the church of Sainte-Trinité, this trendy but relaxing café serves light lunches, including home-made salmon and spinach quiche, crêpes and a variety of salads, all for under €12. The *croque-monsieurs* are the finest in the capital. Mon–Fri 8am–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–7.30pm.

La Porteuse d'Eau av Jean Volders 48a, St-Gilles. Refurbished Art Nouveau café on the corner of rue Vanderschrick, near the Porte de Hal. The food isn't up to much, but the ornate interior is well worth the price of a beer. Daily 10am–1am.

L'Ultime Atome rue St-Boniface 14. A large selection of beers and wines, simple but tasty cuisine (kitchen till 12.30am), and late opening hours, make this funky café-bar a hit with the trendy Ixelles crowd weekdays and weekends alike. Its location, on the appealing place St-Boniface, also makes it a great place to sit outside with a newspaper in the summer. Sun–Thurs 8.30am–12.30am, Fri 8.30am–1.30am, Sat 9am–1.30am, Sun 10am–12.30am.

The EU Quarter

The listings below are marked on the map on pp.110–111.

Hairy Canary rue Archimède 12. Victorian pub in the heart of the EU district. Happy hour every day

from 5-7pm and on Sun mornings they offer the full, heart-stopping English/Irish breakfast for €12.50. Near Métro Schuman. Daily noon-1am.

Kitty O'Shea's bd Charlemagne 42. This large Irish bar, opposite the Centre Berlaymont, is the place to come for Irish food and draught Guinness. Although it gets a bit rowdy when there's a football or rugby international, it's one of the more palatable bars in the area. Mon-Sat noon-3am, Sun noon-3pm.

La Terrasse av Des Celtes 1. Hidden behind a holly and ivy hedge, this cosy bar of wood and red leather makes a nice retreat from the Cinquantenaire museums, five minutes' walk away. It also serves good, reasonably priced food (around €12 for a main dish) and a wide range of beers, including all the Trappist specials. Sun-Thurs 11am-midnight, Fri & Sat 11pm-1am.

Nightlife and entertainment

As far as **nightlife** goes, it's likely you'll be happy to while away the evenings in one of the city's bars or café-bars – there are plenty in which you can drink until sunrise. If that isn't enough, the city has a clutch of first-rate **clubs**, playing anything and everything from acid and techno beats to deep house, with the throbbing *Fuse* featuring a regular line-up of big-name DJs, such as Monika Kruse, Carl Cox and Dave Clarke. As a general rule, clubs **open** Thursday to Saturday from 11pm to 5/6am and entry **prices** seldom exceed €10; many of the smaller clubs have no cover charge at all, though you do have to tip the bouncer a nominal fee (€2 or so) on the way out.

Brussels is a reasonably good place to catch **live bands**, with a number of especially appealing smaller venues such as *Ancienne Belgique*. Along with Antwerp, the city is also a regular stop on the European tours of major artists, though the big venues, like *Forest Nationale*, are mostly on the city's outskirts. **Jazz** is well catered for too, with several bars playing host to local and international acts, as well as the internationally acclaimed Jazz Marathon held every May (📧 www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be).

The **classical musical scene** is excellent. The Orchestre National de Belgique (📧 www.nob.be) fully deserves its international reputation, and the city showcases a number of excellent classical music festivals. Pick of the bunch are the Ars Musica festival of contemporary music held in March (📧 www.arsmusica.be), and May's prestigious Concours Musical Reine Elisabeth (📧 www.concours-reine-elisabeth.be), a competition for piano, violin and voice which numbers among its prize-winners Vladimir Ashkenazy, David Oistrakh and Gidon Kremer. **Opera-lovers** should make a beeline for the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, which has enjoyed something of a renaissance of late, first under the direction of Bernard Foccroulle, but more recently with the inspired conductor Kazushi Ono. Neither is **dance** a poor relation – the city has been impressing visitors ever since Maurice Béjart brought his classical Twentieth Century Ballet here in 1959. Now the main dance performances are at the Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwberg and the Kaaaitheatre, but the innovative legacy of Béjart lives on with his old company (now called Rosas and led by Anne Theresa de Keersmaecker) regularly performing at Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie.

Recent years have seen a significant boost to the Brussels **theatre** scene with the renovation of both the Francophone Théâtre National and the Flemish Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwberg. The city now has more than thirty theatres staging a variety of productions ranging from Shakespeare to Stoppard. Most theatre is performed in French and Flemish, but several American, Irish and British theatre groups put on high-quality amateur productions. The city is also a stop-off point for many international dance and theatre groups – including the RSC and the Comédie Française.

About half the **films** shown in Brussels are in English with French and/or Flemish subtitles (coded “VO”, *version originale*). Most screens are devoted to the big US box-office hits, but there are several more adventurous cinemas showing an eclectic mix of foreign films. The city’s annual **film festivals** are highly recommended. They include the Brussels Festival of European Film (🌐 www.fffb.be) held in July and the bizarre, but wonderful, Brussels Festival of Fantasy Film, Science Fiction and Thrillers (🌐 www.biff.org) in March/early April. Cinemas usually change their programmes on Wednesday.

Two free, weekly magazines – *The Bulletin* (🌐 www.thebulletin.be) and *The Agenda* (🌐 www.agenda.be) – are the best sources for entertainment **listings**, and are widely available in bars and cafés. For **tickets** and information go to either the tourist office on the Grand-Place or look at the appropriate website. **Last-minute tickets** are available at reduced prices at Arsène50, Galerie de la Reine 13–15 (Tues–Sat 12.30–5.30pm; 🌐 www.arsene50.be).

Clubs

Le Bazaar rue des Capucins 63 ☎02 511 26 00, 🌐 www.bazaarresto.be. Try out the delicious international cuisine in the upstairs bar-restaurant before picking up your drinks and descending to the cellar-like club below for a mixture of funk, soul, rock and indie. Not far from rue Haute, down from the Palais de Justice. Tues–Thurs & Sun 7.30pm–midnight, Fri & Sat 7.30pm–4am. Free. See map, pp.84–85.

The Fuse rue Blaes 208, Marolles 🌐 www.fuse.be. Widely recognized as the finest techno club in Belgium, this pulsating dance club has played host to some of Europe’s best DJs, including The Orb, Daft Punk, Carl Cox, Stacey Pullen and Dave Angel. Three floors of techno, house, jungle and occasional hip-hop, as well as the usual staple of chill-out rooms and visuals. The acts are slightly oriented towards Belgian DJs, but big international names are still being pulled in. Entrance is €3 before midnight, €8 after. The price goes up if there’s a big name spinning the discs. Sat 11pm–7am. See map, pp.84–85.

Havana rue de l’Epée 4, Marolles 🌐 www.havana-brussels.com. A Latino club that’s very popular with a thirty-something expat crowd. Punters mostly start early with a bite to eat, then schmooze the night away on mojitos and margaritas, dancing till dawn to the hot Latin beats. Off – and about halfway down - rue Haute. Tues–Thurs 7pm–4am, Fri & Sat 7pm–7am. See map, pp.84–85.

Montecristo rue Henri Maus 25. Beside the Bourse, the *Montecristo* is well known as a salsa venue. Wednesday night is pure salsa night, whilst on the weekend Latin beats are mixed up with more mainstream stuff. Attracts a mixed crowd. Entrance up to €5. Wed 10.30pm–2am, Thurs–Sat 10.30pm–5am. See map, p.79.

You rue du Duquesnoy 18 🌐 www.leyou.be. A short walk southeast of the Grand-Place, *You* boasts an interior design by Miguel Cancio Martins, the man behind the *Buddha Bar* in Paris, and considers itself not only a club but a design concept – and the punters are expected to match. This two-level place offers comfy couches in the bar-lounge, visiting DJs playing funk and disco to electro and house (check out the website for programme details) and gay tea dances on Sun. Thurs–Sun 11pm–late. See map, p.79.

Live music bars



L’Archiduc rue Antoine Dansaert 6 ☎02 512 06 52. Small, tasteful bar with regular live jazz on the weekend, including a free concert every Sat afternoon (1–5pm).

Beursschouwburg rue Auguste Orts 22 🌐 www.beursschouwburg.be. Occupying a handsomely restored building from 1885, this is a fine venue that makes the most of its different spaces, from the cellar to the stairs, the theatre to the café. Features DJs of all genres, plus an eclectic live-music programme catering for a wide range of tastes. Thurs–Sat 7pm–late.

Magazin 4 rue du Magazin 4 ☎02 223 34 74. 🌐 www.magasin4.be. In an old warehouse off bd d’Anvers, this is a favourite venue for up-and-coming Belgian indie bands, as well as a smattering of punk, rap and hip hop. Only open when there’s a gig and entrance usually around €8. Métro Yser.

Sounds rue de la Tulipe 28, Ixelles ☎02 512 92 50. Off place Ferdinand Cocq. Atmospheric café which has showcased both local and internationally acclaimed jazz acts for over twenty years. Live music most nights, but the biggies usually appear Sat. Closed Sun.

Concert halls and large performance venues

AB (Ancienne Belgique) bd Anspach 110 ☎ 02 548 24 24, www.abconcerts.be. The capital's leading rock and indie venue; artistes perform either in the main auditorium or the smaller space on the first floor. Usually around four gigs a week. Closed July & Aug.

BOZAR rue Ravenstein 23 ☎ 02 507 82 00, www.bozar.be. The new name of the Palais des Beaux Arts, just behind Gare Centrale, and home to the Orchestre National de Belgique. Offers an innovative programme of events including theatre, world music and themed cultural nights.

Cirque Royal rue de l'Enseignement 81 ☎ 02 218 20 15, www.cirque-royal.org. Some big names in international rock, dance and classical music have appeared here, in a venue that was formerly an indoor circus.

Forest National av du Globe 36 ☎ 0900 00 991, www.forestnational.be. Brussels' main arena for big-name international concerts and holding around 11,000 people. Tram #18 from various stops in the city centre, including the Gare du Midi.

Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie place de la Monnaie ☎ 02 229 12 11, www.lamonnaie.be. Belgium's premier opera house, consistently earning itself glowing reviews and much lauded for its adventurous repertoire. It has a policy of nurturing promising singers rather than casting the more established stars, so it's a good place to spot up-and-coming talent. Book in advance as tickets are often difficult to come by.

Theatres

Kaai Theater place Saintelette 20 ☎ 02 201 59 59, www.kaaitheater.be. In a good-looking Art Deco building on the banks of the Charleroi canal to the west of place Rogier, this Flemish-language theatre offers a lively programme featuring local and visiting companies with occasional performances in English; plenty of dance and music too. Tickets cost around €12.50.

Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg quai aux Pierres de Taille 7 ☎ 02 210 11 00, www.kvs.be. This Flemish-language theatre has a good reputation for showcasing the works of up-and-coming young playwrights, as well as staging modern classics by the likes of Chekhov and Beckett. It's also an excellent place to catch some innovative dance.

Théâtre National bd Emile Jacqmain 111–115 ☎ 02 203 41 55, www.theatrenational.be. Opened in 2014, this plush venue was built to accommodate the national theatre. Performances, invariably in French, are highly polished productions of everything from the classics – Molière and so forth – to cabaret.

Théâtre Royal de Toone (Puppet Theatre)

Impasse de Schuddevelde 6, off petite rue des Bouchers ☎ 02 511 71 37 www.toone.be. A short walk from the Grand-Place. Excellent puppet plays in the Bruxellois dialect, *Brusseleir*, plus occasional English renditions. Tickets (at €10) are available at the box office half an hour before the performance, but advance booking is advised. Performances Tues–Sat at 8.30pm.

The Warehouse rue Waelham 73 ☎ 02 203 53 03, www.atc-brussels.com. In 1994 the American Theatre Company, the English Comedy Club and the Irish Theatre Group purchased a complex now known as The Warehouse. If you want English-language theatre, this is where you'll find it, but unfortunately it is a fair old trek north from the centre in the suburb of Schaerbeek. Tram #92 or #93.

Cinemas

 **Actors' Studio** petite rue des Bouchers 16 ☎ 02 512 16 96, www.actorsstudio.be. This small cinema is probably the best place in the centre to catch art-house or independent films. It's cheaper than its more commercial rivals and has the added advantage that you can buy a beer and take it in with you.

Arenberg Galleries Galerie de la Reine 26, in Galleries St-Hubert, close to the Grand-Place ☎ 02 512 80 63, www.arenberg.cinenews.be. Set in a handsome Art Deco building converted from a theatre, the Arenberg Galleries is best known for its "Ecran Total" a programme of classic and art-house films over the summer months. An adventurous variety of world films is also screened.

Flagey Studio 5 place Sainte-Croix, Ixelles ☎ 02 641 10 20, www.flagey.be. Part of the Art Deco cultural centre on place Flagey, this studio cinema showcases an impressive range of films, usually focusing on a particular genre or director. The whole building also plays host to the Brussels Festival of European Film, held annually in the first two weeks of July (www.fffb.be).

UGC De Brouckère place de Brouckère 38 ☎ 0900 10 440, www.ugc.be. A ten-screen cinema showing the usual Hollywood stuff. Watch out that you go to the right screen as they can show two versions of the same film, one in the original language, the other dubbed.

Vendôme chaussée de Wavre 18, Ixelles ☎ 02 502 37 00, www.vendome.cinenews.be. A trendy, five-screen cinema well known for its wide selection of arty films as well as more mainstream flicks. It offers a multiple ticket – six for €30 – which is very good value. Métro Porte de Namur.

Gay and lesbian scene

The **gay and lesbian scene** changes fast and the best port of call for anyone visiting Brussels is to check the listings of one of the city's organizations. The English-speaking gay group in Brussels has an informative website with events and listings and organizes a couple of parties a month, on Sunday afternoons (see www.geocities.com/eggbrussels). Alternatively, a number of useful addresses can be obtained from Tels Quels at rue Marché au Charbon 81 (☎02 512 45 87, www.telsquels.be), which also organizes events such as the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, held every January at the Botanique (www.fglb.org), and Gay Pride in May. The other event which is that bit different is the Sunday afternoon *Gay & friendly tea dance* at *You* (4–11pm; see p.133)

Gay bars and clubs

Le Belgica rue Marché au Charbon 32 (Lower Town) www.lebelgica.be. A respected fixture of the Brussels gay scene, Le Belgica is arguably the capital's most popular gay bar and pick-up joint. Admittedly it's a tad run-down, with formica tables and dilapidated chairs that have seen better days, but if you're out for a lively, friendly atmosphere, you could do a lot worse. Come at the weekend when the place is heaving – all are welcome, whether male, female, gay or straight – and be sure to slam back a few of the house speciality: lemon-vodka "Belgica" shots. Thurs–Sat 10pm–3am. See map, p.79.

Le Duquesnoy rue Duquesnoy 12 (Lower Town). Or simply 'Le Duq' to the regulars. Open every night and on Sunday afternoons from 3–6pm, when there is a themed party. Dress code is leather, rubber, latex, uniform or naked – no suits or ties. Mon–Thurs 9pm–3am, Fri & Sat 9pm–5am & Sun 3pm–3am. See map, p.79.

La Démence at *The Fuse*, rue Blaes 208, Marolles ☎02 538 99 31, www.lademence.com. The city's most popular gay club, held on two floors in

The Fuse (see p.133) and playing cutting edge techno. The crowd is a bit difficult to pigeonhole – expect to find a hybrid mix of muscle men, transsexuals, fashion victims and ravers. Sun 11pm–7am. See map, p.79.

Lesbian bars and clubs

Girly Mondays at *Les Salons de l'Atalaïde*, chaussée de Charleroi 89, St-Gilles www.moonday.org. Great setting in the first-floor bar of the *Salons de l'Atalaïde* for this regular lesbian night. There is also a terrace for a bit of air. DJ and girly performances throughout the evening. Mon 8pm–2am. See map, pp.116–117.

Soixante rue du Marché au Charbon 60 (Lower Town) ☎0477 704 156. Not an exclusively lesbian bar, but very lesbian-friendly. As well as an evening programme of DJs (Wed–Sat), who play the gamut from retro-house to electro, at 8am on Sat morning *Soixante* offers a party continuation for all those who get their second wind around that time. Sun eve is almost exclusively lesbian. Wed–Sun 5pm–6am. See map, p.79.

Shopping

Like every other EU capital city, Brussels is swimming with **shops**. The main central shopping street, home to most of the leading chains, is **rue Neuve**, which runs from place de la Monnaie to place Rogier. Towards the top end of rue Neuve, **City 2** is the ultimate sanitized shopping mall, with restaurants, department stores, clothes shops and a large supermarket. Much more distinctive are the city's covered shopping "streets", or **galeries**, kicking off with the **Galeries St-Hubert**, near the Grand-Place, which accommodates a smattering of conservative shops and stores. Close by – and in stark contrast – is the **Galerie Agora**, which peddles cheap leather jackets, incense, jewellery and ethnic goods. Behind the Bourse, **rue Antoine Dansaert** caters for the young and fashionable, housing the stores of upcoming designers as well as big Belgian names like Strelli and Raf Simons. In neighbouring **St-Géry**, rue des Riches Claires and rue du Marché au Charbon are good for streetwear shops and

vintage stores. In Ixelles, the **chaussée d'Ixelles** has most of the big stores and a lively feel in the African quarter in and around the **Galerie d'Ixelles**.

Generally speaking, shops and stores are **open** from 10am to 6pm or 7pm Monday through Saturday. On Fridays, most department stores stay open till 8pm, and some tourist-oriented shops open on Sundays too.

Antiques and art

L'Instant Présent rue Blaes 136, Marolles
 ☎ 02 513 28 91. Photographer Nicolas Springael opens his shop at weekends to sell his stunning black-and-white photos of Brussels, framed if you wish. A keen traveller, Springael also has selections from his trips to India and Africa. Fri & Sun 10.30am–4pm, Sat 10.30am–6pm.

Passage 125 Blaes rue Blaes 125, Marolles
 ☎ 02 503 10 27, @ www.passage125.be. Thirty antique dealers occupy the four floors of this labyrinthine shop, with retro, Art Deco, vintage all here somewhere. If you prefer fewer stairs and less dust, check out the website. Mon, Wed & Fri 10am–5pm, Tues, Thurs & Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 10am–5.30pm.

Sabine Wachters av de Stalingrad (Lower Town)
 ☎ 02 502 39 93. Modern and contemporary gallery specializing in young unknown artists, as well as big names such as Andy Warhol, Donald Judd and Daniel Spoerri. Tues–Sat 11am–7pm.

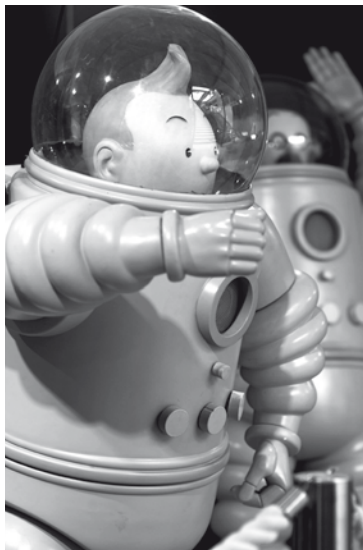
Books and comics

Brüsel bd Anspach 100 (Lower Town) ☎ 02 511 08 09. This well-known comic shop stocks more than eight thousand new issues and specializes in French underground editions – Association, Amok and Bill to name but three. You'll also find the complete works of the Belgian comic-book artist Schuiten, most popularly known for his controversial comic *Brüsel*, which depicts the architectural destruction of a city (guess which one) in the 1960s. Mega Tintin collection too. Prémétro Bourse. Mon–Sat 10am–6.30pm, Sun noon–6.30pm.

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée rue des Sables 20 (Lower Town) ☎ 02 219 19 80. Great museum (see p.89) and great bookstore selling a wide range of new comics. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm.

Espace Tintin rue de la Colline 13 (Lower Town)
 ☎ 02 514 51 52. Tintinarama, from comics to all sorts of branded goods – postcards, stationery, figurines, T-shirts and sweaters. Geared up for the tourist trade, it's located just off the Grand-Place. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

 **Nicola's Bookshop** rue de Stassart 106, Ixelles ☎ 02 513 94 00, @ www.nicolasbookshop.com. Located just off place Stephanie, this independent English-language bookshop offers an excellent selection of books from around the world and a relaxed and friendly




△ Tintin and Professor Calculus at the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée

atmosphere to boot. Occasional events organized too – check the website for details. Mon–Thurs & Sat 11am–7pm, Fri 11am–8pm.

Sterling Books rue du Fossé aux Loups 38 (Lower Town) ☎ 02 223 78 35. This large English-language bookshop has more than fifty thousand UK and US titles, including a large selection of magazines, but is much cheaper than standard bookstores – they sell books at the cover price, converted at the day's exchange rate, plus six percent VAT. There's a children's corner with a small play area. Mon–Sat 10am–7pm, Sun noon–6.30pm.

Chocolates

 **Frederic Blondeel Chocolatier** quai aux Briques 24 (Lower Town) ☎ 02 502 21 31. Just behind place Ste-Catherine, this is paradise for chocolate connoisseurs, with the chocolate made on site, beautifully displayed and reasonably priced. There is a small café here too, where in summer they serve Madagascan chocolate and Tahitian vanilla ice cream. Mon–Fri 10.30am–6.30pm, Sat 10.30am–9.30pm, Sun 1–7.30pm

Galler rue au Beurre 44 (Lower Town) ☎02 502 02 66. Chocolatier to the King – and therefore the holder of the Royal Warrant. Less well-known than many of its rivals, unless you're Belgian royalty of course, and not often seen outside Belgium, so a good choice for a special present. Excellent dark chocolate – 250g will set you back €11. Daily 10am–9.30pm

Mary's rue Royale 73 (Upper Town) ☎02 217 45 00. A very exclusive, pricey shop, with beautiful period decor and a fine line in handmade chocolates – you can easily taste the difference between theirs and those of the chains. Tram #92, #93 or #94. Tues–Fri & Sun 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–12.30pm & 2–7pm.

Pierre Marcolini place du Grand Sablon 1 (Upper Town) ☎02 514 12 06. Considered by many to be the best chocolatier in the world, Pierre Marcolini is a true master of his art – try his spice- and tea-filled chocolates to get the point. Classy service, beautiful packaging and a mouth-watering choice of chocolate cakes. Expect to pay extra for the quality (€13.50 for 250g). On a winter weekend you can have a glass of Marcolini's wonderful hot chocolate at the small bar in the shop. Wed–Fri & Sun 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–6pm.

Wittamer place du Grand Sablon 6 (Upper Town) ☎02 512 37 42. Brussels' most famous patisserie and chocolate shop, established in 1910 and still run by the Wittamer family, who sell gorgeous, if expensive, light pastries, cakes, mousses – and chocolates. They also serve speciality teas and coffees in their tearoom along the street at no. 12. Mon 8am–6pm, Tues–Sat 7am–7pm, Sun 7am–6pm.

Food and drink

Beer Mania chaussée de Wavre 174–176, Ixelles ☎02 512 17 88, @www.beermania.be. The name on the front is Bière Artisanale, but don't be confused, it's the right place. A drinker's heaven, it stocks more than 400 different types of beer, and you can even buy the correct glass to match your favourite tittle. To learn more about Belgian beer or to place an order for home delivery, check out the website or go along to one of the classes-cum-tasting sessions, some of which are given in English. Mon–Sat 11am–9pm.

Dandoy rue au Beurre 31 ☎02 511 03 26. They have been making biscuits at this famous shop just off the Grand-Place since 1829, so it's no surprise they have it down to a fine art. Their main speciality is known locally as "speculoos", a kind of hard gingerbread biscuit, which comes in every size and shape imaginable – the largest are the size of a small child and cost as much as €50. There's a tearoom at the rue Charles Buls 14 branch, just off the Grand-Place. Mon–Sun 10am–7pm.

La Maison du Miel rue du Midi 121 (Lower Town) ☎02 512 32 50. As the name suggests, this tiny family-run shop is all about honey, and has been trading from these premises since the late nineteenth century. Stacked high with jar upon jar of the sticky stuff and its multifarious by-products, from soap and candles to sweets and face creams, plus a number of curious honey pots and receptacles. Also a branch at the rue Marché aux Herbes 11, also in the Lower Town. Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm.

Le Palais des Thés place de la Vieille Halles aux Blés (Lower Town) ☎02 502 50 95. A shop dedicated to the good old cuppa, with a vast array of teas to smell, read about, taste and buy, and tea-related paraphernalia (pots, cups, strainers and so on) on sale too. Daily 11am–6.30pm.

Lace

Louise Verschuieren rue Watteu 16 (Upper Town) ☎02 511 04 44. The Verschuieren have been making lace for four generations and the family shop sticks to old lace-making traditions. No cheap imitations here – craftsmanship and authenticity are guaranteed. Daily 9am–6pm.

Manufacture Belge de Dentelle Galerie de la Reine 6–8 in the Galeries St-Hubert, near the Grand-Place. ☎02 511 44 77. The city's largest lace merchant, in business since 1810, sells a wide variety of modern and antique lace at fairly reasonable prices. The service is helpfully old-fashioned. Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Sun 10am–4pm.

Markets

Gare du Midi Brussels' largest, most colourful food market is held here every Sunday at a bazaar-like affair, with traders crammed under the railway bridge and spilling out into the surrounding streets. Among the vegetables and cheap clothes, numerous stands sell pitta, olives, North African rai tapes, spices, herbs and pulses. Sun 6am–1.30pm.

Place du Châtelain A food and general market takes place here weekly, when this busy Ixelles square is packed with stalls selling fresh vegetables, cheeses, cakes and pastries, as well as plants and flowers, and home-made wines. Wed 2–7pm.

Place du Grand Sablon The swankiest antiques and collectables market in town. Pricey antique shops in the surrounding streets too. Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9am–2pm.

Place du Jeu de Balle In the Marolles quarter. The sprawling flea market does business every morning, but it's at its biggest and best on the weekend, when an eccentric muddle of colonial spoils, quirky odds and ends and domestic and ecclesiastical bric-à-brac give an impression of a century's fads and fashions. Daily 7am–2pm.

Listings

1

BRUSSELS

Listings • Around Brussels: Waterloo

Airlines Aer Lingus ☎02 275 01 75; American Airlines ☎02 711 99 77; British Airways ☎02 717 32 17; British Midland ☎02 713 12 84; Continental ☎02 643 39 39; Delta ☎02 711 97 99; KLM ☎070 707 984; Ryanair ☎0902 88 009; SN Brussels ☎07 035 11 11; United ☎02 713 36 00; VLM ☎03 287 80 80.

Airport information For flight information at Brussels' international airport, call ☎0900 70 000 or go to www.brusselsairport.be.

Banks and exchange There are ATMs dotted right across the city centre, including one at Grand-Place 7. There are also bureaux de change with extended opening hours at Gare du Midi (daily 8am–8.30pm), Gare du Nord (Mon–Fri 8am–8pm, Sat 10am–5pm) and Gare Centrale (Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm).

Bus enquiries Within the city, STIB ☎0900 10 310, www.stib.be; for the Walloon communities south of the city, TEC ☎010 23 53 53, www.infotec.be; for the Flemish communities north of the city, De Lijn ☎070 220 200, www.delijn.be.

Car rental Avis, rue Américaine 145 ☎02 537 12 80, and at the airport ☎02 720 09 44; Budget, at the airport ☎02 753 21 70; Europcar, at the airport ☎02 721 05 92; Sixt, at the airport ☎070 225 800.

Dentists Standby municipal dentist ☎02 426 10 26.

Doctors Standby municipal doctor ☎02 479 18 18.

Embassies Australia, rue Guimard 6–8 ☎02 286 05 00; Canada, av de Tervuren 2 ☎02 741 06 11; Ireland, rue Wiertz 89 ☎02 235 66 76; New Zealand, square de Meeus 1 ☎02 512 10 40; UK, rue d'Arlon 85 ☎02 287 62 11; USA, bd du Régent 27 ☎02 508 21 11.

Emergencies Police ☎101; ambulance/fire brigade ☎100.

Football Brussels has several soccer teams, of which Royal Sporting Club (RSC) Anderlecht (☎02 529 40 67, www.rsc.a.be) are by far the best known and most consistent, regularly among the contenders for the Belgian league championship. Their stadium is the Stade Constant Vanden Stock, at av Théo Verbeeck 2,

within comfortable walking distance of Métro St-Guidon. The season runs from August to May, but tickets can be hard to get hold of.

Internet access Most hotels and hostels provide Internet access for their guests either free or at minimal charge. Internet cafés per se come and go with remarkable speed – the tourist office on the Grand-Place (see p.70) has the latest info.

Left luggage There are coin-operated lockers at all three main train stations.

Lost credit cards The major credit card companies operate a 24hr lost or stolen credit-card line, ☎070 344 344. There are also individual numbers: American Express ☎02 676 21 21; Mastercard ☎02 205 85 85; and Visa ☎02 205 85 85.

Lost property For the métro, buses and trams, the lost property office is at av de la Toison d'Or 15 (☎02 515 23 94); for items lost on the train, inquire in person at the terminus of the service you were using.

Mail The main central post office is in the Gare Centrale complex – the entrance is on bd de l'Imperatrice (Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.30pm & Sat 9am–noon).

Pharmacies One of the largest and most central is Multipharma, near the Grand-Place at rue du Marché aux Poulets 37 (☎02 511 35 90). On weekends and holidays, and outside normal working hours, details of duty pharmacies are usually posted on the front door of every pharmacy. Details of 24hr pharmacies are available from the tourist office, or on ☎0800 20 600.

Police Brussels Central Police Station, rue du Marché au Charbon 30 ☎02 279 79 79.

Taxis See p.73.

Train enquiries SNCB (Belgian Rail), Eurostar & Thalys ☎02 528 28 28.

Women's organization Amazone, rue du Méridien 10 (☎02 229 38 00, www.amazone.be) is a women's centre that houses the headquarters of many different women's groups from both the French- and Flemish-speaking communities, as well as a café/meeting point.

Around Brussels: Waterloo

Brussels lies at the centre of **Brabant**, one of Belgium's nine provinces. The Flemings claim the lion's share of the province with their **Vlaams Brabant** (Flemish Brabant) actually encircling the capital – a noticeably narrow corridor of Flemish-speaking communities runs round the southern edge of Brussels.

The highlights of **Vlaams Brabant** are covered in Chapter 3, but **Waterloo**, easily the most popular attraction in **Brabant Wallon** (French-speaking Brabant), is best seen on a day-trip from the capital.

Waterloo

WATERLOO, now a run-of-the-mill suburb about 18km south of the centre of Brussels, has a resonance far beyond its size. On June 18, 1815, at this small crossroads town on what was once the main route to Brussels from France, Wellington masterminded the battle that put an end to the imperial ambitions of Napoleon. The battle turned out to have far more significance than even its generals realized, for not only was this the last throw of the dice for the formidable army born of the French Revolution, but it also marked the end of France's prolonged attempts to dominate Europe militarily.

Nevertheless, the historic importance of Waterloo has not saved the **battlefield** from interference – a motorway cuts right across it – and if you do visit you'll need a lively imagination to picture what happened and where, unless, that is, you're around to see the large-scale re-enactment which takes place every five years in June; the next one is scheduled for 2010. Scattered round the **battlefield** are several monuments and memorials, the most satisfying of which is the **Butte de Lion**, a huge earth mound that's part viewpoint and part commemoration. The battlefield is 3km north of the centre of Waterloo, where the **Musée Wellington** is easily the pick of several Waterloo museums.

Arrival and information

There are several ways of getting to Waterloo and its scattering of sights, but the most effective is to make a circular loop by train, bus and train. From any of Brussels' three main stations (see p.69), **trains** take you direct to Waterloo (Mon–Fri 2 hourly, Sat & Sun 1 hourly; 25min). From Waterloo train station, it's an easy fifteen-minute **walk** – turn right outside the station building and then first left along rue de la Station – to Waterloo tourist office and the Musée Wellington (see p.142). After you've finished at the museum, you can take **bus #W** (every 30–40min) from across the street – the chaussée de Bruxelles – to the Butte de Lion (see p.142). The bus stops about 600m from the Butte, which you can't miss. After visiting the Butte, return to the same bus stop and catch bus #W on to **Braine-l'Alleud train station**, from where there's a fast and frequent service back to Brussels – again to all three main train stations (Mon–Fri 3 hourly, Sat & Sun 2 hourly; 15min).

Waterloo **tourist office**, the Maison du Tourisme, is handily located in the centre of town, opposite the Musée Wellington at chaussée de Bruxelles 218 (daily: April–Sept 9.30am–6.30pm; Oct–March 10.30am–5pm; ☎02 354 99 10, 🌐www.waterloo.be). It issues free town **maps** and has lots of booklets recounting the story of the battle, amongst which the most competent is *The Battlefield of Waterloo Step by Step*. The tourist office also sells a **combined ticket** (€12) for all the battle-related attractions, though if you're at all selective (and you'll probably want to be) this won't work out as a saving at all. The Brussels Card (see p.70) is valid for most of Waterloo's attractions too.

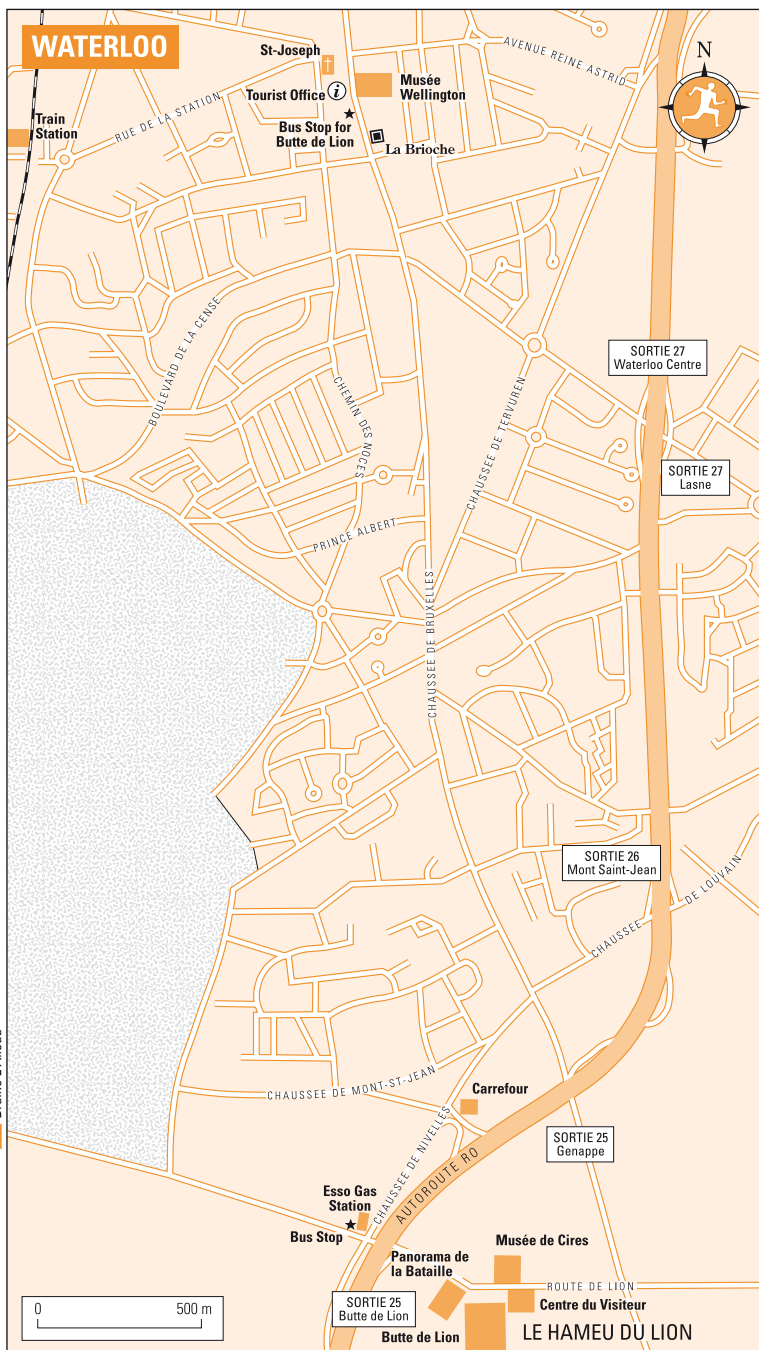
Accommodation and eating

There's no strong reason to stay the night in Waterloo, but the tourist office does have details of several local **hotels**. Amongst them, the comfortable *Hotel Le 1815* (☎02 387 01 60, 🌐www.le1815.com; 📍) has the advantage of being near the Butte de Lion at route du Lion 367; the rooms here are decorated in no-nonsense

WATERLOO

1

BRUSSELS



The Battle of Waterloo

1

BRUSSELS

Around Brussels: Waterloo

Napoleon escaped from imprisonment on the Italian island of Elba on February 26, 1815. He landed in Cannes three days later and moved swiftly north, entering Paris on March 20 just as his unpopular replacement – the slothful **King Louis XVIII** – high-tailed it to Ghent (see p.218). Thousands of Frenchmen rallied to Napoleon's colours and, with little delay, Napoleon marched northeast to fight the two armies that threatened his future. Both were in Belgium. One, an assortment of British, Dutch and German soldiers, was commanded by the **Duke of Wellington**, the other was a Prussian army led by **Marshal Blücher**.

At the start of the campaign, Napoleon's army was about 130,000 strong, larger than each of the opposing armies but not big enough to fight them both at the same time. Napoleon's strategy was, therefore, quite straightforward: he had to stop Wellington and Blücher from joining together – and to this end he crossed the Belgian frontier near Charleroi to launch a quick attack. On June 16, the French hit the Prussians hard, forcing them to retreat and giving Napoleon the opportunity he was looking for. Napoleon detached a force of 30,000 soldiers to harry the retreating Prussians, while he concentrated his main army against Wellington, hoping to deliver a knock-out blow. Meanwhile, Wellington had assembled his troops at Waterloo, on the main road to Brussels.

At **dawn on Sunday June 18**, the two armies faced each other. Wellington had some 68,000 men, about one third of whom were British, and Napoleon around five thousand more. The armies were deployed just 1500m apart with Wellington on the ridge north of – and uphill from – the enemy. It had rained heavily during the night, so Napoleon delayed his first attack to give the ground a chance to dry. At **11.30am**, the battle began when the French assaulted the fortified farm of Hougomont, which was crucial for the defence of Wellington's right. The assault failed and at approximately **1pm** there was more bad news for Napoleon when he heard that the Prussians had eluded their pursuers and were closing fast. To gain time he sent 14,000 troops off to impede their progress and at **2pm** he tried to regain the initiative by launching a large-scale infantry attack against Wellington's left. This second French attack also proved inconclusive and so at **4pm** Napoleon's cavalry charged Wellington's centre, where the British infantry formed into squares and just managed to keep the French at bay – a desperate engagement that cost hundreds of lives. By **5.30pm**, the Prussians had begun to reach the battlefield in numbers to the right of the French lines and, at **7.30pm**, with the odds getting longer and longer, Napoleon made a final bid to break Wellington's centre, sending in his Imperial Guard. These were the best soldiers Napoleon had, but, slowed down by the mud churned up by their own cavalry, the veterans proved easy targets for the British infantry, and they were beaten back with great loss of life. At **8.15pm**, Wellington, who knew victory was within his grasp, rode down the ranks to encourage his soldiers before ordering the large-scale counterattack that proved decisive.

The French were vanquished and Napoleon subsequently **abdicated**, ending his days in exile on St Helena. He died there in 1821. Popular memory, however, refused to vilify Napoleon as the aggressor – and not just in France, but right across Europe, where the Emperor's bust was a common feature of the nineteenth-century drawing room. In part, this was to do with Napoleon's obvious all-round brilliance, but more crucially, he soon became a symbol of opportunity: in him the emergent middle classes of western Europe saw a common man becoming greater than the crowned heads of Europe, an almost unique event at the time.

modern style. For **food**, *La Brioche* is a pleasant, modern café serving up a reasonably good line in sandwiches, pancakes and pastries; it's located just up and across the street from the tourist office at chaussée de Bruxelles 161.

The Musée Wellington

Across the street from the tourist office, at chaussée de Bruxelles 147, is the **Musée Wellington** (daily: April–Sept 9.30am–6.30pm; Oct–March 10.30am–5pm; €5; @ www.museewellington.com), which occupies the old inn where Wellington slept the nights before and after the battle. It's an enjoyable museum, its displays detailing the build-up to and the course of the battle with plans and models, alongside an engaging hotchpotch of personal effects. Room 4 holds the bed where Alexander Gordon, Wellington's principal aide-de-camp, was brought to die, and here also is the artificial leg of Lord Uxbridge, another British commander: "I say, I've lost my leg," Uxbridge is reported to have said during the battle, to which Wellington replied, "By God, sir, so you have!" After the battle, Uxbridge's leg was buried here in Waterloo, but it was returned to London when he died to join the rest of his body; as a consolation, his artificial leg was donated to the museum. Such insouciance was not uncommon among the British ruling class and neither were the bodies of the dead soldiers considered sacrosanct: tooth dealers roamed the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars pulling out teeth, which were then stuck on two pieces of board with a spring at the back – primitive dentures known in England as "Waterloos".

In Wellington's bedroom, Room 6, there are copies of the messages Wellington sent to his commanders during the course of the battle, curiously formal epistles laced with phrases like "Could you be so kind as to . . .". Finally, a new extension at the back of the museum reprises what has gone before, albeit on a slightly larger scale, with more models, plans and military paraphernalia plus a lucid outline of the historical background.

The church of Saint Joseph

Across the street from the museum, the **church of Saint Joseph** is a curious affair, its domed, circular **portico** of 1689 built as part of a larger chapel on the orders of a Habsburg governor in the hope that it would encourage God to grant King Charles II of Spain an heir (see p.82). It didn't, but the plea to God survives in the Latin inscription on the pediment. The portico holds a bust of Wellington and a monument to all those British soldiers who died at Waterloo and there's an assortment of British **memorial plaques** at the back of the chapel beyond. The plaques are rather a jumbled bunch, plonked here unceremoniously when the original chapel was demolished in the nineteenth century to make way for the substantial building of today. Most of them were paid for by voluntary contributions from the soldiers who survived – in the days when the British state rarely coughed up for any but the most aristocratic of its veterans.

The battlefield – the Hameau de Lion

From outside the church of Saint Joseph, pick up bus #W for the quick (4km) journey to the **battlefield** – a landscape of rolling farmland interrupted by a couple of main roads and more pleasingly punctuated by the odd copse and whitewashed farmstead. Today, the ridge where Wellington once marshalled his army holds a motley assortment of attractions collectively known as **Le Hameau du Lion** (Lion's Hamlet). The **Centre du Visiteur** (daily: April–Oct 9.30am–6.30pm; Nov–March 10am–5pm) sells a combined ticket to all the attractions for €8.70, or you can buy them individually as you go. The Centre itself (€4.50) features a dire audiovisual display on the battle and you're much better off heading straight to the adjacent hundred-metre-high **Butte de Lion** (same hours; €2.50). Built by local women with soil from the battlefield, the Butte marks the spot where Holland's Prince William of Orange – one of



▲ Monument atop the Butte de Lion

Wellington's commanders and later King William II of the Netherlands – was wounded. It was only a nick, so goodness knows how high it would have been if William had been seriously wounded, but even so the mound is a commanding monument, surmounted by a regal 28-tonne lion atop a stout plinth. From the viewing platform, there's a panoramic view over the battlefield, and a plan identifies which army was where.

A few metres from the base of the Butte is the **Panorama de la Bataille** (same hours; €5.20), where a circular naturalistic painting of the battle, on a canvas no less than 110m in circumference, is displayed in a purpose-built, rotunda-like gallery – to a thundering soundtrack of bugles, snorting horses and cannon fire. Although difficult (controlling perspective is always a real problem), panorama painting was very much in vogue when the Parisian artist Louis Dumoulin began the painting in 1912. Precious few panoramas have survived, and unfortunately much of this one is poorly executed and showing signs of decay; even worse, small sections of it appear to have been clumsily amended.

Back across the street is the final site, the **Musée de Cires** (April–Sept daily 9.30am–6.30pm; Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–March Sat & Sun 10am–4.30pm; €1.75), an uninspiring wax museum kitted out with models of the soldiers of the various Waterloo regiments and their commanders.

Le Caillou

Napoleon spent the eve of the battle at **Le Caillou** (daily: April–Oct 10am–6.30pm; Nov–March 1–5pm; €2), a two-storey brick farmhouse about 4km south of the Butte de Lion on the chaussée de Bruxelles. The museum, which includes Napoleon's army cot and death mask, is a memorial to the emperor and his army, but it's hardly riveting stuff and you'll need your own transport to get there, as there aren't any buses.

Travel details

1

BRUSSELS

Travel details

Trains

SNCB (Belgian railways) ☎ 02 235 66 76,

🌐 www.sncb.be. SNCB trains stop at all three of the capital's principal train stations – Bruxelles-Nord, Bruxelles-Centrale, and Bruxelles-Midi – unless otherwise indicated.

Brussels to: Amsterdam (1 hourly; 2hr 30min); Antwerp (3 hourly; 40min); Bruges (2 hourly; 1hr); Charleroi (2 hourly; 50min); Ghent (2 hourly; 40min); Liège (1 hourly; 1hr 20min); Leuven (every

30 min; 25min); Luxembourg (1 hourly; 3hr); Maastricht (1 hourly; 2hr); Mons (2 hourly; 55min); Namur (1 hourly; 1hr); Ostend (2 hourly; 1hr 15min); Rotterdam (1 hourly; 1hr 45min).

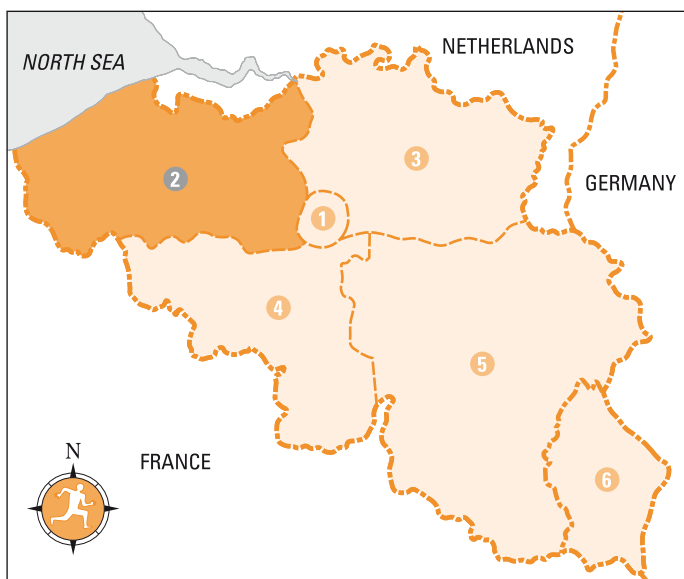
Thalys trains ☎ 02 528 28 28,

🌐 www.thalys.com

Brussels (from Bruxelles-Midi station only)

to: Aachen (every 2hr; 1hr 30min); Amsterdam (8 daily; 2hr 30min); Amsterdam Schiphol airport (8 daily; 2hr 15min); Cologne (every 2hr; 2hr 30min); Paris (every 2hr; 1hr 30min).

Flanders



CHAPTER 2

Highlights

- * **Ostend beach** The Belgian coast boasts a first-rate sandy beach for almost its entire length and Ostend has a fair slice of it.
See p.151
- * **Het Zwin** The polders and dykes of this nature reserve in Knokke-Heist make for perfect coastal cycling.
See p.160
- * **Veurne** A pretty little town with one of Belgium's most appealing main squares.
See p.163
- * **Ieper** Flanders witnessed some of the worst of the slaughter of World War I and Ieper was at the heart of it.
See p.169
- * **Flemish tapestries** Some of the most richly decorated examples can be seen in pleasantly old-fashioned Oudenaarde. **See p.181**
- * **Bruges** Its antique centre, latticed with canals, is one of the prettiest in Europe.
See p.186
- * **Ghent's Adoration of the Mystic Lamb** This wonderful van Eyck painting is simply unmissable. **See p.224**
- * **The Patershol district, Ghent** Jam-packed with atmospheric bars and classy restaurants; try at least one traditional Flemish dish here (*waterzooi* is a fine way to start). **See p.232**



△ Bruges Market

Flanders

The Flemish-speaking provinces of **West Vlaanderen** and **Oost Vlaanderen** (West Flanders and East Flanders) roll east from the North Sea coast, stretching out to the peripheries of Brussels and Antwerp. As early as the thirteenth century, Flanders was one of the most prosperous areas of Europe, with an advanced, integrated economy dependent on the cloth trade with England. The boom times lasted a couple of centuries, but by the sixteenth century the region was in decline as trade slipped north towards Holland, and England's cloth manufacturers began to undermine its economic base. The speed of the collapse was accelerated by **religious conflict**, for though the great Flemish towns were by inclination Protestant, their kings and queens were Catholic. Indeed, once the Habsburgs had seen off the Protestant challenge in Flanders – though not in the Netherlands – thousands of Flemish weavers, merchants and skilled artisans poured north to escape religious persecution. The ultimate economic price of these religious wars was the closure of the River Scheldt, the main waterway to the North Sea, at the insistence of the Dutch in 1648. Thereafter, Flanders sank into poverty and decay, a static, priest-ridden and traditional society where nearly every aspect of life was controlled by decree, and only three percent of the population could read or write. As Voltaire quipped:

In this sad place wherein I stay,
Ignorance, torpidity,
And boredom hold their lasting sway,
With unconcerned stupidity;
A land where old obedience sits,
Well filled with faith, devoid of wits.

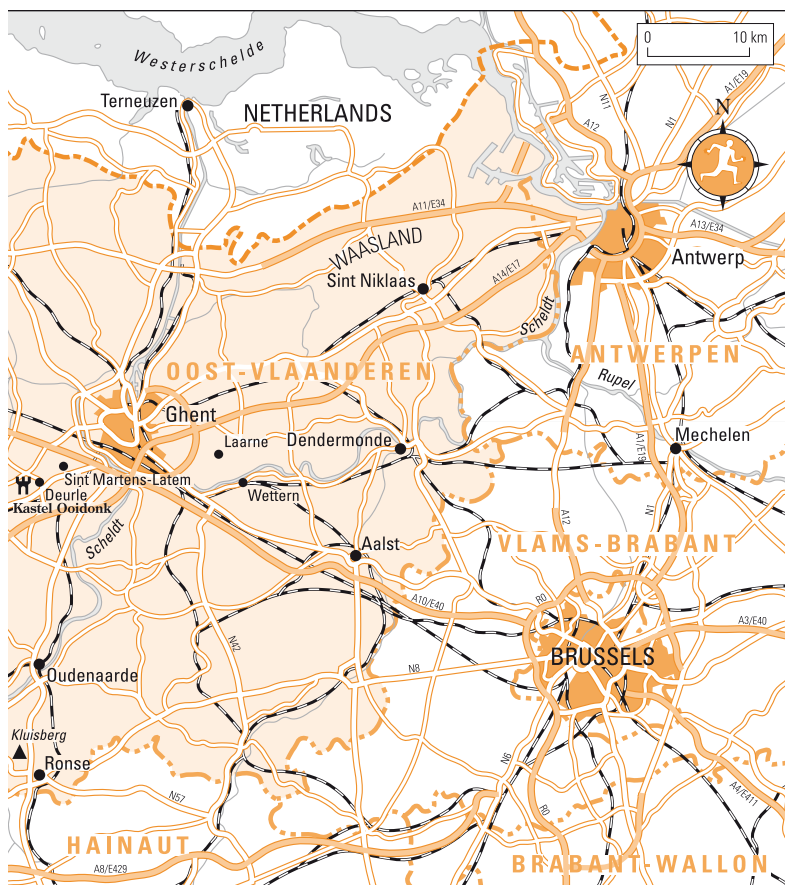
With precious little say in the matter, the Flemish peasantry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw their lands crossed and recrossed by the armies of the Great Powers, for it was here that the relative fortunes of dynasties and nations were decided. Only with Belgian independence did the situation begin to change: the towns started to industrialize, tariffs protected the cloth industry, Zeebrugge was built and Ostend was modernized, all in a flurry of activity that shook Flanders from its centuries-old torpor. This steady progress was severely interrupted by the German occupations of both World Wars, but Flanders has emerged prosperous, its citizens maintaining a distinctive cultural and linguistic identity, often in sharp opposition to their Walloon (French-speaking) neighbours.

With the exception of the range of low hills around Oudenaarde and the sea dunes along the coast, Flanders is unrelentingly flat, a somewhat dreary landscape



at its best in its quieter recesses, where poplar trees and whitewashed farmhouses still decorate sluggish canals. More remarkably, there are many reminders of Flanders' medieval greatness, beginning with the ancient and fascinating cloth cities of **Bruges** and **Ghent**, both of which hold marvellous collections of early Flemish art. Less familiar are a clutch of intriguing smaller towns, most memorably **Oudenaarde**, which has a delightful town hall and is famed for its tapestries; **Kortrijk**, with its classic small-town charms and fine old churches; and **Veurne**, whose main square is framed by a beguiling medley of fine old buildings. There is also, of course, the legacy of **World War I**. By 1915, the trenches extended from the North Sea coast, close to Nieuwpoort, as far as Switzerland, cutting across West Flanders via Diksmuide and Ieper, and many of the key engagements of the war were fought here. Every year hundreds of visitors head for **Ieper** (formerly Ypres) to see the numerous cemeteries and monuments around the town – sad reminders of what proved to be a desperately pointless conflict.

Not far from the battlefields, the Belgian coast is **beach** territory, an almost continuous stretch of golden sand that is filled by thousands of tourists every



summer. An excellent **tram** service connects all the major resorts, and although a lot of the development has been crass, cosy **De Haan** has kept much of its late nineteenth-century charm, and **Knokke** has all the pretensions of a sophisticated resort. The largest town on the coast is **Ostend**, a lively, working seaport and resort crammed with popular bars and restaurants.

Aside from the trams that shuttle up and down the coast, **trains** link all the major inland towns at least once an hour. Where the trains fizzle out, De Lijn **buses** (@www.delijn.be) take over.

The coast

Some 70km from tip to toe, much of the Belgian **coast** groans under an ugly covering of apartment blocks and bungalow settlements, a veritable carpet of concrete that largely – but no means entirely – obscures a landscape that lay

pretty much untouched until the nineteenth century. Before the developers, the beach backed onto an empty line of sand dunes on which nothing grew except rushes and stunted Lombardy poplars. Behind lay a narrow strip of undulating ground (“**Ter Streep**”), seldom more than a kilometre or so in width and covered with moss and bushes, separating the sand dunes from the farms of the Flemish plain. The dunes were always an inadequate protection against the sea, and the inhabitants hereabouts were building dykes as early as the tenth century, an arrangement formalized two hundred years later when Count Baldwin IX of Flanders appointed guardians charged with the duty of constructing defensive works. Despite these efforts, life on the coast remained precarious, and most people chose to live inland; indeed, when Belgium achieved independence in 1830, there were only two coastal settlements of any size – Ostend, a small fortified town with an antiquated harbour, and Nieuwpoort, in a state of what was thought to be terminal decay.

It was **Léopold I**, the first king of the Belgians, who began the transformation of the coast, assisted by the development of the country’s rail system. In 1834 he chose Ostend as a royal residence, had the town modernized and connected it by train to Brussels. Fashionable by royal approval and now easy to reach, the coast was soon dotted with resorts, and the number of seaside visitors rose meteorically. The next king – **Léopold II** – carried on the work of his father, building a light railway along the shore and completing the long chain of massive sea walls that still punctuate the coastline. Barring the extraordinary, the Belgian coast was safe at last.

Popular ever since as a **holiday destination**, the coast has long been thronged by dozens of hotels, though nowadays these rarely offer sea views as the prime sites are almost exclusively occupied by apartment blocks. Bear in mind also that, although there are scores of campsites, many are no more than a few caravans on a field – and surprisingly few are listed by the tourist authorities. Another distinctive feature is the long lines of tiny wooden huts that cut a dash across the more popular beaches. Owned by the local municipalities, each is rented out for the season and, if you’re planning to glue yourself to the beach, some are available by the week at reasonable rates – check with the local tourist office. If you’re after a quick burst of sun, sea and sand, **Ostend** is as pleasant a spot as anywhere, and it also boasts several interesting sights plus a handful of very recommendable restaurants and hotels. For a longer beach holiday, the pick of the resorts is **De Haan**, a charming little place with easy access to a slender slice of pristine coastline.

The coastal tram

Fast and efficient, the **Kusttram** (coastal tram; @www.dekusttram.be) travels the length of the Belgian coast from Knokke-Heist in the east to De Panne in the west, putting all the Belgian resorts within easy striking distance of each other. There are numerous tram stops and one tram station, in Ostend beside the train station. Services in both directions depart every ten or fifteen minutes in summer, every half-hour in winter. **Tickets** can be bought from most newsagents and supermarkets as well as from any De Lijn ticket office, including the one at Ostend tram station. They can also be bought from the driver, but in this case you pay a premium of around twenty percent. **Fares** are relatively inexpensive – Ostend to either Knokke-Heist or De Panne, for instance, costs €2 (€2.50 from the driver). You can also buy multiple journey tickets (Lijnkaart) at a discount on the regular price and tickets for unlimited tram travel, valid for either one day (dagpas; €5) or three days (driedagenpas; €10).

2

FLANDERS



long slice of sandy **beach**. Ostend is also the focal point of the region's public transport system, including the fast, frequent and efficient trams – the **Kusttram** – that run behind the beach to Knokke-Heist in the east and De Panne in the west (see box, p.150). Finally, Transeuropa Ferries operates a regular car ferry service from Ostend to Ramsgate and vice versa.

The old fishing village of Ostend was given a town charter in the thirteenth century, in recognition of its growing importance as a port for trade across the Channel. Flanked by an empty expanse of sand dune, it remained the only important harbour along this stretch of the coast until the construction of Zeebrugge six centuries later. Like so many other towns in the Spanish Netherlands, it was attacked and besieged time and again, winning the admiration of Protestant Europe in resisting the Spaniards during a desperate siege that lasted from 1601 to 1604. Later, convinced of the wholesome qualities of sea air and determined to impress other European rulers with their sophistication, Belgium's first kings, Léopold I and II, turned Ostend into a chichi resort, demolishing the town walls and dotting the outskirts with prestigious buildings and parks. Several of these have survived, but others were destroyed during World War II, when the town's docks made it a prime bombing target. Subsequently, Ostend resumed its role as a major cross-channel port until the completion of the Channel Tunnel in 1994 undermined its position. Since then, Ostend has had to reinvent itself, emphasizing its charms as a seaside resort and centre of culture. There's a long way to go, perhaps – and parts of the centre remain resolutely miserable – but there's no denying the town is on the up.

Curiously enough it was here in Ostend that **Marvin Gaye** hunkered down with friends in 1981 until, the following year, family and musical ties pulled him back to the US – and his untimely demise two years later.

Arrival, information and transport

With regular services from Ramsgate all year, Ostend's **ferry terminal** is next to the **train station**, a couple of minutes' walk from the centre of town – you couldn't wish for a more convenient set-up if you're heading straight through. The **train station's information office** (Mon–Sat 8am–7pm, Sun 9am–5pm) has comprehensive details of international and domestic train times, and there's a left luggage office (daily 6am–9.30pm) as well as coin-operated luggage lockers. The town's **tourist office** is a ten-minute walk away from the train station on Monacoplein (June–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–7pm & Sun 10am–7pm; Sept–May Mon–Sat 10am–6pm & Sun 10am–5pm; ☎059 70 11 99, 🌐www.toerisme-oostende.be).

For destinations along the coast, the **Kusttram** (coastal tram; 🌐www.dekusttram.be) leaves from the tram station in front of the train station. Ostend **bus station** backs on to the tram station; bus timetables are posted at most bus stops. For more details on bus journeys, call De Lijn's information line (☎070 220 200, 🌐www.delijn.be). **Car rental** is available from Europcar, at Kastanjelaan 3, off Torhoutsesteenweg (☎059 70 01 01); **bike rental** is available at the train station.

Accommodation

The tourist office will help you find accommodation in one of Ostend's many **hotels** and **guesthouses** at no extra charge. The best option is to head for a beachside hotel, but these are few and far between – most of the seashore is given over to apartment blocks – so you might plump instead for the area round **Léopoldpark** on the west side of the centre – it's a pleasant district with a relaxed and easy air. There are hotels to match all budgets as well as an HI **hostel**.

The image features two Belgian beer glasses. On the left is a tulip-shaped glass filled with a light-colored beer and a thick head of foam. On the right is a snifter-shaped glass filled with a dark beer and a thin head of foam. The background is blurred, suggesting a bar or restaurant setting.

Belgian Beer

No other country on earth produces more beers than Belgium – around seven hundred and counting. There are strong, dark brews from a handful of Trappist monasteries, light wheat beers perfect for a hot summer's day, fruit beers bottled and corked like champagne, and unusual concoctions that date back to medieval times. Every good Belgian bar has a beer menu, some with several hundred beers and the glasses specific to each one. To get you started, we've listed a selection of the best. Although it's unlikely that any establishment will have every one of those listed, all of them should have at least a couple.

Brugse Zot (Blond 6%, Brugse Zot Dubbel 7.5%)

Huisbrouwerij De Halve Mann, a small brewery located in the centre of Bruges, produces zippy, refreshing ales with a dry, crisp aftertaste. Their Blond is a light and tangy pale ale, whereas the Bruin – Brugse Zot Dubbel - is a classic brown ale with a full body.

Bush Beer (7.5% and 12%) A Walloon speciality. It's claimed that the original version is – at 12% – the strongest beer in Belgium, but it's actually more like a barley wine with a lovely golden colour and an earthy aroma. The 7.5% Bush is a tasty pale ale with a hint of coriander.

Chimay (red top 7%, blue top 9%)

Made by the Trappist monks of Forges-les-Chimay, in southern Belgium, Chimay beers are widely regarded as among the best in the world. Of the several brews they produce, these two are the most readily available, fruity and strong, deep in body, and somewhat spicy with a hint of nutmeg and thyme.

La Chouffe (8%) Produced in the Ardennes, this distinctive beer is instantly recognisable by the red-hooded gnome (*chouffe*) that adorns its label. It's a refreshing pale ale with a peachy aftertaste.

De Koninck (5%) Antwerp's leading brewery, De Koninck, is something of a Flemish institution. Its standard beer, De Koninck, is a smooth pale ale that's very



drinkable, with a sharp aftertaste; better on draught than in the bottle.

Kriek (Cantillon Kriek Lambic 5%, Belle Vue Kriek 5.2%, Mort Subite Kriek 4.3%) A type of beer rather than a particular brew, Kriek is made from a base lambic beer to which are added cherries or, in the case of the more commercial brands, cherry juice and perhaps even sugar. Other fruit beers are available too – such as Framboise – but Kriek is perhaps the happiest blend, and the better versions, including the three mentioned above, are not too sweet and taste wonderful. Kriek is decanted from a bottle with a cork, like a sparkling wine.

Kwak (8%) This Flemish beer, the main product of the family-run Bosteels brewery, is not all that special – it's an amber ale sweetened by a little sugar – but it's served in dramatic style, poured into a distinctive hourglass that's placed in a wooden stand.



▼ Belle Vue Kriek

Lambic beers (Cantillon Lambik 5%, Lindemans Lambik 4%) Representing one of the world's oldest styles of beer manufacture, lambic beers are tart because they are brewed with at least thirty percent raw wheat as well as the more usual malted barley. The key feature is, however, the use of wild yeast in their production, a

Gouden Carolus (8%) Named after – and allegedly the favourite tipple of – the Habsburg emperor Charles V, Gouden Carolus is a full-bodied dark brown ale with a sour and slightly fruity aftertaste. Brewed in the Flemish town of Mechelen.

Gueuze (Cantillon Gueuze Lambic 5%) A type of beer rather than an individual brew, gueuze is made by blending old and new lambic to fuel refermentation, with the end result being bottled. This process makes gueuze a little sweeter and fuller bodied than lambic. Traditional gueuze – like the brand mentioned – can, however, be hard to track down and you may have to settle for the sweeter, more commercial brands, notably Belle Vue Gueuze (5.2%), Timmermans Gueuze (5.5%) and the exemplary Lindemans Gueuze (5.2%).

Hoegaarden (5%) The role model for all Belgian wheat beers, Hoegaarden – named after a small town east of Leuven – is light and extremely refreshing, despite its cloudy appearance. The ideal drink for a hot summer's day, it's brewed from equal parts of wheat and malted barley. The history of wheat beers is curious: in the late 1950s, they were unloved and facing extinction, but within twenty years they had been adopted by a new generation of drinkers and are now massively popular.



process of spontaneous fermentation in which the yeasts of the atmosphere gravitate down into open wooden casks over a period of between two and three years. This balance of wild yeasts is specific to the Brussels area. Draught lambic is extremely rare, but the bottled varieties are more commonplace, even though most are modified in production. Cantillon Lambik is entirely authentic, an excellent drink with a lemony zip. Lindemans Lambik is similar and a tad more available.



▲ The brewing hall at Rochefort

Orval (6.2%) One of the world's most distinctive malt beers, Orval is made in the Ardennes at the Abbaye d'Orval, founded in the twelfth century by Benedictine monks from Calabria. The beer is a lovely amber colour, refreshingly bitter and makes a great aperitif.

Rochefort (Rochefort 6 7.5%, Rochefort 8 9.2%, Rochefort 10 11.3%) Produced at a Trappist monastery

in the Ardennes, Rochefort beers are typically dark and sweet and come in three main versions: Rochefort 6, Rochefort 8 and the extremely popular Rochefort 10, which has a deep reddish-brown colour and a delicious fruity palate.

Rodenbach (Rodenbach 5% and Rodenbach Grand Cru 6.5%)

Located in the Flemish town of Roeselare, the Rodenbach brewery produces a reddish-brown ale in several different formats with the best brews aged in oak containers. Their widely available Rodenbach (5%) is a tangy brown ale with a hint of sourness. The much fuller – and sourer – Rodenbach Grand Cru is far more difficult to get hold of, but is particularly delicious.

Westmalle (Westmalle Dubbel 7%, Tripel 9%) The Trappist monks of Westmalle, just north of Antwerp, claim their beers not only cure loss of appetite and insomnia, but reduce stress by half. Whatever the truth, the prescription certainly tastes good. Their most famous beer, the Westmalle Tripel, is deliciously creamy and aromatic, while the popular Westmalle Dubbel is dark and supremely malty.




Hotels

Andromeda Kursaal Westhelling 5 ☎ 059 80 66 11, www.andromedahotel.be. Smart and modern, four-star high-rise next door to the casino, and overlooking the town's best beach. Most rooms have balconies and sea views, plus there are fitness facilities and an indoor pool. 5

Du Parc Marie Joséplein 3 ☎ 059 70 16 80, www.hotelduparc.be. Located in a fetching Art Deco block, this medium-sized hotel offers comfortable rooms at reasonable prices. The ground-floor café, with its Tiffany glass trimmings, is a favourite with older locals (see p.156). Three stars. 5

 **Hofkamers** Ijzerstraat 5 ☎ 059 70 63 49, www.dehofkamers.be. Very agreeable, family-run hotel whose somewhat dour exterior belies its cosy public rooms, kitted out with all sorts of local by-gones, and the comfortable bedrooms beyond. The nicest room, on the top floor – Floor 6 – has its own mini-balcony with a view (admittedly a bit of a long shot) of the sea. 3

 **Prado** Léopold II-laan 22 ☎ 059 70 53 06, www.hotelprado.be. Very likeable three-star hotel with neatly furnished modern rooms. Ask for a room on the front overlooking Marie Joséplein – and a few floors up from the traffic. 3

Ter Kade Visserskaai 49 ☎ 059 50 09 15, www.terkade.com. A high-rise near the corner of Visserskaai and Albert I Promenade, this three-star hotel has forty-odd bright and cheerful modern rooms, most of which have views of the harbour. 5

 **Thermae Palace** Koningin Astridlaan 7 ☎ 059 80 66 44, www.thermaepalace.be. This four-star hotel enjoys the reputation of being Ostend's best. The building is certainly striking – an Art Deco extravagance with expansive public rooms and spacious bedrooms offering sea views – but the place can't but help seem a little sorry for itself – there's so much to keep in good working order. A 10min walk west of the centre. 6

Hostel

De Ploate hostel Langestraat 82 ☎ 059 80 52 97, www.vjh.be. Well-maintained HI hostel right in the centre of town with 124 beds, mostly in six- to nine-bedded dorms, though there are some family rooms

too. There's a decent café, serving inexpensive meals, Internet access, a bar and no curfew. The overnight fee of €17 per person includes breakfast. Reservations are strongly advised in summer. 1

The Town

There's precious little left of medieval Ostend, and today's **town centre**, which fans out from beside the train station, is a largely modern affair, whose narrow, straight streets are lined by clunky postwar apartment blocks and a scattering of older – and much more appealing – stone mansions. Roughly square in shape, the town centre is bounded by the beach to the north, harbours to the east, the marina to the south, and Leopold II-laan to the west; it takes about ten minutes to walk from one side to the other.

In front of the train station, the first specific sight is the **Amandine** (Mon 2–7pm, Tues–Sun 10am–7pm; €3; www.amandine-museum.be), an Ostend-based, deep-sea fishing boat of unremarkable modern design that was decommissioned in 1995 – and then parked here. The boat's interior has been turned into a museum with displays on fishing, nautical dioramas and so forth. Straight ahead from the boat rises the whopping **St Petrus en Pauluskerk**, a church that looks old but in fact dates from the early twentieth century. Behind it, the last remnant of its predecessor is a massive sixteenth-century brick **tower** with a canopied, rather morbid shrine of the Crucifixion at its base. Nearby, pedestrianized **Kapellestraat**, the principal shopping street, leads north into the main square, **Wapenplein**, a pleasant open space that zeroes in on an old-fashioned bandstand. The south side of the square is dominated by the **Feest-en Kultuurpaleis** (Festival and Culture Hall), a big bruiser of a building that dates from the 1950s and has recently been turned into a shopping centre.



△ Ostend

From the Wapenplein, it's a couple of minutes' walk north to the **James Ensorhuis**, at Vlaanderenstraat 27 (daily except Tues 10am–noon & 2–5pm; €2), which is of some specialist interest as the artist's home for the last thirty years of his life. On the ground floor there's a passable recreation of the old shop where his aunt and uncle sold shells and souvenirs, while up above the painter's living room and studio have been returned to something like their appearance at the time of his death, though the works on display aren't originals. From here, it's a brief stroll west to the **casino** (gaming daily from 3pm–5am), an expansive structure built in 1953 as a successor to the first casino of 1852, which is attached to the **Kursaal** exhibition and concert centre.

The seafront west of the casino

To the west of the casino lies Ostend's main attraction, its sandy **beach**, which extends as far as the eye can see. On summer days thousands drive into the town to soak up the sun, swim and amble along the seafront **promenade**, which runs along the top of the sea wall. Part sea defence and part royal ostentation, the promenade was once the main route from the town centre to the Wellington racecourse 2km to the west. It was – and remains – an intentionally grand walkway. It was designed to pander to Léopold II, whose imperial **statue**, with fawning Belgians and Congolese at its base, still stands in the middle of the long line of columns that now adjoin the **Thermae Palace Hotel**. Built in the 1930s, this is similarly regal, although it does spoil the lines of the original walkway.

Léopoldpark and PMMK

The **casino** sits at the top of Léopold II-laan, a dead-straight boulevard that soon leads to the little lakes, mini-bridges and artificial grottoes of the verdant **Léopoldpark**. Beyond the park, at Romestraat 11, is the **PMMK, Museum voor Moderne Kunst** (Modern Art Museum; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €5; 🌐 www.pmmk.be), where a wide selection of modern Belgian paintings, sculptures and ceramics are exhibited in rotation – everything from the Expressionists of the

The lost fine art museum

Until it was turned into a shopping centre, Ostend's Feest-en Kultuurpaleis housed the town's enjoyable **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art Museum). Unfortunately, no alternative premises have been found for the collection, which is currently in storage waiting developments. At some point, the city will presumably find somewhere to exhibit the paintings, which are well worth seeking out, so check the latest news with the tourist office.

Highlights of the collection include the harsh surrealism of **Paul Delvaux's** (1897–1994) *The Ijzer Time* and several piercing canvases by **Leon Spilliaert** (1881–1946), a native of Ostend whose works combine both Expressionist and Symbolist elements. Spilliaert was smitten by the land and seascapes of Ostend, using them in his work time and again – as in the collection's *Gust of Wind*, with its dark, forbidding colours and screaming woman, and the comparable *Fit of Giddiness*. There's also an excellent sample of the work of **James Ensor** (1860–1949), who was born in Ostend, the son of an English father and Flemish mother. Barely noticed until the 1920s, Ensor spent nearly all his 89 years working in his home town, and is nowadays considered a pioneer of Expressionism. His first paintings were rather sombre portraits and landscapes, but in the early 1880s he switched to brilliantly contrasting colours, most familiarly in his *Self-portrait with Flowered Hat*, a deliberate variation on Rubens' famous self-portraits. Less well known is *The Artist's Mother in Death*, a fine, penetrating example of his preoccupation with the grim and macabre. Look out also for portraits of Ensor by his contemporaries, particularly those by the talented **Henry de Groux**, and – as a curiosity – **Charles Louis Verboeckhoven's** *The Visit of Queen Victoria to Ostend in 1843*: the painting is pretty dire, but it celebrates one of the royal events that put the resort firmly on the international map.

St Martens-Latem group (see p.241) through to pop and conceptual art. Artists represented in the permanent collection include Delvaux, Spilliaert, Constant Permeke and the versatile **Jean Brusselmans** (1884–1953), who tried his hand at several different styles. The museum also puts on an imaginative range of temporary exhibitions (when the entry fee is usually increased).

The Mercator and HMS Vindictive

From PMMK, it's a brief stroll east to the **marina**, where the sailing ship **Mercator** (May–June & Sept daily 10am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; July & Aug daily 10am–5.30pm; Oct–April 10am–12.30pm & 2–4.30pm; €4), the old training vessel of the Belgian merchant navy, has been converted into a marine museum holding a hotch-potch of items accumulated during her world voyages.

There's more of maritime interest a ten-minute walk away to the southeast in a sunken garden beside one of the old city docks, where the prow of the **HMS Vindictive** (open access; free) commemorates events of May 9, 1918, when the British made a desperate attempt to block Ostend's harbour. The sacrificial ships were crewed by volunteers, and one of these vessels, the *Vindictive*, was successfully sunk at the port entrance. After the war the bow was retrieved and kept as a memorial to the sailors who lost their lives. This was one of the most audacious operations of the war, but tragically it was based on false intelligence: German submarines hardly ever used the harbour.

Visserskaai and Fort Napoleon

Back beside the train station, **Visserskaai** leads north along the harbour, running into **Albert I Promenade**, which sweeps left to follow the seashore as far as the casino. En route, the **Noordzeeaquarium** (April & May daily 10am–noon &

2–5pm; June–Sept daily 10am–12.30pm & 2–6pm; €2), housed in the former shrimp market on the east side of Visserskaai, holds a series of displays on North Sea fish, crustacea, flora and fauna. It's also possible to catch the tiny **Blue Line passenger ferry** (July & Aug daily 10.30am–1pm & 1.30–6pm; every 30min; 10min; €1.50 each way) from the Montgomery Dok to the east side of the harbour, from where it's a five- to ten-minute walk to **Fort Napoleon** (April–June & Sept–Oct Tues–Sun 10.30am–1pm & 1.30–6pm; July–Aug daily 10.30am–1pm & 1.30–6pm; Nov–March Sat & Sun 2–5pm; €5), a star-shaped structure built on the dunes immediately behind the beach. This, the only completely intact Napoleonic fortress left in Europe, was built of brick by Spanish prisoners of war during the French occupation of Belgium. Completed in 1812, it had a garrison of 260 men and was defended by no less than 46 cannon.

Eating and drinking

The sheer variety of places to eat in Ostend is almost daunting. Along Visserskaai (where in summer there's also a long line of seafood stalls) and through the central streets are innumerable **cafés**, **café-bars** and **restaurants**. Many of them serve some pretty mediocre stuff, but there are lots of good spots too, and everywhere there are plates of North Sea mussels and french fries, to all intents and purposes the country's national dish.

Café Botteltje Louisastraat 19. Erztatz brown café with a bit more character than most of the bars in downtown Ostend – plus a formidable selection of bottled beers. Mon 4.30pm–1am, Tues–Sun 11.30am–1am & 6.30–9.30pm.

Café du Parc Marie Joséplein 3. Sociable, old-fashioned café-bar, part of the Hotel du Parc (see p.153), with Art Deco décor and a fairly tasty range of daily specials – salads, soups and so forth – from €9. Only a few metres from the casino. Daily 10am–9pm.

Lobster Van Iseghemlaan 64 ☎059 50 02 82. Smart little restaurant close to the tourist office which specializes in (you guessed it) lobster. Main courses hover around €20. Wed–Sun noon–2pm & 6.30–9.30pm.

De Mangerie Visserskaai 36 ☎059 70 18 27. Modern seafood restaurant decked out in strong, deep colours. The service is fast, the fish tasty, but the fries can let things down. Mains from €18. Closed Mon & Tues.

Mosselbeurs Dwarsstraat 10 ☎059 80 73 10.

One of the liveliest restaurants in town, with cheerfully naff nautical fittings and top-notch fishy dishes, especially eels and mussels. Reasonable prices too with mains from €16. Wed–Sun noon–2.30pm & 6–10.30pm.



Villa Maritza Albert I Promenade 76 ☎059 50 88 08. Smooth and polished restaurant in an attractive Belle Epoque mansion on the seafront promenade just west of the casino. The menu is international, but the seafood is especially good, the lobster memorable. Mains from €24. Tues–Sun noon–2pm & Tues–Sat 7–9pm.

De Zoete Zonde Christinastraat 54. Modest little café that's extremely popular with the locals for its light meals and pancakes, which are quite simply the best in town – and a snip at €2.50–6. Mon, Tues & Thurs–Sat 8am–6pm, Sun 1.30–6pm.

East from Ostend

Clearing Ostend's suburbs, the Kusttram (coastal tram) shoots through a series of routine tourist developments on its way to **De Haan**, probably the prettiest and definitely the most distinctive resort on the whole of the coast. Beyond lie two of the coast's busiest resorts, kiss-me-quick **Blankenberge** and sprawling **Knokke-Heist**, with the port of **Zeebrugge**, which itself has a surprisingly pleasant beach, lodged in between.

De Haan

Established at the end of the nineteenth century, **DE HAAN** was carefully conceived as an exclusive seaside village in a rustic Gothic Revival style known as *Style Normand*. The building plots were irregularly dispersed between the

The tourist office has a small cache of **B&Bs** (1–2) plus details of the resort's many **hotels**. Cream of the crop is the first-rate *Auberge des Rois*, at Zeedijk 1 (T 059 23 30 18, www.beachhotel.be; 4), a smart, modern, medium-sized hotel overlooking the beach and adjacent to an undeveloped tract of sand dune; ask for a room with a sea view. Needless to say, it's popular – reservations are advised. A very good second choice is the three-star *Grand Hotel Belle Vue*, in one of the attractive Gothic Revival piles close to the tram stop at Koninklijk Plein 5 (T 059 23 34 39, www.hotelbellevue.be; 3).

Café-restaurants line the seafront, and your best bet is to stroll along until you find somewhere you fancy. The **bar** of the *Hotel des Brasseurs*, just across from the tram stop, has the resort's widest and best range of beers.

Blankenberge

Nine kilometres east of De Haan, **BLANKENBERGE** is one of the busiest resorts on the coast, but there's precious little to recommend it. Hopelessly overcrowded during the summer, it's the archetypal seaside town, with a 1930s pier, a tiled, seafront Art Deco casino, dozens of cheap hotels and numerous fast-food bars pumping out high-energy singalongs. The **tourist office** is on Koning Léopold III-plein (April–June & Sept daily 9–11.45am & 1.30–5pm; July & Aug daily 9am–7pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9–11.45am & 1.30–5pm, Sun 10am–1pm; T 050 41 22 27, www.blankenberge.be), next to the train station and the Blankenberge Station tram stop, and five minutes' walk from the beach along the main pedestrianized street, **Kerkstraat**.

Zeebrugge

In 1895 work began on a brand new seaport and harbour next to the tiny village of **ZEEBRUGGE**, some 5km beyond Blankenberge. Connected to the rail and canal systems, the harbour was an ambitious attempt to improve Belgium's coastal facilities and provide easy access to the North Sea from Ghent via the Leopoldkanaal. The key to the project was a crescent-shaped **mole** some 2.5km long and 100m wide that was built up from the shore, protecting incoming and outgoing shipping from the vagaries of the ocean. Completed in 1907, the harbour was a great commercial success, although two world wars badly damaged its prospects. During World War I, the Allies were convinced that Zeebrugge was a German submarine base, and, in conjunction with the assault on Ostend (see p.155), attempted to obstruct Zeebrugge's harbour in April 1918. Block ships, crewed by volunteers, were taken to strategic positions and sunk, resulting in heavy casualties and only partial success. There's a **monument** to the dead sailors and a map of the action at the base of the mole, restored after it was destroyed during the second German occupation. World War II saw the same job done rather more proficiently, but it didn't stop further bombing raids and the demolition of the port by the retreating Germans in 1944. The last of the block ships (the *Thetis*) was finally cleared and the harbour reopened in 1957, since when business has boomed and the port has continued to expand.

Spreading out along the coast among a series of giant docks, present-day Zeebrugge divides into sections, each with its own tram stop. Easily the most appealing portion is the small **beach resort** on its west side, a couple of minutes' walk from Zeebrugge Strandwijk tram stop. There's nothing much to see, but, pushed up against the base of the original mole to the east and edged by sand dunes to the west, it's a surprisingly pleasant place to stay, particularly if you've got a ferry to catch, and it also hosts one of the country's best sandcastle-building competitions in August.

Practicalities

Zeebrugge's beach resort has one good **hotel**, the four-star *Maritime*, at Zeedijk 6 (☎050 54 40 66, 🌐www.hotel-maritime.be; 📍), a well-kept, six-storey concrete and glass high-rise, where most rooms offer wide sea views. Also on the seafront is a good café-bar, the 't Zandloperkje, which has a decent range of beers, and a **tourist information kiosk** (July & Aug daily 10am–1pm & 1.30–6pm; ☎050 54 50 42). The kiosk can provide up-to-date details of the irregular **bus** service to and from Bruges train station (July & Aug 3–4 daily; Sept–June Mon–Sat 2 daily; 30min) and of **car ferries** to England. P&O Ferries has sailings to Hull and Superfast Ferries runs to Rosyth (see Basics, p.30 for more). Note also that Zeebrugge **train station**, from where there are hourly trains to Bruges, is 1km or so to the east along the main coastal road from the beach resort – and a couple of hundred metres from the Zeebrugge Vaart **tram stop**.

Knokke-Heist

Generally regarded as Belgium's most sophisticated resort, **KNOKKE-HEIST** is the collective name for five villages whose individual identities have disappeared in a sprawling development that stretches for some 7km along the coast almost to the Dutch frontier. The sophistication is hidden by the confusion of high-rise apartment blocks that string along the beach, but reveals itself if you wander the leafy avenues of expensive holiday homes hidden away on the resort's eastern peripheries.

To attract the crowds, a lot of effort goes into planning Knokke-Heist's varied special events programme, which includes an annual sandcastle-building competition and the **Internationaal Cartoonfestival** (🌐cartoonfestival.otr.be), featuring several hundred entries selected by an international panel and shown in the exhibition-cum-cultural centre, Scharpoord Cultuurcentrum, at Meerlaan 32, from late July through to early September. The centre is a five- to ten-minute walk northwest of Knokke tram terminus and neighbouring train station. Up-to-date details of all events are available from Knokke tourist office (see p.160).

Knokke and Albertstrand

The most agreeable part of this elongated resort is towards its east end around **KNOKKE**, a resolutely bourgeois holiday town with a splendid beach, an excellent range of sporting facilities and a clutch of private art galleries, where many of the big names of contemporary Belgian and Dutch art come to exhibit and sell. The centre of all this conspicuous consumption is the sumptuous **casino** (gambling daily from 3pm; 🌐www.casinoknokke.be), which is located in adjacent **ALBERTSTRAND**, a ten-minute walk west of Knokke along the seafront. To emphasize its ritzy credentials, the casino is decorated with canvases by Paul Delvaux in the lobby and René Magritte's *Le Domaine Enchanté* in the gaming room.

Het Zoute

To the east of Knokke is **HET ZOUTE**, whose well-heeled villas stretch along and behind the seashore for a couple of kilometres before fading into the narrow band of polder, dyke, salt marsh and mud flat that extends east across the Dutch border. Strange as it seems today, this undeveloped slice of coast was once one of the busiest waterways in the world, connecting Bruges with the North Sea until the River Zwin silted up in the sixteenth century. In 1340, it was also the site of one of the largest naval engagements of the century,

when Edward III of England sailed up the estuary with his Flemish allies to destroy a French fleet gathered here for a projected invasion of England. Although they were outnumbered three to one, Edward's fleet won an extraordinary victory, his bowmen causing chaos by showering the French ships with arrows at what was (for them) a safe distance. A foretaste of the Battle of Crécy, there was so little left of the French force that no one dared tell King Philip VI of France, until finally the court jester took matters into his own hands: "Oh! The English cowards! They had not the courage to jump into the sea as our noble Frenchmen did." Philip's reply is not recorded.

The band of dunes fronting this tranquil area is breached by a narrow channel, which allows seawater to reach the lagoons and ponds just inland at high tide. As a result, Het Zwin has been colonized by both fresh and seawater species in an unusual and fascinating mixture that attracts a wide range of waterfowl. The best way to explore the area is by bike and a network of cycling trails navigates its every nook and cranny – Knokke train station offers bike rental. You'll also need a detailed map, available from Knokke tourist office. Part of the area has been incorporated into the **Het Zwin Natuurreservaat**, very popular with noisy school parties.

Practicalities

Knokke is well connected to Ostend by **tram** and to Bruges by **train** (every hour; 20min). Knokke's tram terminus, train and bus stations are grouped together at the south end of the long and featureless main street, **Lippenslaan**, an inconvenient 2km south of the seafront. The main **tourist office** is in the Stadhuis just off – and near the south end of – Lippenslaan at Alfred Verweeplein 1 (daily 8.30am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm; ☎050 63 03 80, 🌐www.knokke-heist.be). It has a useful range of local leaflets and will help to arrange a reservation in any local **hotel**. There are plenty to choose from, though only a handful of them are actually on the seafront. Easily the pick of these is *Des Nations*, at Zeedijk Het Zoute 704 (☎050 61 99 11, 🌐www.hoteldesnations.be; 🍷), a swanky, modern high-rise five minutes' walk east from the beach end of Lippenslaan. More affordable is the three-star *Prins Boudewijn*, at Lippenslaan 35 (☎050 60 10 16, 🌐www.hotelprinsboudewijn.com; 🍷), with routine medium-sized, modern rooms a five-minute stroll from the train station. The nearest listed **campsite** is *De Zilvermeeuw* (☎050 51 27 26, 🌐www.camping-zilvermeeuw.com; March to early Nov), at the west end of Knokke-Heist in Heist, at Heistlaan 166.

West from Ostend

West of Ostend, the Kusttram (coastal tram) skirts the sand dunes of a long and almost entirely undeveloped stretch of coast dotted with the occasional remains of the **Atlantikwall** (Atlantic Wall), a chain of gun emplacements, bunkers and so forth built during the German occupation of World War II to protect the coast from Allied invasion. Thereafter, the tram scoots into **Middelkerke**, the first of a sequence of undistinguished seaside resorts whose apartments and villas crimp the coast as far as **Westende-Bad** and **Lombardsijde-Bad**.

Nieuwpoort

After Lombardsijde-Bad, the tram line cuts inland to round the estuary of the River IJzer at the small town of **NIEUWPOORT** (tram stop Nieuwpoort Stad) – not to be confused with the unenticing high-rise development of Nieuwpoort-aan-Zee just up the road (and further along the tram line from

Ostend). Nieuwpoort hasn't had much luck. Founded in the twelfth century, it was besieged nine times in the following six hundred years, but this was nothing compared to its misfortune in World War I. In 1914, the first German campaign reached the IJzer, prompting the Belgians to open the sluices along the Noordvaart Canal, just to the east of the town centre. The water stopped the invaders in their tracks and permanently separated the armies, but it also put Nieuwpoort on the front line, where it remained for the rest of the war. Every day volunteers had to abandon the safety of their bunkers to operate the ring of sluice gates, without which the water would either have drained away or risen to flood the Belgian trenches. Those grim days are recalled by the assorted memorials placed round the ring of **sluice gates** that lies beside the bridge just to the east of the Nieuwpoort Stad tram stop. The largest monument consists of a sombre rotunda with King Albert I at the centre.

Four years of shelling reduced the town to a ruin, and most of what you see today is the result of a meticulous restoration that lasted well into the 1920s. A series of parallel sidestreets, flanked by neat brick terraces, leads south from the tram line to the **Marktpllein**, the attractive main square, which is overseen by a row of replica medieval buildings – the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** church, the neo-Renaissance **Stadhuys** and the **Halle**. It's all very pleasant – in a low-key sort of way – and, if you decide to stay, the **tourist office**, in the Stadhuys at Marktpllein 7 (July & Aug Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun noon–5pm; Sept–June Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 1.30–4.30pm; ☎ 058 22 44 44, 🌐 www.nieuwpoort.be), has a small stock of inexpensive **B&Bs** (1–2). There's also one town-centre **hotel**, the three-star *Clarenhof*, a spick-and-span little place in a former convent just one block west of – and back towards the tram stop from – Marktpllein at Hoogstraat 4 (☎ 058 22 48 00, 🌐 www.clarenhof.be; 3). The nearest **campsite**, *Kompas Camping Nieuwpoort*, at Brugsesteenweg 49 (☎ 058 23 60 37, 🌐 www.kompascamping.be), is a sizeable, well-equipped affair beside the River IJzer about 2km southeast of town.

For somewhere to **eat**, there are a couple of competent, reasonably priced café-restaurants on the Marktpllein – the *Brasserie Nieuwpoort* is the best – but the *Au Bistro*, close to the Nieuwpoort Stad tram stop at Kaai 23 (closed Mon & Tues; ☎ 058 24 14 84), offers much more interesting food in country-cottage style surroundings; the speciality here is seafood with mains from €20.

St Idesbald

Heading on from Nieuwpoort, the Kusttram scuttles back to the coast at **Nieuwpoort-aan-Zee** and then pushes on west through **Oostduinkerke-Bad**, which merges seamlessly into **Koksijde-Bad**. Next up is **ST-IDESBALD**, a well-heeled, mostly modern seaside town and resort. It would be of no particular interest were it not for the artist Paul Delvaux (1897–1994), who stumbled across what was then an empty stretch of coast at the end of World War II and stayed here – despite the development that went on all around him – for the rest of his life. His old home and studio have been turned into the **Paul Delvaux Museum**, at Paul Delvauxlaan 42 (April–Sept Tues–Sun 10.30am–5.30pm; Oct–Dec Thurs–Sun 10.30am–5.30pm; €8; 🌐 www.delvauxmuseum.com), with the addition of a large subterranean extension to avoid disfiguring the house above. The museum holds a comprehensive collection of Delvaux's work, following his development from early Expressionist days through to the Surrealism that defined his oeuvre from the 1930s. Two of his pet motifs are train stations, in one guise or another, and nude or semi-nude women set against some sort of classical backdrop. His intention was to usher the viewer into the unconscious with dream-like images where every perspective is exact, but, despite the impeccable craftsmanship,

there's something very cold about his vision. At their best, his paintings achieve an almost palpable sense of foreboding, good examples being *The Garden* of 1971 and *The Procession* dated to 1963, while *The Station in the Forest* of 1960 has the most wonderful trees. A full catalogue of the collection is available at reception.

Finding the museum is a bit tricky. From the St Idesbald tram stop, walk 100m or so west towards De Panne, turn left (away from the coast) down the resort's main street, Strandlaan, and keep going until you reach Albert Nazylaan, where you go right to follow the signs to the museum; the walk takes about fifteen minutes.

De Panne

Four kilometres or so further west, sitting close to the French frontier, **DE PANNE** is now one of the largest settlements on the Belgian coast, though as late as the 1880s it was a tiny fishing village of low white cottages, nestling in a slight wooded hollow (*panne*) from which it takes its name. Most of the villagers of the time had their own fishing boats and a plot of land surrounded by trees and hedges. The peace and quiet ended with the arrival of surveyors and architects, who reinforced the sea dyke and laid out paths and roads in preparation for the rapid construction of lines of villas and holiday homes. However, with the exception of the buildings on the seafront, the contours of the land were respected, and the houses of much of today's resort perch prettily among the dunes to the south of the beach.

The peripheries of De Panne may be appealing in a casual sort of way, but the town centre is unprepossessing, its humdrum modern buildings jostling a seafront that becomes decidedly overcrowded in the summer. That said, the **beach** is excellent and De Panne comes equipped with all the amenities of a seaside resort, including land sailing. There's one specific sight too, the rather grand **monument** at the west end of Zeedijk, marking the spot where King Léopold I first set foot on Belgian soil in 1831. Otherwise, the town achieved ephemeral fame in World War I, when it was part of the tiny triangle of Belgian territory that the German army failed to occupy, becoming the home of King Albert's government from 1914 to 1918. A generation later, the retreating British army managed to reach the sand dunes between De Panne and Dunkirk, 15km to the west, just in time for their miraculous evacuation back to England. In eight days, an armada of vessels of all sizes and shapes rescued over three hundred thousand Allied soldiers, a deliverance that prompted Churchill to give his most famous speech: "...we shall fight on the beaches...we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender".

De Westhoekreservaat

On the western edge of De Panne, a small segment of these same sand dunes has been protected by the creation of **De Westhoekreservaat**, an expanse of wild, unspoiled coastline, mainly consisting of dunes and dune valleys, criss-crossed by a network of marked footpaths. Rabbits thrive here and birdlife finds shelter in the patches of woodland and scrub, particularly songbirds such as common stonechats, nightingales, willow warblers and turtledoves. The main access point is about 2km west of the town centre: follow Duinkerkeleen, the main east-west street, to the traffic island, turn right down Dynastielaan and keep going as far as the T-junction at the end, where you make a left turn along Schuylhavenlaan. The walk is a bore, but the tram does go as far as the traffic island; even better, **bikes** can be rented at several central locations and at the train station.

Practicalities

The **Kusttram** (coastal tram) travels the length of De Panne's main street, Nieuwpoortlaan/Duinkerkeleen, as it cuts through the centre of the resort running parallel to, and one block south of, the beach. The west end of Duinkerkeleen curves inland to terminate at the Dynastielaan traffic island. It is shadowed by the trams, which then proceed south to the **train station**. For the beach and the town centre, get off at De Panne Centrum tram stop, which is also close to the **tourist information kiosk** on Koning Albertplein. The **main tourist office** is in the Gemeentehuis (City Hall), a ten-minute walk south from the seafront at Zeelaan 21 (May–June & Sept Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 9am–noon & 1–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat & Sun 9am–noon & 1–6pm; Oct–April Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–noon & 2–5pm; ☎058 42 18 18, @www.depanne.be). **Zeelaan** is the principal north–south axis, beginning at the seafront a few metres to the east of Koning Albertplein. There's no strong reason to overnight in De Panne, but both tourist offices will phone around to find **accommodation** at no extra cost; be warned, however, that things get mighty tight at the height of the season.

Veurne and around

Rural Flanders at its prettiest, **VEURNE** is a charming market town, situated just 6km inland by road and rail from De Panne. Founded in the ninth century, it was originally one of a chain of fortresses built to defend the region from the raids of the Vikings, but without much success. The town failed to flourish and two centuries later it was small, poor and insignificant. All that changed when Robert II of Flanders returned from the Crusades in 1099 with a piece of the True Cross. His ship was caught in a gale, and in desperation he vowed to offer the relic to the first church he saw if he survived. The church was St Walburga at Veurne, and the annual procession that commemorated the gift made the town an important centre of medieval pilgrimage for some three hundred years. These days Veurne is one of the more popular day-trip destinations in West Flanders, a neat and amenable backwater whose one real attraction is its **Grote Markt**, one of the best-preserved town squares in Belgium. The flat farmland extending south from Veurne is excellent cycling country and two of its villages, **Lo** and **Beauvoorde**, make enjoyable pit stops,

Arrival, information and accommodation

Hourly **trains** connect Veurne with the seaside resort of De Panne to the west, plus Diksmuide and Ghent to the east. Regular **buses** also link the town with Ieper, some 25km to the south; for bus timetable details, either ask at the tourist office or call the De Lijn bus company (☎070 22 02 00, @www.delijn.be). Veurne's **train and bus stations** are next door to each other, a ten-minute stroll from the town centre. The **tourist office**, at Grote Markt 29 (April–Sept daily 10am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm; Oct to mid-Nov daily 10am–noon & 2–4pm; mid-Nov to March Mon–Sat 10am–noon & 2–4pm; ☎058 33 55 31; @www.veurne.be), issues a useful and free town brochure, which includes an events calendar and accommodation listings. **Bicycle rental** is available from Tweewielcenter, about ten minutes' walk south of the centre at Ieperse Steenweg 20 (☎058 31 16 86); Ieperse Steenweg is a continuation of Zuidstraat.



Accommodation in Veurne is thin on the ground, but the tourist office does have a small cache of **B&Bs** (1–2), and there are two, very recommendable central **hotels**. First up is **t Kasteel & t Koetshuys**, at Lindendreef 5 (T 058 31 53 72, W www.kasteelenkoetshuys.be; 3), a family-run hotel which occupies a sympathetically renovated Edwardian mansion, where the large and well-appointed guest rooms have high ceilings and marble fireplaces; the owners also operate a trim little café out at the back in the old stable house (*Koetshuys*). The other choice is the three-star *Hostellerie Croonhof* (T 058 31 31 28, W www.croonhof.be; 3), a smart, well-cared-for little place in an attractively converted old house with spotless rooms, just off the Grote Markt at Noordstraat 9; it's a popular spot, so be sure to call ahead in summer to make certain of a bed.

The Town

All of Veurne's leading sights are on or around the **Grote Markt**, beginning in the northwest corner with the **Stadhuys** (April to mid-Nov 10am–noon & 2–5pm; €3), an engaging mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles built between 1596 and 1612 and equipped with a fine blue-and-gold-decorated stone loggia projecting from the original brick facade. The interior displays items of unexceptional interest, the best of which is a set of leather wall coverings made in Córdoba. The Stadhuys connects with the more austere classicism of the **Gerechtshof** (Law Courts), whose symmetrical pillars and long, rectangular windows now hold the tourist office, but once sheltered the Inquisition as it set about the Flemish peasantry with gusto. The attached tiered and balconied **Belfort** (Belfry; no public access) was completed in 1628, its Gothic lines culminating in a dainty Baroque tower, from where carillon concerts ring out over the town throughout the summer (for more on carillons, see p.286). The Belfort is, however, dwarfed by the adjacent **St Walburga** (April–Sept daily 9am–6pm; Oct–Mar Wed 8am–12.30pm; free), the objective of the medieval pilgrims, an enormous buttressed and

gargoyled affair with weather-beaten brick walls dating from the thirteenth century. It's actually the second church to be built on the spot; the original version – which in its turn replaced a pagan temple dedicated to Wotan – was razed by the Vikings. The church's hangar-like interior has two virtues, the lavishly carved Flemish Renaissance choir stalls and the superb stonework of the tubular, composite columns at the central crossing.

2

FLANDERS

Veurne and around




Boeteprocessie (Penitents' Procession)

In 1650 a young soldier by the name of Mannaert was on garrison duty in Veurne when he was persuaded by his best friend to commit a mortal sin. After receiving the consecrated wafer during Communion, he took it out of his mouth, wrapped it in a cloth, and returned to his lodgings where he charred it over a fire, under the delusion that by reducing it to powder he would make himself invulnerable to injury. The news got out, and he was later arrested, tried and executed, his friend suffering the same fate a few weeks later. Fearful of the consequences of this sacrilege in their town, the people of Veurne resolved that something must be done, deciding on a procession to commemorate the Passion of Christ. This survives as the **Boeteprocessie** (Penitents' Procession; @ www.boeteprocessie.be), held on the last Sunday in July – an odd and distinctly macabre reminder of a remote past. Trailing through the streets, the leading figures dress in the brown cowls of the Capuchins and carry wooden crosses that weigh anything up to 50kg.

Moving on to the northeast corner of the Grote Markt, the **Spaans Paviljoen** (Spanish Pavilion), at the end of Ooststraat, was built as the town hall in the middle of the fifteenth century, but takes its name from its later adaptation as the officers' quarters of the Habsburg garrison. It's a self-confident building, the initial square brick tower, with its castellated parapet, extended by a facade of long, slender windows and flowing stone tracery in the true Gothic manner – an obvious contrast to the Flemish shutters and gables of the **Oude Vleeshalle** (Old Meat Hall) standing directly opposite. Crossing over to the southeast side of the square, the **Hoge Wacht**, which originally served as the quarters of the town watch, displays a fetching amalgam of styles, its brick gable decorated with a small arcaded gallery. The east side of this building edges the Appelmarkt, home to the clumping medieval mass of **St Nikolaaskerk**, whose detached tower gives spectacular views over the surrounding countryside (mid-June to mid-Sept 10–11.45am & 2–5.15pm; €1.50).

Eating and drinking

Veurne's main square is lined with **cafés** and **bars**, with one of the more popular spots being *'t Centrum*, at Grote Markt 33, which offers reasonably priced snacks and meals from a straightforward Flemish menu; pancakes are a house speciality. A good second choice is the comparable *Flandria*, a cosy spot next door to the tourist office at Grote Markt 30 (closed Thurs); snacks here average about €9 and are best washed down with a Trappist ale, of which they have a wide range. Moving upmarket, the best **restaurant** in town is the Michelin-starred  *Olijfboom*, a chic and modern place at Noordstraat 3 (☎ 058 31 70 77; Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 7–9.30pm); the lobster (*kreeft*) and bouillabaisse are hard to beat; mains average €20–25.

Around Veurne: Beauvoorde, Lo and Diksmuide

Veurne is the capital of the **Veurne-Ambacht**, a pancake-flat agricultural region of quiet villages and narrow country lanes that stretches south of the town, encircled by the French border and the canalized River Ijzer. Of all the villages, **Lo** is the prettiest – and a good base for further explorations – though there's also a sprinkling of World War I sights along the line of the River Ijzer,

which formed the front line for most of the war; the most interesting of these are in the vicinity of the small town of **Diksmuide**.

The best way to see the district is by **bike** – cycles can be rented in Veurne (see p.163) and maps of cycle routes are available from Veurne tourist office. In addition, De Lijn operates a reasonably good **bus** service to most of the villages from Veurne (and Ieper); their information line is ☎070 22 02 00 (🌐www.delijn.be).

Beauvoorde

Heading south from Veurne, it's about 8km to the demure early-seventeenth-century chateau of **Beauvoorde** (April–May & Sept–Oct Thurs–Sun 2–5.30pm; June–Aug Tues–Sun 2–5.30pm; Nov–March Sun 2–5.30pm; €5), whose angular crow-stepped gables and unadorned brick walls sit prettily behind a narrow moat amid the woods of a small park. The castle's interior has been remodelled on several occasions and now holds a mildly diverting collection of ceramics, silverware, paintings and glass. Around the castle, the **park** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; free) makes for a pleasant stroll, after which you can pop across to the **church** and spend a few minutes exploring the trail of low stone cottages that make up the village of **Wulveringem** (Beauvoorde being the name of the castle and the district).

By car, the quickest way to get to the château from Veurne is to take the main Ieper road, the N8, for about 5km and then watch for the signed turning on the right, from where it's a further 2km.

Lo

The agreeable little hamlet of **LO**, off the N8 some 15km southeast of Veurne, has one claim to fame. It was here that Julius Caesar tethered his horse to a yew on his way across Gaul, an event recalled by a plaque and a battered old tree by what is now the **Westpoort**, whose twin turrets and gateway are all that remains of the medieval ramparts. Less apocryphally, the village once prospered under the patronage of its Augustinian **abbey**, founded in the twelfth century and suppressed by the French Revolutionary army. Of the abbey, only the **dovecote** survives, a flashy affair hidden away beside the *Hotel Oude Abdij*, which is itself tucked in behind the village **church**, graced by a soaring crocketed spire, overlooking the main square. Lo's old stone houses fan out from the square – nothing remarkable, it's the peace and quiet which appeals.

The best way to reach Lo is by bike from Veurne along byroads and country lanes, but the village is also on the Veurne–Ieper **bus** route (Mon–Fri: six daily; 25min). Lo has its own seasonal **tourist office** (☎058 28 91 66), just off the main square, and this is useful for local maps and cycle routes, and details of local **B&Bs** (①–②). There are two central **hotels**, the more expensive of which, the *Oude Abdij*, at Noordstraat 3 (☎058 28 82 65, 🌐www.oudeabdij.com; ②), is a somewhat glum, three-star affair with a garden and modern rooms. The rival *Stadhuis*, at Markt 1 (☎058 28 80 16, 🌐www.stadhuys-lo.be; ①), is more engaging, with a handful of clean, simple, en-suite rooms. It occupies part of the old Stadhuis, a much-modified sixteenth-century structure made appealing by a slender, arcaded tower. The ground floor **restaurant-bar** (closed Tues & Wed) serves good quality Flemish food in pleasantly old-fashioned surroundings; mains cost around €20.

Diksmuide

From Lo, it's a short hop of about 12km northeast past the Ijzertoren (see p.168) to **DIKSMUIDE**, a modest little town on the east bank of the River Ijzer – which turned out to be a particularly unfortunate location in World War I. In 1914, the

German offensive across Belgium came to a grinding halt when it reached the river, which then formed the front line for the next four years. As a result, Diksmuide was literally shelled to pieces, so much so that by 1918 its location could only be identified from a map. Rebuilt in the 1920s, the reconstruction works best on the **Grote Markt**, a pleasant, spacious square flanked by an attractive set of brick gables in traditional Flemish style. There's nothing outstanding to see, but it's an enjoyable spot to nurse a coffee, and you could drop by the enormous church of **St Niklaaskerk**, built to the original Gothic design, complete with a splendid spire; the church is a few metres north of the Grote Markt.

Diksmuide's entanglement in World War I is remembered in a couple of interesting sights on the outskirts of town. The first is the domineering **Ijzertoren** (daily: Oct–March 10am–5pm, April–Sept 10am–6pm; €7; www.ijzertoren.org), a massive war memorial and museum which, at 84m high, rises high above the River Ijzer to the west of the town centre. The present structure, a broody affair dating from the 1950s, bears the letters **AVV-VVK** – Alles voor Vlaanderen (“All for Flanders”) and Vlaanderen voor Kristus (“Flanders for Christ”) – in a heady mix of religion and nationalism. The tower is actually the second version – the original, erected in 1930, was blown up in mysterious circumstances in 1946: Belgium's French-speakers usually blame Flemish Fascists disappointed at the defeat of Hitler, the Flemings French-speaking leftists, who allegedly took offence at the avowedly Flemish character of the memorial. The tower is a fifteen-minute walk from the Grote Markt: take Reuzemolenstraat and then Ijzerlaan.

At the foot of the Ijzertoren, in a little park, are a few incidental memorials, principally the Pax gateway of 1950, built of rubble from the original tower, and a crypt holding the gravestones of a number of Belgian soldiers. Lifts inside the Ijzertoren whisk visitors up to the top, from where there are grand views across the plain of Flanders, and here also is the start of the **war museum**, (opening times/entry fees as above) which has about twenty floors, each getting larger as you descend the tapering tower. The museum starts with a bitter little section on the unequal treatment dished out to the Flemings by Belgium's French-speakers and the rise of the Flemish Movement. Thereafter, it hits a more assured tone, tracking through World War I from its beginnings to the invasion of Belgium and continuing on to World War II. Included are a couple of recreated trenches – and very convincing they are too – as well as a number of mini-sections on the likes of gas and gas masks; trench art, featuring all manner of carved and decorated shell casings; and animals at war, with a couple of very odd photos of dogs wearing gas masks. There are also several sections describing how part of the Flemish Nationalist Movement collaborated with the Germans during both world wars; several of its leaders, most notably August Borms, were shot for their treachery at the end of World War II.

There's another reminder of World War I about 2km to the north of the Ijzertoren along the west bank of the river. The **Dodengang** (“Trench of Death”; April to mid-Nov daily 10am–5pm; mid-Nov to March Tues & Fri 9.30am–4pm; free) was an especially dangerous slice of trench that was held by the Belgians throughout the war. Around 400m of trench are viewable and although the original sand bags have, of necessity, been replaced by concrete imitations, it's all very well done – and the attached museum fills in the military background.

Practicalities

Diksmuide is easy to reach by **train** from Veurne and Ghent, and by **bus** from Ieper. From the town's train and adjacent bus station, it's a five- to ten-minute walk west along Stationsstraat to the Grote Markt, where the **tourist office** is

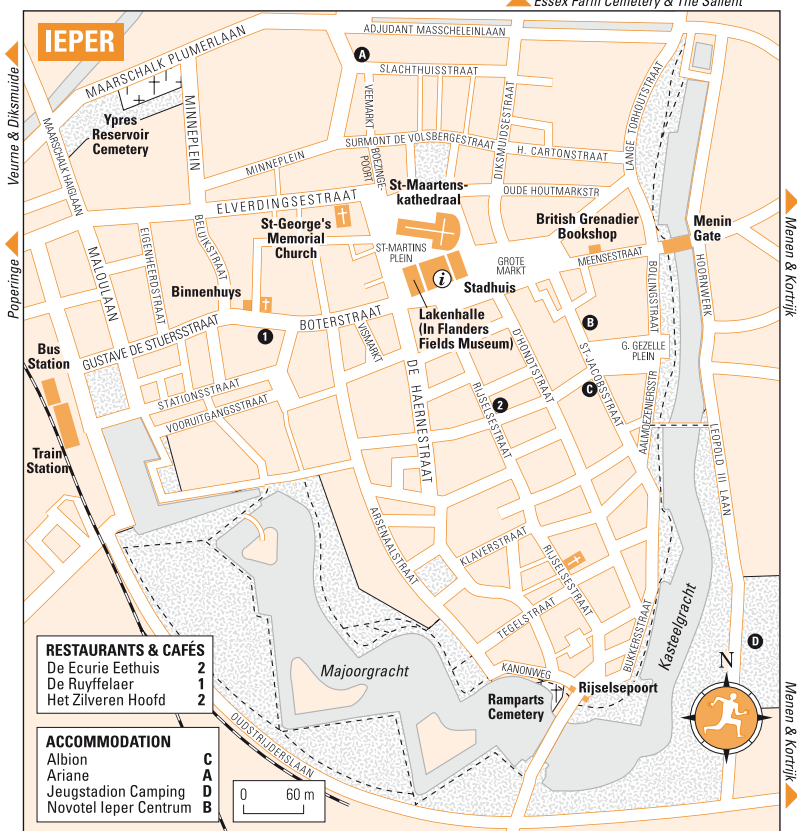
at no.28 (April to mid-Nov daily 10am–noon & 2–5pm; mid-Nov to March Mon–Fri 10am–noon & 2–5pm; ☎051 51 91 46, 🌐www.diksmuide.be). Of the town's several **hotels**, the two-star *Polderbloem*, in a traditional-style building at Grote Markt 8 (☎051 50 29 05, 🌐www.polderbloem.be; 🍽️), has the advantage of a central location and offers inexpensive if fairly standard, modern rooms. More distinctively, 🏡 *De Groote Waere*, at Vladslostraat 21 (☎0477 24 19 38, 🌐www.degrootewaere.be; 🍽️) is a top-notch B&B on a farm about 4.5km from Diksmuide; breakfast is served in the recently modernized farmhouse, and the barn-like annexe behind holds several comfortable, modern rooms with all mod cons. To get there, drive east from Diksmuide on the N35, take the Vladslo turning and it's beside the road on the left.

For **food**, the café-restaurant of the *Polderbloem*, on the Grote Markt (closed Tues), offers a lively, creative menu with a good line in seafood; main courses here average about €20. A good second choice is the town's only Italian restaurant, the *Cappiello*, a prettily decorated little place just west of the Grote Markt at Schoolplein 5 (Wed–Sun; ☎051 50 06 66); the *Cappiello* does all the basics well and its pizzas and pastas, from €16 for a main course, are fresh and tasty.

Ieper

At heart, **IEPER**, about 30km southeast of Veurne, is a pleasant, middling sort of place, a typical Flemish small town with a bright and breezy main square, which is overlooked by the haughty reminders of its medieval heyday as a centre of the cloth trade. Initial appearances are, however, deceptive, for all the old buildings of the town centre were built from scratch after World War I, when Ieper – or **Ypres** as it was then known – was literally shelled to smithereens.

Ieper's long and troubled history dates back to the tenth century, when it was founded at the point where the Bruges–Paris trade route crossed the River Ieperlee. Success came quickly and the town became a major player in the **cloth trade**, its thirteenth-century population of two hundred thousand sharing economic control of the region with rivals Ghent and Bruges. The most precariously sited of the great Flemish cities, Ypres was too near the French frontier for comfort, and too strategically important to be ignored by any of the armies whose campaigns crisscrossed the town's surroundings with depressing frequency. The city governors kept disaster at bay by reinforcing their defences and switching alliances whenever necessary, fighting against the French at the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302 (see p.180), and with them forty years later at Roosebeke. The first **major misjudgement** came in 1383 after Henry Spencer, bishop of Norwich, landed at Calais under the pretext of supporting the armies of Pope Urban VI, who occupied the Vatican, against his rival Clement VII, who was installed in Avignon. The burghers of Ghent and Bruges flocked to Spencer's standard, and the allies had little difficulty in agreeing on an attack against Ypres, which had decided to champion Clement and trust the French for support. The ensuing siege lasted two months before a French army appeared to save the day, and all of Ypres celebrated the victory. In fact, the town was ruined, its trade never recovered and, unable to challenge its two main competitors again, many of the weavers migrated. The process of depopulation proved irreversible, and by the sixteenth century the town had shrunk to a mere five thousand inhabitants.



In **World War I**, the first German thrust of 1914 left a bulge in the Allied line to the immediate east of Ypres. This **Salient** (see pp.176–177) preoccupied the generals of both sides and during the next four years a series of bloody and particularly futile offensives attempted to break through the enemy's front line, with disastrous consequences for Ypres, which served as the Allied communications centre. Comfortably within range of German artillery, Ypres was rapidly reduced to rubble and its inhabitants had to be evacuated in 1915. After the war, the returning population determined to rebuild their town, a remarkable twenty-year project in which the most prominent medieval buildings – the Lakenhalle and cathedral – were meticulously reconstructed. The end result must once have seemed strangely antiseptic – old-style edifices with no signs of decay or erosion – but now, after eighty-odd years, the brickwork has mellowed and the centre looks authentically antique. Nonetheless, the main reason to visit is the mementoes of World War I that speckle both the town and its environs.

Arrival and information

Ieper is readily accessible by hourly **train** from Kortrijk, and by **bus** from Veurne and Diksmuide. The town's **train** and **bus stations** stand on the

western edge of the centre, a ten-minute walk from the Grote Markt, straight down Gustave de Stuersstraat. The **tourist office**, in the Lakenhalle on the Grote Markt (April to mid-Nov Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–6pm; mid-Nov to March Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; ☎057 23 92 20, 🌐www.ieper.be), supplies good town maps, has details of suggested car and cycle routes around the Salient and sells a reasonable range of books on World War I. **Bike rental** is available at the train station, but there are no major **car rental** companies – ask at the tourist office for local suppliers.

Accommodation

Ieper tourist office has the details of around twenty **B&Bs** (①–②), though the majority are either out in the sticks or on the peripheries of town. Most of Ieper's **hotels** are, by comparison, much more central and there's one small and convenient municipal **campsite**, *VZW Jeugstadion*, a fifteen-minute walk from the train station on the east side of the centre at Léopold III-laan 16 (☎057 21 72 82; mid-March to mid-Nov).

Hotels



Albion Hotel Sint Jacobsstraat 28 ☎057

20 02 20, 🌐www.albionhotel.be. Very appealing three-star hotel with eighteen large and well-appointed en-suite guest rooms decorated in an easy-going modern style. The public areas are commodious, the breakfasts are good, and it's in a handy location, a brief stroll from the Grote Markt. ④

Ariane Slachthuisstraat 58 ☎057 21 82 18, 🌐www.ariane.be. A prim and proper garden surrounds this ultra-modern four-star hotel, a 5min walk north of the Grote Markt via Boezingepoort. Presumably it was built with the passing business

trade in mind, but somehow it doesn't quite work – it looks a little marooned rather than secluded, despite the water fountain and mature trees. Nevertheless, the fifty en-suite rooms are very comfortable. ④

Novotel Ieper Centrum Sint Jacobsstraat 15 ☎057 42 96 00, 🌐www.accorhotels.com. Lovers of chain hotels will be pleased to find this here in Ieper. The building is a bit of a modern bruiser, but the hundred-odd rooms are all comfortably modern in true *Novotel* style, and there are fitness facilities and a sauna. ④

The Town

A monument to the power and wealth of the medieval guilds, the **Lakenhalle**, on the Grote Markt, is a copy of the thirteenth-century original that stood beside the River Ieperlee, which now flows underground. Too long to be pretty and too square to be elegant, it is nonetheless an impressive edifice, one that was built with practical considerations uppermost: no fewer than 48 doors once gave access from the street to the old selling halls, while boats sailed in and out of the jetty on the west wing, under the watchful eyes of the mighty turreted belfry. During winter, wool was stored on the upper floor and cats were brought in to keep the mice down. The cats may have had a good time in winter, but they couldn't have relished the prospect of spring when they were thrown out of the windows to a hostile crowd below as part of the **Kattestoet** or Cats' Festival, the slaughter intended to symbolize the killing of evil spirits. The festival ran right up until 1817, and was revived in 1938, when the cats were (mercifully) replaced by cloth imitations. Since then it's developed into Ieper's principal shindig, held every three years on the second Sunday in May – the next one is in 2009. The main event is the parade of cats, a large-scale celebration of all things feline, complete with processions, dancers and bands, and some of the biggest models and puppets imaginable.

The interior of the Lakenhalle holds the ambitious **In Flanders Fields Museum** (April to mid-Nov daily 10am–6pm; mid-Nov to March, but closed early Jan Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €7.50; @ www.inflandersfields.be), which focuses on the experiences of those caught up in the war rather than the ebb and flow of the military campaigns, though these are sketched in too. In part this approach is very successful – the section simulating a gas attack is most effective and the interactive touch screens provide all manner of background information – but there’s not nearly enough about the individuals involved and lots of the personal artefacts on display would have greater meaning if there were more about the men and women who owned them. That said, the museum is wide-ranging and thoughtful, and the (multilingual) quotations are well chosen. The photographs are particularly powerful – soldiers grimly digging trenches, the pathetic casualties of a gas attack, flyblown corpses in the mud and panoramas of a blasted landscape.

Back outside, the east end of the Lakenhalle is attached to the **Stadhuis**, whose fancy Renaissance facade rises above an elegant arcaded gallery; round the back is **St Maartenskathedraal**, built in 1930 as a copy of the thirteenth-century Gothic original. The church’s cavernous nave is a formal, rather bland affair, but the rose window above the south transept door is a fine tribute to King Albert I of Belgium, its yellow, green, red and blue stained glass the gift of the British armed forces. Just to the northwest, at the end of Elverdingestraat, stands **St George’s Memorial Church** (daily 9.30am–8pm; free), a modest brick building finished in 1929. The interior is crowded with brass plaques honouring the dead of many British regiments, and the chairs carry individual and regimental tributes. It’s hard not to be moved, for there’s nothing vainglorious in this public space, so consumed as it is with private grief. From here, it’s a brief walk north up the Minneplein to one of two British Commonwealth graveyards in the town centre, the **Ypres Reservoir Cemetery**.

Heading back towards the Grote Markt, take a look at Boterstraat’s **Binnenhuys**, an elegant eighteenth-century mansion in the French style that was, remarkably enough, the only building in town to survive World War I intact. Close by, also on Boterstraat, watch out for the fancy Baroque portal that leads through to the old **Vismarkt** (Fish Market), another 1920s reconstruction, complete with canopied stone stalls and a dinky little toll house.

The Menin Gate and the Ramparts Cemetery

Beyond the east side of the Grote Markt, the **Menin Gate** war memorial was built on the site of the old Menenpoort, which served as the main route for British soldiers heading for the front. It’s a simple, brooding monument, towering over the edge of the town, its walls covered with the names of those fifty thousand British and Commonwealth troops who died in the Ypres Salient but have no grave. The simple inscription above the lists of the dead has none of the arrogance of the victor but rather a sense of great loss. The self-justifying formality of the memorial did, however, offend many veterans and prompted a bitter verse from Siegfried Sassoon:

*Was ever an immolation so belied
As these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in slime
Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.*

The **Last Post** is sounded beneath the gate every evening at 8pm by volunteers from the local fire brigade. Sometimes it’s an extremely moving ceremony, but

at other times it's noisy and really rather crass with scores of school kids milling around. Oddly enough, the seventeenth-century brick and earthen **ramparts** on either side of the Menin Gate were strong enough to survive World War I in fine condition – the vaults even served as some of the safest bunkers on the front. These massive ramparts and their protective moat still extend right round the east and south of the town centre, and there's a pleasant footpath along the top amid scores of mature horse-chestnut trees. Heading south, the stroll takes you past the **Ramparts Cemetery**, a British Commonwealth War Cemetery beside the old Lille Gate – the present Rijselsepoort – from where it takes about ten minutes to get back to the Grote Markt.

Eating and drinking

With one or two notable exceptions, Ieper's **cafés** and **restaurants**, most of which are dotted on and around the Grote Markt, are not a particularly distinguished bunch, but the meals on offer are usually substantial and reasonably priced. Almost all of Ieper's **bars** are on the main square too, and though the action could hardly be described as frenetic, there's enough to keep most visitors happy.

De Ecurie Eethuis A. Merghelynckstraat 1A. Pleasant restaurant covering all the Flemish classics plus a few Italian dishes, with mains from €15. Tues–Sat 11.30am–2pm & 6.30–10pm.



De Ruiffelaer Gustave de Stuersstraat 9 ☎ 057 36 60 06. Especially cosy little restaurant kitted out with all sorts of local by-gones and offering delicious home-made food with Flemish dishes uppermost. Mains average €16.

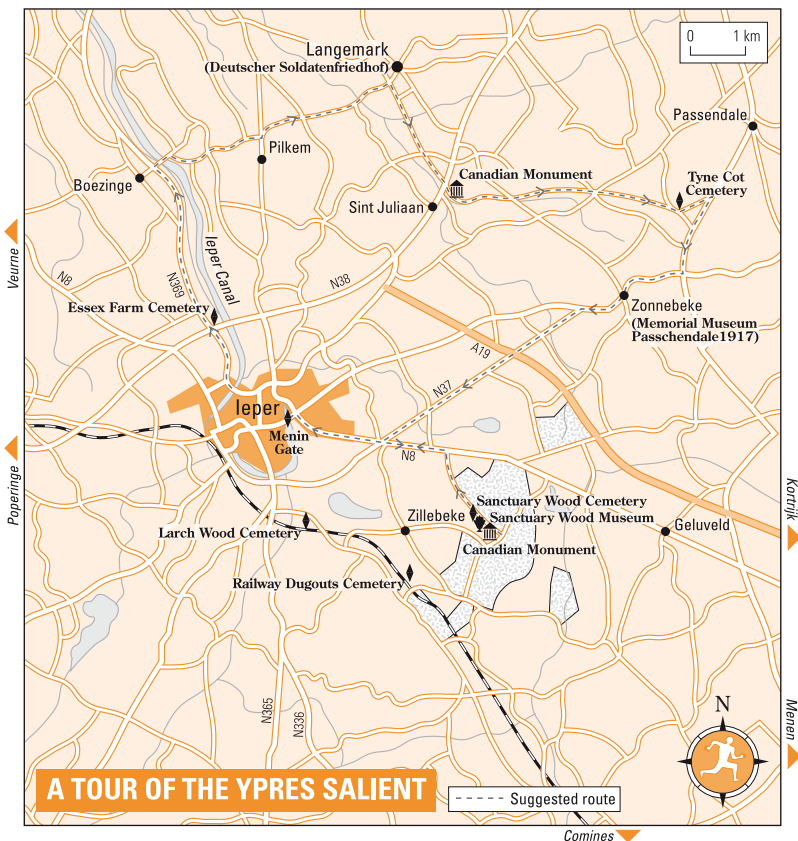
Wash it down with Hommel, the tangy local ale from the neighbouring town of Poperinge. Open Wed–Fri from 5.30pm, Sat & Sun from 11.30am.

Het Zilveren Hoofd Rijselsestraat 49. Amenable café-cum-snack bar offering filling and reasonably tasty dishes from as little as €10. The pastas are the best bet. Next door to – and run by the same people as – De Ecurie Eethuis (see above). Open Tues–Sat from 11am until around 10pm.

The Ypres Salient

The **Ypres Salient** occupies a basin-shaped parcel of land about 25km long, and never more than 15km deep, immediately to the east of Ieper. For the generals of World War I, the area's key feature was the long and low sequence of ridges that sweep south from the hamlet of Langemark to the French border. These gave the occupants a clear view of Ieper and its surroundings, and consequently the British and Germans spent the war trying to capture and keep them. The dips and sloping ridges that were then so vitally important are still much in evidence, but today the tranquillity of the landscape makes it difficult to imagine what the war was actually like.

In fact it's surprisingly difficult to find anything that gives any real impression of the scale and nature of the conflict. The most resonant reminders of the blood-letting are the 160 or so **British Commonwealth War Cemeteries**, immaculately maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Each cemetery has a **Cross of Sacrifice** in white Portland stone, and the larger ones also have a sarcophagus-like **Stone of Remembrance** bearing the legend "Their Name Liveth For Ever More", a quotation selected by Rudyard Kipling from Ecclesiasticus. The graves line up at precisely spaced intervals and, wherever possible, headstones bears the individual's name, rank, serial number, age, date of death, and the badge of the military unit or a national emblem, plus an appropriate religious symbol and, at the base, an inscription chosen by relatives. Thousands of gravestones



do not, however, carry any or all of these tags as the bodies were buried without ever being properly identified.

To navigate round the scores of sites and to understand the various battles in detail, you'll need *Major & Mrs Holt's Pocket Battlefield Guide to the Ypres Salient*, a well-written and thoroughly researched book that describes several manageable itineraries. Unfortunately, the book is hard to get hold of in advance, but it is on sale at Ieper tourist office. Note also that the maps in the book are not detailed enough and you're best off supplementing it with the detailed map of the Westhoek on sale, once again, at Ieper tourist office. Alternatively, the tourist office produces several brochures describing possible routes round the Salient and its surroundings, one of the best being the 80km-long Yzer Front Route, though you do have to be very committed to find this enjoyable.

If all this sounds too onerous, guided tours beginning in Ieper are provided by both Flanders Battlefield Tours (☎057 36 04 60, 🌐www.ypres-fbt.be), which offers four-hour and two-and-a-half-hour tours of the Salient for €35 and €30 respectively; and Salient Tours (☎057 21 46 57, 🌐www.salienttours.com), with a similar tour at around the same price. Salient Tours also operates the British Grenadier Bookshop, just off the Grote Markt at Meensestraat 5, where there are all sorts of books and CDs on World War I. For both operators,

advance reservations are strongly advised. Finally, if you are staying in Bruges, Quasimodo operates excellent all-inclusive battlefield tours from Bruges to Ieper and back (see box, p.191).

A tour of the Salient

A detailed exploration of the **Ypres Salient** could take days; below is an abbreviated itinerary that can be completed comfortably **by car** in half a day, a day if you dilly and dally. Beginning and ending in Ieper, the route focuses on the Salient's central – and most revealing – section.

Ieper's one-way system initially makes things confusing, but leave the town to the north along the **N369**, the road to Diksmuide. After about 3km, just beyond the flyover, watch for **Essex Farm Cemetery** on the right, where the wounded and dead from the battlefield across the adjacent canal were brought. In the bank behind (and to the left of) the cemetery's Cross of Sacrifice are the remains of several British bunkers, part of a combined forward position and first-aid post, where the Canadian **John McCrae** wrote the war's best-known poem, *In Flanders Fields*:

...We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunsets glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields...

Back on the N369, proceed north for another 3km and you'll reach the next bridge over the canal. Turn right over the bridge and drive the 4.5km east to **Langemark**, a largish village just beyond which (follow the signs) is a German war cemetery, the **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof**. Nearly forty-five thousand German soldiers are buried here, mostly in communal graves, but others are interred in groups of eight with stone plaques above each tomb carrying the names of the dead where known. The entrance gate is a squat neo-Romanesque structure, whose style is continued by the basalt crosses dotting the rest of the site, and overlooking it all is a sad and moving **bronze** of four mourning soldiers by the Munich sculptor Emil Krieger.

Doubling back to Langemark, take the Zonnebeke road southeast and, after 2km, you'll reach a T-junction. Turn right, then left and left again at the little roadside shrine to get onto the country lane leading the 4km east to Tyne Cot (see below). These manoeuvres take you round the **Canadian Monument**, a ten-metre-high granite statue topped by the bust of a Canadian soldier, which was raised in honour of those who endured the first German chlorine gas attacks in April 1915.

Tyne Cot

Tyne Cot is the largest British Commonwealth war cemetery in the world, containing 11,956 graves and the **Memorial to the Missing**, a semicircular wall inscribed with the names of a further thirty-five thousand men whose bodies were never recovered. The soldiers of a Northumbrian division gave the place its name, wryly observing, as they tried to fight their way up the ridge, that the German pill boxes on the horizon looked like Tyneside cottages. The largest of these concrete pill boxes was, at the suggestion of George V, incorporated within the mound beneath the Cross of Sacrifice – and you can still see a piece of it where a slab of stone has been deliberately omitted. The scattered graves behind the cross were dug during the final weeks of the war and have remained in their original positions, adding a further poignancy to the seemingly endless

The creation of the Ypres Salient was entirely **accidental**. When the German army launched the war in the west by invading Belgium, they were following the principles – if not the details – laid down by a chief of the German General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, who had died eight years earlier. The idea was simple: to avoid fighting a war on two fronts, the German army would outflank the French and capture Paris by attacking through Belgium, well before the Russians had assembled on the eastern frontier. It didn't work, with the result that as the initial German offensive ground to a halt, so two lines of opposing **trenches** were dug, which soon stretched from the North Sea down to Switzerland.

No one knew quite what to do next, but attention focused on the two main bulges – or **salients** – in the line, one at Ieper, the other at Verdun, on the Franco-German frontier just to the south of Luxembourg. To the Allied generals, the bulge at Ieper – the Ypres Salient – was a good place to break through the German lines and roll up their front; to the Germans it represented an ideal opportunity to break the deadlock by attacking key enemy positions from several sides at the same time. Contemporary **military doctrine** on both sides held that the way to win a war was to destroy the enemy's strongest forces first. In retrospect this may seem strange, but the generals of the day were schooled in cavalry tactics, where a charge that broke the enemy's key formations was guaranteed to spread disorder and confusion among the rest, paving the way for victory. The consequence of this tactical similitude was that the salients attracted armies like magnets. However, **technological changes** had shifted the balance of war in favour of defence: machine guns had become more efficient, barbed wire more effective, and, most important of all, the railways could shift defensive reserves far faster than an advancing army could march. Another issue was **supply**. Great efforts had been made to raise vast armies but they couldn't be fed off the land, and once they advanced much beyond the reach of the railways, the supply problems were enormous. As the historian A.J.P. Taylor put it, "Defence was mechanized; attack was not."

Seemingly incapable of rethinking their strategy, the generals had no answer to the stalemate save for an amazing profligacy with people's lives. Their tactical innovations were limited, and two of the new techniques – gas attack and a heavy preliminary bombardment – actually made matters worse. The **shells** forewarned the enemy of

lines of tombstones below. Strangely, the Memorial to the Missing at the back of the cemetery wasn't part of the original design: the intention was that these names be recorded on the Menin Gate, but there was not enough room.

Tyne Cot cemetery overlooks the shallow valley that gently climbs up to Passendale, known then as **Passchendaele**. This village was the British objective in the Third Battle of Ypres, but torrential rain and intensive shelling turned the valley into a giant quagmire. Men, horses and guns simply sank into the mud and disappeared without trace. The whole affair came to symbolize the futility of the war and the incompetence of its generals: when Field-Marshal Haig's Chief of Staff ventured out of his HQ to inspect progress, he allegedly said, "Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?" The new **Tyne Cot visitor centre** (daily 10am–6pm; free), at the back of the cemetery beside the car park, gives further background information and has an intriguing selection of World War I photos.

To Zonnebeke and the Sanctuary Wood Museum

Double back from the Tyne Cot car park, turn left when you reach the country lane you originally approached on, and, after about 400m you reach

an offensive and churned the trenches into a muddy maelstrom where men, horses and machinery were simply engulfed; the **gas** was as dangerous to the advancing soldiers as it was to the retreating enemy. **Tanks** could have broken the impasse, but their development was never prioritized.

Naturally enough, soldiers of all armies involved lost confidence in their generals, and by 1917, despite court martials and firing squads, the sheer futility of the endless round of failed offensives made **desertion** commonplace and threatened to bring mass mutiny to the western front. However, although it is undeniably true that few of the military commanders of the day showed much understanding of how to break the **deadlock** – and they have been savagely criticized for their failures – some of the blame must be apportioned to the politicians. They demanded assault rather than defence, and continued to call for a general “victory” even after it had become obvious that this was beyond reach and that each attack cost thousands of lives. Every government concerned had believed that a clear victor would emerge by Christmas 1914, and none of them was able to adjust to the **military impasse**. There were no moves toward a negotiated settlement, because no one was quite sure what they would settle for – a lack of clarity that contrasted starkly with the jingoistic sentiments stirred up to help sustain the conflict, which demanded victory or at least military success. In this context, how could a general recommend a defensive strategy or a politician propose a compromise? Those who did were dismissed.

This was the background to the four years of war that raged in and around the Ypres Salient, the scene of **four major battles**. The first, in October and November of 1914, settled the lines of the bulge as both armies tried to outflank each other; the second was a German attack the following spring, that moved the trenches a couple of kilometres west. The third, launched by British Empire soldiers in July 1917, was even more pointless, with thousands of men dying for an advance of only a few kilometres. It's frequently called the Battle of Passchendaele, but Lloyd George more accurately referred to it as the “battle of the mud”, a disaster that cost 250,000 British lives. The fourth and final battle, in April 1918, was another German attack inspired by General Ludendorff's desire to break the British army. Instead it broke his own, and led to the **Armistice** of November 11.

a wider road, the **N303**, which runs along the top of the Passendale ridge. Turn right onto it and shortly afterwards, after 800m, turn right again, down the N332 into **Zonnebeke**. Here, beside the main road in the middle of the village – and occupying a nineteenth-century chateau and its grounds – is the **Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917** (Feb–Nov daily 10am–6pm; €5; @www.passchendaele.be), with the region's largest collection of World War I artefacts. The museum focuses on the Third Battle of Ypres, illustrating this desperately futile conflict with photos, military hardware and reconstructions of a trench and a dugout.

At the far end of Zonnebeke, fork left onto the **N37**, keep straight over the motorway and you'll soon reach the **N8**, the Ieper–Menen road, which cut across the back of the Salient – crowded with marching armies at night and peppered by German shrapnel during the day. Go round the island onto the N8 heading east (in the direction of Menen), and after 1.2km turn right up Canadalaan for the 1.3-kilometre trip to **Sanctuary Wood Cemetery**, holding two thousand British and Commonwealth dead.

Just beyond the cemetery, the **Sanctuary Wood Museum** holds a ragbag of shells, rifles, bayonets, billycans, and incidental artefacts (daily 10am–6pm or

dusk; €7.50). Outside, things have been left much as they were the day the war ended, with some primitive zigzags of sand-bagged trench, shell craters and a few shattered trees that convey something of the desolateness of it all. The woods and the adjacent Hill 62 saw ferocious fighting, and there's a modest **Canadian monument** on the brow of the hill 300m up the road from the museum. From here, you can see Ieper, 5km away, across the rolling ridges of the countryside. The N8 leads back to the **Menin Gate**.

Comines and Menen

From Ieper, hourly trains to Comines slip south past a pair of spruce **war cemeteries** – Railway Dugouts and Larch Wood – just outside the village of **Zillebeke**, scene of some of the bloodiest fighting of World War I. Further along the tracks, the border town of **Comines** is French-speaking, a linguistic outpost in Flemish-speaking Flanders that has prompted a very Belgian administrative fudge – Comines is part of the province of Hainaut, even though it is separated from the rest of it by a chunk of France. From Comines, trains travel on to **Menen**, the terminus of the infamous “Menin” road from Ypres, on which Allied troops were cruelly exposed to German guns positioned on the higher ground to the east.

Kortrijk

Just 10km from both Menen and the French border, **KORTRIJK** (Courtrai in French) is the largest town and main rail junction in this part of West Flanders, tracing its origins to a Roman settlement named Cortracum. In the Middle Ages, its fortunes paralleled those of Ieper, but although it became an important centre of the cloth trade, it was far too near France for comfort; time and again Kortrijk was embroiled in the wars that swept across Flanders, right up to the two German occupations of the last century.

Kortrijk is quite different from its Flemish neighbours: it's very much a Francophile town, with a lively café scene and several ritzy hotels, which – together with its smattering of medieval buildings – makes for an enjoyable overnight stay.

Arrival and information

Kortrijk **train station** is a five-minute walk from the Grote Markt, which is itself a five-minute stroll from the **tourist office**, part of the new cultural-cum-visitor centre in the leafy Begijnhofpark (April–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; ☎056 27 78 40, 🌐www.kortrijk.be). They issue free maps and a town brochure that details everything of any possible interest and has basic information on the town's **hotels** and **B&Bs** (①–②).

Accommodation

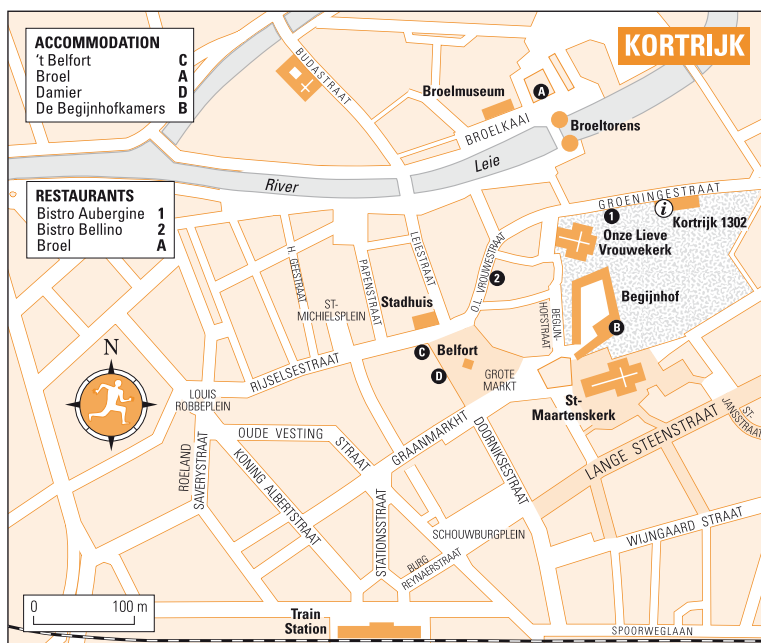


De Begijnhofkamers Begijnhof 23 ☎056 22 83 74, 🌐users.belgacom.net /begijnhofkortrijk. This tempting B&B occupies one of the old whitewashed cottages in the middle of the Begijnhof – a charming setting if ever there was one. Offers two neat and trim en-suite guest rooms. ②

't Belfort Grote Markt 53 ☎056 22 22 20, 🌐www.belforthotel.be. A smart and comfortable, medium-sized hotel across the street from the Stadhuis. Three-star; thirty rooms. ③



Broel Broelkaai 8 ☎056 21 83 51, 🌐www.hotelbroel.be. The plain exterior of



this four-star hotel on the north bank of the River Leie is deceptive, for the inside of the building, which was once a tobacco factory, has a mock-monastic theme, its tunnels and stone-trimmed arches entirely bogus but great fun. Each of the seventy en-suite rooms is spacious and relaxing, and decorated in tasteful style. 4

Damier Grote Markt 41 ☎056 22 15 47, 🌐www.hoteldamier.be. A plush and classy four-star establishment with fifty commodious rooms decorated in brisk modern style. Set behind an imperious Neoclassical facade, complete with its old carriage archway. 4

The Town

Heavily bombed during World War II, the **Grote Markt**, at the centre of Kortrijk, is a comely but architecturally incoherent mixture of bits of the old and a lot of the new, surrounding the forlorn, turreted **Belfort** – all that remains of the medieval cloth hall (Lakenhalle). At the northwest corner of the Grote Markt, the **Stadhuys** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm; free) is a sedate edifice with modern statues of the counts of Flanders on the facade, above and beside two lines of ugly windows. Inside, through the side entrance, there are two fine sixteenth-century **chimneypieces**: one in the old Schepenzaal (Aldermen’s Room) on the ground floor, a proud, intricate work decorated with municipal coats of arms and carvings of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella of Spain; the other, upstairs in the Raadzaal (Council Chamber), a more didactic affair, ornamented by three rows of precise statuettes, representing, from top to bottom, the virtues, the vices (to either side of the Emperor Charles V), and the torments of hell.

Opposite, off the southeast corner of the Grote Markt, the heavyweight tower of **St Maartenskerk** dates from the fifteenth century (Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; free), its gleaming white-stone exterior now cleaned of



△ Kortrijk: Begijnhof

decades of grime. You can pop inside the church for a look at the gilded if somewhat battered stone **tabernacle** (near the high altar), whose cluster of slender columns shelters a series of figurines, including a grumpy-looking Jesus with his cross, the work of Hendrik Maes in 1585. Immediately to the north, the **Begijnhof**, founded in 1238 by a certain Joanna of Constantinople, preserves the cosy informality of its seventeenth-century houses, and both the church and a small **museum** (daily 2–5pm; €1) shed a little light on the simple, devotional life of the Beguines.

The Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk

On the north side of the Begijnhof, pushing into Groeningestraat, is the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat 9am–4pm, Sun 11am–6pm; free), a hulking grey structure that formerly doubled as part of the city's fortifications. In July 1302, the nave of the church was crammed with hundreds of spurs, ripped off the feet of dead and dying French knights at what has become known as the **Battle of the Golden Spurs**. These plundered spurs were the pathetic remains of the army Philip the Fair had sent to avenge the slaughter of the Bruges Matins earlier that year (see p.187). The two armies, Philip's heavily armoured cavalry and the lightly armed Flemish weavers, had met outside Kortrijk on marshy ground, strategic parts of which the Flemish had disguised with brushwood. Despising their lowly born adversaries, the French knights made no reconnaissance and fell into the trap, milling around in the mud like cumbersome dinosaurs. They were massacred, marking the first time an amateur civilian army had defeated professional mail-clad knights. The spurs disappeared long ago and today the inside of the church is a riot of styles, from the Gothic and the Baroque to the Neoclassical. However, the gloomy and truncated north transept does hold one splendid painting, **Anthony van Dyck's** *Raising of the Cross*, a muscular, sweeping work with a pale, almost vague-looking Christ, completed just before the artist went to England. Across

the church, the **Counts' Chapel** has an unusual series of somewhat crude, nineteenth-century portraits painted into the wall niches, but the highlight is a sensuous medieval alabaster **statue of St Catherine**, her left hand clutching a representation of the spiked wheel on which her enemies tried to break her (hence the "Catherine wheel" firework).

The rest of the centre

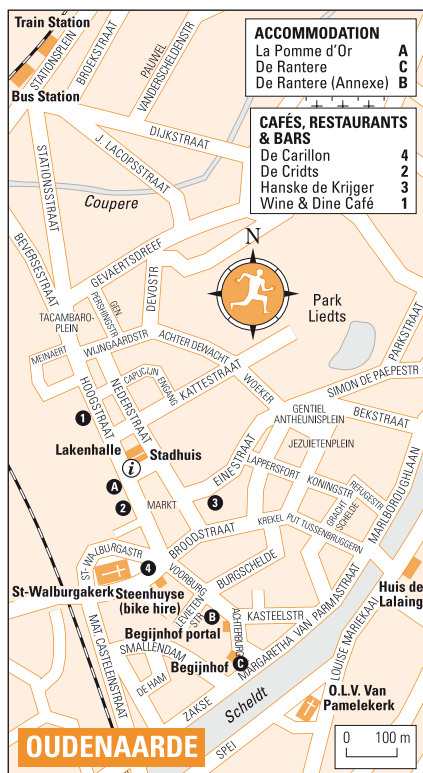
From opposite the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, an alley cuts through to the River Leie, where a pair of squat and sturdy towers, the **Broeltorens**, are all that remains of the old town walls. On the far side of the bridge, the **Broelmuseum**, at Broelkaai 6 (Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 2–5pm; free), houses a fine sample of Flemish tiles and porcelainware, an interesting collection of locally made damask, and several paintings by the sixteenth-century Flemish artist **Roelandt Savery** (1576–1639). Trained in Amsterdam, Savery worked for the Habsburgs in Prague and Vienna before returning to the Netherlands. To suit the tastes of his German patrons, he infused many of his landscapes with the romantic classicism that they preferred – Orpheus and the Garden of Eden were two favourite subjects – but the finely observed detail of his paintings was always in the true Flemish tradition. Among the works on display is the striking *Plundering of a Village*, where there's a palpable sense of outrage, in contrast to *The Drinking-Place*, depicting a romanticized, arboreal idyll.

Eating and drinking

Among Kortrijk's many **cafés and restaurants**, one of the best is *Bistro Aubergine*, a slick modern place with an adventurous menu at Groeningestraat 16 (Tues–Fri noon–2pm & Mon–Sat 6.30–10pm; ☎056 25 79 80). They cover the Flemish basics here, but also serve up such delights as kangaroo; main courses average around €25. The 🦋 *Hotel Broel*, at Broelkaai 8, has a good bistro-restaurant too (daily noon–midnight, except Sat from 3pm), though here the emphasis is on Flemish cuisine, with mains from €20. A third choice is *Bistro Bellino*, a cosy little Italian place at Onze Lieve Vrouwestraat 18 (closed Wed; ☎056 25 43 54), serving up pasta dishes from €12.

Oudenaarde

Some 25km east across the Flanders plain from Kortrijk, the attractive and gently old-fashioned town of **UDENAARDE**, literally "old landing place", hugs the banks of the River Scheldt as it twists its way north towards Ghent. The town has a long and chequered history. Granted a charter in 1193, it concentrated on cloth manufacture until the early fifteenth century, when its weavers cleverly switched to **tapestry making**, an industry that made its burghers rich and the town famous, with the best tapestries becoming the prized possessions of the kings of France and Spain. So far so good, but Oudenaarde became a key military objective during the religious and dynastic wars of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, perhaps most famously in July 1708, when the Duke of Marlborough came to the rescue and won a spectacular victory here against the French in the War of the Spanish Succession. Attacked and besieged time and again, the town found it impossible to sustain any growth, and the demise of the tapestry industry pauperized the town, rendering it an insignificant backwater in one of the poorest parts of Flanders. In the last few years, however, things have improved considerably due to its canny use of



regional development funds, and today's town – with its fascinating old buildings – makes an enjoyable and pleasant day out.

Arrival, information and getting around

Oudenaarde's modern **train station**, linked by frequent services with a number of towns and cities, including Ghent, Kortrijk and Brussels, has usurped its neo-Gothic predecessor, which stands forlorn and abandoned next door. From the station, it's a ten-minute walk to the town centre, where the **tourist office**, in the Stadhuis on the Markt (April–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 1.30–4pm, Sat 2–5pm; ☎055 31 72 51, www.oudenaarde.be), issues free town brochures and has an accommodation list. They also sell cycling maps of the **Vlaamse Ardennen**

(Flemish Ardennes), the ridge of low, wooded hills that rises from the Flanders plain a few kilometres to the south of town. The area's best scenery is beside the N36, the road from Kerkhove (and Kortrijk), which crosses the ridge from the west, passing near the hilltop vantage point of **Kluisberg**. **Bike rental** is available in Oudenaarde from Steenhuyse, at Markt 37 (☎055 23 23 73, www.steenhuyse.info).

Accommodation

Oudenaarde has several central **hotels**, the pick of which is the 🏠 *De Rantere*, at Jan Zonder Vreeslaan 8 (☎055 31 89 88, www.derantere.be; 4), a spruce and comfortable place overlooking the River Scheldt a brief walk to the south of the Markt. It has a less well-appointed annexe just a couple of minutes' walk away at Burg 18, also with pleasantly furnished rooms. A second option is *La Pomme d'Or*, at Markt 62 (☎055 31 19 00, www.pommedor.be; 4), which occupies a large old house on the main square and offers plain, but perfectly adequate, modern rooms.

The Town

On the way into town from the train station, the only surprise is the romantic war memorial occupying the middle of **Tacambaroplein**. For

The Oudenaarde tapestry industry

Tapestry manufacture in Oudenaarde began in the middle of the fifteenth century, an embryonic industry that soon came to be based on a dual system of **workshop** and **outworker**, the one with paid employees, the other with workers paid on a piecework basis. From the beginning, the town authorities took a keen interest in the business, ensuring its success by a rigorous system of quality control that soon gave the town an international reputation for consistently well-made tapestries. The other side of this interventionist policy was less palatable: wages were kept down and the Guild of the Masters cunningly took over the running of the Guild of Weavers in 1501. To make matters worse, tapestries were by definition a luxury item, and workers were hardly ever able to accumulate enough capital to buy either their own looms or even raw materials.

The first great period of Oudenaarde tapestry making lasted until the middle of the sixteenth century, when religious conflict overwhelmed the town and many of its Protestant-inclined weavers, who had come into direct conflict with their Catholic masters, migrated north to the rival workshops of Antwerp and Ghent. In 1582 Oudenaarde was finally incorporated into the Spanish Netherlands, precipitating a revival of tapestry production, fostered by the king and queen of Spain, who were keen to support the industry and passed draconian laws banning the movement of weavers. Later, however, French occupation and the shrinking of the Spanish market led to diminishing production, the industry finally fizzling out in the late eighteenth century.

There were only two significant types of tapestry: **decorative**, principally *verdures*, showing scenes of foliage in an almost abstract way (the Oudenaarde speciality), and **pictorial** – usually variations on the same basic themes, particularly rural life, knights, hunting parties and religious scenes. Over the centuries, changes in style were strictly limited, though the early part of the seventeenth century saw an increased use of elaborate woven borders, an appreciation of perspective and the use of a far brighter, more varied range of colours.

The **technique** of producing tapestries was a cross between embroidery and ordinary weaving. It consisted of interlacing a wool weft above and below the strings of a vertical linen “chain”, a process similar to weaving; the appearance of a tapestry was entirely determined by the weft, the design being taken from a painting to which the weaver made constant reference. However, the weaver had to stop to change colour, requiring as many shuttles for the weft as he had colours, as in embroidery.

Standard-size Oudenaarde tapestries took six months to make and were produced exclusively for the very wealthy. The tapestries were normally in yellow, brown, pale blue and shades of green, with an occasional splash of red, though the most important clients would, on occasion, insist on the use of gold and silver thread. Some also insisted on the employment of the most famous **artists** of the day for the preparatory painting – Pieter Paul Rubens, Jacob Jordaens and David Teniers all completed tapestry commissions.

once it's nothing to do with either world war, but instead it commemorates those who were daft or unscrupulous enough to volunteer to go to Mexico and fight for Maximilian, the Habsburg son-in-law of the Belgian king, Leopold I. Unwanted and unloved, Maximilian was imposed on the Mexicans by a French army provided by Napoleon III, who wanted to create his own western empire while the eyes of the US were averted by the American Civil War. It was, however, all too fanciful and the occupation rapidly turned into a fiasco. Maximilian paid for the adventure with his life in 1867, and few of his soldiers made the return trip. The reasons for this calamity seem to have been entirely lost on Maximilian, who declared, in front of the firing squad



△ Oudenaarde Stadhuis

that was about to polish him off, “Men of my class and lineage are created by God to be the happiness of nations or their martyrs ...Long live Mexico, long live independence”.

The Markt

At the heart of Oudenaarde, the airy and expansive **Markt** is overlooked by the **Stadhuis** (April–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm;

Nov–March Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 1.30–4pm, Sat 2–5pm; €2, with guided tour when available €5; includes Lakenhalle), one of the finest examples of Flamboyant Gothic in the country. Built around 1525, its elegantly symmetrical facade spreads out on either side of the extravagant tiers, balconies and parapets of a slender central tower, which is topped by the gilded figure of a knight, *Hanske de Krijger* (“Little John the Warrior”). Underneath the knight, the cupola is in the shape of a crown, a theme reinforced by the two groups of cherubs on the dormer windows below, who lovingly clutch the royal insignia. Inside, a magnificent oak doorway forms the entrance to the old Schepenzaal (Aldermen’s Hall). A stylistically influential piece of 1531, by a certain Paulwel Vander Schelde, the doorway consists of an intricate sequence of carvings, surmounted by miniature cherubs who frolic above three coats of arms and a 28-panel door, each rectangle a masterpiece of precise execution; the design was copied in several other Flemish town halls. Of the paintings on display in the Stadhuis, the most distinguished are those by **Adriaen Brouwer**, a native of Oudenaarde, noted for his ogre-like characters and caricaturist’s style.

To the rear of the Stadhuis sulks the dour and gloomy exterior of the adjoining **Lakenhalle** (same times & ticket), a Romanesque edifice dating from the thirteenth century. The interior does, however, hold a superb collection of **tapestries**, the first being the eighteenth-century *Nymphs in a Landscape*, a leafy romantic scene in which four nymphs pick and arrange flowers. The adjacent *Return from Market*, which also dates from the eighteenth century, features trees in shades of blue and green, edged by sky and bare earth – a composition reminiscent of Dutch landscape paintings. There are also several excellent examples of the classical tapestries that were all the rage in the sixteenth century, such as *Hercules and the Stymphalian Birds*, a scene set among what appear to be cabbage leaves. Equally impressive is *Scipio and Hannibal*, in which the border is decorated with medallions depicting the Seven Wonders of the World – though the Hanging Gardens of Babylon appear twice to create the symmetry. Glamourized pastoral scenes were perennially popular: the seventeenth-century *Landscape with Two Pheasants* frames a distant castle with an intricate design of trees and plants, while *La Main Chaude* depicts a game of blind man’s buff.

South of the Markt

Immediately southwest of the Markt rises **St Walburgakerk** (Easter–Sept Tues & Sat 2–4.30pm, Thurs 10–11am & 2–4.30pm; free), a hulking, rambling mass of Gothic masonry that was recently repaired and restored. The interior is cluttered with gaudy Baroque altarpieces, but of some interest are several locally manufactured tapestries and, near the entrance, paintings of the four Catholic notables who were thrown into the Scheldt in 1572 from the windows of the town castle (since demolished) by local Protestants. Across the road, opposite the church, Voorburg and then Kasteelstraat lead down to the river past the elaborate seventeenth-century **portal** that serves as the entrance to the **Begijnhof**; the original Begijnhof virtually disappeared years ago, but is currently being revamped and rebuilt.

They may no longer make tapestries in Oudenaarde, but they do repair the old ones at the municipal workshop inside the **Huis de Lalaing**, a grand old mansion on the far side of the river at Bourgondiestraat 9 (April–Oct Tues–Fri 9am–noon & 1.30–4pm; €1.50). The workshops don’t make a big thing out of showing visitors around, but everyone is quite friendly and you can poke around looking at the various restorative processes.

Eating and drinking

The Markt is lined with **cafés and bars**, one good option being *De Cridts*, at no. 58, a routine café-restaurant serving standard-issue but tasty Flemish dishes at very reasonable prices – main courses average €16. Better still is the 🍷 *Wine & Dine Café*, at Hoogstraat 34 (Tues–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–10.30pm; Sun 11.30am–2.30pm; ☎055 23 96 97), a natty decorated place that offers a short but simply delicious and wide-ranging menu; fish and meat dishes here cost around €18, salads €14–18.

As for **drinking**, the local Roman brewery rules the municipal roost, its most distinctive products being Tripel Ename, a strong blond beer, and Roman Dobbelen Bruinen, a snappy, filtered stout. These are usually available at *Hanske de Krijger*, a fashionable, pastel-decorated bar off the east side of the Grote Markt at Einestraat 3. A second option is *De Carillon*, a quieter place in the old brick-gabled building in the shadow of St Walburgakerk.

Bruges

“Somewhere within the dingy casing lay the ancient city,” wrote Graham Greene of **BRUGES**, “like a notorious jewel, too stared at, talked of, and trafficked over”. And it’s true that Bruges’s reputation as one of the most perfectly preserved medieval cities in western Europe has made it the most popular tourist destination in Belgium, packed with visitors throughout the summer season. Inevitably, the crowds tend to overwhelm the city, but you’d be mad to come to Flanders and miss the place: its museums hold some of the country’s finest collections of Flemish art, and its intimate, winding streets, woven around a skein of narrow canals and lined with gorgeous ancient buildings, live up to even the most inflated tourist hype. See it out of season, or in the early morning before the hordes have descended, and it can be memorable – though not so much on **Mondays**, when most of the sights are closed.

Some history

Bruges originated from a ninth-century fortress built by the warlike first count of Flanders, **Baldwin Iron Arm**, who was intent on defending the Flemish coast from Viking attack. The settlement prospered, and by the fourteenth century it shared effective control of the **cloth trade** with its two great rivals, Ghent and Ypres (now Ieper), turning high-quality English wool into clothing that was exported all over the known world. An immensely profitable business, it made the city a focus of international trade: at its height, the town was a key member of – and showcase for the products of – the **Hanseatic League**, the most powerful economic alliance in medieval Europe. Through the harbours and docks of Bruges, Flemish cloth and Hansa goods were exchanged for hogs from Denmark, spices from Venice, hides from Ireland, wax from Russia, gold and silver from Poland and furs from Bulgaria. The business of these foreign traders was protected by no fewer than 21 consulates, and the city developed a wide range of support services, including banking, money-changing, maritime insurance and an elementary shipping code, known as the *Roles de Damme*.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this lucrative state of affairs, Bruges was dogged by **war**. Its weavers and merchants were dependent on the goodwill of the kings of England for the proper functioning of the wool trade, but their feudal overlords, the counts of Flanders, and their successors, the dukes of

Burgundy (from 1384), were vassals of the rival king of France. Although some of the dukes and counts were strong enough to defy their king, most felt obliged to obey his orders and thus take his side against the English when the two countries were at war. This conflict of interests was compounded by the designs the French monarchy had on the independence of Bruges itself. Time and again, the French sought to assert control over the cities of West Flanders, but more often than not they encountered armed rebellion. In Bruges, the most famous insurrection was precipitated by **Philip the Fair** at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Philip and his wife, Joanna of Navarre, had held a grand reception in Bruges, but it had only served to feed their envy. In the face of the city's splendour, Joanna moaned, "I thought that I alone was Queen; but here in this place I have six hundred rivals." The opportunity to flex royal muscles came shortly afterwards when the city's guildsmen flatly refused to pay a new round of taxes. Enraged, Philip dispatched an army to restore order and garrison the town, but at dawn on Friday May 18, 1302, a rebellious force of Flemings crept into the city and massacred Philip's sleepy army – an occasion later known as the **Bruges Matins**. Anyone who couldn't correctly pronounce the Flemish shibboleth *schild en vriend* ("shield and friend") was put to the sword. There is a statue celebrating the leaders of the insurrection – Jan Breydel and Pieter de Coninck – in the Markt (see p.195).

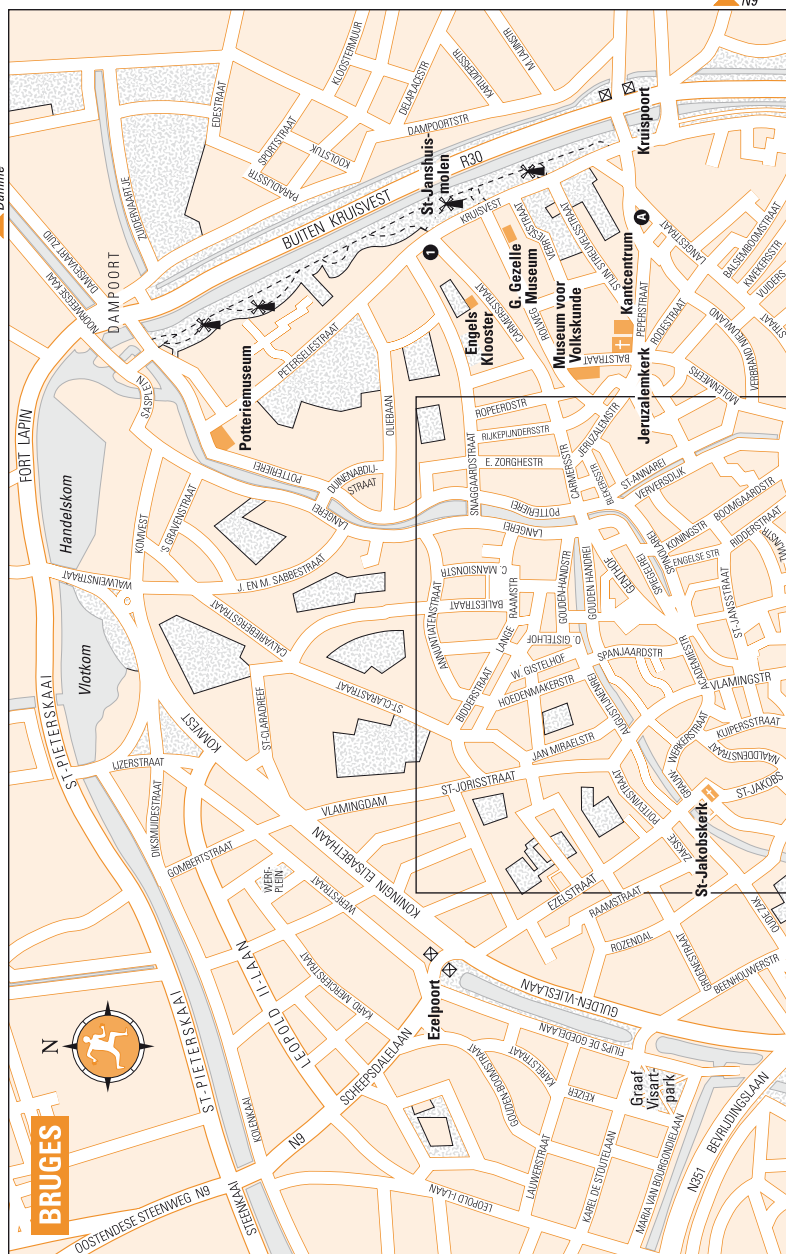
The **Habsburgs**, who inherited Flanders – as well as the rest of present-day Belgium and Holland in 1482 – whittled away at the power of the Flemish cities, no one more so than **Charles V**, the ruler of a vast kingdom that included the Low Countries and Spain. As part of his policy, Charles favoured Antwerp at the expense of Flanders and, to make matters worse, the Flemish cloth industry began its long decline in the 1480s. Bruges was especially badly hit and, as a sign of its decline, failed to dredge the silted-up River Zwin, the town's trading lifeline to the North Sea. By the 1510s, the stretch of water between Sluis and Damme was only navigable by smaller ships, and by the 1530s the city's sea trade had collapsed completely. Bruges simply withered away, its houses deserted, its canals empty and its money spirited north with the merchants.

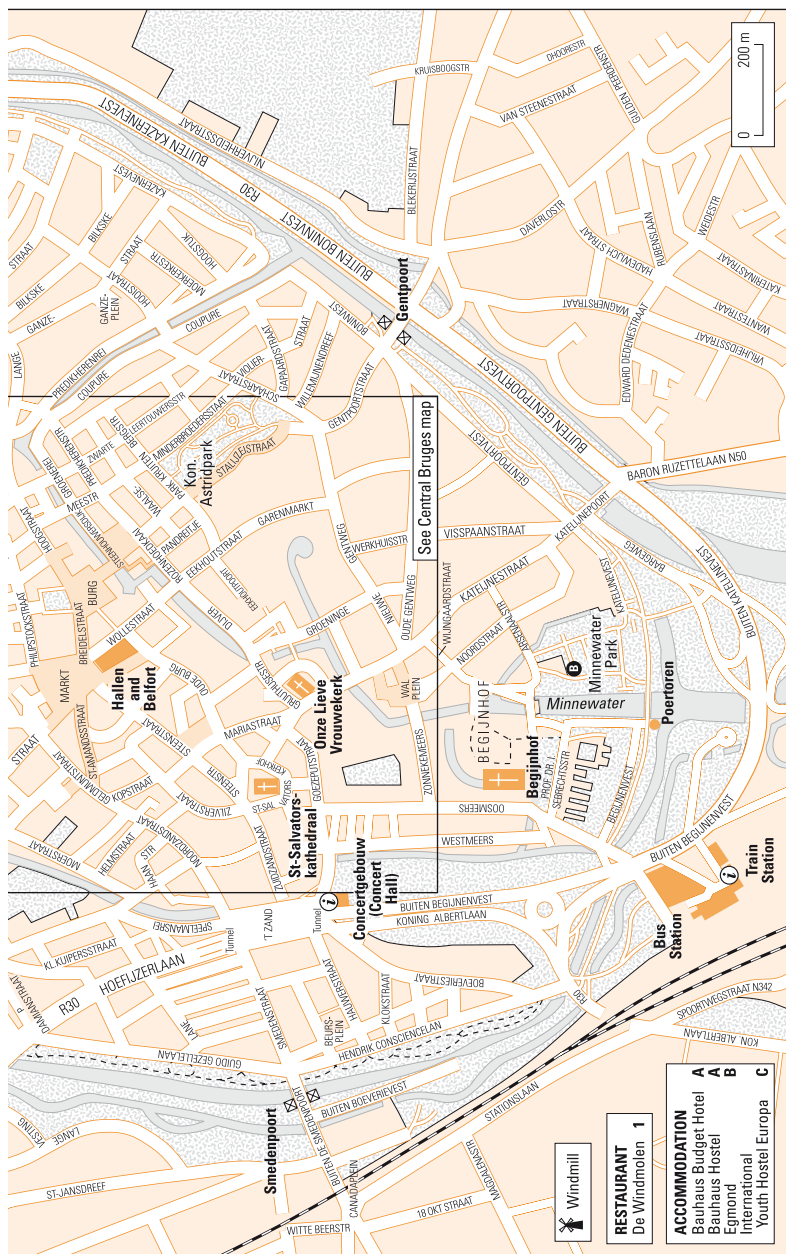
Some four centuries later, **Georges Rodenbach's** novel *Bruges-la-Morte* alerted well-heeled Europeans to the town's aged, quiet charms, and Bruges – frozen in time – escaped damage in both world wars to emerge as the perfect tourist attraction.

Arrival

Bruges **train station** adjoins the **bus station**, about 2km southwest of the town centre. Inside the train station, next to the ticket offices, there's a **tourist information desk** (Tues–Sat 9.30am–12.30pm & 1–5pm) and they will assist with on-spec hotel and B&B reservations. They carry a limited range of tourist information too, but mostly leave this task to the main tourist office at the Concertgebouw (see p.190). Operated by De Lijn, **local buses** for the town centre leave from in front of the train station; some services stop on the Markt, the main square, others stop in the surrounding side streets. All local buses have destination signs at the front, but if in doubt check with the driver. Single **tickets** cost €1.50 from the driver, €1.20 in advance from the De Lijn information kiosk outside the train station. A **taxi** from the train station to the centre costs about €8.

Most **motorists** arrive via the **E40**, which runs west from Brussels to Ostend, skirting Bruges on the way. Bruges is clearly signed from the E40 and





its oval-shaped centre is encircled by the **R30** ring road, which follows the course of the old city walls. **Parking** in the centre can be a real tribulation, with on-street parking almost impossible to find and the city centre's handful of car parks often full. Easily the best option is to use the massive 24/7 car park by the train station, particularly as the price – €2.50 per day – includes the cost of the bus ride to and from the centre.

Information

The tourist information desk at the train station (see p.187) is a very modest affair, but the main **tourist office**, in the Concertgebouw (Concert Hall) complex, on the west side of the city centre on 't Zand (daily 10am–6pm, Thurs until 8pm; ☎050 44 46 46, 🌐www.brugge.be), is large and ultra-modern. They offer an accommodation-booking service and, in addition, sell all manner of brochures about the city, one of the most useful being a general guide with suggested walking routes and museum opening times (€1). Among a variety of free leaflets, there's a comprehensive accommodation listings brochure and a bi-monthly, multilingual events booklet, though the latter isn't nearly as detailed as **Exit** (🌐www.exit.be), a free monthly, Flemish-language newssheet available here and at many town-centre bars, cafés and bookshops. The tourist office also has local bus and train **timetables**, and sells tickets for many events and performances.

City transport

The most enjoyable way to explore Bruges is to **walk**, and the centre is certainly compact and flat enough to make this an easy proposition. The city is also ideal for **cycling**, with cycle lanes on many of the roads, and cycle racks dotted across the centre. There are half a dozen **bike rental** places in Bruges, but Belgian Railways sets the benchmark, hiring out bikes at the railway station (☎050 30 23 29; €9.50 per day). One other option is the Bauhaus Bike Rental, at Langestraat 155 (☎050 34 10 93; €9 per day). The main tourist office issues a free and useful leaflet detailing five **cycle routes** in the countryside around Bruges and Quasimundo Tours offers guided cycling tours (see box, opposite).

Bruges has an excellent network of local **bus** services, shuttling round the centre and the suburbs. These are operated by **De Lijn** (☎070 22 02 00, 🌐www.delijn.be), which has an information kiosk outside the train station (Mon–Fri 10.30am–5.45pm, Sat 10am–5.15pm). The majority of local services are routed through the town centre, mostly via 't Zand. The standard single **fare** is €1.20 in advance (€1.50 from the driver); a 24-hour city bus pass, a Dagpas, costs €5 (€6 from the driver).

Accommodation

Bruges has over one hundred hotels, dozens of bed-and-breakfasts and several unofficial youth hostels, but still can't accommodate all its visitors at the height of the season. If you're arriving in July or August, be sure to **book ahead** or, at a pinch, make sure you get here in the morning before all the rooms have gone. Given the crush, many visitors use the hotel and B&B **accommodation booking service** provided by the tourist office (see above) – it's efficient and can save you endless hassle. At other times of the year, things are usually much less pressing, though it's still a good idea to reserve ahead. Standards are generally high, but note that hoteliers are wont to deck out their foyers rather grandly,

Guided tours and boat trips

Guided tours are big business in Bruges - and the main tourist office (see p.190) has comprehensive details. On offer are all sorts of ways of exploring the centre, from bus rides and horse and carriage jaunts to boat trips, as well as excursions out into the Flemish countryside, most notably to the battlefields of World War I.

Among the many options, Sightseeing Line (☎050 35 50 24, 🌐www.citytour.be) operates 50min **mini-coach tours** of the city centre, departing from the Markt, for €11.50 per adult (pay the driver); passengers are issued with individual headphones in the language of their choice. More expensive are the **horse-drawn carriages**, which line up on the Markt offering a 30min canter round town for €30. These are extremely popular, so expect to queue at the weekend. Bruges has a small army of tour operators, but one of the best is **Quasimodo Tours** (☎050 37 04 70, 🌐www.quasimodo.be), which runs a first-rate programme of excursions both in and around Bruges and out into Flanders. Highly recommended is their laid-back **Flanders Fields** minibus tour of the World War I battlefields near Ieper (see pp.173-178; 7hr 30min); tours cost €50 (under-26 €40) including picnic lunch. Reservations are required and hotel or train station pick-up can be arranged. Their sister organization, **Quasimundo** (☎050 33 07 75, 🌐www.quasimundo.be) runs several **bike tours**, starting from the Burg. Their "Bruges by Bike" excursion (daily March-Oct; 2.5hr; €22) zips round the main sights and then explores less visited parts of the city, while their "Border by Bike" tour (daily March-Oct; 4hr; €22) is a 25-kilometre ride out along the poplar-lined canals to the north of Bruges, visiting Damme and Oostkerke with stops and stories along the way. Both are good fun and the price includes mountain bike and rain-jacket hire; reservations are required.

Boat trips

Half-hour **boat trips** around the city's central canals leave from a number of jetties south of the Burg (March-Nov daily 10am-6pm; €5.70). Boats depart every few minutes, but long queues still build up during high season, with few visitors seemingly concerned by the canned commentary. In wintertime (Dec-Feb), there's a spasmodic service at weekends only. There are also boat excursions out to the attractive town of Damme (see p.216).

often in contrast to the spartan rooms beyond, while many places offer rooms of widely divergent size and comfort. Twenty-odd Bruges establishments are reviewed below, but in addition the city's tourist office issues a free **accommodation booklet** providing comprehensive listings including hotel photographs and prices.

The centre is liberally sprinkled with **hotels**, many of which occupy quaint or elegant old buildings. There's a cluster immediately to the south of one of the two main squares, the Burg - though places here tend to be the most expensive - and another, more affordable group in the vicinity of the Spiegelrei canal, one of the prettiest and quieter parts of the centre. Most of the city's hotels are small - twenty rooms, often less - and few are owned by a chain.

B&Bs are generously distributed across the city centre too, and many offer an excellent standard of en-suite accommodation. A reasonable average price is €60-70 per double, but some of the more luxurious establishments charge in the region of €90-100. In addition, Bruges has a handful of unofficial **youth hostels**, offering dormitory beds at around €16 per person per night. Most of these places, as well as the official **HI youth hostel**, which is tucked away in the suburbs, also have a limited supply of smaller rooms, with doubles at about €35-45 per night.

Hotels



Adornes St Annarei 26 ☎050 34 13 36, www.adornes.be. Three-star hotel in a tastefully converted old Flemish townhouse, with a plain, high-gabled facade. Both the public areas and the comfortable bedrooms are decorated in bright whites and creams, which emphasize the antique charm of the place. Great location, too, at the junction of two canals near the east end of Spiegelrei, and delicious breakfasts. Also very child-friendly; for example, high chairs for the dining room are no problem. See map, p.194. ④



Alegria Sint Jakobsstraat 34 ☎050 33 09 37, www.alegria-hotel.com. Formerly a B&B, this appealing, family-run, three-star hotel has just six well-appointed rooms, each decorated in pastel greens, creams and whites. The rooms at the back, overlooking the garden are quieter than those at the front. Located just a brief stroll from the Markt. See map, p.194. ④

Bauhaus Budget Hotel Langestraat 133 ☎050 34 10 93, www.bauhaus.be. Next to the *Bauhaus Hostel* (see p.193), this one-star hotel offers 21 very spartan rooms with shower and basin. Very popular with backpackers thanks to its cheap singles, doubles, triples and quads, but the rooms are a little dingy, and don't expect too much in the way of creature comforts. Laidback, occasionally boisterous atmosphere plus a (usually) friendly clientele. Doubles €50. ①

Cordoeanier Cordoeaniersstraat 18 ☎050 33 90 51, www.cordoeanier.be. Medium-sized, family-run two-star handily located in a narrow sidestreet a couple of minutes' walk north of the Burg. Mosquitoes can be a problem here, but the small rooms are clean and pleasant. See map, p.194. ⑤

Egmond Minnewater 15 ☎050 34 14 45, www.egmond.be. Set in an old manor house, this rambling three-star stands in a quiet location in its own gardens just metres from the Minnewater. The interior has wooden beamed ceilings and fine eighteenth-century chimneypieces, while the eight guest rooms are comfortable and surprisingly affordable. See map, pp.188–189. ④

Europ Augustijnenrei 18 ☎050 33 79 75, www.hoteleurop.com. Two-star hotel in a dignified late nineteenth-century townhouse overlooking a canal about 5min walk north of the Burg. It's a pleasant place to stay, even if the public areas are somewhat frumpy and some of the modern bedrooms a tad spartan. See map, p.194. ⑤



De Goezeput Goezeputstraat 29 ☎050 34 26 94, www.hotelgoezeput.be. Set in a charming location on a quiet street near the

cathedral, this outstanding two-star hotel occupies an immaculately refurbished eighteenth-century convent complete with wooden beams and oodles of antiques. A snip, with en-suite doubles from €75. See map, p.194. ②

Jacobs Ballestraat 1 ☎050 33 98 31, www.hoteljacobs.be. Pleasant three-star set in a creatively modernized old brick building complete with a precipitous crow-step gable. The twenty or so rooms are decorated in brisk modern style, though some are perhaps a little small. In a quiet location in an attractive part of the centre, a 10min walk to the northeast of the Markt. See map, p.194. ②



Montanus Nieuwe Gentweg 78 ☎050 33 11 76, www.montanus.be. Smart four-star hotel occupying a substantial seventeenth-century mansion kitted out in crisp modern style – although most of the rooms are at the back, in chalet-like accommodation at the far end of a large and attractive garden. There's also an especially appealing room in what amounts to a (cosy and luxurious) garden shed. See map, p.194. ④

Passage Hotel Dweersstraat 28 ☎050 34 02 32, www.passagebruges.com. A ten-minute stroll west of the Markt, this hotel is a real steal, with simple but well-maintained en-suite doubles for just €60, plus doubles with shared facilities from €45. It's a very popular spot and there are only ten rooms (four en suite) so advance reservations are pretty much essential. The busy bar serves inexpensive meals and is a favourite with backpackers. See also *Passage Hostel*, p.194. ①

Relais Oud Huis Amsterdam Spiegelrei 3 ☎050 34 18 10, www.o.ha.be. Smooth, tastefully turned-out four-star hotel in a grand eighteenth-century mansion overlooking the Spiegelrei canal. Many of the furnishings and fittings are period, but more so in the public areas than in the thirty-odd rooms. See map, p.194. ⑥



Die Swaene Steenhoudersdijk 1 ☎050 34 27 98, www.dieswaene.com. The unassuming brick exterior of this long-established, four-star hotel is deceptive, as each of the large rooms beyond is luxuriously furnished in an individual antique style, while the new annexe across the canal has ten sumptuously decorated "Pergola" suites complete with marble bathrooms and lavish soft furnishings. The location is perfect too, beside a particularly pretty and peaceful section of canal a short walk from the Burg – which partly accounts for its reputation as one of the city's most "romantic" hotels. There's a heated pool and sauna. The breakfast will set you up for the best part of a day. See map, p.194. ⑦

Walburg Boomgaardstraat 13 ☎050 34 94 14, www.hotelwalburg.be. Engaging four-star in an elegant nineteenth-century mansion – with splendidly large doors – a short walk east of the

Burg along Hoogstraat. The rooms are smart and comfortable, and there are also capacious suites. See map, p.194. 5

Bed & breakfasts

Mr & Mrs Gheeraert Ridderstraat 9 ☎050 33 56 27, www.bb-bruges.be. The three en-suite guest rooms here are bright and smart, and occupy the top floor of a creatively modernized old house a short walk east from the Burg. No credit cards. Closed January. See map, p.194. 2

Number 11 Peerdenstraat 11 ☎050 33 06 75, www.number11.be. In the heart of Bruges, on a traffic-free street, this first-rate B&B, with just two guest rooms and a suite, is a lavish affair, adorned by art and antiques in equal proportions. Every comfort – and smashing breakfasts too. See map, p.194. 5

Hostels

Bauhaus International Youth Hotel Langestraat 135 ☎050 34 10 93, www.bauhaus.be. Laid-back hostel with few discernible rules, several large dormitories (sleeping up to eight people) and a mish-mash of double (€36) and triple rooms (€51). Not for the fastidious – the place is far from neat and trim. There's bike rental, currency exchange and lockers, and the popular downstairs bar serves filling meals. The hostel is situated about fifteen minutes' walk east of the Burg, next to the bargain-basement *Bauhaus Hotel*. From €14 per person for a dorm bed. See map, pp.188–189.

Charlie Rockets Hoogstraat 19 ☎050 33 06 60, www.charlierockets.com. The rooms in this busy hostel may not be as pristine as they were when it opened a few years ago, but it steals a march on its rivals by being so much closer to the Markt. Accommodation is either in dorms (sleeping four or six) or double rooms. It's above an American-style bar, so light sleepers may

prefer to go elsewhere. Dormitory beds from €16, doubles €45. See map, p.194

International Youth Hostel Europa Baron Ruzettelaan 143 ☎050 35 26 79, www.vjh.be. Big, modern HI-affiliated hostel in its own grounds, a (dreary) 2km south of the centre in the suburb of Assebroek. There are over two hundred beds in a mixture of rooms from singles through to six-bed dorms. Breakfast is included in the price. No curfew, security lockers and Internet access. City bus #2 from the train station goes within 150 metres – ask the driver to let you off. Dorm beds €15, doubles €34. See map, pp.188–189.

Passage Dweersstraat 26 ☎050 34 02 32, www.passagebruges.com. The most agreeable hostel in Bruges, accommodating fifty people in ten comparatively comfortable dormitories (all with shared bathrooms). Located in an old and interesting part of town, about ten minutes' walk west of the Markt. Closed Jan. Rates from €14 for a dorm bed, sheets included; €5 extra for breakfast. See map, p.194.

The City

Passing through Bruges in 1820, William Wordsworth declared that this was where he discovered “a deeper peace than in deserts found”. He was neither the first nor the last Victorian to fall in love with the place; by the 1840s there was a substantial **British colony** here, its members enraptured by the city's medieval architecture and air of lost splendour. Neither were the expatriates slow to exercise their economic muscle, applying an architectural **Gothic Revival** brush to parts of the city that weren't “medieval” enough. Time and again, they intervened in municipal planning decisions, allying themselves to like-minded Flemings in a movement that changed, or at least modified, the face of the city – and ultimately proved highly profitable with the arrival of mass tourism in the

A **combined ticket** for any five of Bruges's central museums, including the Stadhuis, Renaissancezaal 't Brugse Vrije, Arentshuis, Gruuthuse and Memling, is available at any of them, as well as from the tourist office, for €15.

CENTRAL BRUGES

0 100 m

ACCOMMODATION

- Adornes
- Alegria
- Charlie Rockets
- Cordeoanier
- Europ
- De Goezeput
- Jacobs
- Montanus
- Mr & Mrs Gheeraert
- Number 11
- Passage hotel
- & hotel
- Relais Oud Huis
- Amsterdam
- Die Swaene
- Walburg

CE I H B M A N F J L D K G

▼ *Train Station (700m)*

Den Amand	9	Den Dwyer
De Belegde Boterham	12	Gran Kaffe
Cafedraal	21	de Passage
Café Craenenburg	8	Kok au Vin
Café de Medici	7	Laurent
Het Dagelijks Brood	6	L'Intermède

B-in	24	Oud Vlissinghe	1
De Bolero	22	De Republiek	4
Het Brugs Beertje	18	De Vuurmolen	3
De Garre	10	Wijnbar Est	14
L'Estaminet	15		

1960s. Thus, Bruges is not the perfectly preserved medieval city of much tourist literature, but rather a clever, frequently seamless combination of medieval original and nineteenth- and sometimes twentieth-century additions.

The obvious place to start an exploration of the city is in the two principal squares: the **Markt**, overlooked by the mighty **belfry**, and the **Burg**, flanked by the city's most impressive architectural ensemble. Almost within shouting distance, along the **Dijver**, are the city's three main museums, among which the **Groeninge Museum** offers a wonderful sample of early Flemish art. Another short hop brings you to **St Janshospitaal** and the important paintings of the fifteenth-century artist **Hans Memling**, as well as Bruges's most impressive churches, the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** and **Sint Salvatorskathedraal**.

Further afield, the gentle canals and maze-like cobbled streets of eastern Bruges – stretching out from **Jan van Eyckplein** – are extraordinarily pretty. The most characteristic architectural feature is the crow-step gable, popular from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century and revived by the restorers of the 1880s and later, but there are also expansive Georgian-style mansions and humble, homely cottages. There are one or two obvious targets here, principally the **Kantcentrum** (Lace Centre), where you can buy locally made lace and watch its manufacture, and the city's most unusual church, the adjacent **Jeruzalemkerk**. Above all, however, eastern Bruges excels in the detail, surprising the eye again and again with its sober and subtle variety, featuring everything from intimate arched doorways and bendy tiled roofs to wonky chimneys and a bevy of discrete shrines and miniature statues.

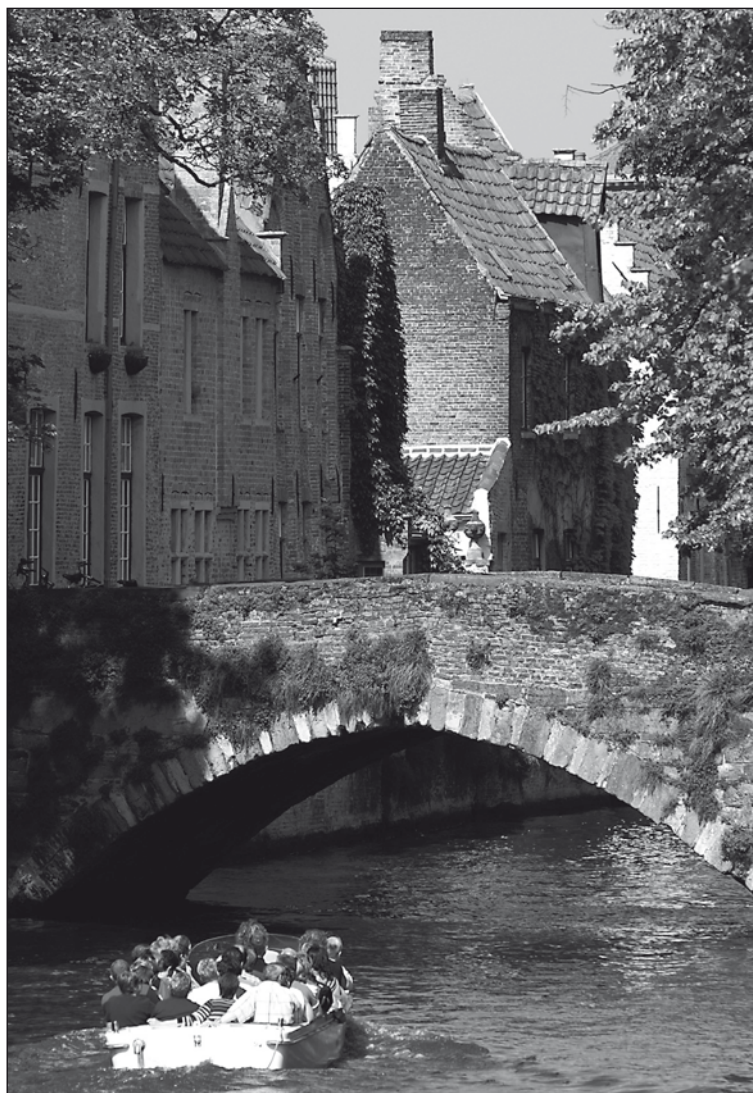
The Markt

At the heart of Bruges is the **Markt**, an airy open space edged on three sides by rows of gabled buildings and with horse-drawn buggies clattering over the cobbles. The burghers of nineteenth-century Bruges were keen to put something suitably civic in the middle of the square and the result was the conspicuous **monument** to the leaders of the Bruges Matins, **Pieter de Coninck**, of the guild of weavers, and **Jan Breydel**, dean of the guild of butchers. Standing close together, they clutch the hilt of the same sword, their faces turned to the south in slightly absurd poses of heroic determination.

The biscuit-tin buildings flanking most of the Markt form a charming ensemble, largely mellow ruddy-brown brick, each gable compatible with but slightly different from its neighbour. Most are late nineteenth- or even twentieth-century recreations – or reinventions – of older buildings, though the **post office**, which hogs the east side of the square, is a thunderous neo-Gothic edifice that refuses to camouflage its modern construction. The **Craenenburg Café**, on the corner of **St Amandsstraat** at Markt 16, occupies a modern building too, but it marks the site of the eponymous medieval mansion in which the guildsmen of Bruges imprisoned the Habsburg heir, **Archduke Maximilian**, for three months in 1488. The reason for their difference of opinion was the archduke's efforts to limit the city's privileges, but whatever the justice of their cause, the guildsmen made a big mistake. Maximilian made all sorts of promises to escape their clutches, but a few weeks after his release his father, the Emperor **Frederick III**, turned up with an army to take imperial revenge. Maximilian became emperor in 1493 and he never forgave Bruges, doing his considerable best to push trade north to its great rival, **Antwerp**.

The Belfort

Filling out the south side of the Markt, the mighty **Belfort** (daily 9.30am–5pm; €5) was built in the thirteenth century when the city was at its richest and most



△ Bruges

extravagant. A potent symbol of civic pride and municipal independence, its distinctive octagonal lantern is visible for miles across the surrounding polders.

Entry to the belfry is via the quadrangular **Hallen** at its base. Now used for temporary exhibitions, the Hallen is a much-restored edifice also dating from the thirteenth century, its style and structure modelled on the Lakenhalle at Ieper. In the middle, overlooked by a long line of galleries, is a rectangular courtyard, which originally served as the city's principal market, its cobblestones

once crammed with merchants and their wares. On the north side of the courtyard, up a flight of steps, is the entrance to the belfry. Inside, the **belfry staircase** begins innocuously enough, but it gets steeper and much narrower as it nears the top. On the way up, it passes several mildly interesting chambers, beginning with the **Treasury Room**, where the town charters and money chest were locked for safe keeping. Further up is the **Carillon Chamber**, where you can observe the slow turning of the large spiked drum that controls the 47 bells of the municipal carillon (for more on the instrument, see p.286). The city still employs a full-time bell ringer – you're likely to see him fiddling around in the Carillon Chamber – who puts on regular **carillon concerts** (mid-June to Sept Mon, Wed & Sat 9–10pm plus Sun 2.15–3pm; Oct to mid-June Wed, Sat & Sun 2.15–3pm; free). A few stairs up from here and you emerge onto the belfry roof, which offers fabulous views over the city, especially in the late afternoon when the warm colours of the city are at their deepest.

The Burg

From the east side of the Markt, Breidelstraat leads through to the city's other main square, the **Burg**, named after the fortress built here by the first count of Flanders, Baldwin Iron Arm, in the ninth century. The fortress disappeared centuries ago, but the Burg long remained the centre of political and ecclesiastical power with the *Stadhuis* (which has survived) on one side, and **St Donaaskathedraal** (St Donatian's Cathedral) – razed by the French in 1799 – on the other. The modern *Croune Plaza Hotel* marks the site of the cathedral, which was, by all accounts, a splendid structure, in which – emulating Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel in Aachen – the octagonal main building was flanked by a sixteen-sided ambulatory and an imposing tower. The foundations were uncovered in 1955, but they were promptly re-interred and although there have been vague plans to carry out another archeological dig, nothing has happened yet.

Heilig Bloed Basiliek

The southern half of the Burg is fringed by the city's finest group of buildings, beginning on the right with the **Heilig Bloed Basiliek** (Basilica of the Holy Blood; April–Sept daily 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm; Oct–March Mon–Tues & Thurs–Sun 10am–noon & 2–4pm, Wed 10am–noon; free), named after the holy relic that found its way here in the Middle Ages. The church divides into two parts. Tucked away in the corner, the **lower chapel** is a shadowy, crypt-like affair, originally built at the beginning of the twelfth century to shelter another relic, that of St Basil, one of the great figures of the early Greek Church. The chapel's heavy and simple Romanesque lines are decorated with just one relief, carved above an interior doorway and showing the baptism of Basil in which a strange giant bird, representing the Holy Spirit, plunges into a pool of water.

Next door, approached up a wide, low-vaulted curving staircase, the **upper chapel** was built a few years later, but has been renovated so frequently that it's impossible to make out the original structure; it also suffers from excessively rich nineteenth-century decoration. The building may be disappointing, but the large silver **tabernacle** that holds the rock-crystal phial of the Holy Blood is simply magnificent, being the gift of Albert and Isabella of Spain in 1611. One of the holiest relics in medieval Europe, the phial purports to contain a few drops of blood and water washed from the body of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea. Local legend asserts that it was the gift of Diederik d'Alsace, a Flemish knight who distinguished himself by his bravery during the Second Crusade and was given the phial by a grateful patriarch of Jerusalem in 1150. It is, however, rather more likely that the relic was acquired during the sacking of Constantinople in 1204,

when the Crusaders simply ignored their collective job description and robbed and slaughtered the Byzantines instead – hence the historical invention. Whatever the truth, after several weeks in Bruges, the relic was found to be dry, but thereafter it proceeded to liquefy every Friday at 6pm until 1325, a miracle attested to by all sorts of church dignitaries, including Pope Clement V.

The Holy Blood is still venerated and, despite modern scepticism, reverence for it remains strong, not least on Ascension Day (mid-May) when it is carried through the town in a colourful but solemn **procession**, the Heilig-Bloedprocessie. The procession starts on 't Zand in front of the new Concertgebouw (Concert Hall) at 3pm and then wends its way round the centre taking in Steenstraat, Simon Stevinplein, Dyver, Wollestraat, the Markt, Geldmunstraat and Noordzandstraat before returning to 't Zand at about 5.30pm. Grandstand tickets (€5–11) are sold at the main tourist office (see p.190) from March 1. The reliquary that holds the phial during the procession is displayed in the tiny **treasury** (same times as basilica; €1.50), next to the upper chapel. Dating to 1617, it's a superb piece of work, the gold and silver superstructure encrusted with jewels and decorated with tiny religious scenes. The treasury also contains an incidental collection of vestments and lesser reliquaries plus a handful of old paintings. Look out also, above the treasury door, for the faded strands of a locally woven seventeenth-century tapestry depicting St Augustine's funeral, the sea of helmeted heads, torches and pikes that surround the monks and abbots very much a Catholic view of a muscular State supporting a holy Church.

The Stadhuis

Immediately to the left of the basilica, the **Stadhuis** (daily 9.30am–5pm; €2.50 including the Renaissance Hall, see p.199) has a beautiful fourteenth-century sandstone facade, though its statues, mostly of the counts and countesses of Flanders, are modern replacements for those destroyed by the occupying French army in 1792. Inside, a flight of stairs climbs up to the magnificent **Gothic Hall**, dating from 1400 and the setting for the first meeting of the States General (parliamentary assembly) in 1464. The ceiling has been restored in a vibrant mixture of maroon, dark brown, black and gold, dripping pendant arches like decorated stalactites. The ribs of the arches converge in twelve circular **vault-keys**, picturing scenes from the New Testament. These are hard to see without binoculars, but down below – and much easier to view – are the sixteen gilded **corbels** that support them. They represent the months and the four elements, beginning in the left-hand corner beside the chimney with January and continuing in a clockwise direction right round the hall. The **frescoes** around the walls were commissioned in 1895 to illustrate the history of the town – or rather history as the council wanted to recall it. The largest scene, commemorating the victory over the French at the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302, has lots of noble knights hurrah-ing, though it's hard to take this seriously when you look at the dogs, one of which clearly has a mis-match between its body and head.

Renaissancezaal 't Brugse Vrije and the Gerechtshof

Next door to the Stadhuis, above and beside the archway, is the bright and cheery **Civiele Griffie** (no admission), which was built to house the municipal records office in 1537, its elegant facade decorated with Renaissance columns and friezes superimposed on the Gothic lines of the gable below. The adjacent **Paleis van het Brugse Vrije** (Mansion of the Liberty of Bruges) is demure by comparison, but pop inside to look at the only room to have survived from the original fifteenth-century mansion, the Schepenkamer (Aldermen's Room),

now known as the **Renaissancezaal 't Brugse Vrije** (Renaissance Hall of the Liberty of Bruges; daily 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm; €2.50 including the Stadhuis). Dominating the room is an enormous marble and oak **chimneypiece**, a superb example of Renaissance carving completed in 1531 to celebrate the defeat of the French at Pavia six years earlier and the advantageous Treaty of Cambrai that followed. A paean of praise to the Habsburgs, the work features the Emperor Charles V and his Austrian and Spanish relatives, each person identified by the audio-guide, though it's the trio of bulbous codpieces that really catch the eye. The alabaster frieze running below the carvings was a caution for the Liberty's magistrates, who held their courts here. In four panels, it relates the then familiar Biblical story of **Susanna**, in which – in the first panel – two old men surprise her bathing in her garden and threaten to accuse her of adultery if she resists their advances. Susanna does just that and the second panel shows her in court. In the third panel, Susanna is about to be put to death, but the magistrate, Daniel, interrogates the two men and uncovers their perjury. Susanna is acquitted and, in the final scene, the two men are stoned to death.

Adjoining the Brugse Vrije is the plodding courtyard complex of the **Gerechthof** (Law Courts), dating from 1722 and now home to municipal offices.

To the Dijver

From the arch beside the Stadhuis, **Blinde Ezelstraat** (Blind Donkey Street) leads south across the canal to the sombre eighteenth-century Doric colonnades of the **Vismarkt** (fish market), though, with its handful of fish traders, this is but a shadow of its former self. Neither are there any tanners in the huddle of picturesque houses that crimp the **Huidenvettersplein**, the square at the centre of the old tanners' quarter immediately to the west. Tourists converge on this pint-sized square in their droves, holing up in its bars and restaurants and snapping away at the postcard-perfect views of the belfry from the adjacent **Rozenhoedkaai**. From here, it's a short hop west to the Wollestraat bridge, which is overlooked by a statue of the patron saint of bridges, **St John Nepomuk**. The bridge marks the start of the **Dijver**, which tracks along the canal as far as Nieuwstraat, passing the path to the first of the city's main museums, the Groeninge, just before reaching the Arentshuis (see p.203).

The Groeninge Museum

The **Groeninge Museum** (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €8, including Arentshuis Museum, see p.203) possesses one of the world's finest samples of early Flemish paintings, from Jan van Eyck through to Hieronymus Bosch and Jan Provoost. These paintings make up the kernel of the museum's permanent collection, but there are later (albeit lesser) pieces on display too, reaching into the twentieth century, with works by the likes of Constant Permeke and Paul Delvaux. The Groeninge has just **eleven rooms**, chronologically arranged; the early Flemish paintings are concentrated in Rooms 1 to 4, Rooms 5 and 6 are usually devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Rooms 7 to 11 continue on into the 1900s. The description below details some of the most important works and, although the collection is regularly rotated, you can expect most if not all of the ones described to be on display.

Jan van Eyck

Arguably the greatest of the early Flemish masters, **Jan van Eyck** (1385–1441) lived and worked in Bruges from 1430 until his death eleven years later. He was a key figure in the development of oil painting, modulating its tones to create

paintings of extraordinary clarity and realism. The Groeninge has two gorgeous examples of his work in its permanent collection, beginning with the miniature portrait of his wife, *Margareta van Eyck*, painted in 1439 and bearing his motto, “als ich can” (the best I can do). The painting is very much a private picture and one that had no commercial value, marking a small step away from the sponsored art – and religious preoccupations – of previous Flemish artists. The second Eyck painting is the remarkable *Madonna and Child with Canon George van der Paele*, a glowing and richly symbolic work with three figures surrounding the Madonna: the kneeling canon, St George (his patron saint) and St Donatian, to whom he is being presented. St George doffs his helmet to salute the infant Christ and speaks by means of the Hebrew word “*Adonai*” (Lord) inscribed on his chin strap, while Jesus replies through the green parrot in his left hand: folklore asserted that this type of parrot was fond of saying “*Ave*”, the Latin for welcome. The canon’s face is exquisitely executed, down to the sagging jowls and the bulging blood vessels at his temple, while the glasses and book in his hand add to his air of deep contemplation. Audaciously, Van Eyck has broken with tradition by painting the canon among the saints rather than as a lesser figure – a distinct nod to the humanism that was gathering pace in contemporary Bruges.

Rogier van der Weyden and Hugo van der Goes

The Groeninge possesses two fine and roughly contemporaneous copies of paintings by **Rogier van der Weyden** (1399–1464), one-time official city painter to Brussels. The first is a tiny *Portrait of Philip the Good*, in which the pallor of the duke’s aquiline features, along with the brightness of his hatpin and chain of office, are skilfully balanced by the sombre cloak and hat. The second and much larger painting, *St Luke painting the Portrait of Our Lady*, is a rendering of a popular if highly improbable legend that Luke painted Mary – thereby becoming the patron saint of painters. The painting is notable for the detail of its Flemish background and the cheeky-chappie smile of the baby Christ.

One the most gifted of the early Flemish artists, **Hugo van der Goes** (d. 1482) is a shadowy figure, though it is known that he became master of the painters’ guild in Ghent in 1467. Eight years later, he entered a Ghent priory as a lay-brother, perhaps related to the prolonged bouts of acute depression that afflicted him. Few of his paintings have survived, but these exhibit a superb compositional balance and a keen observational eye. His last work, the luminescent *Death of Our Lady*, is here at the Groeninge, though it was originally hung in the abbey at Koksijde on the coast. Sticking to religious legend, the Apostles have been miraculously transported to Mary’s deathbed, where, in a state of agitation, they surround the prostrate woman. Mary is dressed in blue, but there are no signs of luxury, reflecting both der Goes’s asceticism and his polemic – the artist may well have been appalled by the church’s love of glitter and gold.

The Master of the St Ursula Legend

Another Groeninge highlight is the two matching panels of *The Legend of St Ursula*, the work of an unknown fifteenth-century artist known as the **Master of the St Ursula Legend**. The panels, each of which displays five miniature scenes, were probably inspired by the twelfth-century discovery of the supposed bones of St Ursula and the women who were massacred with her in Cologne seven centuries before – a sensational find that would certainly have been common knowledge in Bruges. Surfacing in the ninth century, the original legend describes St Ursula as a British princess who avoids an unwanted marriage by going on a pilgrimage to Rome accompanied by ten female companions, sometimes referred to as nuns or virgins. On their way back, a

tempest blows their ship off-course and they land at Cologne where the (pagan) Huns promptly slaughter them. Pious women who suffered for the faith always went down a storm in medieval Christendom, but somewhere along the line the eleven women became eleven thousand – possibly because the buckets of bones found in Cologne were from an old public burial ground and had nothing to do with Ursula and her chums.

Hans Memling

The work of **Hans Memling** (1430–1494) is represented by a pair of *Annunciation* panels from a triptych – gentle, romantic representations of an angel and Mary in contrasting shades of grey, a monochrome technique known as *grisaille*. Here also is Memling's *Moreel Triptych*, in which the formality of the design is offset by the warm colours and the gentleness of the detail – St Giles strokes the fawn and the knight's hand lies on the donor's shoulder. The central panel depicts saints Giles and Maurus to either side of St Christopher with a backdrop of mountains, clouds and sea. St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, carries Jesus on his shoulders in an abbreviated reference to the original story which has the saint, who made his living lugging travellers across a river, carrying a child who becomes impossibly heavy. In the way of such things, it turns out that the child is Jesus and the realization turns Christopher into a Christian. The side panels show the donors and their sixteen children along with their patron saints – the knight St William for Willem Moreel, a wealthy spice trader and financier, and St Barbara for his wife. There are more Memling paintings at St Janshospitaal (see p.206).

Gerard David and Hieronymus Bosch

Born near Gouda, the Dutchman **Gerard David** (c.1460–1523) moved to Bruges in his early twenties. Soon admitted into the local painters' guild, he quickly rose through the ranks, becoming the city's leading artistic light after the death of Memling. Official commissions rained in on David, mostly for religious paintings, which he approached in a formal manner but with a fine eye for detail. The Groeninge holds two excellent examples of his work, starting with the *Baptism of Christ Triptych*, in which a boyish, lightly bearded Christ is depicted as part of the Holy Trinity in the central panel. There's also one of David's few secular ventures in the Groeninge, the intriguing *Judgement of Cambyses*, painted on two oak panels. Based on a Persian legend related by Herodotus, the first panel's background shows the corrupt judge Sisamnes accepting a bribe, with his subsequent arrest by grim-faced aldermen filling the rest of the panel. The aldermen crowd in on Sisamnes with a palpable sense of menace and, as the king sentences him to be flayed alive, a sweaty look of fear sweeps over the judge's face. In the gruesome second panel the king's servants carry out the judgement, applying themselves to the task with clinical detachment. Behind, in the top right corner, the fable is completed with the judge's son dispensing justice from his father's old chair, which is now draped with the flayed skin. Completed in 1498, the painting was hung in the council chamber by the city burghers to encourage honesty amongst its magistrates.

The Groeninge also holds **Hieronymus Bosch's** (1450–1516) *Last Judgement*, a trio of oak panels crammed with mysterious beasts, microscopic mutants and scenes of awful cruelty – men boiled in a pit or cut in half by a giant knife. It looks like unbridled fantasy, but in fact the scenes were read as symbols, a sort of strip cartoon of legend, proverb and tradition. Indeed Bosch's religious orthodoxy is confirmed by the appeal his work had for that most Catholic of Spanish kings, Philip II.

Jan Provoost and Adriaen Isenbrant

There's more grim symbolism in **Jan Provoost's** (1465–1529) crowded and melodramatic *Last Judgement*, painted for the Stadhuis in 1525, and his striking *The Miser and Death*, which portrays the merchant with his money in one panel, trying desperately to pass a promissory note to the grinning skeleton in the next. Provoost's career was typical of many of the Flemish artists of the early sixteenth century. Initially he worked in the Flemish manner, his style greatly influenced by Gerard David, but from about 1521 his work was reinvigorated by contact with the German painter and engraver Albrecht Dürer, who had himself been inspired by the artists of the early Italian Renaissance. Provoost moved around too, working in Valenciennes and Antwerp, before settling in Bruges in 1494. One of his Bruges contemporaries was **Adriaen Isenbrant** (died 1551), whose speciality was small, precisely executed panels. His *Virgin and Child* triptych is a good example of his technically proficient work.

Pieter Pourbus, Frans the Elder and Frans the Younger

The Groeninge's collection of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings isn't especially strong, but there's enough to discern the period's watering down of religious themes in favour of more secular preoccupations. **Pieter Pourbus** (1523–1584) is well represented by a series of austere and often surprisingly unflattering portraits of the movers and shakers of his day. There's also his *Last Judgement*, a much larger but atypical work, crammed with muscular men and fleshy women; completed in 1551, its inspiration came from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. Born in Gouda, Pourbus moved to Bruges in his early twenties, becoming the leading local portraitist of his day as well as squeezing in work as a civil engineer and cartographer. Pieter was the first of an artistic dynasty with his son, **Frans the Elder** (1545–1581), jumping municipal ship to move to Antwerp as Bruges slipped into the economic doldrums. Frans was a noted portraitist too, but his success was trifling in comparison with that of his son, **Frans the Younger** (1569–1622), who became one of Europe's most celebrated portraitists, working for the Habsburgs and the Medicis amongst a bevy of powerful families. In the permanent collection is a fine example of his work, an exquisite double portrait of the *Archdukes Albert and Isabella*.

Jacob van Oost the Elder

Jacob van Oost the Elder (1603–1671) was the city's most prominent artist during the Baroque period and the Groeninge has a substantial sample of his work. However, his canvases are pretty meagre stuff (and are often not displayed at all). His *Portrait of a Theologian*, for example, is a stultifyingly formal and didactic affair only partly redeemed by its crisp draughtsmanship, while his *Portrait of a Bruges Family* drips with bourgeois sentimentality.

The Symbolists

There is a substantial collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Belgian art at the Groeninge, but not nearly enough gallery space to display it all – and consequently even the more significant paintings aren't always on display. Nonetheless, obvious highlights include the paintings of the Symbolists, among whom **Fernand Khnopff** (1858–1921) is represented by *Secret Reflections*, not one of his better paintings perhaps, but interesting in so far as its lower panel, showing St Janshospitaal (see p.205) reflected in a canal, confirms one of the Symbolists' favourite conceits: "Bruges the dead city". This was inspired by Georges Rodenbach's novel *Bruges-la-Morte*, a highly stylized muse on love and obsession first published in 1892. The book kickstarted the craze for visiting

Bruges, the “dead city”, where the action unfolds. The upper panel of Khnopff’s painting is a play on appearance and desire, but it’s pretty feeble, unlike his later attempts, in which he painted his sister, Marguerite, again and again, using her refined, almost plastic beauty to stir a vague sense of passion – for him she was desirable and unobtainable in equal measure.

The Expressionists and Surrealists

The museum has a healthy sample of the work of the talented **Constant Permeke** (1886–1952). Wounded in World War I, Permeke’s grim wartime experiences helped him develop a distinctive **Expressionist** style in which his subjects – usually agricultural workers, fishermen and so forth – were monumental in form, but invested with sombre, sometimes threatening emotion. His charcoal drawing *the Angelus* is a typically dark and earthy representation of Belgian peasant life dated to 1934. In similar vein is the enormous *Last Supper* by **Gustave van de Woestijne** (1881–1947), another excellent example of Belgian Expressionism, with Jesus and the disciples, all elliptical eyes and restrained movement, trapped within prison-like walls.

Also noteworthy is the spookily stark surrealism of **Paul Delvaux’s** (1897–1994) *Serenity*. One of the most interesting of Belgium’s modern artists, Delvaux started out as an Expressionist but came to – and stayed with – **Surrealism** in the 1930s. This painting is a classic example of his oeuvre and, if it whets your artistic appetite, you might consider visiting Delvaux’s old home, in St Idesbald, which has been turned into a museum with a comprehensive selection of his paintings (see p.161).

The Groeninge also owns a couple of minor oils and a number of etchings and drawings by **James Ensor** (1860–1949), one of Belgium’s most innovative painters, and **Magritte’s** (1898–1967) characteristically unnerving *The Assault*; for more on Magritte, see p.102.

The Arentshuis

The **Arentshuis**, at Dijver 16 (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €3, or free admission with Groeninge ticket), occupies an attractive eighteenth-century mansion with a stately porticoed entrance. Now a museum, the interior is divided into two separate sections: the ground floor is given over to temporary exhibitions, usually of fine art, while the **Brangwyn Museum** upstairs displays the moody sketches, etchings, lithographs, studies and paintings of the much-travelled artist Sir Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956). Born in Bruges of Welsh parents, Brangwyn flitted between Britain and Belgium, donating this sample of his work to his native town in 1936. Apprenticed to William Morris in the early 1880s and an official UK war artist in World War I, Brangwyn was nothing if not versatile, turning his hand to several different mediums, though his forceful drawings and sketches are much more appealing than his paintings, which often slide into sentimentality. In particular, look out for the sequence of line drawings exploring industrial themes – powerful, almost melodramatic scenes of shipbuilding, docks, construction and the like.

The Arentspark

The Arentshuis stands in the north corner of the pocket-sized **Arentspark**, whose brace of forlorn stone columns are all that remains of the **Waterhalle**, which once stood on the east side of the Markt. Demolished in 1787, the Waterhalle straddled the most central of the city’s canals, with boats sailing inside the building to unload their cargoes. When part of the canal – between Jan van Eyckplein and the Dijver – was covered over in the middle of the

eighteenth century, the Waterhalle became redundant; its place has mostly been taken by the main post office. Also in the Arentspark is the tiniest of humpbacked bridges – **St Bonifaciusbbrug** – whose stonework is framed against a tumble of antique brick houses. One of Bruges's most picturesque (and photographed) spots, the bridge looks like the epitome of everything medieval, but in fact it was built only in 1910. St Bonifaciusbbrug spans the canal behind and between two of the city's main museums – the Arentshuis and the Gruuthuse.

The Gruuthuse Museum

The **Gruuthuse Museum**, at Dijver 17 (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €6, but closed until 2008), occupies a rambling mansion dating from the fifteenth century. The building is a fine example of civil Gothic architecture and it takes its name from the houseowners' historical right to tax the *gruit*, the dried herb and flower mixture once added to barley during the beer-brewing process to improve the flavour. The last lord of the *gruit* died in 1492 and, after many twists and turns, the mansion was turned into a museum to hold a hotchpotch of Flemish fine, applied and decorative arts, mostly dating from the medieval and early modern period. The museum's strongest suit is its superb collection of **tapestries**, mostly woven in Brussels or Bruges during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The museum's most famous artefact is a much-reproduced polychromatic terracotta **bust** of a youthful Emperor Charles V. An unusual feature is the oak-panelled **oratory** that juts out from the first floor to overlook the altar of the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk next door. A curiously intimate room, the oratory allowed the lords of the *gruit* to worship without leaving home – a real social coup.

Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk

Next door to the Gruuthuse, the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.50pm, Sun 1.30–4.50pm; free) is a rambling shambles of a building, a clamour of different dates and styles, whose brick spire is – at 122m – one of the tallest in Belgium. Entered from the south, the **nave** was three hundred years in the making, an architecturally discordant affair, whose thirteenth-century, grey-stone central aisle is the oldest part of the church. The central aisle blends in with the south aisle, but the later, fourteenth-century north aisle doesn't mesh at all – even the columns aren't aligned. This was the result of changing fashions, not slapdash work: the High Gothic north aisle was intended to be the start of a complete remodelling of the church, but the money ran out before the work was finished.

In the south aisle is the church's most acclaimed *objet d'art*, a delicate marble *Madonna and Child* by **Michelangelo**. Purchased by a Bruges merchant, this was the only one of Michelangelo's works to leave Italy during the artist's lifetime and it had a significant influence on the painters then working in Bruges, though its present setting – beneath gloomy stone walls and set within a gaudy Baroque altar – is hardly prepossessing.

The chancel

Michelangelo apart, the most interesting part of the church is the **chancel** (Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.50pm, Sun 1.30–4.50pm; €2.50), beyond the black and white marble rood screen. Here you'll find the **mausoleums** of Charles the Bold and his daughter Mary of Burgundy (see box, p.206), two exquisite examples of Renaissance carving, their side panels decorated with coats of arms connected by the most intricate of floral designs. The royal figures are enhanced in the detail, from the helmet and gauntlets placed gracefully by

The earthly remains of Mary of Burgundy and Charles the Bold

The last independent rulers of Flanders were **Charles the Bold**, the Duke of Burgundy, and his daughter **Mary of Burgundy**, both of whom died in unfortunate circumstances, Charles during the siege of the French city of Nancy in 1477, she after a riding accident in 1482, when she was only 25. Mary was married to **Maximilian**, a Habsburg prince and future Holy Roman Emperor, who inherited her territories on her death and thus, at a dynastic stroke, Flanders was incorporated into the Habsburg empire.

In the sixteenth century, the Habsburgs relocated to Spain, but they were keen to emphasize their connections with – and historical authority over – Flanders, one of the richest parts of their expanding empire. Nothing did this quite as well as the ceremonial burial – or reburial – of bits of royal body. Mary was safely ensconced in Bruges's Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, but the body of Charles was in a makeshift grave in **Nancy**. The Emperor Charles V, the great grandson of Charles the Bold, had – or thought he had – this body exhumed and carried to Bruges, where it was reinterred next to Mary. There were, however, persistent rumours that the French, the traditional enemies of the Habsburgs, had deliberately handed over a dud skeleton, specifically one of the knights who died in the same engagement. In the 1970s, **archeologists** had a bash at solving the mystery. They dug beneath Charles and Mary's mausoleums in the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, but, among the assorted tombs, they failed to authoritatively identify either the body or even the tomb of Charles; Mary proved more tractable, with her skeleton confirming the known details of her hunting accident. Buried alongside her also was the urn which contained the heart of her son, Philip the Fair, placed here in 1506.

Charles's side to the pair of watchful dogs nestled at Mary's feet. The hole dug by archeologists beneath the mausoleums during the 1970s was never filled in and mirrors now give sight of Mary's coffin along with the burial vaults of several unknown medieval dignitaries, three of which have now been moved to the Lanchals Chapel.

Just across the ambulatory from the mausoleums, the **Lanchals Chapel** holds the imposing Baroque gravestone of Pieter Lanchals, a one-time Habsburg official who had his head lopped off by the citizens of Bruges for being corrupt in 1488. In front of the Lanchals gravestone are three relocated **medieval burial vaults**, each plastered with lime mortar. The inside walls of the vaults sport brightly coloured **grave frescoes**, a type of art which flourished hereabouts from the late thirteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. The iconography is fairly consistent, with the long sides mostly bearing one, sometimes two angels apiece, with most of them shown swinging thuribles (the vessels in which incense is burnt during religious ceremonies). Typically, the short sides show the Crucifixion and a Virgin and Child and there's sometimes an image of the dead person or his/her patron saint too. The background decoration is more varied with crosses, stars and dots all making appearances as well as two main sorts of flower – roses and bluebells. The frescoes were painted freehand and executed at great speed – Flemings were then buried on the day they died – hence the delightful immediacy of the work.

Sint Janshospitaal and the Hospitaalmuseum

Opposite the entrance to the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, across Mariestraat, is **Sint Janshospitaal**, a sprawling complex that sheltered the sick of mind and body until well into the nineteenth century. The oldest part – at the front on Mariestraat, behind two church-like gable ends – has been turned into a slick

museum (see below), while the nineteenth-century annexe, reached along a narrow passageway on the north side of the museum, has been converted into an exhibition-cum-shopping centre called – rather confusingly – **Oud St-Jan**.

The **Hospitaalmuseum** (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €8), at the front of the St-Janshospitaal complex, divides into two, with one large section – in the former hospital ward – exploring the historical background to the hospital through documents, paintings and religious *objets d'art*; and a second, smaller section (see below), sited in the old hospital chapel, devoted to six works by Hans Memling. In both, the labelling is minimal, though the audio-guide provides copious background information. Highlights of the larger section include Jan Beerblock's *The Wards of St Janshospitaal* (audio guide no.27; exhibit no.66), a minutely detailed painting of the hospital ward as it was in the late eighteenth century, the patients tucked away in row upon row of tiny, cupboard-like beds. There were 150 beds in total divided into three sections – one for women, one for men and the third for the dying. Other noteworthy paintings include an exquisite *Deposition* (audio guide no.36; exhibit no.138), a late fifteenth-century version of an original by Rogier van der Weyden, and a stylish, intimately observed diptych (audio guide no.38; exhibit no.153) by Jan Provoost, with portraits of Christ and the donor – a friar – on the front and a skull on the back.

The Memling collection

The former **chapel** inside the Hospitaalmuseum houses six works by **Hans Memling** (1433–1494). Born near Frankfurt, Memling spent most of his working life in Bruges, where he was taught by Rogier van der Weyden (see p.460). He adopted much of his tutor's style and stuck to the detailed symbolism of his contemporaries, but his painterly manner was distinctly restrained, often pious and grave. Graceful and warmly coloured, his figures also had a velvet-like quality that greatly appealed to the city's burghers, whose enthusiasm made Memling a rich man – in 1480 he was listed among the town's major moneylenders.

Of the six works on display, the most unusual is the *Reliquary of St Ursula*, comprising a miniature wooden Gothic church painted with the story of St Ursula. Six panels show Ursula and her ten companions on their way to Rome, only to be massacred by Huns as they passed through Germany. It is, however, the mass of incidental detail that makes the reliquary so enchanting – a wonderful evocation of the late medieval world. Equally delightful is the *Mystical Marriage of St Catherine*, the middle panel of a large triptych depicting St Catherine, who represents contemplation, receiving a ring from the baby Jesus to seal their spiritual union. The complementary side panels depict the beheading of St John the Baptist and a visionary St John writing the book of Revelation on the bare and rocky island of Patmos. Again, it's the detail that impresses: between the inner and outer rainbows above St John, for instance, the prophets play music on tiny instruments – look closely and you'll spy a lute, a flute, a harp and a hurdy-gurdy. Across the chapel are two more Memling triptychs, a *Lamentation* and an *Adoration of the Magi*, in which there's a gentle nervousness in the approach of the Magi, here shown as the kings of Spain, Arabia and Ethiopia.

Memling's skill as a portraitist is demonstrated to exquisite effect in his *Portrait of a Young Woman*, where the richly dressed subject stares dreamily into the middle distance, her hands – in a superb optical illusion – seeming to clasp the picture frame. The lighting is subtle and sensuous, with the woman set against

a dark background, her gauze veil dappling the side of her face. A high forehead was then considered a sign of great womanly beauty, so her hair is pulled right back and was probably plucked – as are her eyebrows. There's no knowing who the woman was, but in the seventeenth century her fancy headgear convinced observers that she was one of the legendary Persian sibyls who predicted Christ's birth; so convinced were they that they added the cartouche in the top left-hand corner, describing her as *Sibylla Sambetha* – and the painting is often referred to by this name.

The sixth and final painting, the *Virgin and Martin van Nieuwenhove* diptych, is exhibited in the adjoining **side chapel**. Here, the eponymous merchant has the flush of youth and a hint of arrogance: his lips pout, his hair cascades down to his shoulders and he is dressed in the most fashionable of doublets – by the middle of the 1480s, when the portrait was commissioned, no Bruges merchant wanted to appear too pious. Opposite, the Virgin gets the full stereotypical treatment from the oval face and the almond-shaped eyes through to full cheeks, thin nose and bunched lower lip.

St Salvatorskathedraal

From St Janshospitaal, it's a couple of minutes' walk north along Heilige-Geeststraat to **St Salvatorskathedraal** (Holy Saviour's Cathedral; Mon 2–5.30pm, Tues–Fri 9–noon & 2–5.30pm, Sat 9–noon & 2–3.30pm, Sun 9–10am & 2–5pm; free), a bulky Gothic edifice that mostly dates from the late thirteenth century, though the Flamboyant Gothic ambulatory was added some two centuries later. A parish church for most of its history, it was only made a cathedral in 1834 following the destruction of St Donatian's (see p.197) by the French. This change of status prompted lots of ecclesiastical rumblings – nearby Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (see p.204) was bigger and its spire higher – and when part of St Salvators went up in smoke in 1839, the opportunity was taken to make its tower higher and grander in a romantic rendition of the Romanesque style.

Recently cleaned, the cathedral's **nave** has emerged from centuries of accumulated grime, but it remains a cheerless, cavernous affair. The star turn is the **set of eight paintings** by Jan van Orley displayed in the transepts. Commissioned in the 1730s, the paintings were used for the manufacture of a matching set of **tapestries** from a Brussels workshop, and, remarkably enough, these have survived too and hang in sequence in the choir and nave. Each of the eight scenes is a fluent, dramatic composition featuring a familiar episode from the life of Christ – from the Nativity to the Resurrection – complete with a handful of animals, including a remarkably determined Palm Sunday donkey. The tapestries are actually mirror images of the paintings as the weavers worked with the rear of the tapestries uppermost on their looms; the weavers also had sight of the tapestry paintings – or rather cartoon copies, as the originals were too valuable to be kept beside the looms.

Entered from the nave, the cathedral treasury (daily except Sat 2–5pm; €2.50) occupies the adjoining neo-Gothic chapter house, whose nine rooms are packed with ecclesiastical tackle, from religious paintings and statues through to an assortment of reliquaries, vestments and croziers. The labelling is poor, however, so it's a good idea to pick up the English-language mini-guide at the entrance. Room B holds the treasury's finest painting, a gruesome, oak-panel triptych, *The Martyrdom of St Hippolytus*, by Dieric Bouts (1410–1475) and Hugo van der Goes (died 1482). The right panel depicts the Roman Emperor Decius, a notorious persecutor of Christians, trying to persuade the priest Hippolytus to abjure his faith. He fails, and in the central panel Hippolytus is pulled to pieces by four horses.

The Begijnhof

Heading south from Sint Janshospitaal, it's a short stroll to **Wijngaardstraat**, whose antique terrace houses are crammed with souvenir shops, bars and restaurants. This is all rather depressing, but there's relief near at hand in the much more appealing, if just as over-visited, **Begijnhof** (daily 9am–6.30pm or sunset; free), where a rough circle of old and infinitely pretty whitewashed houses surrounds a central green. The best time to visit is in spring, when a carpet of daffodils pushes up between the wispy elms, creating one of the most photographed scenes in Bruges. There were once *begijnhofs* all over Belgium, and this is one of the few to have survived in good nick. They date back to the twelfth century, when a Liège priest, a certain Lambert le Bègue, encouraged widows and unmarried women to live in communities, the better to do pious acts, especially caring for the sick. These communities were different from convents in so far as the inhabitants – the **beguines** (*begijns*) – did not have to take conventual vows and had the right to return to the secular world if they wished. Margaret, Countess of Flanders, founded Bruges's *begijnhof* in 1245 and, although most of the houses now standing date from the eighteenth century, the medieval layout has survived intact, preserving the impression of the *begijnhof* as a self-contained village, with access controlled through two large gates.

The houses are still in private hands, but, with the beguines long gone, they are now occupied by Benedictine nuns, who you'll see flitting around in their habits. Only one is open to the public – the **Begijnenhuisje** (Mon–Sat 10am–noon & 1.45–5pm, Sun 10.45am–noon & 1.45–5pm; €2), a pint-sized celebration of the simple life of the beguines. The prime exhibit here is the *schapraai*, a traditional beguine's cupboard, which was a frugal combination of dining table, cutlery cabinet and larder.

The Minnewater

Metres from the more southerly of the *begijnhof*'s two gates is the **Minnewater**, often hyped as the city's "Lake of Love". The tag certainly gets the canoodlers going, but in fact the lake – more a large pond – started life as a city harbour. The distinctive stone **lock house** at the head of the Minnewater recalls its earlier function, though it's actually a very fanciful nineteenth-century reconstruction of the medieval original. The **Poertoren**, on the west bank at the far end of the lake, is more authentic, its brown brickwork dating from 1398 and once part of the city wall. This is where the city kept its gunpowder – hence the name, "powder tower".

Beside the Poertoren, a footbridge spans the southern end of the Minnewater to reach the leafy expanse of **Minnewaterpark**, which trails north back towards the *begijnhof*.

North and east of the Markt

Jan van Eyckplein, a five-minute walk north of the Markt, is one of the prettiest squares in Bruges, its cobbles backdropped by the easy sweep of the Spiegelrei canal. The centrepiece of the square is an earnest **statue of Van Eyck**, erected in 1878, whilst on the north side is the **Tolhuis**, whose fancy Renaissance entrance is decorated with the coat of arms of the dukes of Luxembourg, who long levied tolls here. The Tolhuis dates from the late fifteenth century, but was extensively remodelled in medieval style in the 1870s, as was the **Poortersloge** (Merchants' Lodge), whose slender tower pokes up above the rooftops on the west side of the square. Theoretically, any city merchant was entitled to be a member of the Poortersloge, but in fact membership was restricted to the richest and the most powerful. An informal alternative to the Town Hall, it was

here that key political and economic decisions were taken and it was also where local bigwigs could drink and gamble discreetly.

The Spiegelrei canal and the Augustijnenbrug

Running east from Jan van Eyckplein, the **Spiegelrei canal** was once the heart of the foreign merchants' quarter, its frenetic quays overlooked by the trade missions of many of the city's trading partners. The medieval buildings were demolished long ago but they have been replaced by an exquisite medley of architectural styles from expansive Georgian mansions to pirouetting crow-step gables.

At the far end of Spiegelrei, turn left onto **Gouden-Handrei**, which, along with adjoining **Spaanse Loskaai**, flanks an especially attractive sliver of canal that was once used as a quay by Bruges's Spanish merchants. On the far side of the canal stands a string of delightful summer out-houses, privately owned and sometimes surprisingly lavish extensions to the demure houses fronting onto Gouden-Handstraat.

At the west end of Spaanse Loskaai is the **Augustijnenbrug**, the city's oldest surviving bridge, a sturdy three-arched structure dating from 1391. The bridge was built to help the monks of a nearby (and long demolished) Augustinian monastery get into the city centre speedily; the benches set into the parapet were cut to allow itinerant tradesmen to display their goods here.

Running south from the bridge is **Spanjaardstraat**, which was also part of the Spanish enclave. It was here, at no.9, in a house formerly known as **De Pijnappel** (The Fir Cone), that the founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), spent his holidays while he was a student in Paris, but unfortunately the town's liberality failed to temper Loyola's nascent fanaticism. Spanjaardstraat leads back to Jan van Eyckplein.

Kantcentrum

Beyond the east end of the Spiegelrei canal is an old working-class district of low brick cottages, in the middle of which, at the foot of **Balstraat**, lies a complex of buildings which originally belonged to the wealthy Adornes family, who migrated here from Genoa in the thirteenth century. Inside the complex, the **Kantcentrum**



△ Passenger boat to Bruges

(Lace Centre; Mon–Fri 10am–noon & 2–6pm, Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm; €2.50), on the right-hand side of the entrance, has a couple of busy workshops and offers very informal demonstrations of traditional lace-making in the afternoon (no set times). They sell the stuff too – both here and in the shop at the ticket kiosk – but it isn't cheap: a smallish Bruges table mat, with two swans, for example, costs €20–25; if you fancy having a go yourself, the shop sells all the gubbins.

Jeruzalemkerk

Across the passageway from the Kantcentrum kiosk is one of the city's real oddities, the **Jeruzalemkerk** (Jerusalem Church; same times and ticket as the Kantcentrum). This was built by the Adornes family in the fifteenth century as an approximate copy of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem after one of their number, Pieter, had returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The interior is on two levels: the lower one is dominated by a large and ghoulish altarpiece, decorated with skulls and ladders, in front of which is the black marble tomb of Anselm Adornes, the son of the church's founder, and his wife Margaretha. There's more grisliness at the back of the church, where the small vaulted **chapel** holds a replica of Christ's tomb – you can glimpse the imitation body down the tunnel behind the iron grating. To either side of the main altar, steps ascend to the choir, which is situated right below the eccentric, onion-domed lantern tower.

Kantmuseum

Behind the Jeruzalemkerk, the tiny **Kantmuseum** (Lace Museum; same times and ticket as the Kantcentrum) is of passing interest for its samples of antique lace. Renowned for the fineness of its thread and beautiful motifs, Belgian lace – or **Flanders lace** as it was formerly known – was once worn in the courts of Brussels, Paris, Madrid and London with Bruges the centre of its production. Handmade lace reached the peak of its popularity in the early nineteenth century, when hundreds of Bruges women and girls worked as home-based lacemakers. The industry was, however, transformed by the arrival of **machine-made lace** in the 1840s and, by the end of the century, handmade lace had been largely supplanted, with the lacemakers obliged to work in factories. This highly mechanized industry collapsed after World War I when lace, a symbol of an old and discredited order, suddenly had no place in the wardrobe of most women. The Kantmuseum holds fifty or so examples of old, handmade lace, the most elaborate of which is its sample of late nineteenth-century Chantilly lace. Incidentally, most **lace shops in Bruges** – and there are lots – sell lace manufactured in the Far East, especially China. The best lace shop in town – for locally made lace – is 't Apostelientje (see p.215), very close to the Kantcentrum at Balstraat 11. It's expensive, but the lace is of much higher quality.

Museum voor Volkskunde and St Janshuismolen

At the north end of Balstraat, the **Museum voor Volkskunde** (Folklore Museum; Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €3) occupies a long line of low-ceilinged almshouses set beside a trim courtyard. It's a varied collection, comprising a string of period rooms and workshops with the emphasis on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the labelling is patchy so it's best to pick up an English guidebook at reception. Beside the entrance, in Room 15, *De Zwarte Kat* – the Black Cat – is a small tavern done out in traditional style and serving ales and snacks.

Rolweg leads east from the Museum voor Volkskunde to the long and wide earthen **bank** that marks the path of the old town walls. Perched on top are a

quartet of **windmills** – two clearly visible close by and another two beyond eyeshot, about 300m and 500m to the north. You'd have to be something of a windmill fanatic to want to visit them all, but the nearest two are mildly diverting – and the closest, **St Janshuismolen**, is in working order, and the only one which is open (April–Sept Sat & Sun 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm; €2).

Engels Klooster

Founded in 1629, the **Engels Klooster** (English Convent; Mon–Sat 2–4pm & 4.30–5.30pm; free), a short walk from St Janshuismolen at Carmersstraat 85, was long a haven for English Catholic exiles – though this didn't stop Queen Victoria from popping in during her visit to Belgium in 1843. Nowadays, the convent's nuns provide an enthusiastic twenty-minute guided tour of the lavishly decorated Baroque church, whose finest features are the handsome cupola and the altar, an extraordinarily flashy affair made of 23 different types of marble. It was the gift of the Nithsdales, English aristocrats whose loyalty to the Catholic faith got them into no end of scrapes.

From the Engels Klooster, it's a ten- to fifteen-minute stroll back to the Markt.

Eating

There are literally scores of **cafés and restaurants** in Bruges, and very few of them are owned by chains, with the result that the majority are small and cosy. Standards are very variable, however, with a whole slew of places churning out some pretty mediocre stuff to cater for the enormous number of day-trippers. There are, on the other hand, plenty of commendable exceptions, including the places we detail below.

Most waiters speak at least a modicum of English – many are fluent – and **multilingual menus** are the norm.

Cafés

De Belegde Boterham Kleine St Amandsstraat 5. Most of the cafés in and around the Markt are firmly tourist-orientated, but this bright and breezy little place, in attractively renovated old premises, has a local following on account of its fresh sandwiches (€7–10) and tasty salads (€10–12). Mon–Sat noon–4pm. See map, p.194.

Café Craenburg Markt 16. Unlike the other touristy café-restaurants lining the Markt, this old-fashioned place still attracts a loyal, local clientele. With its leather and wood panelling, wooden benches and mullion windows, the Craenburg has the flavour of old Flanders, and although the daytime-only food is routine (mains from €14), it has a good range of beers, including a locally produced, tangy brown ale called Brugse Tripel. Daily 10am until late. See map, p.194.



Café de Medici Geldmuntstraat 9. An enjoyable antidote to the plain modernism of many of its rivals, this attractive café boasts an extravagantly ornate interior, complete with a huge mirror and spindly curving staircase. Has the best range of coffees in town, not to mention

mouthwatering cakes and tarts. Does sandwiches and salads too, from as little as €4. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm. See map, p.194.

Gran Kaffee de Passage Dweersstraat 26 ☎050 34 02 32. This lively café is extremely popular with backpackers, many of whom have bunked down in the adjacent Passage Hostel (see p.192). Serves up a good and filling line in Flemish food, with many dishes cooked in beer, as well as mussels and vegetarian options. Not much in the way of frills, but then main courses only cost €10–14. Daily 6pm–midnight, kitchen until 10.30pm. See map, p.194.

Het Dagelijks Brood Philipstockstraat 21. This excellent bread shop doubles as a wholefood café with one long wooden table – enforced communalism, which can be good fun – and a few smaller side tables too. The homemade soup and bread makes a meal in itself for just €8, or you can chomp away on a range of snacks and cakes. Mon & Wed–Sun 8am–6pm. See map, p.194.

Laurent Steenstraat 79c. Cheap and cheerful café metres from the cathedral. No points for

décor or atmosphere, but the snacks are filling and fresh and the pancakes first-rate. Very popular with locals. Daily 9am–5.30pm.

See map, p.194.

Lokkedize Korte Vuldertsstraat 33. Attracting a youthful crowd, this sympathetic café-bar – all subdued lighting, fresh flowers and jazz music – serves up a good line in Mediterranean (especially Greek) food, with main courses averaging around €11 and bar snacks from €7. Wed–Sun 6pm to midnight. See map, p.194.

De Verbeelding Oude Burg 26. Low-key, amenable café-bar serving a reasonably satisfying range of salads, pastas and tapas. Few

would say the food was brilliant, but it is inexpensive and – at its best – very tasty. Main courses around €10, half that for tapas. Handy for the Markt. Tues–Sat 11.30am–11.30pm. See map, p.194.

De Windmolen Carmerstraat 135. Amiable neighbourhood café-bar in an old brick house at the east end of Carmerstraat. Dishes up a decent line in inexpensive snacks and light meals – *croque monsieur*, spaghetti, lasagne and so forth – and possesses a competent beer menu. Has a pleasant outside terrace and an interior dotted with folksy knick-knacks. Mon–Thurs 10am–10pm, Fri & Sun 10am–3pm. See map, p.188–189.

Restaurants

Den Amand St Amandstraat 4 ☎050 34 01 22. Decorated in pleasant modern style, this cosy and informal family-run restaurant offers inventive cuisine combining French and Flemish traditions. Mains from the limited but well-chosen menu – for instance, swordfish in a seafood jus or seafood waterzooi (soup) – average a very reasonable €20. It's a small place, so best to book a few hours in advance. Daily except Wed & Sun noon–3pm & 6–10pm, Sun 6–10pm only. See map, p.194



Cafedraal Zilverstraat 38 ☎050 34 08 45, www.cafedraal.be. Fashionable and justifiably famous restaurant decked out in ersatz medieval style, with oodles of wood panelling, a big open fire in winter and an outside garden terrace in summer. The menu runs the gamut of French and Flemish dishes, but it's hard to beat the North Sea *bouillabaisse* or the lobster and veal cooked in mustard. Main courses around €20–25. Mon–Sat noon–3pm & 6–11pm. See map, p.194



Den Dyver Dijver 5 ☎050 33 60 69. Top-flight restaurant specializing in traditional Flemish dishes cooked in beer – the quail and rabbit are magnificent, though the seafood runs them close. The décor is plush and antique, with tapestries on the walls beneath an ancient wood-beam ceiling. The service is attentive, but not unduly so, and the only real negative is the muzak, which can be tiresome. Popular with an older clientele. Reservations advised. Mains around €25. Daily noon–2pm & 6.30–9pm, but closed Wed & Thurs lunch. See map, p.194.



Kok au Vin Ezelstraat 19 ☎050 33 95 21. Swish restaurant in tastefully modernized old premises on the north side of the city centre. An ambitious menu covers all the Franco-Belgian bases and then some with mains averaging around €25, though lunch is half that. Daily except Wed & Thurs noon–2pm & 6.30–10pm. See map, p.194.

L'Intermède Wulfhagestraat 3 ☎050 33 16 74. Tastefully decorated and very chic little restaurant serving exquisite French cuisine with a Flemish twist. Prices are reasonable and it's away from the tourist zone – which is very much to its advantage. Mains €18–24. Tues–Sat noon–1.30pm & 7–9.30pm. See map, p.194.

De Stove Kleine St Amandsstraat 4 ☎050 33 78 35. Noticeably small and extraordinarily cosy Franco-Belgian restaurant that's recommended by just about everyone, including Michelin. The menu is carefully constructed with both fish and meat dishes given equal prominence. Mains €22–25, set three-course menus €44, €60 with wine. Reservations essential. Daily except Wed & Thurs 6.45–9.30pm, plus Sat–Tues noon–1.45pm. See map, p.194.

De Visscherie Vismarkt 8 ☎050 33 02 12, www.visscherie.be. Arguably the city's premier seafood restaurant, De Visscherie manages to be smart and relaxed at the same time. A well-presented and imaginative menu features such delights as a spectacularly tasty fish soup (€14) and cod cooked in traditional Flemish style (€32). The restaurant occupies a spacious nineteenth-century mansion a short walk south of the Burg, but the décor has some intriguing modern touches – small sculptures and so on – and the chairs are supremely comfortable. Daily except Tues noon–2pm & 7–10pm. See map, p.194.

In Den Wittekop St-Jakobstraat 14 ☎050 33 20 59. This small and intimate split-level restaurant is one of the most appealing in town, its interior a fetching mixture of the tasteful and the kitsch. There's smooth jazz as background music plus good Flemish food, including the local speciality of pork and beef stewed in Trappist beer. Mains average around €18. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9.30pm. See map, p.194.

Drinking

Few would say Bruges's **bars** are cutting edge, but neither are they staid and dull – far from it if you know where to go. Indeed, drinking in the city can be a real pleasure and one of the potential highlights of any visit. Here, as elsewhere in Belgium, the distinction between the city's cafés and bars is blurred, with good beer bars often selling excellent food, and cafés frequently boasting an extensive beer list. Nonetheless, the city's specialist bars – from traditional haunts to sleek modern places – are generally more distinctive than the Euro-style pavement cafés that dominate much of the town centre and flank the Markt. As for the **club scene**, Bruges struggles to make a real fist of it, though a couple of places are enjoyable enough. **Opening hours** are fairly elastic; although we've given them for each of our recommendations, don't be amazed if the bar you're in sails on past the supposed closing time.

Bruges hosts two big-deal music festivals, the **Cactusfestival** of rock, reggae, rap, roots and R&B (three days over the second weekend of July; @www.cactusmusic.be); and **Klinkers** (two and a half weeks, usually from the last weekend of July; @www.cactusmusic.be). For more details on both, see pp.47–48.

Bars and clubs

For exact locations see map, p.194.

B-in Mariastraat 38 ☎050 31 13 00, @www.b-in.be. The coolest place in town, this slick bar-cum-club is kitted out in attractive modern style with low seats and an eye-grabbing mix of coloured fluorescent tubes and soft ceiling lights. Guest DJs play funky, uplifting house and the drinks and cocktails are reasonably priced. Attracts a relaxed and friendly crowd; gets going about 11pm. Free entry. Located at the far end of the Oud St-Jan shopping centre off Mariastraat. Daily except Sun & Mon 10am–3am, Fri & Sat until 5am.

De Bolero Garenmarkt 32. Currently the only gay and lesbian bar/club in town, hosting regular dance evenings with a wide range of sounds, from Abba to house. Entrance is free and the drinks aren't at too much of a premium. Thurs–Mon from 9pm.

Het Brugs Beertje Kemelstraat 5. This small and friendly speciality beer bar claims a stock of three hundred beers, which aficionados reckon is one of the best selections in Belgium. There are tasty snacks too, such as cheeses and salad, but note that the place is very much on the (backpacker) tourist trail. Daily except Tues & Wed 4pm–1am.



De Garre De Garre 1. Down a narrow alley off Breidelstraat between the Markt and the Burg, this cramped but charming tavern (estaminet) has an outstanding range of Belgian beers and tasty snacks, while classical music adds to the relaxed air. Mon–Fri noon – midnight, Sat & Sun 5pm–1am.



L'Estaminet Park 5 ☎050 33 09 16. Groovy café-bar with a relaxed

neighbourhood feel and (for Bruges) a diverse and cosmopolitan clientele. Rickety furniture both inside and on the large outside terrace adds to the flavour of the place, as does the world music backing track, while the first-rate beer menu skilfully picks its way through Belgium's vast offering. Daily except Mon 11.30am–1am or later, but Thurs from 4pm.

Oud Vlissinghe Blekersstraat 2 ☎050 34 37 37, @www.cafevlissinghe.be. With its wood panelling, antique paintings and long wooden tables, this is one of the oldest and most distinctive bars in Bruges, thought to date from 1515. The atmosphere is relaxed and easy-going, with the emphasis on quiet conversation; there are no jukeboxes here. There's a pleasant garden terrace too. Wed–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 11am–7pm.

De Republiek Sint Jacobsstraat 36 ☎050 34 02 29, @www.derepubliek.be. One of the most fashionable and popular café-bars in town – though without the most welcoming staff – with an arty, sometimes alternative and youthful crew. Also does very reasonably priced snacks, including vegetarian food and pasta, and has occasional gigs. Daily from 11am until 3/4am.

De Vuurmolen Kraanplein 5 ☎050 33 00 79, @www.vuurmolen.be. This crowded, youthful bar has a reasonably wide range of beers, a large front terrace and some of the best DJs in town playing a good mix of sounds – techno through to house and beyond. Daily 10am–7am.

Wijnbar Est Noordzandstraat 34 ☎050 33 38 39. The best wine bar in town, with a friendly and

relaxed atmosphere, an extensive cellar and over 25 different wines available by the glass every day. It's especially strong on New World vintages, and also serves a selection of cheeses in the

evening. There's live (and free) jazz, blues and folk music every Sunday from 8pm – 10.30pm. Mon, Thurs & Sun 5pm until midnight, Fri 5pm–1am & Sat 3pm–1am.

Performing arts and cinema

Keen to entertain its many visitors, Bruges puts on a varied programme of performing arts, mostly as part of its annual schedule of festivals and special events. In particular, look out for the **Musica Antiqua festival** of medieval music in the last week of July and first week of August (@www.musica-antiqua.com), and the more generalised **Festival van Vlaanderen** (Flanders Festival; May–Oct; @www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be), which comprises more than one hundred classical concerts distributed among the big Flemish-speaking cities, including Bruges. The two principal **venues** are the municipal theatre, the Stadsschouwburg, and the prestigious concert hall, the Concertgebouw.

In terms of **classical music** and **opera**, Bruges doesn't have its own full-blown orchestra or opera company, but it is home to a renowned chamber orchestra, the (largely itinerant) Collegium Instrumentale Brugense. The town also has two excellent art-house **cinemas**; films are normally shown in the original language, with Dutch subtitles as required.

There are several ways to find out about forthcoming concerts and performances. The main tourist office, on 't Zand (see p.190), posts information on its website and publishes a free – if somewhat skimpy – multilingual events calendar called *evenementen*, though this is supplemented by their rather more detailed monthly *events@brugge*. Much more detailed is *Exit* (@www.exit.be), a local listings magazine, also published monthly, which has in-depth reviews and a calendar. It's widely available in bookshops and assorted outlets, including the tourist office, but is (almost entirely) in Dutch.

Art-house cinemas

Ciné Liberty Kuipersstraat 23 ☎050 33 20 11, @www.cinebel.be. Right in the centre of town, located in an attractive old building, this cinema offers a choice selection of English and American mainstream films.

Cinema Lumière Sint Jacobstraat 36 ☎050 34 34 65, @www.lumiere.be. Bruges's premier venue for alternative, cult, foreign and art-house movies, with three screens.

Classical music, opera, theatre and dance

Collegium Instrumentale Brugense ☎050 81 66 18, @www.collegiuminstrumentale.be. Based in Bruges, this internationally acclaimed chamber orchestra gives fairly frequent performances in a variety of city venues. The performances dip into many historical periods, but Baroque is its speciality. The conductor, Patrick Peire, directs both the orchestra and the choral singers of the associate Capella Brugensis.

Concertgebouw 't Zand ☎070 22 33 02, @www.concertgebouw.be. Built to celebrate

Bruges's year as a cultural capital of Europe in 2002, the Concertgebouw (Concert Hall) hosts all the performing arts, from opera and classical music through to big-name bands.

Stadsschouwburg Vlamingsstraat 29 ☎050 44 30 60, @www.cultuurcentrumbrugge.be. Occupying a big and breezy, neo-Renaissance building dating from 1869, the Stadsschouwburg (Municipal Theatre) hosts a wide-ranging programme, including theatre, dance, musicals, concerts and opera.

Listings

ATMs Those ATMs in Central Bruges include ones at the post office, Markt 5; KBC, Steenstraat 38; Fortis Bank, Simon Stevinplein 3; AXA, 't Zand 1; and the Europabank, Vlamingsstraat 13.

Bike rental There are half a dozen bike rental places in Bruges, all charging around €9–10 per day, including Belgian Railways at the railway station (☎ 050 30 23 29). A second option is Bauhaus Bike Rental, at Langestraat 155 (☎ 050 34 10 93).

Books A reasonable selection of English titles and a comprehensive range of Belgian walking maps are available at Standaard Boekhandel, at Steenstraat 88 (Mon–Sat 8.30am–6pm & Sun 2–6pm).

Buses All local bus services are operated by De Lijn (☎ 070 22 02 00, www.delijn.be), which has an information kiosk outside the train station (Mon–Fri 10.30am–5.45pm, Sat 10am–5.15pm). The tourist office also has bus timetables.

Car rental Europcar, at St Pieterskaai 48 (☎ 050 31 45 44); Hertz, at Pathoekeweg 25 (☎ 050 37 72 34).

Chocolate The Chocolate Line, at Simon Stevinplein 19 (☎ 050 34 10 90, www.thechocolateline.be).

Almost certainly the best chocolate shop in town, serving up quality chocolates, handmade on the premises using natural ingredients – so not surprisingly, it's more expensive than most of its rivals. Chocolate truffles and figurines are a speciality. Boxes of mixed chocolates are sold in various sizes: a 250g box costs €10. Tues–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Mon & Sun 10.30am–6pm.

Doctors A list of doctors is available from the tourist office; for night-time doctors (8pm–8am) call ☎ 078 15 15 90.

Emergencies Fire brigade and emergency medical assistance ☎ 100; Police ☎ 101.

Football Club Brugge (www.clubbrugge.be) is one of Belgium's premier soccer clubs and a recent winner of the Belgian league and cup. They play in

the Jan Breydelstadion, a 10min drive southwest from the centre along Gistelse Steenweg; on match days there are special buses to the ground from the train station. Fixture details on the website.

Internet access Most hotels and hostels provide Internet access for their guests either free or at minimal charge. There are also several Internet cafés in the city, the most central of which is The Coffee Link, in the Oud St-Jan shopping centre, off Mariastraat (daily except Thurs & Fri 11am–6pm; ☎ 050 34 99 73, www.thecoffeelink.com). Rates are currently €0.20 per minute, after an initial charge of €2 for the first ten minutes.

Lace 't Apostelientje, Balstraat 11 (Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Sun 10am–1pm; ☎ 050 33 78 60). Close to the Kantcentrum (see p.209), this small shop sells a charming variety of handmade lace with pieces of both modern and traditional design. Most of the lace you'll see for sale in Bruges comes from Asia, but everything here is made in Belgium.

Left luggage There are luggage lockers and a luggage office at the train station.

Markets Not much to get excited about – the Saturday food and general goods market on 't Zand (8am–1pm) is the brightest and best.

Pharmacies Pharmacies are liberally distributed across the city centre and late-night duty rotas are usually displayed in pharmacists' windows; for late-night and weekend pharmacies, you can also call ☎ 050 40 61 62.

Post office Markt 5 (Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm).

Taxis There's a taxi rank on the Markt (☎ 050 33 44 44) and outside the train station on Stationsplein (☎ 050 38 46 60).

Train enquiries For domestic and international services, drop by the train station or the tourist office, or call ☎ 050 30 24 24 (daily 7am–9pm; www.b-rail.be).

Damme

Now a popular day-trippers' destination, well-known for its easy-going atmosphere and classy restaurants, the quaint village of **DAMME**, 7km northeast of Bruges, was in medieval times the town's main seaport. At its height, it boasted a population of ten thousand and guarded the banks of the **River Zwin**, which gave Bruges direct access to the sea. The river silted up in the late fifteenth century, however, and Damme slipped into a long decline, its old brick buildings crumbling away until the tourists and second-homers arrived to create the pretty and genteel village of today.

Damme's one main street, **Kerkstraat**, is edged by what remains of the medieval town, most memorably the Stadhuis (Town Hall) and the Onze Lieve

Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady). Kerkstraat also lies at right angles to the pretty, tree-lined **canal** that links Bruges with Damme and, ultimately, Sluis, a tiny village over the border in Holland. The Sluis canal intersects with the wider and busier **Leopoldkanaal** just 2km to the northeast of Damme, and together they frame a delightfully scenic sliver of countryside dotted with whitewashed farmhouses and patterned by old causeways – perfect for **cycling**.

Arrival and information

There are several ways of reaching Damme from Bruges, the most rewarding being the seven-kilometre **cycle ride** out along the tree-lined Brugge–Sluis canal, which begins at the **Dampoort**, on the northeast edge of the city centre. Cycle hire is available in Bruges (see p.190) and in Damme at Tijn en Nele, round the corner from the Stadhuis at Jacob van Maerlantstraat 2 (reservations advised; ☎050 35 71 92; closed Wed; €10 per day).

You can also get from Bruges to Damme by **canal boat**, with excursions starting about 500m east of the Dampoort on the Noorweegse Kaai (Easter to mid-Oct; five daily each way; 40min; one-way €5.20, return €6.70); tickets are purchased on board. Connecting bus #4 from the Markt and the bus station runs to the Noorweegse Kaai to meet most departures – but check the connection with the De Lijn information kiosk, outside the train station, before you set out.

Finally, you can reach Damme on **city bus** #43 from the bus station or the Markt (April–Sept; six daily each way; 20min). During the rest of the year, the bus runs less frequently and you'll be forced to hang around for longer than you'll want in Damme – if, indeed, you can make the return journey at all.

Damme has its own **tourist office**, across the street from the Stadhuis (mid-April to mid-Oct Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–noon & 2–6pm; mid-Oct to mid-April Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm, Sat & Sun 2–5pm; ☎050 28 86 10, 🌐www.toerismedamme.be).

The Town

Funded by a special tax on barrels of herrings, the fifteenth-century **Stadhuis** (no public access), just a few steps down Kerkstraat from the Sluis canal, is easily the best-looking building in the village, its elegant, symmetrical facade balanced by the graceful lines of its exterior stairway. In one of the niches you'll spy Charles the Bold offering a wedding ring to Margaret of York, who stands in the next niche along – appropriately as the couple got spliced here in Damme, a prestige event that attracted aristocratic bigwigs from all over western Europe.

Metres from the Stadhuis, the **Tijn Ulenspiegel Museum** (same times as tourist office; €2.50) is devoted to the eponymous folkloric figure who started out as a fool-cum-prankster in Germany in the fourteenth century. As Ulenspiegel stories spread into Flanders, so he became more of a scoundrel than a joker until, that is, the Belgian Charles de Coster (1827–79) subverted the legend, turning Ulenspiegel into the enemy of King Philip II of Spain and the embodiment of the Belgian hankering for freedom.

Just down the street from the museum, **St Janshospitaal** (April–Sept Mon & Fri 2–6pm, Tues–Thurs, Sat & Sun 11am–noon & 2–6pm; €1.50) accommodates a small museum of five rooms and a dainty little chapel. Room 1 houses a couple of curiously crude parchment-and-straw peasants' pictures of St Peter and St Paul, while rooms 2 and 3 have some fine old furniture. Room 4, the main room, displays an enjoyable sample of Delftware and pewter, but it's the

Cycling around Damme

Damme lies at the start of a pretty little parcel of land, a rural backwater criss-crossed by drowsy canals and causeways, each of which is shadowed by two long lines of slender poplar trees which quiver and rustle in the prevailing westerly winds. This perfect **cycling country** extends as far as the E34 motorway, about 6km from Damme. There are lots of possible cycling routes and, if you want to explore the area in detail, you should buy the detailed **Fietsnetwerk Brugse Ommeland Noord** (cycling map; 1:50,000; €6) from any major bookstore or Bruges tourist office before you set out.

One especially delightful itinerary, taking in some of the most charming scenery, is a fifteen-kilometre round-trip that begins by leaving Damme to the northeast along the Brugge–Sluis canal, then crosses over the **Leopoldkanaal** and proceeds along the canal to the hamlet of **Hoeke**. Here, just over the bridge, turn hard left for the narrow causeway – the **Krinkelidijk** – that wanders straight back in the direction of Damme, running to the north of the Brugge–Sluis canal. Just over 3km long, it drifts across a beguiling landscape of bright whitewashed farmhouses and deep-green grassy fields before reaching an intersection where you turn left to regain the Brugge–Sluis waterway.

chimneypiece that grabs the attention, a Baroque extravagance with a cast-iron backplate representing the penance of King David for the murder of Bathsheba's husband. Otherwise, the museum holds a mildly diverting assortment of liturgical objects, a potpourri of ceramic ware and folksy votive offerings.

From St Janshospitaal, it's a couple of minutes' walk further down Kerkstraat to the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (May–Sept daily 10.30am–noon & 2.30–5.30pm; €1), a sturdy brick structure in classic Gothic style. The church is attached to a ruined segment of the original nave (open access) that speaks volumes about Damme's decline: the church was built in the thirteenth century, but when the population shrank it was just too big and so the inhabitants abandoned part of the nave and the remnants are now stuck between the present church and its clumpy tower. Climb the **tower** for panoramic views over the surrounding polders. The large and enigmatic, three-headed modern statue beside the tower is the work of the contemporary Belgian painter and sculptor Charles Delporte (b.1928).

Just beyond the church, on the right hand side of Kerkstraat, a **footpath** branches off along a narrow canal to loop round the west side of Damme, an enjoyable ten-minute stroll through the poplars which brings you out just west of the village beside the Bruges–Sluis canal.

Accommodation and eating

There's no strong reason to overnight here, but if you do decide to stay the tourist office can help you find a bed – Damme has a reasonable range of **B&Bs** (2–6). Alternatively, just wander along Kerkstraat and watch for the signs, though you'll be lucky to find a vacancy in the height of the season. Damme's real forte is its **restaurants**, with a string of first-class places lining up along Kerkstraat. Pick of the bunch is the excellent *Bij Lamme Goedzak*, at Kerkstraat 13 (April–Sept daily except Thurs 11am–10pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri noon–2pm, Sat & Sun 11am–10pm; ☎050 35 20 03), which serves snacks and light meals during the day and mouth-watering traditional Flemish dishes, often featuring wild game, in the evening, when main courses run to about €25. It also sells its own house ales, has a garden terrace at the back and

a pavement terrace at the front. Similarly enticing is *Restaurant De Lieve*, just behind the Stadhuis at Jacob van Maerlantstraat 10 (Wed–Sun 6–10pm, ☎050 35 66 30), a smart and formal restaurant offering the best of Flemish and French cuisine with mains from €22.

Ghent

GHEENT may be more of a sprawl and less immediately picturesque than Bruges, its great and ancient rival, but it still musters a string of superb Gothic buildings and a bevy of delightful, intimate streetscapes, where antique brick houses are woven around a skein of narrow canals. The city's star turn is undoubtedly **St Baafskathedraal** – or at least its principal treasure, Jan van Eyck's remarkable *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* – but it's well supported by the likes of **St Nikolaaskerk**, with its soaring arches and pencil-thin turrets, and the forbidding castle of the counts of Flanders, **Het Gravensteen**. Here also are exquisite medieval guildhouses and enjoyable museums, not to mention a regiment of lively bars and first-class restaurants clustering the cobbled lanes of the **Patershol** district. These central attractions are supplemented by several outlying sights, most notably **SMAK**, a prestigious Museum of Contemporary Art, and the **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art). But perhaps above all, Ghent remains a quintessentially Flemish city with a tourist industry – rather than the other way round – and if you're put off by the tourists and tweeness of Bruges, this is the place to decamp.

Some history

The principal seat of the counts of Flanders and the largest town in western Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Ghent was once at the heart of the Flemish **cloth trade**. By 1350, the city boasted a population of fifty thousand, of whom no fewer than five thousand were directly involved in the industry, a prodigious concentration of labour in a predominantly rural Europe. Like Bruges, Ghent prospered throughout the Middle Ages, but it also suffered from endemic disputes between the count and his nobles (who supported France) and the cloth-reliant citizens (to whom friendship with England was vital).

The relative decline of the cloth trade in the early sixteenth century did little to ease the underlying tension, as the people of Ghent were still resentful of their ruling class, from whom they were now separated by **language** – French against Flemish – and **religion** – Catholic against Protestant. Adapting to the new economic situation, the town's merchants switched from industry to trade, exporting surplus grain from France, only to find their efforts frustrated by an interminable series of wars in which their rulers were deeply involved. The catalyst for conflict was usually taxation: long before the Revolt of the Netherlands (see p.443), Ghent's merchants and artisans found it hard to stomach the financial dictates of their rulers – the Habsburgs after

1482 – and time and again they rose in revolt only to be crushed and punished. In 1540, for example, the Holy Roman Emperor **Charles V** lost patience and stormed the town, abolishing its privileges, filling in the moat and building a new castle at the city's expense. Later, in 1584, with the Netherlands well on the way to independence from Spain, Ghent was captured by Philip II's armies. It was a crucial engagement. Subsequently, Ghent proved to be too far south to be included in the United Provinces and

was reluctantly pressed into the **Spanish Netherlands**. Many of its citizens fled north, and those who didn't may well have regretted their decision when the Inquisition arrived and the Dutch forced the Habsburgs to close the River Scheldt, Ghent's economic lifeline, as the price of peace in 1648.

In the centuries that followed, Ghent slipped into a slow decline from which it only emerged during the **industrial boom** of the nineteenth century. In optimistic mood, the medieval merchants had built the city's walls a fair distance from the town centre to allow Ghent to expand, but the expected growth had never taken place until now. Within the space of twenty years, these empty districts filled up with factories, whose belching chimneys encrusted the old city with soot and grime, a disagreeable measure of the city's economic revival. Indeed, its entrepreneurial mayor, Emille Braun, even managed to get the **Great Exhibition**, showing the best in contemporary design and goods, staged here in 1913.

Ghent remains an industrial city, Belgium's third largest, but in the last twenty years it has benefited from an extraordinarily ambitious programme of **restoration** and refurbishment, thanks to which the string of fine Gothic buildings that dot the ancient centre have been returned to their original glory.

Arrival

Ghent has three **train stations**, but the biggest by far – and the one you're almost bound to arrive at – is **Ghent St Pieters**, which adjoins the **bus station**, some 2km south of the city centre. From the west side of St Pieters train station, **tram #1** runs up to the Korenmarkt, right in the city centre, every few minutes, passing along Kortrijksepoortstraat and Nederkouter. All trams have destination signs and numbers at the front, but if in doubt check with the driver. The **taxi** fare from the train station to the Korenmarkt is about €8.

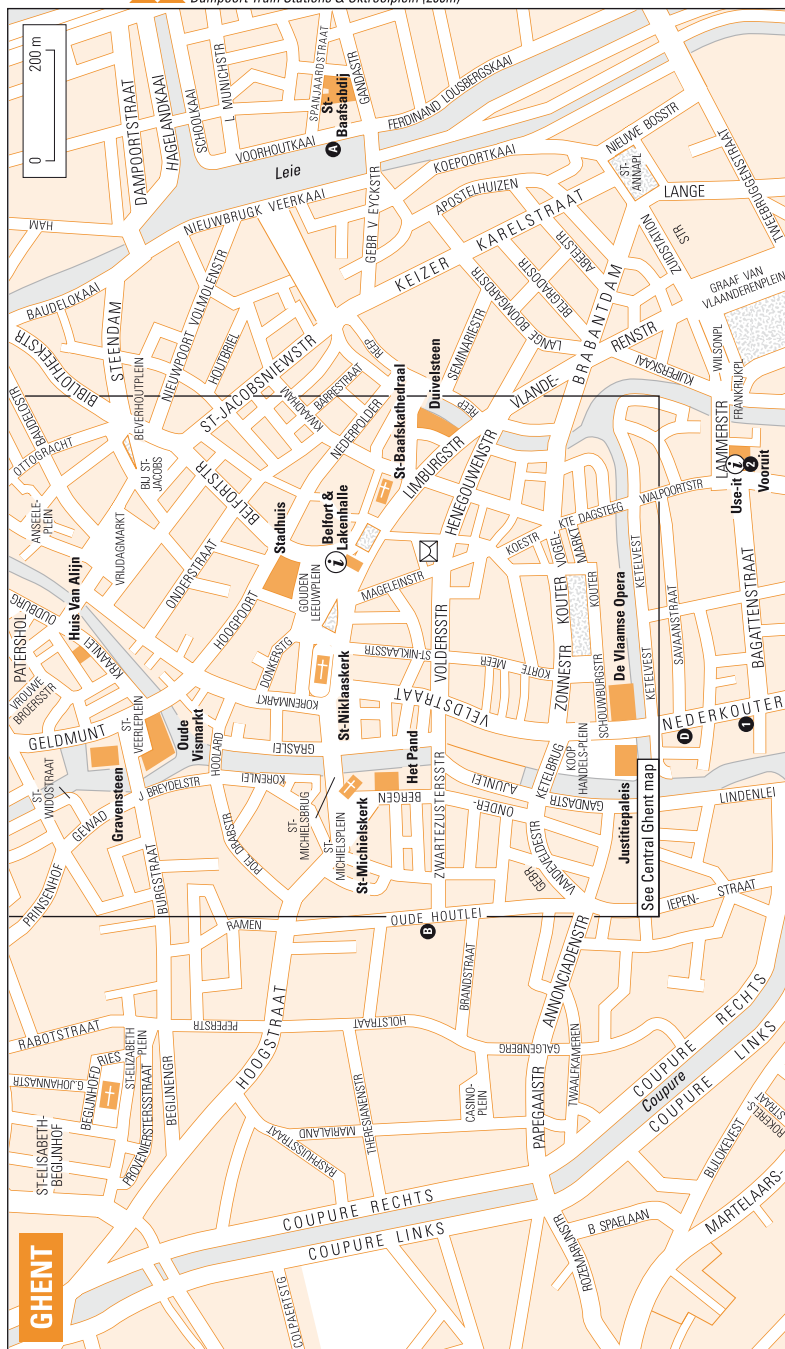
Most motorists arrive via the **E40**, the Ostend–Brussels motorway, which clips the southern edge of the city. **Car parks** within the city centre – an oval encircled by the **R40** ring road – are often jam-packed; to help, the city has signed two **parking routes** (*parkeeroute*), one signed with yellow arrows (anti-clockwise), the other with green (clockwise). Both lead to – or past – the nine car parks that lie in or close to the centre. The green route is better for the central car parks and is a little less convoluted than the yellow; the 24-hour car park beneath the Vrijdagmarkt is one of the best placed.

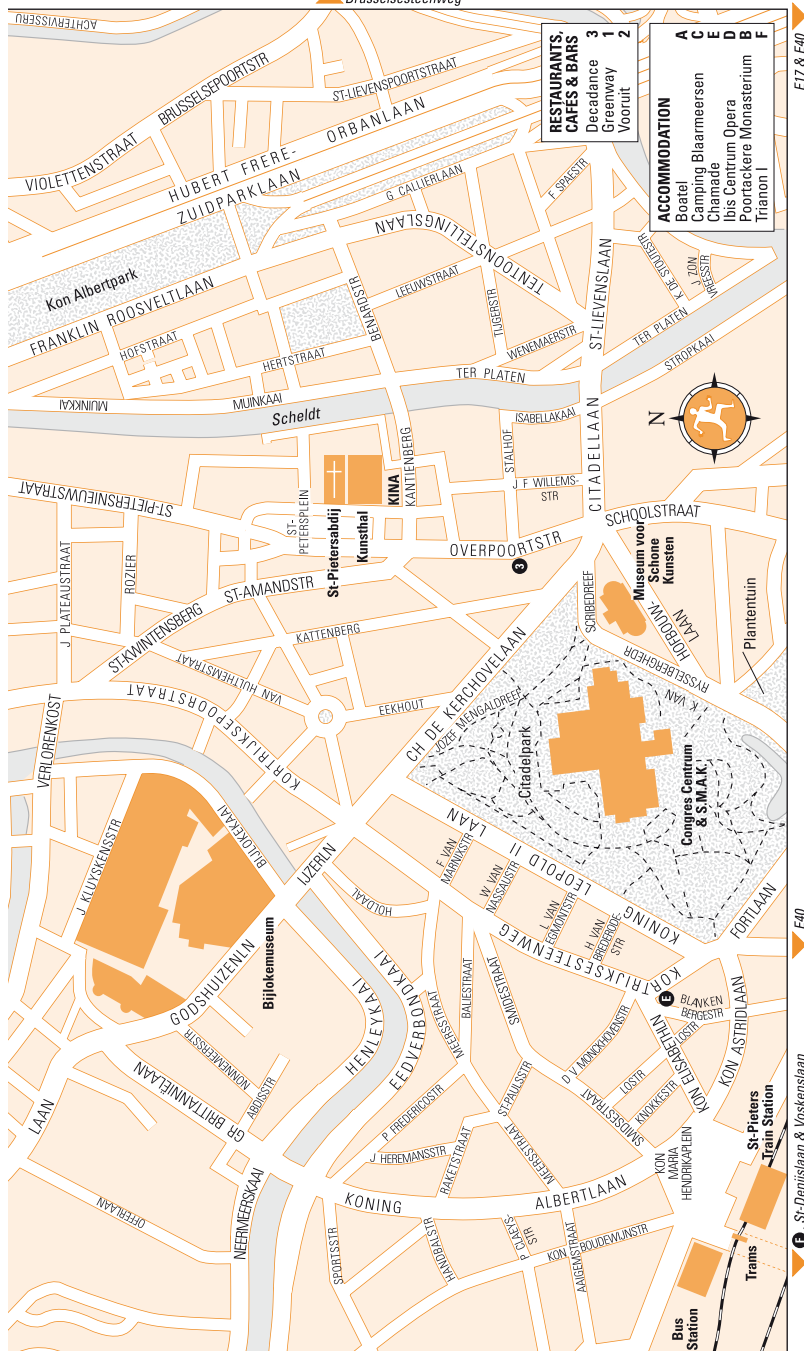
Information

Ghent's **tourist office** is bang in the centre of the city, in the crypt of the Lakenhalle (daily: April–Oct 9.30am–6.30pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm; ☎09 266 56 60, 🌐www.visitgent.be). They supply a wide range of free city information, including maps, a city guide and a hotel and restaurant book. The tourist office will also book hotel accommodation on your behalf – an especially useful service on busy summer weekends. The city also has a **youth tourist information office**, Use-it, at St Pietersnieuwstraat 21 (Mon–Fri 1–6pm; 🌐www.use-it.be), which caters for younger travellers.

City transport

All **tram and bus** services are operated by De Lijn (☎070 22 02 00, 🌐www.delijn.be). A standard one-way fare costs €1.20 in advance, €1.50 from the driver, but note that at peak times some tram and bus drivers don't take money or issue tickets. A ten-journey Lijnkaart ticket costs €8 in advance,





Walking tours and boat trips

Guided walking tours are particularly popular in Ghent. The standard walking tour, organized by the tourist office, is a two-hour jaunt round the city centre (Nov–April Sat at 2.30pm, May–Oct daily at 2.30pm; €6); advance booking – at least a few hours ahead of time – is strongly recommended. Alternatively, **horse-drawn carriages** line up outside the Lakenhalle, on St Baafsplein, offering a thirty-minute canter round town for €25 (April–Oct daily 10am–6pm & most winter weekends).

Throughout the year, **boat trips** explore Ghent's inner **waterways**, departing from the Korenlei and Graslei quays, just near the Korenmarkt, as well as from the Vleeshuisbrug, metres from the Groentenmarkt (March to mid-Nov daily 10am–6pm, mid-Nov to Feb Sat & Sun 11am–4pm; €6). Trips last forty minutes and leave roughly every fifteen minutes, though the wait can be longer as boats often only leave when reasonably full.

€10 from the driver, and a 24-hour city transport pass, the Dagpas, costs €5 (€6 from the driver). Tickets are widely available at shops and newsagents and at the automatic ticket machines on the Korenmarkt and at the train station. There are De Lijn **information kiosks** by the tram stops on the Korenmarkt (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm, Sat 10.30am–5.30pm) and at St Pieters train station (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm). They issue free maps of the transport system (the Netplan).

Ghent is good for **cycling**: the terrain is flat and there are cycle lanes on many of the roads and cycle racks dotted across the centre. There are a couple of **bike rental** outlets in Ghent, but Belgian Railways sets the benchmark, hiring out bikes at St Pieters railway station (☎09 241 22 24; daily 7am–8pm) for €9.50 per day.


Accommodation

Ghent has around thirty **hotels**, ranging from the delightful to the mundanely modern, with several of the most stylish and enjoyable – but not necessarily the most expensive – located in the centre, which is where you want to be. The city also has a good supply of budget accommodation. There's a bright, cheerful and centrally located **youth hostel**; a large suburban **campsite**; and a modest range of **B&Bs**, a list of which can be obtained from the tourist office – reckon on €50–70 per double.

The tourist office will make hotel and B&B **reservations** on your behalf at no charge, though they do require a small deposit, which is deducted from the final bill. They also publish a free brochure detailing local accommodation, including hotels and hostels (but not B&Bs) along with prices, as well as a separate Bed & Breakfast leaflet – or check out 🌐www.bedandbreakfast-gent.be.

Hotels

Boatel Voorhuitkaai 44 ☎09 267 10 30, 🌐www.theboatel.com. Arguably the most distinctive of the city's hotels, the two-star Boatel is, as its name implies, a converted boat – an imaginatively and immaculately refurbished canal barge to be precise. It's moored in one of the city's outer canals, a ten-fifteen-minute walk east from the centre. The seven bedrooms are decked out in crisp, modern style, and breakfasts, taken on the poop deck, are first-rate. See map, pp.220–221. ④

Chamade Koningin Elisabethlaan 3 ☎09 220 15 15, 🌐www.chamade.be. Standard three-star accommodation is available in bright, modern bedrooms at this chain hotel, though the building itself – a six-storey block – is a bit of an eyesore. A five-minute walk north of the train station. Weekend discounts. See map, pp.220–221. ④
 **Erasmus** Poel 25 ☎09 224 21 95, 🌐www.erasmushotel.be. Another contender for Ghent's most distinctive hotel, a friendly family-run

affair located in a commodious old town house a few metres away from the Korenlei. Each room is thoughtfully decorated and furnished with antiques. The breakfast is excellent. Reservations strongly advised in summer. Two stars, but this rating does it precious little justice. See map, p.225. ④

Flandre Poel 1 ①09 266 06 00, ①www.hoteldeflandre.be. New kid on the hotel block, this smooth and polished four-star hotel occupies an imaginatively refashioned old coach house a short walk from the Korenmarkt. Spacious public areas kitted out in sharp style are followed by neat and trim bedrooms. See map, p.225. ⑤

Gravensteen Jan Breydelstraat 35 ①09 225 11 50, ①www.gravensteen.be. Medium-sized hotel centred in an attractively restored nineteenth-century mansion adorned with Second Empire trimmings. Great location, close to the castle. The rooms in the annexe and in one wing of the original building are smart and relatively spacious with modern furnishings. Several of the older rooms are, however, very poky. Three star. See map, p.225. ⑥


Ibis Centrum Kathedraal Limburgstraat 2 ①09 233 00 00, ①www.ibishotel.com. Handily situated opposite the cathedral, this large hotel – one of the Ibis chain – offers comfortable modern rooms, though the noise from the square in front of the hotel can be irritating late at night, so ask for a room at the back. Two star. See map, p.225. ②

Ibis Centrum Opera Nederkouter 24–26 ①09 225 07 07, ①www.ibishotel.com. Spick-and-span five-storey block a five-minute walk south of the Korenmarkt. The rooms lack character, but they're perfectly functional. Two star. See map, pp.220–221. ②

B&Bs, hostel and camping

Brooderie Jan Breydelstraat 8 ①09 225 06 23, ①www.brooderie.be. An appealing little café (see p.238) whose owners rent out three neat and trim little rooms immediately above it. Breakfast is excellent. Handily located near the Korenmarkt. See map, p.225. ②

Camping Blaarmeersen Zuiderlaan 12 ①09 266 81 60, ①www.gent.be/blaarmeersen. Among the woods beside a watersports centre to the west of town, this large campsite is equipped with laundry, shop, cafeteria and various sports facilities. March to mid-Oct. Bus #38 or #39 from the southern end of the Korenmarkt (10min).

 **Chambreplus** Hoogpoort 31 ①09 225 37 75, ①www.chambreplus.be. Charming B&B with three extremely cosy, a/c guest rooms – one decorated in the manner of a sultan's room,

Novotel Centrum Goudenleeuwplein 5 ①09 224 22 30, ①www.novotel.com. First-class, modern chain hotel bang in the middle of the town centre. The rooms are neat and trim, decorated in a fetching version of chain style. Has an outdoor swimming pool and offers good breakfasts. Three star. See map, p.225. ⑦

Poortackere Monasterium Oude Houtlei 56 ①09 269 22 10, ①www.monasterium.be. This unusual hotel-cum-guesthouse occupies a rambling and somewhat spartan former monastery, whose ageing brickwork dates from the nineteenth century. The complex includes a modest neo-Gothic chapel, but guests don't stay here. Instead they have a choice between unassuming, en-suite rooms in the hotel section, or the more authentic monastic-cell experience in the guesthouse, where some rooms have shared facilities. Breakfast is taken in the old chapter-house. About 5min west of Veldstraat. Two star. See map, pp.220–221. ②–④

Sofitel Gent Belfort Hoogpoort 63 ①09 233 33 31, ①www.sofitel.com. One of the plushiest hotels in town, daintily shooehorned behind an ancient facade across from the Stadhuis. Spacious, pastel-shaded rooms and suites as well as all mod cons, including good fitness facilities. Four star. Enquire direct for discounts. See map, p.225. ⑧

Tranon I Sint Denijslaan 203 ①09 221 39 44, ①www.hoteltranon.be. Motel-style accommodation on a quiet residential street about 2km south of the centre, just beyond Ghent St Pieters train station. The nineteen rooms are comfortable and spotless, and all are en suite. Two star. See map, pp.220–221. ②

another the Congo, with the third occupying a self-contained mini-house at the back of the garden. Breakfasts are delicious – as are the homemade chocolates. Smashing central location too. See map, p.225. ③

Jeugdherberg De Draecke St Widostraat 11 ①09 233 70 50, ①www.vjh.be. Excellent, well-equipped HI-affiliated youth hostel in the city centre, a five-minute walk north of the Korenmarkt. Over a hundred beds, in two-, three-, four-, five- and six-bedrooms. Advance reservations are advised, especially in the height of the season. Breakfast is included, and the restaurant offers lunch and dinner too. There are also lockers, a bar, and facilities for bike rental and currency exchange. Dorm beds €17, doubles €44. See map, p.225.

The City Centre

The shape and structure of today's **city centre** reflect Ghent's ancient class and linguistic divide. The streets to the south of the **Korenmarkt** (Corn Market), the traditional focus of the city, tend to be straight and wide, lined with elegant old mansions, the former habitations of the wealthier, French-speaking classes, while, to the north, Flemish Ghent is all narrow alleys and low brick houses. They meet at the somewhat confusing sequence of **squares** that spread east from the Korenmarkt to St Baafskathedraal, with all of the city's leading attractions within easy walking distance.

St Baafskathedraal

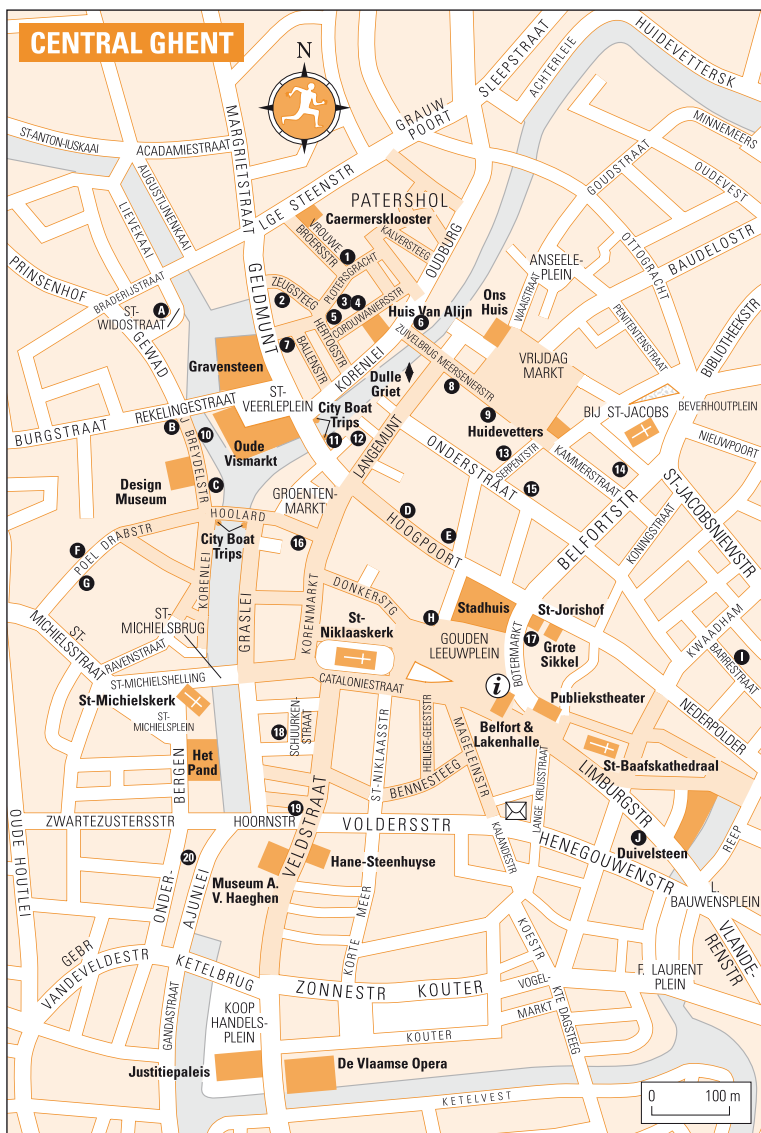
The best place to start an exploration of the city is the mainly Gothic **St Baafskathedraal** (St Bavo's Cathedral; daily: April–Oct 8.30am–6pm & Nov–March 8.30am–5pm; free), squeezed into the eastern corner of St Baafsplein. The third church on this site, and 250 years in the making, the cathedral is a tad lop-sided, but there's no gainsaying the imposing beauty of the **west tower**, with its long, elegant windows and perky corner turrets. Some 82m high, the tower was the last major part of the church to be completed, topped off in 1554 – just before the outbreak of the religious wars that were to wrack the country for the next one hundred years.

The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb

Inside the cathedral, in a small side **chapel** to the left of the entrance (daily: April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10.30am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm; €3), is Ghent's greatest treasure, a winged **altarpiece** known as *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (*De Aanbidding van het Lam Gods*), a seminal work of the early 1430s, though of dubious provenance. Since the discovery of a Latin verse on its frame in the nineteenth century, academics have been arguing about who actually painted it. The inscription reads that **Hubert van Eyck** “than whom none was greater” began, and **Jan van Eyck**, “second in art”, completed the work, but as nothing else is known of Hubert, some art historians doubt his existence. They argue that Jan, who lived and worked in several cities, including Ghent, was entirely responsible for the painting and that only later, after Jan had firmly rooted himself in the rival city of Bruges, did the citizens of Ghent invent “Hubert” to counter his fame. No one knows the altarpiece's authorship for sure, but what is certain is that in their manipulation of the technique of oil painting the artist – or artists – was able to capture a needle-sharp, luminous realism that must have stunned their contemporaries.

The altarpiece is now displayed with its panels open, though originally these were kept closed and the painting only revealed on high days and holidays. Consequently, it's actually best to begin round the back with the **cover screens**, which hold a beautiful Annunciation scene with the archangel Gabriel's wings reaching up to the timbered ceiling of a Flemish house, the streets of a town visible through the windows. In a brilliant coup of lighting, the shadows of the angel dapple the room, emphasizing the reality of the apparition – a technique repeated on the opposite cover panel around the figure of Mary. Below, the donor and his wife, a certain Joos Vydt and Isabella Borlout, kneel piously alongside statues of the saints.

A **museum pass**, valid for three days and covering fourteen of the city's sights and museums, costs just €12.50. It is available at any of the fourteen, as well as from the tourist office and some hotels.



ACCOMMODATION

Brooderie **C**
 Chambréplus **D**
 Erasmus **F**
 Flandre **G**
 Flandria Centrum **I**
 Gravensteen **B**
 Ibis Centrum Kathedraal **J**
 Jeugdherberg De Draeck **A**
 Novotel Centrum **H**
 Sofitel Gent Belfort **E**

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Amadeus **3**
 Avalon **7**
 Bij den wijzen **5**
 en den zot **1**
 De Blauwe Zalm **C**
 Brooderie **20**
 Domestica **2**

De 3 Biggetjes **10**
 House of Elliott **16**
 Malatesta **13**
 Marco Polo Trattoria **18**
 Pakhuis **19**
 Patisserie Bloch **6**
 Souplounge **6**

BARS & CLUBS

't Dreupelkot **12**
 Dulle Griet **9**
 Pink Flamingos **15**
 Rocco **4**
 De Tempelier **8**
 De Trollekelder **14**
 Den Turk **17**
 Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant **11**

By design, the restrained exterior was but a foretaste of what lies within – a striking, visionary work of art whose brilliant colours and precise draughtsmanship still take the breath away. On the **upper level** sit God the Father (some say Christ Triumphant), the Virgin and John the Baptist in gleaming clarity; to the right are musician-angels and a nude, pregnant Eve; and on the left is Adam plus a group of singing angels, who strain to read their music. The celebrated sixteenth-century Flemish art critic Karel van Mander argued that the singers were so artfully painted that he could discern the different pitches of their voices – and true or not, it is the detail that impresses, especially the richly embroidered trimmings on the cloaks. In the **lower central panel** the Lamb, the symbol of Christ's sacrifice, is depicted in a heavenly paradise – “the first evolved landscape in European painting”, suggested Kenneth Clark – seen as a sort of idealized Low Countries. The Lamb stands on an altar whose rim is minutely inscribed with a quotation from the Gospel of St John, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world”. Four groups converge on the Lamb from the corners of the central panel. In the bottom right are a group of male saints and up above them are their female equivalents; the bottom left shows the patriarchs of the Old Testament and above them are an assortment of bishops, dressed in blue vestments and carrying palm branches.

On the **side panels**, approaching the Lamb across symbolically rough and stony ground, are more saintly figures. On the right-hand side are two groups, the first being St Anthony and his hermits, the second St Christopher, shown here as a giant with a band of pilgrims. On the left side panel come the horsemen, the inner group symbolizing the Warriors of Christ – including St George bearing a shield with a red cross – and the outer group showing the Just Judges, each of whom is dressed in fancy Flemish attire. The **Just Judges panel** is not, however, authentic. It was added during the 1950s to replace the original, which was stolen in 1934 and never recovered. The lost panel features in **Albert Camus's** novel *The Fall*, whose protagonist keeps it in a cupboard, declining to return it for a complex of reasons, one of which is “because those judges are on their way to meet the Lamb . . . [but] . . . there is no lamb or innocence any longer”. Naturally enough, there has been endless speculation as to who stole the panel and why with suspicion ultimately resting on a certain Arsène Goedertier, a stockbroker and conservative politician from just outside of Ghent, who made a deathbed confession in 1934. Whether he was acting alone or as an agent for others is still hotly contested – some argue that the theft was orchestrated by the Knights Templar, others by the Nazis, but no one really knows.

The theft was just one of many dramatic events to befall the painting – indeed it's remarkable that the altarpiece has survived at all. The Calvinists wanted to destroy it; Philip II of Spain tried to acquire it; the Emperor Joseph II disapproved of the painting so violently that he replaced the nude Adam and Eve with a clothed version of 1784 (exhibited today on a column at the start of the nave just inside the church entrance); and near the end of World War II the Germans hid it in an Austrian salt mine, where it remained until American soldiers arrived in 1945.

The rest of the cathedral

The chapel displaying the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* is at the beginning of the cathedral's mighty, fifteenth-century **nave**, whose tall, slender columns give the whole interior a cheerful sense of lightness, though the Baroque marble screen spoils the effect by darkening the choir. In the nave, the principal item of interest is the rococo **pulpit**, a whopping oak and marble affair, where the main

timber represents the Tree of Life with an allegorical representation of Time and Truth at its base. Beyond, the **high altar**, with its tons of marble, features an enthroned St Baaf ascending to heaven on an untidy heap of clouds, while the neighbouring **north transept** holds a characteristically energetic painting by Rubens (1577–1640) entitled *St Baaf entering the Abbey of Ghent*. Dating to 1624, it includes a self-portrait – he’s the bearded head. Also in the north transept is the entrance to the dank and capacious vaulted **crypt**, a survivor from the earlier Romanesque church. The crypt is stuffed with religious bric-à-brac of some mild interest, but the highlight is **Justus van Gent**’s superb fifteenth-century triptych, *The Crucifixion of Christ*. This depicts the crucified Christ flanked, on the left, by Moses purifying the waters of Mara with wood, and to the right by Moses and the bronze serpent which cured poisoned Israelites on sight. As the Bible has it: “So Moses made a bronze serpent [as the Lord had commanded] and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live”.

The Lakenhalle and the Belfort

Across from the cathedral, on the west side of St Baafsplein, lurks the **Lakenhalle** (Cloth Hall), a dour hunk of a building with an unhappy history. Work began on the hall in the early fifteenth century, but the cloth trade slumped before it was finished and it was only grudgingly completed in 1903. No one has ever quite worked out what to do with the building ever since, and today it’s little more than an empty shell with the city’s tourist office tucked away in the basement on the north side. This basement was long used as the town prison, whose entrance was round on the west side of the Lakenhalle through the **Mammelokker** (The Suckling), a grandiose Louis XIV-style portal that stands propped up against the main body of the building. Part gateway and part warder’s lodging, the Mammelokker was added in 1741 and is adorned by a bas-relief sculpture illustrating the classical legend of Cimon, who the Romans condemned to death by starvation. He was saved by his daughter, Pero, who turned up daily to feed him from her breasts – hence the name.

The first-floor entrance on the south side of the Lakenhalle is the only way to reach the adjoining **Belfort** (Belfry; mid-March to mid-Nov daily 10am–6pm; €3), a much-amended medieval edifice whose soaring spire is topped by a comically corpulent, gilded copper dragon. Once a watchtower and storehouse for civic documents, the interior is now just an empty shell displaying a few old bells and statues alongside the rusting remains of a couple of old dragons, which formerly perched on top of the spire. The belfry is equipped with a glass-sided lift that climbs up to the roof, where consolation is provided in the form of excellent views over the city centre.

The Stadhuis

Stretching along the west side of the Botermarkt, just to the north of the Lakenhalle, is the striking and newly restored **Stadhuis** (City Hall). The building’s main facade comprises two distinct sections. The later section, framing the central stairway, dates from the 1580s and offers a good example of Italian Renaissance architecture, its crisp symmetries faced by a multitude of black-painted columns. In stark contrast are the wild, curling patterns of the section to the immediate north, carved in Flamboyant Gothic style at the beginning of the sixteenth century to a design by one of the era’s most celebrated architects, **Rombout Keldermans** (1460–1531). The whole of the Stadhuis was originally to have been built by Keldermans, but the money ran out when the wool trade collapsed and the city couldn’t afford to finish

it off until much later – hence today's discordant facade. Look carefully at Keldermans' work and you'll spot all sorts of charming details, especially in the elaborate tracery, decorated with oak leaves and acorns as well as vines laden with grapes. Each one of the ornate niches was intended to hold a statuette, but Keldermans never quite got round to them and the present carvings, representing important historical personages in characteristic poses, were added in the nineteenth century.

Inside the Stadhuis, **guided tours** (May–Oct Mon–Thurs daily at 2.30pm as the first 45min of the 2hr walking tour organized by the tourist office, see p.219; full 2hr tour €7, Stadhuis only €4) amble round a series of halls and chambers, the most interesting being the old Court of Justice or **Pacifcatiezaal** (Pacification Hall), where the Pacification of Ghent treaty was signed in 1576. A plaque commemorates this agreement, which momentarily bound the rebel armies of the Low Countries (today's Belgium and The Netherlands) together against their rulers, the Spanish Habsburgs. The carrot offered by the dominant Protestants was the promise of religious freedom, but they failed to deliver and much of the south (present-day Belgium) soon returned to the Spanish fold. The hall's charcoal and cream tiled **floor** is designed in the form of a maze. No one's quite certain why, but it's supposed that more privileged felons (or sinners) had to struggle round the maze on their knees as a substitute punishment for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem – a good deal if ever there was one.

St Niklaaskerk

Back down the slope from the Stadhuis, the cobbled square to the west of the Belfort is **Emile Braunplein**, named after the reforming burgomaster who cleared many of the city's slums at the beginning of the twentieth century. The west edge of the square abuts **St Niklaaskerk** (Mon 2–5pm, Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; free), an architectural hybrid dating from the thirteenth century that was once the favourite church of the city's wealthier merchants. It's the shape and structure that pleases most, especially the arching buttresses and pencil-thin turrets which, in a classic example of the early Scheldt Gothic style, elegantly attenuate the lines of the nave. Inside, many of the original Baroque furnishings and fittings have been removed and the windows unbricked, thus returning the church to its early appearance, though unfortunately this does not apply to a clumsy and clichéd set of statues of the apostles. Much better is the giant-sized Baroque **high altar** with its mammoth representation of God the Father glowering down its back, blowing the hot wind of the Last Judgement from his mouth and surrounded by a flock of cherubic angels. The church is sometimes used for temporary art exhibitions, which can attract an admission fee.

The Korenmarkt and St Michielsbrug

St Niklaaskerk marks the southern end of the **Korenmarkt** (Corn Market), a long and wide cobbled area where the grain which once kept the city fed was traded after it was unloaded from the boats that anchored on the Graslei dock (see p.229). The one noteworthy building here is the former **post office**, whose combination of Gothic Revival and neo-Renaissance styles illustrates the eclecticism popular in Belgium at the beginning of the twentieth century. The carved heads encircling the building represent the rulers who came to the city for the Great Exhibition of 1913; among them, bizarrely, is a bust of Florence Nightingale. The interior has been turned into a shopping mall.

Behind the post office, the neo-Gothic **St Michielsbrug** (St Michael's bridge) offers fine views back over the towers and turrets that pierce the Ghent skyline – just as it was meant to: the bridge was built in 1913 to provide visitors

to the Great Exhibition with a vantage point from which to admire the city centre. As such, it was one of several schemes dreamed up to enhance Ghent's medieval appearance, one of the others being the demolition of the scrabbly buildings that had sprung up in the lee of the Lakenhalle. The bridge also overlooks the city's oldest harbour, the **Tussen Bruggen** (Between the Bridges), from whose quays – the **Korenlei** and the **Graslei** – boats leave for trips around the city's canals (see box, p.222).

The guild houses of the Graslei

Ghent's boatmen and grainweighers were crucial to the functioning of the medieval city, and they built a row of splendid **guild houses** along **Graslei**, each gable decorated with an appropriate sign or symbol. Working your way north from St Michielsbrug, the first building of distinction is the **Gildehuis van de Vrije Schippers** (Guild House of the Free Boatmen), at no. 14, where the badly weathered sandstone is decorated with scenes of boatmen weighing anchor plus a delicate carving of a caravel – the type of Mediterranean sailing ship used by Columbus – located above the door. Medieval Ghent had two boatmen guilds: the Free, who could discharge their cargoes within the city, and the Unfree, who could not. The Unfree Boatmen were obliged to unload their goods into the vessels of the Free Boatmen at the edge of the city – an inefficient arrangement by any standard, though typical of the complex regulations governing the guilds.

Next door, at Graslei 12–13, the seventeenth-century **Cooremetershuys** (Corn Measurers' House) was where city officials weighed and graded corn behind a facade graced by cartouches and garlands of fruit. Next to this, at no. 11, stands the quaint **Tolhuisje**, another delightful example of Flemish Renaissance architecture, built to house the customs officers in 1698, while the adjacent limestone **Spijker** (Staple House), at no. 10, boasts a surly Romanesque facade dating from around 1200. It was here that the city stored its grain supply for over five hundred years until a fire gutted the interior. Finally, three doors down at no. 8, the splendid **Den Enghel** takes its name from the angel bearing a banner that decorates the facade; the building was originally the stonemasons' guild house, as evidenced by the effigies of the four Roman martyrs who were the guild's patron saints, though they are depicted in medieval attire rather than togas and sandals.

The Groentenmarkt and the Korenlei

Just north of Graslei, on the far side of Hoolard street, is the **Groentenmarkt** (Vegetable Market), one of the city's prettier squares, a jumble of old buildings, one of which houses the especially distinctive shop Tierenteyn, a mustard specialist (see p.241). The west side of the square is flanked by a long line of sooty stone gables which were once the retaining walls of the **Groot Vleeshuis** (Great Butchers' Hall), a covered market in which meat was sold under the careful control of the city council. The gables date from the fifteenth century but are in poor condition and the interior is only of interest for its intricate wooden roof.

From the north end of Graslei, the **Grasbrug** bridge leads over to the **Korenlei**, which trips along the western side of the old city harbour. Unlike the Graslei opposite, none of the medieval buildings have survived here and instead there's a series of expansive, high-gabled Neoclassical merchants' houses, mostly dating from the eighteenth century. It's the general ensemble that appeals rather than any particular building, but the **Gildehuis van de Onvrije Schippers** (Guild house of the Unfree Boatmen), at no. 7, does boast a fetching

eighteenth-century facade decorated with whimsical dolphins and bewigged lions, all bulging eyes and rows of teeth.

St Michielskerk

At the south end of Korenlei, on the far side of St Michielsbrug, rises the bulky mass of **St Michielskerk** (April–Sept Mon–Sat 2–5pm; free), a heavy-duty Gothic structure begun in the 1440s. The city's Protestants seem to have taken a particularly strong disliking to the place, ransacking it twice – once in 1566 and again in 1579 – and the repairs were never quite finished, as witnessed by the forlorn and clumsily truncated tower. Entered on Onderbergen, the interior is, however, much more enticing, the broad sweep of the five-aisled nave punctuated by tall and slender columns that shoot up to the arching vaults of the roof. Most of the furnishings and fittings are Gothic Revival, pedestrian stuff enlivened by a scattering of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings, the pick of which is a splendidly impassioned *Crucifixion* by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) in the north transept. Trained in Antwerp, where he worked in Rubens' workshop, van Dyck made extended visits to England and Italy in the 1620s, before returning to Antwerp in 1628. He stayed there for four years – during which time he painted this *Crucifixion* – before migrating to England to become portrait painter to Charles I and his court.

The Design Museum

Doubling back from St Michielskerk, it's a short walk north along the Korenlei to the **Design Museum**, at Jan Breydelstraat 5 (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €2.50; @www.designmuseumgent.be), one of the city's more enjoyable museums, which focuses on Belgian decorative and applied arts. The wide-ranging collection divides into two distinct sections. At the front, squeezed into what was once an eighteenth-century patrician's mansion, is an attractive sequence of **period rooms**, mostly illustrating the Baroque and the Rococo. The original dining room is especially fine, from its fancy painted ceiling, ornate chandelier and Chinese porcelain through to its intricately carved elm panelling.

The second section, at the back of the mansion, comprises a gleamingly **modern display** area used both for temporary exhibitions and to showcase the museum's eclectic collection of applied arts, dating from 1880 to the present day. There are examples of the work of many leading designers, but the Art Nouveau material is perhaps the most visually arresting, especially the finely crafted furnishings of the Belgian **Henry van der Velde** (1863–1957).

Het Gravensteen

At the top of Jan Breydelstraat, turn right and cross the bridge to reach **Het Gravensteen** (daily: April–Sept 9am–5/6pm; Oct–March 9am–4/5pm; €6), the castle of the counts of Flanders, which looks sinister enough to have been lifted from a Bosch painting. Its cold, dark walls and unyielding turrets were first raised in 1180 as much to intimidate the town's unruly citizens as to protect them and, considering the castle has been used for all sorts of purposes since then (it was even used as a cotton mill), it has survived in remarkably good nick. The imposing **gateway** comprises a deep-arched, heavily fortified tunnel leading to the **courtyard**, which is framed by protective battlements complete with wooden flaps, ancient arrow slits and apertures for boiling oil and water.

Overlooking the courtyard stand the castle's two main buildings: the **count's residence** on the left and the **keep** on the right, the latter riddled with narrow, interconnected staircases set within the thickness of the walls. A self-guided tour

takes you through this labyrinth, the first highlight being a room full of medieval military hardware, from suits of armour, pikes, swords and daggers through to an exquisitely crafted sixteenth-century crossbow. Beyond, and also of interest, is a gruesome collection of instruments of torture; the count's cavernous state rooms; and a particularly dank, underground dungeon (an oubliette). It's also possible to walk along most of the castle's encircling wall, from where there are pleasing views over the city centre.

St Veerleplein and the Oude Vismarkt

Public punishments ordered by the counts and countesses of Flanders were carried out in front of the castle on **St Veerleplein**, now an attractive cobbled square, but with an ersatz punishment post, plonked here in 1913 and topped off by a lion carrying the banner of Flanders. At the back of the square, beside the junction of the city's two main canals, is the grandiloquent Baroque facade of the **Oude Vismarkt** (Old Fish Market), in which Neptune stands on a chariot drawn by sea horses. To either side are allegorical figures representing the River Leie (Venus) and the River Scheldt (Hercules), the two rivers that spawned the city. The market itself is in a terrible state, scheduled for restoration – or possibly demolition.

Huis van Alijn Museum

From St Veerleplein, it's a brief stroll east to one of the city's more popular attractions, the **Huis van Alijn**, at Kraanlei 65 (Tues–Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; €2.50; www.huisvanalijn.be), a folklore museum which occupies a series of exceptionally pretty little almshouses set around a central courtyard. Dating from the fourteenth century, the almshouses were built following a major scandal reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1354, two members of the Rijms family murdered three of the rival Alijns when they were at Mass in St Baafskathedraal. The immediate cause of the affray was that a man from each clan were rivals for the same woman, but the dispute went deeper, reflecting the commercial animosity of two guilds, the weavers and the fullers. The murderers fled for their lives and were condemned to death in absentia, but were eventually – eight years later – pardoned on condition that they paid for the construction of a set of almshouses, which was to be named after the victims. The result was the Huis van Alijn, which became a hospice for elderly women and then a workers' tenement until the city council snapped it up in the 1950s.

The **museum** consists of two sets of period rooms depicting local life and work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one each on either side of the central courtyard. The duller rooms hold reconstructed shops and workshops – a dispensary, a cobbler's and so forth – the more interesting are thematic, illustrating particular aspects of traditional Flemish society. There are, for example, good displays on funerals and death, popular entertainment – from brass bands through to sports and fairs – and on religious beliefs in an age when every ailment had its own allocated saint. The more substantial exhibits are explained in free multilingual leaflets, which are available in the appropriate room, but generally the labelling is very skimpy. One of the rooms on the right-hand side of the museum has a bank of miniature TV screens showing short, locally made **amateur films** in a continuous cycle. Some of these date back to the 1920s, but most are postwar including a snippet featuring a local 1970s soccer team, when footballers' shorts were terrifyingly tight.

Overlooking the central courtyard in between the two sets of period rooms is the **chapel**, a pleasantly gaudy affair built in the 1540s and now decorated with folksy shrines and votive offerings. When they aren't out on loan, the church is

also home to a pair of wooden “goliaths,” large and fancily dressed wooden figures that are a common feature of Belgian street processions and festivals.

The Patershol

Behind the Kraanlei are the lanes and alleys of the **Patershol**, a tight web of brick terraced houses dating from the seventeenth century. Once the heart of the Flemish working-class city, this thriving residential quarter had, by the 1970s, become a slum threatened with demolition. After much debate, the area was saved from the developers and a process of gentrification begun, the result being today's gaggle of good bars and smashing restaurants. The process is still underway and the fringes of the Patershol remain a ragbag of decay and restoration, but few Belgian cities can boast a more agreeable drinking and eating district. One specific sight is the grand old Carmelite Monastery on Vrouwebroersstraat, now the **Provinciaal Cultuurcentrum Caermersklooster** (☎09 269 29 10, 🌐www.caermersklooster.be), which showcases temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, photography, design and fashion.

The Vrijdagmarkt and Bij St Jacobs

Pushing on along the Kraanlei from the Huis van Alijn, it's only a few paces to the antiquated little bridge that leads over to **Dulle Griet** (Mad Meg), a lugubrious fifteenth-century **cannon** whose failure to fire provoked a bitter row between Ghent and the nearby Flemish town of Oudenaarde, where it was cast. In the 1570s, fearful of a Habsburg attack, Ghent purchased the cannon from Oudenaarde. As the region's most powerful siege gun, able to propel a 340kg cannonball several hundred metres, it seemed a good buy, but when Ghent's gunners tried it out the barrel cracked on first firing. The useless lump was then rolled to the edge of the Vrijdagmarkt, where it has stayed ever since, and, much to the chagrin of Ghent's city council, Oudenaarde simply refused to offer a refund.

From Dulle Griet, it's metres to the **Vrijdagmarkt**, a wide and open square that was long the political centre of Ghent, the site of both public meetings and executions – sometimes both at the same time. In the middle of the square stands a nineteenth-century statue of the guild leader **Jacob van Artevelde** (see box below), portrayed addressing the people in heroic style. Of the buildings flanking the Vrijdagmarkt, the most appealing is the former **Gildehuis van de Huidevetters** (Tanners' Guildhouse), at no. 37, a tall, Gothic structure whose pert dormer windows and stepped gables culminate in a dainty and

Jacob van Artevelde

One of the shrewdest of Ghent's medieval leaders, **Jacob van Artevelde** (1290–1345) was elected captain of all the guilds in 1337. Initially, he steered a delicate course during the interminable wars between France and England, keeping the city neutral – and the textile industry going – despite the machinations of both warring countries. Ultimately he was, however, forced to take sides, plumping for England. This proved his undoing: in a burst of Anglomania, Artevelde rashly suggested that a son of Edward III of England become the new count of Flanders, an unpopular notion that prompted a mob to storm his house and hack him to death. Artevelde's demise fuelled further outbreaks of communal violence and, a few weeks later, the Vrijdagmarkt witnessed a riot between the fullers and the weavers that left five hundred dead. This rumbling vendetta – one of several that plagued the city – was the backdrop to the creation of the Huis van Alijn (see p.231).

distinctive corner turret – the **Toreken**. Also worth a second glance is the old headquarters of the trade unions, the whopping **Ons Huis** (Our House), a sterling edifice built in eclectic style at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Adjoining Vrijdagmarkt is busy **Bij St Jacobs**, a sprawling square sprinkled with antique shops and set around a sulky medieval church. The square hosts the city's biggest and best **flea market** (*prondelmarkt*) on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 8am to 1pm. From the square, it's a couple of minutes' walk up Belfortstraat back to Hoogpoort and the Stadhuis.

East along the Hoogpoort to Geeraard de Duivelsteen

Formerly known as **St Jorishof**, the building facing the Stadhuis, on the corner of Botermarkt and Hoogpoort, is one of the city's oldest, its heavy-duty stonework dating from the middle of the fifteenth century. This was once the home of the Crossbowmen's Guild, and although the crossbow was a dead military duck by the time it was built, the guild was still a powerful political force – and remained so until the eighteenth century. It was here, in 1477, that Mary of Burgundy (see p.205) was pressured into signing the Great Privilege confirming the city's commercial freedoms. She was obviously not too offended, though, as later that year this was where she chose to receive the matrimonial ambassadors of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III. Frederick was pressing the suit of his son, Maximilian, whom Mary duly married, the end result being that Flanders became a Habsburg fiefdom.

Lining up along the **Hoogpoort**, beyond St Jorishof, are some of the **oldest facades** in Ghent, sturdy if sooty Gothic structures also dating from the fifteenth century. The third house along – formerly a heavily protected aristocratic mansion called the **Grote Sikkel** – is now the home of a music school, but the blackened remains of an antique torch-snuffer remain fixed to the wall beside the grand double doors.

Hoogpoort leads into **Nederpolder** and a right turn at the end brings you to the forbidding **Geraard de Duivelsteen** (no admission), a fortified palace of splendid Romanesque design built of grey limestone in the thirteenth century. The stronghold, bordered by what remains of its moat, takes its name from Geraard Vilain, who earned the soubriquet “duivel” (devil) for his acts of cruelty or, according to some sources, because of his swarthy features and black hair. Vilain was not the only noble to wall himself up within a castle – well into the fourteenth century, Ghent was dotted with fortified houses (*stenen*) – such was the fear the privileged few had of the rebellious guildsmen. The last noble moved out of the Duivelsteen in about 1350 and since then the building has been put to a bewildering range of uses – at various times it served as an arsenal, a prison, a madhouse and an orphanage; nowadays it houses government offices.

Lieven Bauwensplein and the van Eyck monument

Just south of the Duivelsteen is **Lieven Bauwensplein**, a square that takes its name from – and has a statue of – the local entrepreneur who founded the city's machine-manufactured textile industry. Born in 1769, the son of a tanner, Bauwens was an intrepid soul, who posed as an ordinary textile worker in England to learn how its (much more technologically advanced) machinery worked. In the 1790s, he managed to smuggle a spinning jenny over to the continent and soon opened cotton mills in Ghent. It didn't, however, do Bauwens much good: he over-borrowed and when there was a downturn in demand, his factories went bust and he died in poverty.



△ Duivelsteen

From the square, it's a short stroll north up Limburgstraat to St Baafskathedraal. On the way, you'll pass a **monument** to the Eyck brothers, Hubert and Jan, the painter(s) of the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. The monument is a somewhat stodgy affair, knocked up for the Great Exhibition of 1913, but it's an interesting piece of art propaganda, proclaiming Hubert as co-painter of the altarpiece, when this is very speculative (see p.224). Open on Hubert's knees is the Bible's *Revelations*, which may or may not have given him artistic inspiration.

South of the centre

Although the majority of Ghent's key attractions are within easy strolling distance of the Korenmarkt, two of the city's principal museums are located some 2km south of the centre. These are the newly refurbished **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art Museum) and the adjacent Museum of Contemporary Art, **S.M.A.K.** Many visitors just hop on a tram at the Korenmarkt for the quick trip down to the two, but with a little more time – and energy – the twenty-minute walk there can take in several less well-known attractions. The route suggested below begins by heading south from the Korenmarkt along **Veldstraat**, Ghent's main shopping street, before dropping by the two museums.

South along Veldstraat

Veldstraat leads south from the Korenmarkt, running parallel to the River Leie. By and large, it's a very ordinary shopping strip, but the eighteenth-century mansion at no. 82 does hold the modest **Museum Arnold Vander Haeghen** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm; free), where pride of place goes to the Chinese salon, whose original silk wallpaper has survived intact. The Duke of Wellington stayed here in 1815 after the Battle of Waterloo, popping across the street to the **Hôtel d'Hane-Steenhuysse**, at no. 55, to bolster the morale of the refugee King of France, Louis XVIII. Abandoning his throne, Louis had hot-footed it to Ghent soon after Napoleon landed in France following his escape from Elba. While others did his fighting for him, Louis waited around in Ghent gorging himself – his daily dinner lasted all of seven hours and the bloated exile was known to polish off one hundred oysters at a sitting. His fellow exile, the writer and politician François Chateaubriand ignored the gluttony and cowardice, writing meekly, "The French alone know how to dine with method". Thanks to Wellington's ministrations, Louis was persuaded to return to his kingdom and his entourage left for Paris on June 26, 1815, one week after Waterloo. Dating from 1768, the grand facade of Louis's hideaway has survived in good condition, its elaborate pediment sporting allegorical representations of Time and History, but at present there's no access to the expansive salons beyond.

Pushing on down Veldstraat, it's a couple of minutes more to a matching pair of grand, Neoclassical nineteenth-century buildings. On the right-hand side is the **Justitiepaleis** (Palace of Justice), whose colossal pediment sports a frieze with the figure of Justice in the middle, the accused to one side and the condemned on the other. Opposite stands the recently restored **opera house** – home to De Vlaamse Opera (see p.241) – its facade awash with playfully decorative stone panels.

From the opera house, it's an easy, if dull, ten-minute stroll south to S.M.A.K. and the Museum voor Schone Kunsten via the Nederkouter, but it's

STAM

Founded in the thirteenth century, the old Cistercian **Bijlokeabdij** (Bijloke Abbey) on Godshuizenlaan, just to the west of the River Leie, was savaged by Calvinists on several occasions, but much of the medieval complex has survived, its tidy brown-brick buildings set behind a handsome Baroque portal. The abbey is currently closed to visitors as part of a major redevelopment, which will create **STAM** (@www.stamgent.be), a museum devoted to the city's heritage. The surrounding grounds are being redeveloped too with the creation of a concert hall, studios and an academy. The work is scheduled for completion in 2009.

better – and not much further – to get there along the banks of the River Leie: turn off Nederkouter at Verlorenkost and then, with the Coupure canal and its dinky swing bridge dead ahead, turn left along the river.

Citadelpark and S.M.A.K.

Citadelpark, just to the east of Kortrijksepoortstraat, takes its name from the fortress that stood here until the 1870s, when the land was cleared and enhanced with a network of leafy footpaths that steer their way past grottoes and ponds, statues and fountains, a waterfall and a bandstand. Later, in the 1940s, a large brick complex was built on the east side of the park and, after many incarnations, part of this now houses **S.M.A.K.**, the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €5; www.smak.be), one of Belgium's most adventurous contemporary art galleries. The museum is given over to temporary displays of international standing, and recent exhibitions have displayed the works of Anton Henning and Kendell Geers. These exhibitions are supplemented by a regularly rotated selection of sculptures, paintings and installations taken from the museum's wide-ranging permanent collection. S.M.A.K. possesses examples of all the major artistic movements since World War II – everything from Surrealism, the CoBrA group and Pop Art through to Minimalism and conceptual art – as well as their forerunners, most notably René Magritte and Paul Delvaux. Perennial favourites include the installations of the influential German **Joseph Beuys** (1921–86), who played a leading role in the European avant-garde art movement of the 1970s, and a characteristically unnerving painting by **Francis Bacon** (1909–1992) entitled *A Figure Sitting*.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten

Directly opposite S.M.A.K., the recently upgraded **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art Museum; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €4; www.mskgent.be) occupies an imposing Neoclassical edifice on the edge of Citadelpark. Inside, the central atrium and connecting rotunda are flanked by a sequence of rooms, with the older paintings exhibited to the right in Rooms 1–8, the bulk of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century material in Rooms 13–19, and the early twentieth-century material mostly on the left in Rooms A–K. There's not enough space to display all the permanent collection at any one time, so there's some rotation, but you can expect to see the paintings mentioned below even if they are not in the room specified. The layout of the collection does not seem to follow much of a scheme, but it's small enough to be easily manageable; free **museum plans** are issued at reception.

Beginning with the numbered rooms on the right, one highlight of the museum's small but eclectic collection of early Flemish paintings is **Rogier van der Weyden's** (1399–1464) *Madonna with Carnation*, a charming work where the proffered flower, in all its exquisite detail, serves as a symbol of Christ's passion. Also in Room 2 are two superb works by **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450–1516), his *Bearing of the Cross* showing Christ mocked by some of the most grotesque and deformed characters Bosch ever painted. Look carefully and you'll see that Christ's head is at the centre of two diagonals, one representing evil, the other good – the latter linking the repentant thief with St Veronica, whose cloak carries the imprint of Christ's face. This struggle between good and evil is also the subject of Bosch's *St Jerome at Prayer*, in the foreground of which the saint prays, surrounded by a menacing landscape. Room 3 displays **Adriaen Isenbrandt's** (d. 1551) *Mary and Child*, a gentle painting showing Mary suckling Jesus on the flight to

Egypt, with the artist choosing a rural Flemish landscape as the backdrop rather than the Holy Land.

A couple of rooms along, Room 5 features a powerful *St Francis* by **Rubens** (1577–1640), in which a very sick-looking saint bears the marks of the stigmata, while **Jacob Jordaens** (1593–1678), who was greatly influenced by Rubens, is well-represented in Room 7 by the robust romanticism of his *Judgement of Midas*. Jordaens was, however, capable of much greater subtlety and his *Studies of the Head of Abraham Grapheus*, also in Room 7, is an example of the high-quality preparatory paintings he completed, most of which were later recycled within larger compositions. In the same room, **Anthony van Dyck's** (1599–1641) *Jupiter and Antiope* wins the bad taste award for its portrayal of the lecherous god, with his tongue hanging out in anticipation of sex with Antiope. Next door, Room 8 holds two precise works by **Pieter Bruegel the Younger** (1564–1638), who inherited his father's interest in the landscape and those who worked and lived on it, as evidenced by his *Wedding Breakfast and Village Lawyer*.

To the right of the rotunda, Rooms 13–19 kick off the museum's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collection with a handful of romantic historical canvases, plus – and this is a real surprise – a superbly executed portrait of a certain *Alexander Edgar* by the Scot **Henry Raeburn** (1756–1823), in Room 17. There are more late nineteenth-century paintings to the left of the rotunda in Rooms N–S as well as some especially fine canvases from the early 1900s, including two harrowing studies by Ostend's **Leon Spilliaert** (1881–1946), in Room R. Next door, Room P displays one of the museum's most celebrated paintings, **James Ensor's** (1860–1949) *Self-Portrait with Flower Hat*, and Ensor's remarkable work continues in Rooms F, I, J and K – look out for the ghoulish *Skeleton looking at Chinoiserie* and *Pierrot and Skeleton in Yellow Robe*. Finally, Room C displays several characteristically unsettling works by both **Paul Delvaux** (1897–1994) and **René Magritte** (1898–1967), most memorably the latter's *Persepective II. Manet's Balcony*, in which the figures from Manet's painting have been replaced by wooden coffins.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Ghent's numerous **cafés and restaurants** offer the very best of Flemish and French cuisines with a sprinkling of Italian, Chinese and Arab places for variety. There's a concentration of deluxe restaurants in and around the narrow lanes of the Patershol quarter and another, of less expensive options, on and around the Korenmarkt. **Prices** run the gamut, but a filling main course in a mid-range restaurant will cost you around €18–25, €9–15 in a café or cheaper restaurant.

The city also has a first-rate range of **bars**, from antique drinking dens with nicotine-stained ceilings through to earthy students' pubs and slick, modern places with hi-tech furnishings and fittings. There are good places dotted all over the city, but several of the most distinctive, complete with a beer list long enough to strain any liver, are within a couple of minutes' walk of Het Gravensteen. The **club and live music scene** is also first-rate, with several top-ranking, inventive venues. Note that most student bars and clubs don't open at the weekend, when most of the clientele clear off out of town. The best listings magazine around, though it is stuffed with ads, is the fortnightly freebie **Zone 09** (@www.zone09.be); it's available at newspaper racks all over the city centre.

Cafés

Brooderie Jan Breydelstraat 8. Pleasant and informal café with a health-food slant, offering wholesome breakfasts, lunches, sandwiches and salads (from around €9), plus cakes and coffee. Also offers bed and breakfast (see p.223).

Tues–Sun 8am–6pm. See map, p.225.

Greenway Nederkouter 42. Straightforward café-cum-takeaway decorated in sharp modern style, selling a wide range of eco-friendly foods, from biogburgers to pastas, noodles and baguettes, all for just a few euros each. Mon–Sat 11am–9pm. See map, pp.220–221.


Pâtisserie Bloch Veldstraat 60. Something of a local institution, and a favourite with shoppers for

donkey's years, this tearoom offers a lip-smacking variety of cakes and confectioneries, washed down by premium coffees and teas. Snacks are available too – though these are no great shakes – and there's a takeaway service. The décor is really rather ordinary – the place is a bit like a canteen – but if you like cakes you won't give a hoot. On the corner with Voldersstraat. Mon, Tues & Thurs 9.30am–6pm, Fri & Sat 9.30am–5pm. See map, p.225.

Souplounge Zuivelbrug 4. Bright and cheerful modern café, where the big bowls of freshly made soup are the main event – from €6. Self-service. Daily 10am–7pm. See map, p.225.

Restaurants

Amadeus Plotersgracht 8 ☎ 09 225 13 85. In the heart of the Patershol, this busy, well-established restaurant specializes in spare ribs. Long tables, oodles of stained glass, low ceilings and an eccentric sprinkling of bygones make the place feel relaxed and convivial. Main courses at around €20. Mon–Thurs 7–11pm & Fri–Sun 6pm–midnight, plus Thurs–Sun noon–2.30pm. See map, p.225.

 **Avalon** Geldmunt 32 ☎ 09 224 37 24. This spick-and-span vegetarian restaurant offers a wide range of well-prepared dishes. The key pull are the daily lunchtime specials, which cost about €9. Choose from one of the many different rooms or the terrace at the back in the summer. Mon–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm, plus Fri & Sat 6–9pm. See map, p.225.

Bij den wijzen en den zot Hertogstraat 42 ☎ 09 223 42 30. One of the better restaurants in the Patershol, serving up Flemish cuisine with more than a dash of French flair. Soft lighting and classical music set the tone. The premises are charming too – an old brick house of tiny rooms and narrow stairs with dining on two floors. Prices are bearable, with main courses averaging about €24; house specialties include eel, cooked in several different ways, and waterzooi. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6.30–9.30pm. See map, p.225.

 **De Blauwe Zalm** Vrouwebroersstraat 2 ☎ 09 224 08 52. Outstanding seafood restaurant – the best in town – serving up everything from the more usual cod, salmon, monkfish and haddock through to the likes of seawolf, sea bass, turbot and John Dory. Fish tanks keep the crustacea alive and kicking, and the décor has a distinctly maritime feel – though it's all done in impeccable, ultra-cool style. Main courses from €20. Reservations are pretty much essential.

Tues–Fri noon–2pm plus Mon–Sat 7–9.30pm. See map, p.225.

Domestica Onderbergen 27 ☎ 09 223 53 00. Smart and chic brasserie-restaurant serving up an excellent range of Belgian dishes – both French and Flemish – in nouvelle cuisine style. Has a garden terrace for good-weather eating. Main courses from €20. Mon 6.30–10.30pm, Tues–Fri noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm, Sat 6.30–10.30pm. See map, p.225.

De 3 Biggetjes Zeugsteeg 7 ☎ 09 224 46 48, www.de3biggetjes.com. In the heart of the Patershol, this charmingly intimate restaurant occupies an old terrace house with a trim crowsfoot gable. A select but extremely well-chosen menu features the freshest of ingredients prepared with creative gusto – antelope in jenever sauce for example. Main courses from €20. Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri noon–2pm & 7–9pm, Sat 7–9pm, Sun noon–2pm. See map, p.225.

 **House of Eliott** Jan Breydelstraat 36 ☎ 09 225 21 28, www.thehouseofeliott.be. Idiosyncratic, split-level restaurant strewn with Edwardian bric-à-brac, even including models' dummies, and offering a limited but well-chosen menu of meat and fish dishes – all freshly prepared and very tasty. Mains €20–25. The window tables overlook a canal and, if the weather holds, you can eat out on the pontoon at the back. Mon & Thurs–Sun noon–2pm & 6–10pm. See map, p.225.

Malatesta Korenmarkt 35. Informally fashionable café-restaurant decorated in strong, modern style and offering tasty pizza and pasta dishes from €12. Handy location, bang in the centre of the city. Daily except Tues 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–11pm. See map, p.225.

Marco Polo Trattoria Serpentstraat 11 ☎ 09 225 04 20. This simple rustic restaurant is part of the Italian “slow food” movement in which the emphasis is on organic, seasonal ingredients prepared in a traditional manner. The menu is small, but all the dishes are freshly prepared and delicious. Mains from €13. Tues–Fri noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm, Sat & Sun 6–10pm. See map, p.225.

Pakhuis Schuurkenstraat 4 ☎ 09/223 55 55, www.pakhuis.be. Set in an intelligently

remodelled old warehouse with acres of glass and metal, this lively bistro-brasserie is one of Ghent’s more fashionable restaurants, attracting a diverse clientele. The extensive menu features Flemish and French cuisine, with mains averaging €18. Bar area too. Down a narrow alley near St Michielsbrug. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6.30–11pm, bar Mon–Sat 11.30am–1am. See map, p.225.

Bars and clubs

Decadance Overpoortstraat 76 ☎ 09 329 00 54. This funky club near the university (hence the abundance of students) offers one of the city’s best nights out, with reggae, hip-hop, drum ‘n’ bass and garage-techno vibes. Daily from 10pm until 8/10am, Sun until midnight. See map, pp.220–221.

‘t Dreupelkot Groentenmarkt 12. Cosy bar specializing in jenever (Belgian gin), of which it stocks more than 215 brands, all kept at icy temperatures – the vanilla flavour is particularly delicious. It’s down a little alley leading off the Groentenmarkt, and next door to Het Waterhuis (see below). Daily: July & Aug from 6pm until late; Sept–June from 4pm until late. See map, p.225.

Dulle Griet Vrijdagmarkt 50. Long, dark and atmospheric bar with all manner of incidental *objets d’art* and an especially wide range of beers. Mon 4.30pm–1am, Tues–Sat noon–1am & Sun noon–7.30pm. See map, p.225.

Pink Flamingos Onderstraat 55, ☎ 09 233 47 18, www.pinkflamingos.be. Weird and wonderful place – the interior is the height of kitsch, with plastic statues of film stars, tacky religious icons and Barbie-dolls. If something is cheesy, you can guarantee it’s somewhere amid the décor. Attracts a groovy crowd, and is a great place for an aperitif or cocktails. Mon–Wed noon–midnight, Thurs & Fri noon–3am, Sat 2pm–3am, Sun 2pm–midnight. See map, p.225.

Rococo Corduwaniersstraat 57. This intimate café-cum-bar attracts a diverse but cool clientele and is a perfect place to be on a cold winter evening, with candles flickering and the fire roaring. Stocks a good range of wines and beers, and also has home-made cakes. Daily except Mon from 10pm until late. See map, p.225.

De Tempelier Meersenerstraat 9. Few tourists venture into this small, dark and intriguing old bar,



△ Dulle Griet Bar, Vrijdagmarkt, Ghent

which offers a vast range of beers at prices lower than usual. Sometimes eccentric clientele, plus frequent live bands. Near Dulle Griet, off Vrijdagmarkt. Wed–Sat from 10pm. See map, p.225.

De Trollekelder Bij St Jacobs 17. This dark and atmospheric bar offers a huge selection of beers in an ancient merchant's house – don't be deterred by the trolls stuck in the window. Mon–Thurs 5pm–2am & Fri–Sun 4pm–2am. See map, p.225.

Den Turk Botermarkt 3. The oldest bar in the city, this tiny rabbit-warren of a place offers a good range of beers and whiskies, but much of its atmosphere disappeared when it was recently renovated. Frequent live music, mainly jazz. Daily from 11am until late. See map, p.225.



Vooruit St Pietersnieuwstraat 23. ☎ 09 267 28 28, www.vooruit.be. The Vooruit performing arts centre has good claim to be the cultural centre of the city (at least for the under-40s),

offering a wide-ranging programme of rock and pop through to dance. It also occupies a splendid building, a twin-towered and turreted former festival hall that was built for Ghent's socialists in an eclectic rendition of Art Nouveau in 1914. The café-bar is a large barn-like affair that stays jam-packed until early in the morning. Café-bar: Mon–Thurs 11.30am–2am, Fri & Sat 11.30am–3am, Sun 4pm–2am. See map, pp.220–221.



Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant Groentenmarkt 9. More than a hundred types of beer are available in this engaging, canal-side bar, which is popular with tourists and locals alike. Be sure to try Stropken (literally “noose”), a delicious local brew named after the time in 1453 when Philip the Good compelled the rebellious city burghers to parade outside the town gate with ropes around their necks. Daily from 11am until late. See map, p.225.

Listings

ATMs ATMs are liberally distributed across the city centre.

Bike rental Bicycles can be rented at St Pieters train station (☎ 09 241 22 24; daily 7am–8pm) for €9.50 per day.

Books FNAC, at Veldstraat 88 (☎ 09 223 40 80, www.fnac.be; Mon–Sat 10am–6.30pm, close to the junction with Zonnestraat, has several floors of music, books and newspapers, including a good English-language section. It's also excellent for maps, including a comprehensive range of Belgian hiking maps, and sells tickets for most mainstream cultural events.

Buses and trams All city trams and buses services are operated by De Lijn (☎ 070 22 02 00, www.delijn.be), which has information kiosks on the Korenmarkt (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm, Sat 10.30am–5.30pm) and at St Pieters train station (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm).

Car rental Avis, at Kortrijksesteenweg 676 (☎ 09 222 00 53); Europcar, at Einde Were 1 (☎ 09 226 81 26); Hertz, at Nieuwewandeling 76 (☎ 09 224 04 06).

Chocolates Van Hecke, at Koestraat 42 (Mon–Sat except Wed 9.30am–6pm; ☎ 09 225 43 57), is an independent chocolatier and many locals swear it's the best one in town. Sells cakes too.

Cinema Ghent has two really good cinemas: Sphinx, at Sint-Michielselling 3 (☎ 09 225 60 86; www.sphinx-cinema.be), which focuses on foreign-language and art-house films (with original soundtrack intact); and Studio Skoop, at Sint Annaplein 63 (☎ 09 225 08 45, www.studioskoop.be), the cosiest of the city's film

venues, but still with five screens. For details of the much-acclaimed Ghent Film Festival, see 'Festivals' below.

Festivals Ghent's main festivals are the Gentse Feesten or town fair, held for ten days in mid- to late July (always including July 21; www.gentsefeesten.be); the Patersholfeesten, the Patershol neighbourhood knees-up over a weekend in mid-Aug; and the Festival van Vlaanderen (Flanders Festival; www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be), the Flanders classical music festival, which runs from May to October with concerts in all of the major cities of Flanders, including Ghent. There's also the prestigious **Ghent Film Festival** (twelve days in Oct; www.filmfestival.be), one of Europe's foremost cinematic events, in which the city's art-house cinemas combine to present a total of around two hundred feature films and a hundred shorts from all over the world, screening Belgian films and the best of world cinema well before they hit the international circuit. There's also a special focus on music in film.

Internet access Most hotels and hostels provide Internet access for their guests either free or at minimal charge. There are also several Internet cafés in the city, the most central of which is the Coffee Lounge, across from the tourist office at Botermarkt 6 (daily 10am–7pm).

Left luggage There are luggage lockers and a luggage office at the train station.

Markets Ghent has a good line in open-air markets. There's a large and popular flea market (*prondelmarkt*) on Bij St Jacobs and adjoining Beverhoutplein (Fri, Sat & Sun 8am–1pm); a daily

flower market on the Kouter, on the south side of the centre, just off Veldstraat (7am–1pm); organic foodstuffs on the Groentenmarkt (Fri 7.30am–1pm); and a bird market (not for the squeamish) on the Vrijdagmarkt on Sundays (7am–1pm).

Mustard Tierenteyn, at Groetenmarkt 3 (Mon–Sat 8.30am–6pm). This traditional shop, one of the city's most delightful, makes its own mustards, wonderful, tongue-tickling stuff displayed in shelf upon shelf of ceramic and glass jars. A small jar will set you back about €6.

Performing arts Ghent has its own opera company, half a dozen theatre troupes, as well as four first-rate venues. Concertzaal Handelsbeurs, on the Kouter, is the city's newest concert hall, with two auditoria, hosting a diverse programme spanning the gamut of the performing arts (☎ 09 265 91 60, 🌐 www.handelsbeurs.be). Next-door is the recently restored Opera House, where the city's opera company, De Vlaamse Opera (☎ 09 268 10 11, 🌐 www.vlaamseopera.be), perform. A third prime venue is the handsomely restored, nineteenth-century Publiektheater Groot Huis, the municipal theatre at Sint Baafsplein 17. This is home to the Nederlands

Toneel Gent (NTG; ☎ 09 225 01 01, 🌐 www.ntgent.be), the regional repertory company. Almost all of their performances are in Flemish, though they do play occasional host to touring English-language theatre companies. Vooruit, at Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23, is a leading venue for rock, pop and jazz concerts (☎ 09 267 28 28, 🌐 www.vooruit.be). FNAC (see p.240) sells tickets for most mainstream cultural events.

Pharmacies Two central pharmacies are at 15 St Michielsstraat and 123 Nederkouter. Duty rotas, detailing late-night opening pharmacies, should be displayed in every pharmacy window.

Post office The main post office is at Lange Kruisstraat 55 (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–12.30pm).

Secondhand clothes Alternatief, at Baudelostraat 15 (☎ 09 223 23 11. Mon–Sat 11am–6.30pm) has a great range of good-quality secondhand clothes and paraphernalia.

Taxi V-Tax ☎ 09 222 22 22.

Train enquiries For domestic and international services, visit the train station in person or call ☎ 050 30 24 24 (daily 7am–9pm; 🌐 www.b-rail.be).

Around Ghent

Rivers and canals radiate out from Ghent in all directions, slicing across the flatness of the Flemish plain. By and large there's little here of much interest in what is primarily an industrial area, although – if you have your own transport – you might consider a day-trip southwest to the art museums of **Deurle**.

Deurle and around

Spreading out among the woods beside the winding course of the River Leie, the leafy and well-heeled village of **DEURLE** lies about 10km southwest of central Ghent. The village was a favourite with two successive schools of early twentieth-century artists who took up residence here and in the adjoining hamlet of **Sint Martens-Latem**, from which both groups took their name. The first school was Symbolist and its leading light was the sculptor Georges Minne; the second group was Expressionist, and counted among their number Constant Permeke and Gustave de Smet.

To get there with your own transport, take Kortrijksepoortstraat out of the centre and keep going, crossing over the E40 motorway at junction 14 and then proceeding along the **N43**, where you take the signed turning to Nevele (and Deurle) on the right. After about 1200m, take another right down P de Denterghemlaan, then either turn right again along **Dorpstraat**, which leads to the old brick cottages that make up the centre of Deurle, or – a little further on – take the first left, **Museumlaan**, to a trio of signposted art museums. At no. 14, the **Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens** (Tues–Sun 11am–5pm; €3; 🌐 www.museumdd.be) provides an overview of the period and its key players. The adjacent **Museum Leon de Smet**, at Museumlaan 18 (Nov–April Sat & Sun 2–5pm; May–Oct Sat & Sun 2–6pm; free), features the work of the eponymous artist, whose striking blocks of colour and bold

lines were clearly influenced by the Fauves. By comparison, Leon's brother Gustave (1877–1943) was much inspired by the Cubists, and some of his canvases and drawings are on display in the nearby **Museum Gustaaf de Smet**, at Gustaaf de Smetlaan 1 (May–Sept Wed–Sat 2–6pm, Sun 10am–noon & 2–6pm; Oct–April Wed–Sun 2–5pm; €2), on the second left turn off P de Denterghemlaan.

Travel details

Trains

Bruges to: Brussels (every 30min; 1hr); Ghent (every 30min; 20min); Knokke (hourly; 15min); Ostend (every 30min; 15min); Zeebrugge (hourly; 15min).

Ghent to: Antwerp Centraal (every 30min; 50min); De Panne (hourly; 1hr 10min); Diksmuide (hourly; 1hr); Kortrijk (every 30min; 20min); Mechelen (every 30min; 40min); Ostend (every 30min; 40min); Oudenaarde (hourly; 25min); Veurne (hourly; 1hr 10min).

Ieper to: Kortrijk (hourly; 30min).

Kortrijk to: Ghent (every 30min; 20min); Ieper (hourly; 30min); Lille, France (hourly; 30min); Oudenaarde (hourly; 25min).

Ostend to: Bruges (every 30min; 15min); Brussels (every 30min; 1hr 20min); Ghent (every 30min; 40min).

Veurne to: De Panne (hourly; 10min); Diksmuide (hourly; 10min); Ghent (hourly; 1hr 10min).

Buses

Ieper to: Diksmuide (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 1hr); Lo (2–7 daily; 35min); Veurne (2–7 daily; 60min).

Ostend to: Veurne (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 3 daily; 1hr 15min).

Veurne to: Ieper (2–7 daily; 60min); Ostend (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 3 daily; 1hr 15min).

Coastal tram

Ostend to: De Panne (every 15min in summer, every 30min in winter; 1hr 10min); Knokke (same frequency; 1hr).

Antwerp and the northeast



CHAPTER 3

Highlights

* **Antwerp's cathedral**

A supreme example of the Gothic style, a truly magnificent edifice. **See p.258**

* **The paintings of Rubens**

Don't leave Antwerp without viewing at least some of Rubens' paintings, most stirring in the cathedral, inside the Museum voor Schone Kunsten and at the Rubenshuis, the great man's former home and studio.

See p.265

* **Antwerp at night** The city boasts a mouthwatering

selection of restaurants and bars, more than enough for the pickiest of gourmands.

See p.275

* **Lier** A charming little place with a clutch of fine old buildings, including St-Gummaruskerk, which boasts a delightful set of stained-glass windows.

See p.278

* **Tongeren** An amiable, old-fashioned town, well off the beaten track, with a clutch of interesting Roman remains.

See p.300



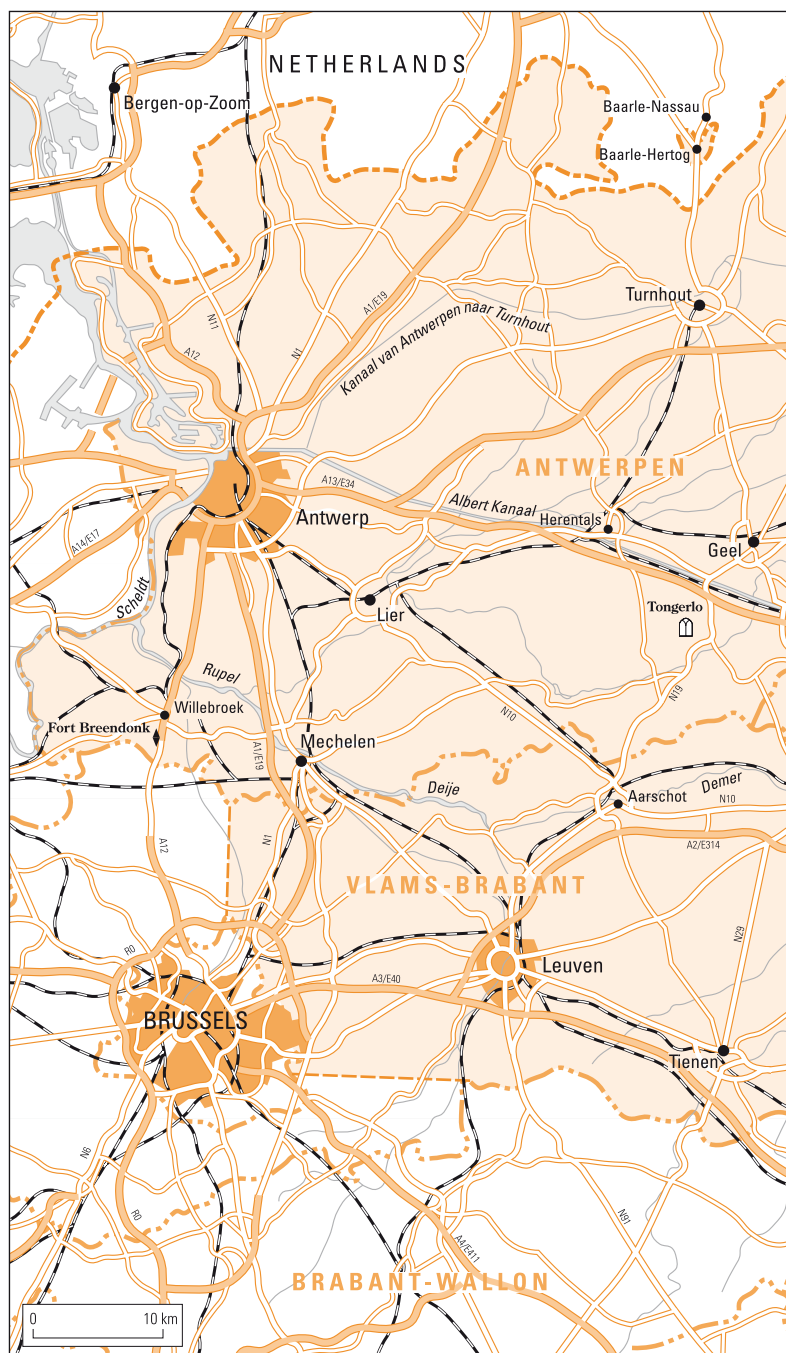
△ The Rubenshuis, Antwerp

Antwerp and the northeast

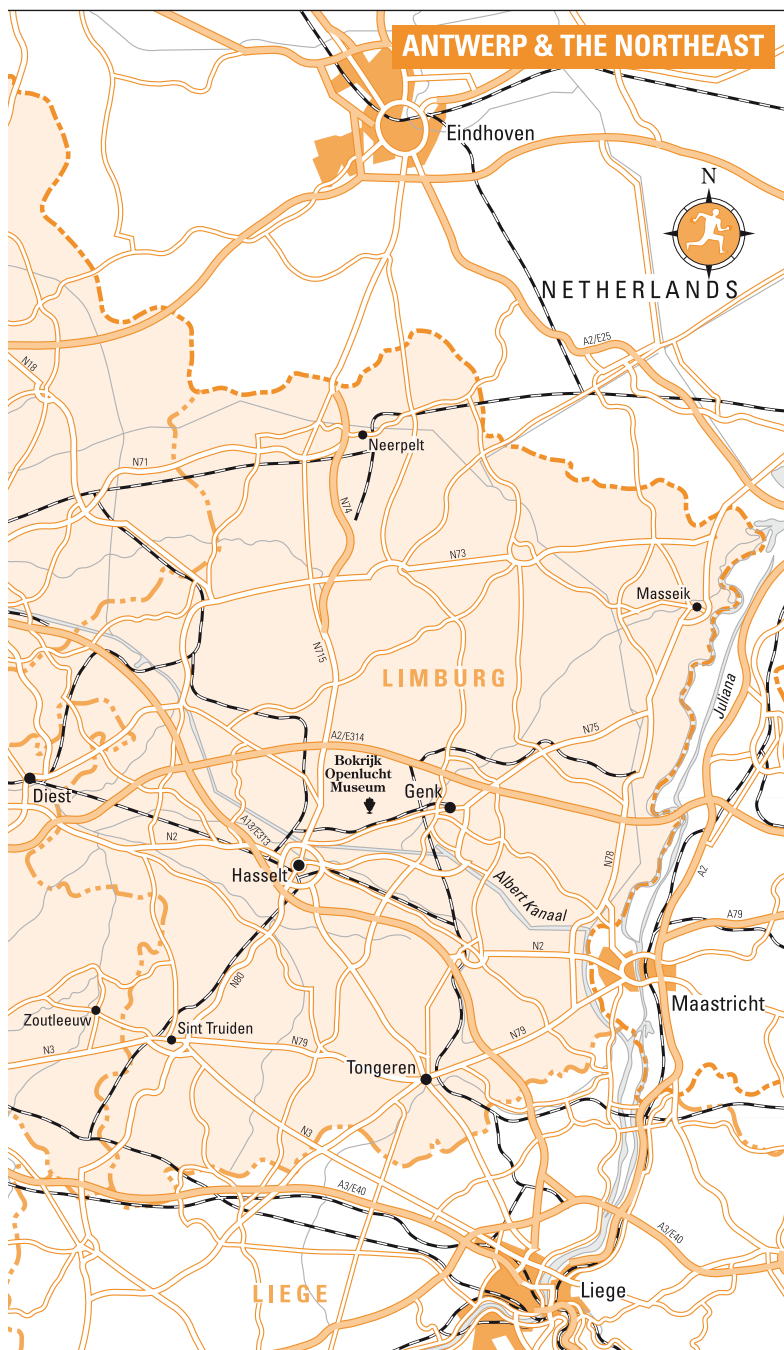
The **provinces** of Antwerp and Limburg, together with a chunk of Brabant, constitute the Flemish-speaking northeastern rim of Belgium, stretching as far as the border with the Netherlands. The countryside is dull and flat on the whole, its most distinctive feature being the rivers and canals that cut across it, with the River Scheldt leading the way. Easily the main attraction hereabouts is **Antwerp**, a sprawling, intriguing city with many reminders of its sixteenth-century golden age before it was upstaged by Amsterdam as the prime commercial centre of the Low Countries. Antwerp boasts a battery of splendid medieval churches and as fine a set of museums as you'll find anywhere in Belgium, featuring in particular the enormous legacy of **Rubens**, who spent most of his career in the city and produced many of his finest works here. On a more contemporary note, Antwerp is the international centre of the diamond trade and one of Europe's biggest ports, though these roles by no means define its character – for one thing its centre has a range of bars and restaurants to rival any city in Northern Europe.

That part of **Antwerp province** lying to the south of the city isn't of much immediate appeal – it's too industrial for that – but there's compensation in a string of old Flemish towns that make ideal day-trips. The first two obvious targets are small-town **Lier**, whose centre is particularly quaint and diverting, and **Mechelen**, the ecclesiastical capital of Belgium, which weighs in with its handsome Gothic churches, most memorably a magnificent cathedral. Southeast from here, just beyond the reaches of Brussels' sprawling suburbs, stands the lively university town of **Leuven** which, boasting its own clutch of fine medieval buildings, is the principal attraction of this corner of Flemish Brabant.

Further to the east, the province of **Limburg** is, unlike Antwerp, seldom visited by tourists, its low-key mixture of small towns and tranquil farmland having limited appeal. Nevertheless, **Hasselt**, the workaday capital, does have an amenable air, and the nearby **Bokrijk** estate holds one of the best open-air museums in the country, primarily dedicated to the rural traditions of Flemish Belgium. Of Limburg's smaller towns, **Tongeren** most deserves a visit, being a pleasant and likeable market town dominated by its giant basilica. Just to the west is **Sint Truiden**, from where buses run to the village of **Zoutleeuw**, distinguished by its spectacular fourteenth-century church – the only one in



ANTWERP & THE NORTHEAST



3

ANTWERP AND THE NORTHEAST

The Kempen – and Baarle-Hertog

Filling out the northeast corner of Belgium, just beyond Antwerp, are the flat, sandy moorlands of the **Kempen**. Once a barren wasteland dotted with the poorest of agricultural communities – and punctuated by tracts of acid heath, bog and deciduous woodland – the Kempen's more hospitable parts were first cultivated and planted with pine by pioneering Cistercian monks in the twelfth century. The monks helped develop and sustain a strong regional identity and dialect, which survives in good order today, though the area's towns and villages are in themselves uniformly drab. The Kempen was also the subject of endless territorial bickering during the creation of an independent Belgium in the 1830s, a particular point of dispute being the little town of **Baarle-Hertog**, 14km north of Turnhout. The final compromise verged on the ridiculous: Baarle-Hertog was designated as being part of Belgium, but it was surrounded by Dutch territory and the international border between it and the adjoining (Dutch) town of **Baarle-Nassau** actually cut through houses, never mind dividing streets. If you're eager to have one leg in the Netherlands, another in Belgium, then here's the spot.

Belgium that managed to avoid the depredations of Protestants, iconoclasts and invading armies.

Hopping from town to town by **public transport** is very easy – there's an excellent network of trains and, where these fizzle out, buses pick up the slack.

Antwerp

About 50km north of Brussels, **ANTWERP**, Belgium's second city, lays claim to being the effective capital of Flemish Belgium, boosting its credentials with an animated cultural scene, a burgeoning fashion industry and a spirited nightlife. The city fans out carelessly from the east bank of the Scheldt, its **centre** a rough polygon formed and framed by its enclosing boulevards and the river. Recent efforts to clean and smarten the centre have been tremendously successful, revealing scores of beautiful buildings previously camouflaged by the accumulated grime. On the surface it's not a wealthy city, and it's rarely neat and tidy, but it is a hectic and immediately likeable place, with a dense concentration of things to see, not least some fine churches, including a simply wonderful **cathedral**, and a varied selection of excellent museums.

East of the centre lies the main shopping street, **Meir**, whose hotchpotch of old and new buildings rolls past the **Rubenshuis**, one-time home and studio of Rubens, before proceeding on to the cathedral-like **Centraal Station** and the diamond district – the city has long been at the heart of the international diamond trade. South of the centre lies **Het Zuid**, a long neglected but now resurgent residential district whose wide boulevards, with their long vistas and geometrical roundabouts, were laid out at the end of the nineteenth century. The highlight here is the substantial collection of Belgian art in the **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art Museum), with the invigorating **Middelheim Open-Air Sculpture Museum** beckoning beyond. Added to this historical and cultural stew is an excellent café, restaurant and bar scene – enough to keep anyone busy for a few days, if not more.

Some history

In the beginning **Antwerp** wasn't much desired: it may have occupied a prime river site, but it was too far east to be important in the cloth trade and too far west to be on the major trade routes connecting Germany and Holland. However, in the **late fifteenth century** it benefited from a general movement of trade to the west, a process that was accelerated by the decline of the cloth trade – and the Flemish cloth towns. Within the space of just 25 years, many of the great trading families of western Europe had relocated here, and the tiny old fortified settlement of yesteryear was transformed by a deluge of splendid new mansions and churches, docks and harbours. In addition, the new masters of the region, the **Habsburgs**, had become frustrated with the turbulent burghers of Flanders and both the emperor Maximilian and his successor **Charles V** patronized the city at the expense of its rivals, underwriting its success as the leading port of their expanding empire.

Antwerp's golden age lasted for less than a hundred years, prematurely stifled by Charles V's son **Philip II**, who inherited Spain and the Low Countries in 1555. Fanatically Catholic, Philip viewed the reformist stirrings of the Low Countries with horror and his sustained attempt to bring his Protestant subjects to heel brought war and pestilence to the region for decades. Protestantism had taken root in Antwerp early on and the city seethed with discontent as Philip's intentions became all too clear. The spark was the Ommegang of August 18, 1566, when priests carting the image of the Virgin through the city's streets insisted that all should bend the knee as it passed. The parade itself was peaceful enough, but afterwards, with the battle cry of "Long live the beggars", the city's Protestant guildsmen and their apprentices smashed the inside of the cathedral to pieces – the most extreme example of the "**iconoclastic fury**" that then swept the region. Philip responded by sending in an army of occupation, which sought to overawe and intimidate the local citizenry from a brand-new citadel built on the south side of town. Nine years later, it was this same garrison that sat unpaid and underfed in its fortress, surrounded by the wealth of what the soldiers regarded as a "heretical" city. Philip's mercenaries **mutinied**, and at dawn on November 4, 1576, they stormed Antwerp, running riot for three long days, plundering public buildings and private mansions, and slaughtering some eight thousand of its inhabitants in the "**Spanish fury**", a catastrophe that finished the city's commercial supremacy. More disasters were to follow. Philip's soldiers were driven out after the massacre, but they were back in 1585 laying siege outside the city walls for seven months, their success leading to Antwerp's ultimate incorporation within the **Spanish Netherlands**. Under the terms of the capitulation, Protestants had two years to leave town, and a flood of skilled workers poured north to the relative safety of Holland, further weakening the city's economy.

In the early seventeenth century there was a modest recovery, but the Dutch, who were now free of Spain, controlled the waterways of the **Scheldt** and were determined that no neighbouring Catholic port would threaten their trade. Consequently, in 1648, under the **Peace of Westphalia**, which finally wrapped up the Thirty Years' War, they forced the closure of the Scheldt to all non-Dutch shipping. This ruined Antwerp, and the city remained firmly in the doldrums until the French army arrived in 1797 – **Napoleon** declaring it to be "little better than a heap of ruins . . . scarcely like a European city at all". The French rebuilt the docks and reopened the Scheldt to local shipping, and the city revived to become independent Belgium's largest port, a role that made it a prime target during both World Wars. In 1914, the invading German army overran the city's outer defences with surprising ease, forcing the Belgian

ACCOMMODATION

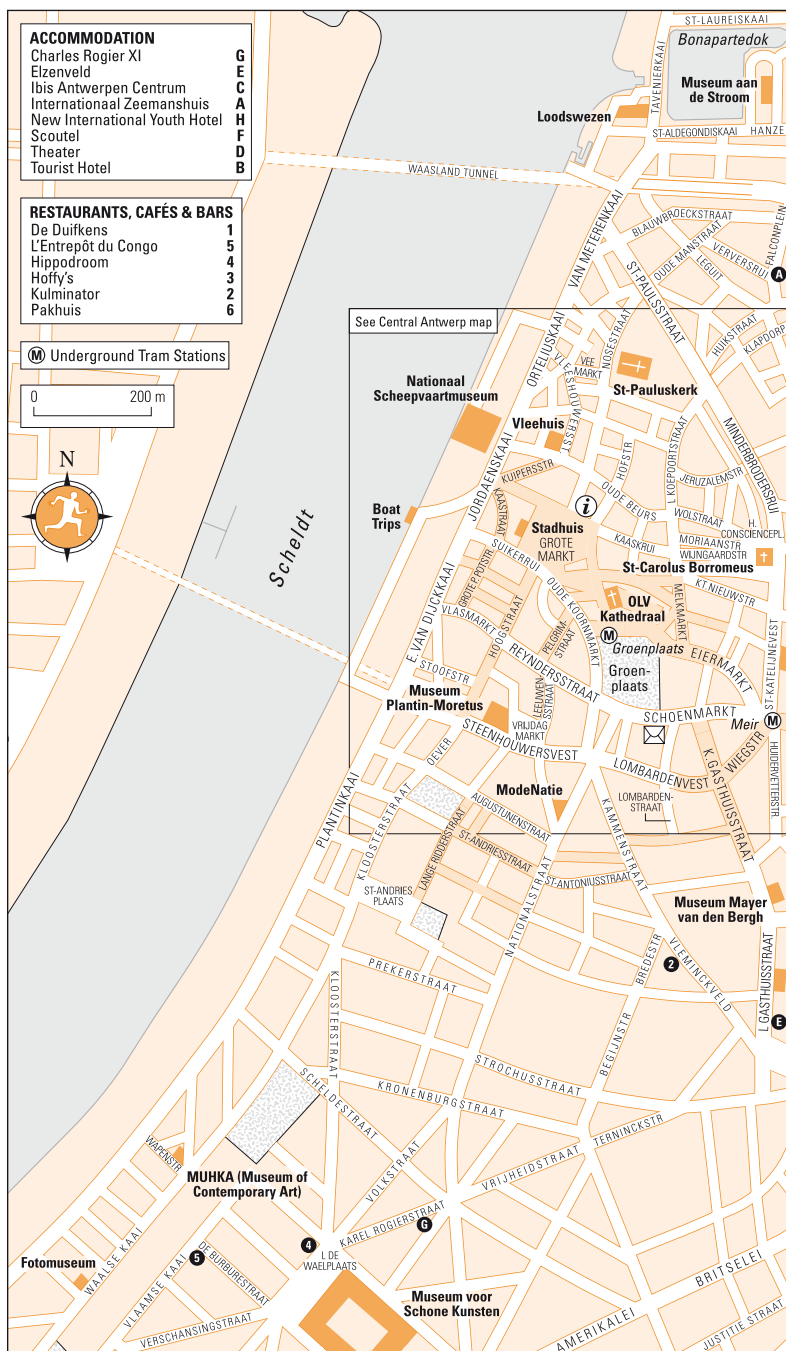
Charles Rogier XI
Elzenveld
Ibis Antwerpen Centrum
Internationaal Zeemanshuis
New International Youth Hotel
Scoutel
Theater
Tourist Hotel

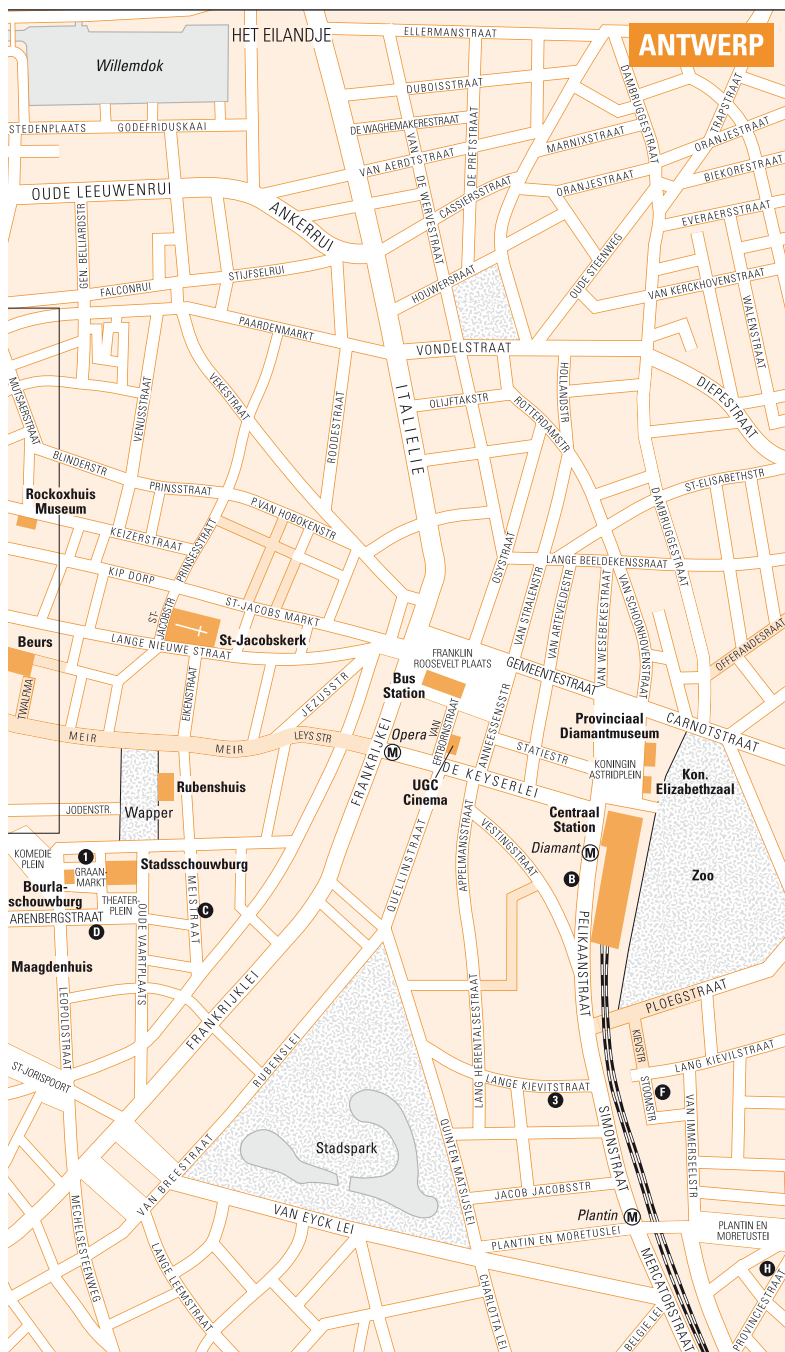
G
E
C
A
H
F
B**RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS & BARS**

De Duijkens 1
L'Entrepôt du Congo 5
Hippodroom 4
Hoffy's 3
Kulminator 2
Pakhuis 6

(M) Underground Tram Stations

0 200 m





Mercenary mutinies

The **Spanish fury** was a disaster for Antwerp, but although the savagery of the attack was unusual, **mutinies** in the Spanish army were not. The Habsburgs often neglected to pay their soldiers for years on end and this failure, combined with harsh conditions and seemingly interminable warfare, provoked at least a couple of mutinies every year. Indeed, **mutinies** became so commonplace that they began to develop their own rituals, with the *tercio* (army unit) concerned refusing orders but keeping military discipline and **electing representatives** to haggle a financial deal with the army authorities. A deal was usually reached, outstanding wages were paid (at least in part), normal military life was resumed and, remarkably enough, punishments were rare.

government – which had moved here from Brussels a few weeks before – into a second hasty evacuation along with Winston Churchill and the Royal Marines, who had only just arrived. During **World War II**, both sides bombed Antwerp, but the worst damage was inflicted after the Liberation when the city was hit by hundreds of Hitler's V1 and V2 **rockets**.

After the war, Antwerp quickly picked up the pieces, becoming one of Europe's major **seaports** and – more recently – a focus for those Flemish-speakers looking for greater independence within (or without) a federal Belgium: the right-wing, nationalist Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) is now a major force in municipal politics. More positively, Antwerp has recently produced a string of innovative **fashion** designers, from Olivier Strelli through to the so-called “Antwerp Six” (see p.270).

Arrival

Antwerp has two main **train stations**, Berchem and Centraal. A few domestic and international trains pause at Berchem, 4km southeast of downtown, before bypassing Centraal, but the majority call at both. **Centraal Station**, lying about 2km east of the main square, the Grote Markt, is much the more convenient for the city centre and most of the major sights. If you do have to change, connections between the two stations are frequent and fast (10 hourly; 4min). **Trams** from Centraal Station to the city centre go underground, departing from the adjacent Diamant underground tram station (#2 or #15 direction Linkeroever; get off at Groenplaats). Most **long-distance buses**, including Eurolines international services, arrive at the bus station on Franklin Rooseveltplaats, a five-minute walk northwest of Centraal Station. The **information kiosk** here deals with bus services throughout the province of Antwerp.

Antwerp's tiny **airport** (@www.antwerpairport.be) is located about 6km southeast of the city centre in the suburb of **Deurne**. There are regular buses from the airport into the city centre, or you can take a taxi (€20).

Information

The **tourist office** is bang in the city centre at Grote Markt 13 (Mon–Sat 9am–5.45pm, Sun 9am–4.45pm; ☎03 232 01 03, @www.visitantwerpen.be). Its comprehensive range of information includes a free and very useful “infoguide” detailing the city's sights and an accommodation booklet covering registered hotels, hostels and B&Bs. It also issues free transit maps, city maps and a youth-oriented information sheet produced by *Use-It*, and sells a number of

specialist leaflets on Rubens. It also stocks *Fashion Walk*, a useful booklet of routes that take in the city's best designer boutiques; there are two versions – the long one (€3) and the short one (€1.50). Finally, the tourist office has details of local cycle rental (see “Listings”, p.278) and is a handy spot to pick up the free, fortnightly *Zone 03* (@www.zone03.be), a comprehensive, though Flemish-only, **listings magazine** also available at public news-stands across the centre. The tourist office shares its premises with **Info Cultuur** (☎03 203 95 85, @www.infocultuur.be), which sells tickets for concerts and events.

City transport

Operated by De Lijn (☎070 220 200, @www.delijn.be), a first-rate **tram and bus** system serves the city and its suburbs from two main hubs, **Groenplaats** and more especially **Centraal Station**. At Centraal Station, bus stops line up along Pelikaanstraat and on Koningin Astridplein, whilst trams stop either on Koningin Astridplein or at the Diamant underground tram station (for the city centre, take #2 or #15 direction Linkeroever and get off at Groenplaats). **Ticket prices** are very reasonable. A standard one-way fare within the city centre costs €1.50 from the driver (€1.20 in advance), ten rides with a “Line Card” €10 (€8 in advance); tickets are valid for one hour. Alternatively, a 24-hour unlimited citywide travel card, a Daggas, costs (€5 €6 in advance), (€12) €10 for three days. Advance tickets are sold all over the place, including many newsagents and supermarkets. The De Lijn **information office** at the underground tram station on the Groenplaats (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 8am–noon & 1–4pm) sells tickets and issues free maps of the transport system (the *Netplan*).

Accommodation

Antwerp has the range of **hotels** you'd expect of Belgium's second city, as well as a number of **hostels** and an ever increasing supply of **B&Bs**. Consequently, finding accommodation is rarely difficult, although there are surprisingly few places in the centre, which is by far the best spot to soak up the city's atmosphere. Many medium-priced and budget places are clustered in the humdrum area around Centraal Station, where you should exercise caution at night, particularly if travelling alone.

The tourist office issues a free and comprehensive booklet detailing the city's hotels, B&Bs and hostels (excluding the city's seedier establishments) and will make last-minute **hotel bookings** on your behalf at no cost, charging only a modest deposit, which is subtracted from your final bill. Antwerp's B&Bs also have their own association, the Gilde der Antwerpse Gastenkamers, whose website (@www.gastenkamersantwerpen.be) provides lots of extra details on its members.

Boat trips

A variety of **boat trips** explore Antwerp's network of waterways, most of them operated by **Flandria**, whose offices are located at the west end of Suikerrui (☎03 231 31 00, @www.flandriaboat.com). The most straightforward – and least expensive – cruise is down the **River Scheldt**, departing from beside the Flandria offices (on the hour 1–4pm: May–June & Sept Wed–Sun; July–Aug daily; Oct Sat & Sun only; 50min; €7.50). Flandria also operates tours of the **port** (2.30pm: May–Sept daily; Oct & Nov Fri, Sat & Sun only; 2hr 30min; €12), but these depart from Kaai 14 beside Londenbrug, about 1500m north of the city centre just beyond the Willemdok (see p.262).

The hotels, B&Bs and hostels reviewed below are marked on the map of central Antwerp on p.256 unless otherwise stated.

Hotels

Cammerpoorte Nationalestraat 38 ☎ 03 231 97 36, www.hotelcammerpoorte.be. Modern, two-star hotel with 39 spartan, en-suite rooms in a building that looks a bit like a car park. It has a mildly forlorn air, but the location is handy and the staff friendly. A couple of minutes' walk south of Groenplaats. ③

Elzenveld Lange Gasthuisstraat 45 ☎ 03 202 77 71, www.elzenveld.be. More of a conference centre than a hotel, the *Elzenveld* occupies a sympathetically modernized former monastery and its gardens. Thirty-odd simply decorated rooms are rented out on a nightly basis, but the main pleasure is the setting rather than the decor. Breakfast included. See map, pp.250–251. ④

Hilton Antwerp Groenplaats ☎ 03 204 12 12, www.antwerp.hilton.com. Big and flashy chain hotel in a good-looking, nineteenth-century building metres from the cathedral. Large, very comfortable rooms, plus a fitness centre, bars and restaurants. ⑧

Ibis Antwerpen Centrum Meistraat 39 ☎ 03 231 88 30, www.ibishotel.com. Relatively inexpensive chain hotel with routine modern rooms. It's hidden away behind a particularly ghastly concrete exterior, but there's compensation in its handy location, close to the Rubenshuis. See map, pp.250–251. ③

Internationale Zeemanshuis (Seamen's House) Falconrui 21 ☎ 03 227 54 33, www.zeemanshuis.be. In a substantial and surprisingly attractive 1950s block, perched on a hillock and in its own (mini) grounds, the *Zeemanshuis* has over one hundred brisk, modern rooms, all en suite. Situated a 10-min walk north of the Grote Markt, out towards the old docks in a lively-verging-on-the-seedy part of town. Despite the name, it's open to landlubbers and women as well as mariners. See map, pp.250–251. ②

Matelote Haarstraat 11 ☎ 03 201 88 00, www.matelote.be. Decorated in crisp, modernist style, this small hotel occupies intelligently revamped and remodelled old premises a (long) stone's throw from the Grote Markt. The rooms are large, also modern and reasonably well appointed. Breakfast is served next door. ④

New International Youth Hotel Provinciestraat 256 ☎ 03 230 05 22, www.youthhotel.be. Spick-and-span, medium-sized, family-run hotel-chain-hostel offering bargain singles and doubles, some en suite. Breakfast is included. A 10-min walk from Centraal Station. See map, pp.250–251. ①



Rubens Grote Markt Oude Beurs 29

☎ 03 222 48 48, www.hotelrubensantwerp.be

. Probably the most agreeable hotel in town, the public rooms of the four-star *Rubens* are kitted out in a decorous version of traditional (ie vaguely Edwardian) style with just 36 attractively furnished modern rooms beyond. Occupies a handy downtown location too, just a couple of minutes' walk north of the Grote Markt. ⑥

Theater Arenbergstraat 30 ☎ 03 203 54 10, www.theater-hotel.be. Well-appointed, four-star chain hotel in a modern block a 5-min walk south of the Rubenshuis. See map, pp.250–251. ④

Tourist Hotel Pelikaanstraat 20 ☎ 03 232 58 70, www.demahotels.be. An inexpensive if rather uninspiring option near Centraal Station – OK for a night or two, though Pelikaanstraat can be noisy. Straightforward, modern rooms. See map, pp.250–251. ②

De Witte Lelie Keizerstraat 16 ☎ 03 226 19 66, www.dewittellelie.be. Immaculate four-star hotel – arguably the city's ritziest and most exclusive. Just ten charming rooms in a handsomely renovated sixteenth-century merchant's house, a 5-min walk from the Grote Markt. ⑨

Bed and breakfast

Charles Rogier XI Karel Rogierstraat 11 ☎ 475 29 99 89, www.charlesrogierxi.be. Carefully contrived B&B, where period decor – from the late nineteenth century – means heavy drapes, high beds and all manner of antiques. Three suites – one each for “France”, “England” and “Scotland” – all at the same price. It's in Het Zuid, and is readily reachable on tram #8 from Groenplaats. See map, pp.250–251. ⑦

Enich Anders Leeuwenstraat 12 ☎ 03 231 37 92, www.enich-anders.be. Above a sculptor's workshop on a weather-beaten old narrow street off the Vrijdagmarkt, this B&B offers a furnished studio with bathroom and kitchen. The breakfast part of the arrangement is served up in a basket in the room itself. Minimum two nights' stay on the weekend. ②



M0851 Nationalestraat 19

☎ 03 297 60 66, www.m0851.be. There are three, modern, self-contained suites here above the M0851 shop. Each is kitted out in slick modernist style – painted floorboards and lots of blacks and whites. The top suite, right under the eaves (and with a/c), is especially cosy. All three have Internet access and basic kitchen facilities; breakfast is by coupon at a nearby café. ⑤

Hostels

Jeugdherberg Op Sinjoorke (Youth Hostel) Eric Sasselaan 2 ☎ 03 238 02 73, 🌐 www.vjh.be. NYH-affiliated hostel in a park close to the ring road, about 5km south of the centre. Has around 130 beds in two-, four-, six- and eight-bedded rooms, with shared showers. There's a canteen serving lunch and dinner, free parking and a laundry room. To get there, take tram #2 from Centraal Station, direction Hoboken; get off – or ask to be put off – at the Antwerp Expo centre, from where it's a 300-metre walk to the west. Breakfast included in the rate. See map, pp.250–251. Dorm beds from €15, doubles ①

Scoutel Stoomstraat 3 ☎ 03 226 46 06, 🌐 www.scoutel.be. Neat and trim hostel-cum-hotel offering frugal but perfectly adequate singles, doubles, triples and quadruples with breakfast. It's a 5-min walk from Centraal Station: head south down Pelikaanstraat, turn left along Lange Kievitstraat, go through the tunnel and it's the first road on the right. There's no curfew, but be sure to check in before 6pm when reception closes. Reservations are advised in the summer. Singles €27, doubles €43; under-25s get a fifteen-percent discount on the regular rate. See map, pp.250–251. ①

The City Centre

Antwerp's bustling **centre** is the most engaging part of the city, its mazy streets and cobbled lanes studded with fine old churches, mansions and museums. The logical place to start an exploration is the **Grote Markt**, still the centre of activities and flanked by the elegant **Stadhuis**. From here, it's a couple of hundred metres south to the magnificent Gothic church of **Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal**, home to a quartet of paintings by Rubens, with the intriguing old printing house of Christopher Plantin, now the **Museum Plantin-Moretus**, just beyond. Another short hop, this time west to the waterfront, brings up the **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum** – the National Maritime Museum – with its first-rate nautical displays, and then comes the striking medieval **Vleeshuis**, one-time headquarters of the guild of butchers. The city centre finishes off with two other excellent attractions, the sinuous Baroque of **St-Pauluskerk** and a small but superb collection of paintings in the **Rockoxhuis Museum**.

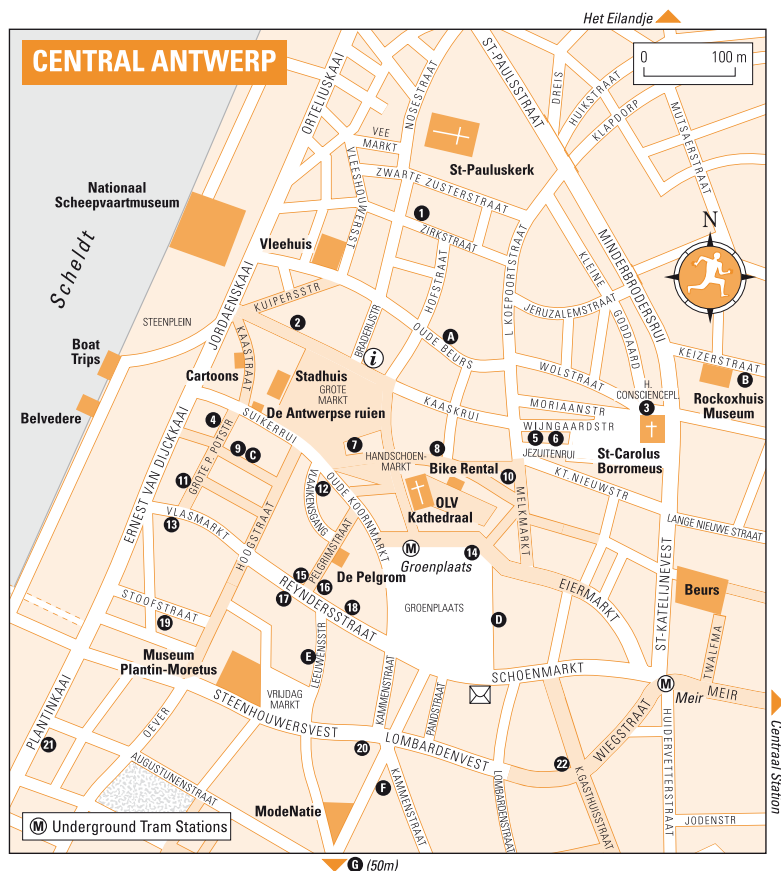
The Grote Markt

The centre of Antwerp is the **Grote Markt**, at the heart of which stands the **Brabo Fountain**, a haphazard pile of roughly sculpted rocks created in 1887 and surmounted by a bronze of Silvius Brabo, depicted flinging the hand of the prostrate giant Antigonius into the Scheldt. Legend asserts that Antigonius extracted tolls from all passing ships, cutting off the hands of those who refused to pay. He was eventually beaten by the valiant Brabo, who tore off his hand and threw it into the river, giving the city its name, which literally means “hand-throw”. There are more realistic explanations of the city's name, but this is the most colourful, and it certainly reflects Antwerp's early success at freeing the river from the innumerable taxes levied on shipping by local landowners.

The north side of the Grote Markt is lined with daintily restored **guildhouses**, their sixteenth-century facades decorated with appropriate reliefs and topped by finely cast gilded figures basking in the afterglow of the city's Renaissance lustre. No. 7, the House of the Crossbowmen, with its figures of St George and the dragon, is the tallest and most distinctive; it stands next to the Coopers' House, with its barrel motifs and statue of St Matthew. They are, however, both overshadowed by the Stadhuis.

The Stadhuis

Presiding over the Grote Markt, the **Stadhuis** was completed in 1566 to an innovative design by Cornelis Floris (occasional guided tours – ask at the tourist

**ACCOMMODATION**

Cammerpoorte
Enich Anders
Hilton Antwerp
M0851
Matelote
Rubens Grote Markt
De Witte Lelie

G
E
D
F
C
A
B

RESTAURANTS

Aurelia
Den Dobbelsesteen
Gin Fish
Hungry Henrietta
De Kleine Zavel
De Peerdestal
Pizzeria Da Antonio
De Stoempot
Varelli
Zoute Zoen

6
15
9
22
19
5
7
13
21
1

BARS

Het Elfde Gebod
Den Engel
De Faam
De Herk
Den Hopsack
Café Pelikaan
De Vagant

8
2
4
18
11
10
16

CAFÉS & CAFÉ-BARS

Facade
De Grootte Witte Arend
Mockamore
Le Pain Quotidien
Popoff

3
17
14
20
12

office) – though there have been several subsequent modifications. The building's pagoda-like roof gives it a faintly oriental appearance, but apart from the central gable it's quite plain, with a long pilastered facade of short and rather shallow Doric and Ionic columns. These, along with the windows, lend it a simple elegance, in contrast to the purely decorative gable (there's no roof behind it). The niches at the top contribute to the self-congratulatory aspect of the building, with a statue of the Virgin Mary set above representations of *Justice* and *Wisdom*, virtues the city burghers reckoned they had in plenty.

The **main entrance** is on the Suikerrui. Inside, the main staircase clambers up to the lofty main hall, which used to be an open courtyard and was only covered over in the late nineteenth century. The monumental gallery



△ The Stadhuis and Brabo Fountain, Antwerp

flanking the hall is decorated with paintings that took the place of the original windows. They represent aspects of commerce and the arts – a balance of which Antwerp has long been aware, and is now anxious to preserve. Among the other rooms you can see are the **Leyszaal** (Leys Room), named after Baron Hendrik Leys, who painted the frescoes in the 1860s, and the **Trouwzaal** (Wedding Room), which has a chimneypiece from the original interior, decorated with two splendid alabaster caryatids by Floris himself, who doubled as a master sculptor.

The Handschoenmarkt

Leaving the Grote Markt by its southeast corner, you'll soon come to the triangular **Handschoenmarkt** (the former Glove Market), an appealing little square framed by an attractive ensemble of antique gables. Here, a conspicuous **stone well** is adorned by a graceful iron canopy and bears the legend "It was love connubial taught the smith to paint" – a reference to the fifteenth-century painter Quentin Matsys, who learned his craft so he could woo the daughter of a local artist: marriage was then strongly discouraged between families of different guilds. The Handschoenmarkt is the most westerly of a somewhat confusing cobweb of pedestrianized streets and miniature squares that laps round the edge of the cathedral.

The Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal

One of the finest Gothic churches in Belgium, the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–3pm, Sun 1–4pm; €2) is a forceful, self-confident structure that mostly dates from the middle of the fifteenth century. Its graceful spire dominated the skyline of the medieval city and was long a favourite with British travellers. William Beckford, for instance, fresh from spending millions on his own house in Wiltshire in the early 1800s, was particularly impressed, writing that he "longed to ascend it that instant, to stretch myself out upon its summit and calculate, from so sublime an elevation, the influence of the planets". What's more, the church is in better shape than it's been for centuries, after an exemplary 25-year restoration. Pick up a free diagrammatic **plan** just beyond the entry desk.

Inside, the seven-aisled **nave** is breathtaking, if only because of its sense of space, an impression that's reinforced by the bright, light stonework. The religious troubles of the sixteenth century – primarily the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 – polished off the cathedral's early furnishings and fittings, so what you see today are largely Baroque embellishments, most notably four early paintings by **Pieter Paul Rubens** (1577–1640). Of these, the *Descent from the Cross*, a triptych painted after the artist's return from Italy in 1612, is without doubt the most beautiful, displaying an uncharacteristically moving realism derived from Caravaggio; it's just to the right of the central crossing. Christ languishes in the centre in glowing white, surrounded by mourners tenderly struggling to lower him. As was normal practice at the time, students in Rubens' studio worked on the painting, among them the young **van Dyck**, who completed the face of the Virgin and the arm of Mary Magdalene. His work was so masterful that Rubens is supposed to have declared it an improvement on his own, though this story appears to originate from van Dyck himself. Oddly enough, the painting was commissioned by the guild of arquebusiers, who asked for a picture of St Christopher, their patron saint; Rubens' painting was not at all what they had in mind, and they promptly threatened him with legal action unless he added a picture of the saint to the wings. Rubens obliged, painting in the muscular giant who now dominates the outside of the left panel.

Above the high altar is a second Rubens painting, the *Assumption*, a swirling Baroque scene, full of cherubs and luxuriant drapery, painted in 1625, while, on the left-hand side of the central crossing, Rubens' *The Raising of the Cross* is a grandiloquent canvas full of muscular soldiers and saints; this triptych was painted in 1610, which makes it the earliest of the four.

On the right-hand side of the ambulatory in the second chapel along, there's the cathedral's fourth and final Rubens, the *Resurrection*, painted in 1612 for the tomb of his friend, the printer Jan Moretus, showing a strident, militaristic Christ carrying a red, furred banner. Among the cathedral's many other paintings, the only other highlight is **Maarten de Vos'** (1531–1603) *Marriage at Cana*, hung opposite the *Descent from the Cross*, a typically mannered work completed in 1597.

Groenplaats

Flanked by some of the most popular cafés in town, **Groenplaats**, the expansive open square behind the cathedral, actually started out as the municipal graveyard, though presumably the bodies were moved long before the construction of today's underground car park. In the middle of the square stands a really rather uninspiring **statue** of Rubens, the work of the prolific Guillaume Geefs (1806–60), one of King Léopold II's favourite sculptors.

Vrijdagmarkt and the Museum Plantin-Moretus

From Groenplaats, it takes a couple of minutes to thread your way southwest to the **Vrijdagmarkt**, an appealing little square that took a direct hit from a V2 rocket in World War II. The square is in the middle of an old working-class district and hosts a browbeaten open-air **market** of old household effects on Fridays (9am–1pm).

One side of the Vrijdagmarkt is taken up by the **Museum Plantin-Moretus** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €6), which occupies the old mansion of the printer Christopher Plantin, who rose to fame and fortune in the second half of the sixteenth century. Born in Tours in 1520, Plantin moved to Antwerp when he was 34 to set up a small bookbinding business, but in 1555 he was forced to give up all heavy work when, in a case of mistaken identity, he was wounded by revellers returning from carnival. Paid to keep quiet about his injuries, Plantin used the money to start a printing business. He was phenomenally successful, his fortune assured when Philip II granted him the monopoly of printing missals and breviaries for the whole of the Spanish Empire. On Plantin's death, the business passed to his talented son-in-law, Jan Moerentorf, who Latinized his name, in accordance with the fashion of the day, to Moretus, as did his son, Balthasar, who was a close friend of Rubens. The family donated their mansion to the city in 1876.

From the **entrance**, a signed route takes visitors through most of the rooms of the house, which is set around a compact central courtyard. The mansion is worth seeing in itself, its warren of small, dark rooms equipped with mullioned windows and lockable wooden window shutters, plus oodles of leather wallpaper in the Spanish style. As for the museum, it provides a marvellous insight into how Plantin and his offspring conducted their business.

A detailed guidebook is on sale at reception, as is an audioguide, but **highlights** include several well-preserved pictorial tapestries in Rooms 1 and 6, and, in Room 4, a delightful seventeenth-century bookshop. Here you'll spot a list of prohibited books – the Habsburgs' *Librorum Prohibitorum* – along with a money-balance to help identify clipped and debased coins. Room 11 has a fine portrait of *Seneca* by Rubens, and Room 14 contains the old print

workshop, with a set of ancient presses. Upstairs, Room 15 displays examples of the work of Christopher Plantin, notably several finely worked vellum Bibles and a scattering of geographical texts.

Throughout the museum there are lots of intriguing, precise **woodcuts** and **copper plates**, representing the best of an enormous number used by several centuries of print workers. In particular, look out for the superbly crafted sample prepared for the publication of a seventeenth-century naturalist's book in Room 18. Concentrated in Room 19 are sketches by Rubens, who occasionally worked for the family as an illustrator, while Room 24 boasts a selection of early printed books from other parts of Europe.

From Vrijdagmarkt north to the waterfront

Across Vrijdagmarkt from the museum is **Leeuwenstraat**, a narrow little street flanked by very old terrace houses. At the end, turn left and then first right for **Pelgrimstraat**, which provides one of the best views of the cathedral, with a sliver of sloping, uneven roofs set against the majestic lines of the spire behind. By no. 6, an ancient, cobbled alley called **Vlaaikensgang** (Pie Lane) is a surviving fragment of the honeycomb of narrow lanes that made up medieval Antwerp. It twists a quaint route through to **Oude Koormarkt**, which soon leads west into **Suikerrui**, where the underground tunnels and sewers of the city centre, **De Antwerpse ruien**, can be accessed at no. 21 (guided walks: 2 daily except Tues & Wed; 3hr; €2.50; reservations on ☎03 232 01 03).

Suikerrui connects the Grote Markt with the east bank of the Scheldt, clearly separated from the town since Napoleon razed the riverside slums and constructed proper wharves in the early 1800s. Jutting out into the river at the end of Suikerrui is an overblown, formal **belvedere**, where the Belgian middle classes once took the air, looking out over the river before taking the ferry from the jetty next door. The river ferry is long gone – several roads now run under the Scheldt – and there's precious little to gaze at today except the belvedere, which can't help but seem a little eccentric. Incidentally, there are plans afoot to entirely redevelop the riverfront, making it a car-free attraction rather than the eyesore it currently is.

Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum

A few metres north along the riverfront from the belvedere, the stalwart remains of the Steen are approached past a statue of the giant Lange Wapper, a very dubious local folklore figure – part practical joker, part Peeping Tom – who, as well as being fond of children, exploited his height by spying into people's bedrooms. The Steen marks the site of the ninth-century castle from which the rest of the town spread and later it was the location of an impressive medieval stronghold, successively reinforced and remodelled to keep the turbulent guildsmen of Antwerp in check.

The stone gatehouse and front section are all that have survived of the medieval stronghold, and today they house the **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum** (National Maritime Museum; Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €4), whose cramped rooms hold exhibits illustrating a whole range of shipping activity from inland navigation to life on the waterfront and shipbuilding. Clearly laid out and labelled, with multilingual details on all the major displays, the museum is a delight, an appealing mixture of the personal and the public. High points include a charming British scrimshaw engraved on a whale bone in Room 1, a fascinating fifth-century nautical totem in the form of a snake's head in Room 3, and several fine model ships in Rooms 6 and 9. One of the last rooms is the old council chamber, decorated by two

large paintings of the city's harbour in the seventeenth century. Behind the Steen, the museum has an open-air section (April–Oct) with a long line of tugs and barges parked under a rickety corrugated roof.

The Vleeshuis

Opposite the Steen across Jordaenskaai, filling out the end of narrow Vleeshuisstraat, are the tall, turreted gables of the **Vleeshuis** (Meat Hall; Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5), built for the guild of butchers in 1503. This strikingly attractive building, with its alternating layers of red brick and stonework resembling rashers of bacon, was once the suitably grand headquarters of one of the most powerful of the medieval guilds. It was here in 1585, with the Spanish army approaching, that the butchers made a fateful decision: they opposed the opening of the dykes along the River Scheldt as advised by the Protestant commander, **William the Silent**, who realized that the best way to defend the city was by flooding its immediate surroundings. The butchers were, however, more worried about the safety of their sheep, which grazed the threatened meadows, and so they sent a deputation to the city magistrates to object. The magistrates yielded, and the consequences were disastrous – the Spaniards were able to close the Scheldt and eventually force the town to surrender, a defeat that placed Antwerp firmly within the Spanish Netherlands.

Inside, the cavernous brick hall that comprises the ground floor of the Vleeshuis has an ambitious, if not entirely successful display on music and dance in the city over the last six hundred years. Software handed out at the reception desk enables visitors to listen to a wide range of historic instruments, but somehow it's all too fiddly and a bit tedious. More positively, the museum holds an excellent range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century musical instruments, most memorably a platoon of primly decorated **clavichords** and **harpisichords**, some of which were produced locally in the Ruckers workshop.

To St-Pauluskerk

The streets around the Vleeshuis were badly damaged by wartime bombing, leaving a string of bare, open spaces edged by some of the worst of the city's slums. In the last decade, however, the area has largely been rebuilt and revamped, the prostitutes who once congregated here moved north to Verversrui, near the Willemdok (see p.262), and the crumbling terraces replaced by solid modern houses, whose pinkish brick facades imitate the style of what went before. Cosy and respectable, these new buildings are in stark contrast to the remaining areas of dilapidation, but in due course these will disappear too.

From the Vleeshuis, it's a couple of minutes' walk north along Vleeshouwersstraat to the **Veemarkt**, where an extravagant Baroque portal leads through to **St-Pauluskerk** (May–Sept daily 2–5pm; free), one of the city's most delightful churches, an airy, dignified late Gothic structure dating from 1517. Built for the Dominicans, the original church was looted by the Calvinists when they expelled the monks in 1578. Restored to their property after the Spanish recaptured the city in 1585, the Dominicans refashioned St-Pauluskerk in a Baroque style that was designed to glorify the Catholic Church: the choir symbolized the Church Glorious, and the nave, aisles and transepts the Church Militant. To hammer home the ecclesiastical point, the Dominicans commissioned a series of **paintings** to line the wall of the nave's north aisle depicting the "Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary". Dating from 1617, the series has survived intact, a remarkable snapshot of Antwerp's artistic talent with works by the likes of Cornelis De Vos (1584–1651) – *Nativity* and *Presentation at the Temple*; David Teniers the Elder (1582–1649) – *Gethsemane*; van Dyck (1599–1641) – *The*

Bearing of the Cross; and Jordaens (1593–1678) – the *Crucifixion*. But it is **Rubens**’ contribution – the *Scourging at the Pillar* – which stands out, a brilliant, brutal canvas showing Jesus clad in a blood-spattered loincloth.

There’s more Rubens close by – at the far end of the *Mysteries* series – in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, an early work of 1609, which has a jaunty secular air, with a smartly dressed Mary imperiously lifting the Christ’s bedsheet to the wonder of the shepherds. Across the church, in the south transept, there’s the same artist’s *Disputation on the Nature of the Holy Sacrament*, again completed in 1609, but this time forming part of a grand marble altarpiece sprinkled with frolicking cherubs. The marble was crafted by **Pieter Verbruggen the Elder**, who was also responsible for the extraordinary woodcarving of the confessionals and stalls on either side of the nave, flashy work of arabesque intricacy decorated with fruit, cherubs and pious saints. Verbruggen takes some responsibility for the huge and ugly high altar too: he didn’t fashion the black and white marble – that was the work of a certain Frans Sterbeeck – but he erected it.

Look out also for *Our Lady of the Rosary*, a polychromed wood, early sixteenth-century statuette stuck to a pillar next to the nave’s north aisle. It’s a charming effigy with the Virgin robed in the Spanish manner – it was the Spaniards who first introduced dressed figurines to Flemish churches. The two unusual bas-relief medallions to either side of *Our Lady* are just as folksy, telling a Faustian story of a rich woman who is gulled by the devil, shown here as a sort of lion with an extremely long tail. The first panel sees the woman entrapped by the devil’s letter, the second shows the good old Dominicans coming to the rescue and the devil being carted off by an angel.

One final curiosity is the **Calvarieberg**, beside the passageway linking the Baroque portal and the church. Glued to the buttresses of the south transept in the early eighteenth century, this mound of rock and slag is decorated with statues of angels, prophets and saints beneath a crucified Christ. It was built at the behest of the Pilgrims of Jerusalem, a society keen to encourage the devout to visit the Holy Land. Writing in the nineteenth century, the traveller Charles Tennant got things about right when he described it as being “a more striking instance of religious fanaticism than good taste”.

North to the old city docks – Het Eilandje

From St-Pauluskerk, it’s a ten-minute walk northeast to the first of the several docks that comprise **Het Eilandje** (The Little Isle), a sprawling network of canals, wharves and docks that abut the River Scheldt. Work began on the docks in the early sixteenth century, but the economic collapse following the Spanish Fury (see p.249) stopped the digging in its tracks and only much later, in the 1860s, did work resume. Thereafter, Het Eilandje became the economic centre of the city, its docks crowded with vessels from every corner of the globe, its quays lined by warehouses, sheds, offices, factories and terrace houses. The boom times were, however, short-lived. The docks were simply unable to accommodate the larger vessels that were built after World War II and Het Eilandje hit the skids in the late 1950s, becoming a neglected, decaying corner of the city until forty years later when – in the manner of dockside developments right across western Europe – plans were laid to rejuvenate the whole district. It’s very much a work in progress, but a stroll round the two southernmost docks – the **Bonapartedok** and the adjoining **Willemdok** – is enjoyable enough and there’s one notable building, the **Loodswezen**, a grand neo-Gothic edifice of 1885 that, as the first part of the docks they saw, was meant to impress newly arrived seafarers and once housed the city’s river pilots and tug-boat crews. In the future, the Bonapartedok will hold a collection of historic ships and the

jetty separating the Bonapartedok and the Willemdok will be home to the **Museum aan de Stroom** (River Museum), scheduled to open in 2009. Incidentally, Antwerp's **red-light district** is concentrated on and around pedestrianized **Verversui**, in between St-Pauluskerk and Bonapartedok.

The Rockoxhuis Museum

Southeast of St-Pauluskerk, the **Rockoxhuis Museum**, at Keizerstraat 12 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €2.50), is housed in the attractively restored seventeenth-century town house of Nicolaas Rockox, friend and patron of Rubens. Inside, a sequence of rooms has been crammed with period furnishings and art work, based on an inventory taken after the owner's death in 1640. Nevertheless, it's far from a recreation of Rockox's old home, but rather a museum with a small but highly prized collection. Particular highlights include, in **Room 1**, a gentle *Holy Virgin and Child* by Quentin Matsys (1465–1530) as well as a *Calvary* by one of his sons, Cornelis, and a *St Christopher Bearing the Christ Child*, a typical work by Quentin's collaborator Joachim Patenier (1485–1524). Born in Dinant,

Bruegel's Proverbs

Pieter Bruegel the Younger's *Proverbs* illustrates over a hundred folk sayings. Some of the more diverting are explained below – to help pick them out we've divided the canvas into four squares.

Upper left

The cakes on the roof represent prosperity.

To fire one arrow after another is to throw good after bad.

The Cross hangs below the orb, which is crapped upon by the fool – it's an upside-down world.

The fool gets the trump card – luck favours the foolish.

The man with toothache behind his ear symbolizes the malingerer.

Lower left

He bangs his head against the wall – stupidity.

She carries water in one hand, fire in the other – a woman of contradictory opinions.

The pig opens the tap of the barrel – gluttony.

The knight, literally armed to the teeth, ties a bell to the cat – cowardice.

One woman holds the distaff, while the other spins – it takes two to gossip.

The hat on the post, as in to keep a secret "under your hat".

The pig shearer is a symbol of foolishness.

Upper right

The opportunist on the tower hangs his cloak according to the wind.

To fall from the ox to the ass is to go from good to bad.

He opens the door with his arse – doesn't know if he is coming or going.

The man with the fan is so miserly he even resents the sun shining on the water.

To have the devil as a confessor – distorted values.

Lower right

The imprudent man fills in the well after the cow has drowned.

The poor man cannot reach from one loaf to another.

The dogs fight over a bone – hence bone of contention.

The monk giving Jesus a false beard symbolizes blasphemy.

The man trapped within the globe suggests you have to stoop low to get through life.

Patenier moved to Antwerp, where he became the first Flemish painter to emphasize the landscape of his religious scenes at the expense of its figures – which he reduced to compositional elements within wide, sweeping vistas. Moving on, **Room 2** displays two pictures by Rubens, beginning with the small and romantic *Virgin in Adoration Before the Sleeping Christ Child*, which depicts the Virgin with the features of Rubens' first wife and models Jesus on the artist's son. The second work is his *Christ on the Cross*, a fascinating oil sketch made in preparation for an altarpiece he never had time to paint. Look out also for *Two Studies of a Man's Head* by van Dyck (1599–1641), striking portraits that the artist recycled in several later and larger commissions.

Room 3 is distinguished by a flashy and fleshy genre painting, *Woman Selling Vegetables* by Joachim Beuckelaer (1533–73), the sixteenth-century Antwerp artist whose work is seen again in **Room 4**, this time in the more restrained *Flight into Egypt*, revealing a bustling river bank where – in true Mannerist style – the Holy Family are hard to spot. There's another good illustration of genre painting in **Room 5**, where the *Antwerp Fish Market* is by Frans Snyders (1579–1657), who sometimes painted in the flowers and fruit on the canvases of his chum Rubens.

Finally, in **Room 6**, Pieter Bruegel the Younger's (1564–1638) *Proverbs* is an intriguing folksy work, one of several he did in direct imitation of his father, a frenetic mixture of the observed and imagined set in a Flemish village. The meaning of many of the pictured proverbs has been the subject of long debate and unfortunately the museum doesn't provide a caption – see the box on p.263 for some pointers – but there's little doubt about the meaning of the central image depicting an old man dressed in the blue, hooded cape of the cuckold at the suggestion of his young wife.

Hendrik Conscienceplein and around

From the western end of Keizerstraat, it's a short stroll through to **Hendrik Conscienceplein**, which takes its name from a local nineteenth-century novelist, who wrote prolifically on all things Flemish. One of the most agreeable places in central Antwerp, the square is flanked by the church of **St-Carolus Borromeus** (Mon–Sat 10am–12.30pm & 2–5pm; free), whose finely contrived facade is claimed to have been based on designs by Rubens. Much of the interior was destroyed by fire at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but inside, on the right hand side of the nave, the ornate **Onze Lieve Vrouwekapel** (Chapel of Our Lady) has survived, its ornate giltwork and luxurious mix of marbles a fancy illustration of the High Baroque. Streaky, coloured marble was a key feature of the original design and here it serves as the background for a series of tiny pictures placed to either side of the high altar.

From Hendrik Conscienceplein, walk west to the end of Wijngaardstraat, where a left and then a right turn takes you into the series of tiny squares that ring the northern side of the cathedral. Here, the **Het Elfde Gebod** (The Eleventh Commandment), on Torfbrug, is one of the most unusual bars in the city, jam-packed with a bizarre assortment of kitsch religious statues – see “Bars”, p.276.

East of the centre

Meir, Antwerp's broad and pedestrianized main shopping street, connects the city centre with Centraal Station, some fifteen minutes' walk away to the east. Taken as a whole this part of the city lacks any particular character – being an indeterminate medley of the old and the new – but there's no disputing the

principal sight, the **Rubenshuis**, the cleverly restored former home and studio of Rubens – and the city's most popular tourist attraction by a long chalk. Rubens was buried nearby in **St-Jacobskerk**, a good-looking Gothic church that well deserves a visit, but the architectural highlight hereabouts is the neo-Baroque **Centraal Station**, a sterling edifice dating from 1905. The station presides over Koningin Astridplein, a large and very busy square that accommodates both the **Provincial Diamond Museum** and the **zoo**.

From the Groenplaats to the Rubenshuis

From the northeast corner of Groenplaats, **Eiermarkt** curves round to **Meir**, Antwerp's main shopping drag. At the beginning of Meir, just beyond its junction with St Katelijnevest, is **Twaalfmaandenstraat**, a truncated street that ends in the **Beurs**, the late nineteenth-century stock exchange, built as a rough copy of the medieval original which was burned to the ground in 1868. Used for special events but otherwise dusty and deserted, it's still a splendid extravagance, its high, glass-paned roof supported by spindly iron beams displaying the coats of arms of the maritime nations, with the walls below sporting a giant map of the world.

From the Beurs, it's a two-minute walk east along the Meir to Wapper, a mundane little square, where the **Rubenshuis** at no. 9 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €6) attracts tourists in droves. Not so much a house as a mansion, this was where Rubens lived for most of his adult life, but the building was only acquired by the town in 1937, by which time it was little more than a shell. Skilfully restored, it opened as a museum in 1946. On the right is the classical studio, where Rubens worked and taught; on the left is the traditional, gabled Flemish house, to which is attached the art gallery, an Italianate chamber where Rubens entertained the artistic and cultural elite of Europe. He had an enviably successful career, spending the first years of the seventeenth century studying the Renaissance masters in Italy, before settling in this house in 1608. Soon after, he painted the Antwerp Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal series and his fame spread, both as a painter and diplomat, working for Charles I in England, and receiving commissions from all over Europe.

Unfortunately, there are only a handful of his less distinguished paintings here, and very little to represent the works of those other artists he collected so avidly throughout his life. The restoration of the rooms is convincing, though, and a clearly arrowed tour begins by twisting its way through the neatly panelled and attractively furnished **domestic interiors** of the Flemish half of the house. Beyond, and in contrast to the cramped living quarters, is the elegant **art gallery**, which, with its pint-sized sculpture gallery, was where Rubens displayed his favourite pieces to a chosen few – and in a scene comparable to that portrayed in Willem van Haecht's *The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest*, which is displayed here. The arrows then direct you on into the **great studio**, which is overlooked by a narrow gallery and equipped with a special high door to allow the largest canvases to be brought in and out with ease. Several of Rubens' paintings are displayed here, including a playful *Adam and Eve*, an early work in which the couple flirt while the serpent slithers back up the tree. Also in the studio is a more characteristic piece, the *Annunciation*, where you can sense the drama of the angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary – both in the preparatory sketch and in the finished article, which are exhibited next to each other.

Behind the house, the garden is laid out in the formal style of Rubens' day, as it appears in his *Amid Honeysuckle*, now in Munich. The Baroque portico might also be familiar from the artist's Medici series, on display in the Louvre.



△ The Rubenshuis, Antwerp

St-Jacobskerk

Rubens died in 1640 and was buried in **St-Jacobskerk**, just to the north of the Wapper – take Eikenstraat off the Meir and it's at the end on Lange Nieuwstraat (April–Oct daily except Tues 2–5pm; €2). Very much the church of the Antwerp nobility, who were interred in its multiple vaults and chapels, the church is a mighty Gothic structure begun in 1491, but not finished until 1659. This delay means that much of its Gothic splendour is hidden by an over-decorous Baroque interior, the soaring heights of the nave flattened by heavy marble altars and a huge marble rood screen.

Seven chapels radiate out from the ambulatory, including the **Rubens chapel**, directly behind the high altar, where the artist and his immediate family are buried beneath the tombstones in the floor with a lengthy Latin inscription giving details of Rubens' life and honours. The chapel's altar was the gift of Helene Fourment, Rubens' second wife, and shows one of his last works, *Our Lady and the Christ Child surrounded by Saints* (1634), in which he painted himself as St George, his wives as Martha and Mary, and his father as St Jerome. It's as if he knew this was to be his epitaph; indeed, he is said to have asked for his burial chapel to be adorned with nothing more than a painting of the Virgin Mary with Jesus in her arms, encircled by various saints.

The rest of the church is crammed with the chapels and tombs of the rich and powerful, who kept the city's artists busy with a string of commissions destined to hang above their earthly remains. Most are only of moderate interest, but the **chapel** next to – and north of – the tomb of Rubens is worth a peek for its clumsily titled *St Charles Borromeo Pleading with the Virgin on Behalf of those Stricken by the Plague*, completed by Jacob Jordaens in 1655. A dark, gaudy canvas, it's not without its ironies: Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, was an ardent leader of the Counter-Reformation, while the artist was a committed Protestant. In the north aisle of the nave – on the opposite side from the entrance – the third chapel down from the transept is also of interest as it holds the remains of members of the **Rockox** family (see p.263). They are pictured on the side panels of a Jan Sanders triptych, their demure modesty in stark contrast to the breezy Neoclassicism of a *Last Judgement* which oozes bare flesh (nudity was permitted in the portrayal of classical figures). Finally, in the chapel at the far end of the south aisle, look out for a flamboyant *St George and the Dragon* by van Dyck (1599–1641).

To Centraal Station

Meir heads east from the Rubenshuis to its junction with Jezusstraat, where the carved figure on the building on the corner honours **Lodewyk van Bercken**, who introduced the skill of diamond-cutting to the city in 1476. Beyond, Leysstraat, the continuation of Meir, is flanked by a sweeping facade that culminates in a pair of high, turreted gables, whose allegorical figures and gilt cupolas formed the impressive main entrance to the nineteenth-century city. Straight ahead, the magnificent neo-Baroque **Centraal Station** was finished in 1905, a medley of spires and balconies, glass domes and classical pillars designed by Louis Delacenserie, who had made his reputation as a restorer of Gothic buildings in Bruges. Sadly, the station was also the victim of one of Belgium's greatest cock-ups: in the 1970s, the construction of the underground tram tunnels alongside the station disturbed the water table, causing the oak pillars that supported it to dry out, and threatening it with collapse. The repairs took years and cost millions of euros, but the building has finally been restored to its full glory, whilst down below more tunnels have been added to accommodate long-distance trains. The station itself is an extraordinary edifice, a well-considered blend of earlier architectural styles and fashions – particularly the Gothic lines of the main body of the building and the ticket hall, which has all the darkened mystery of a medieval church – yet displaying all the self-confidence of the new age of industrial progress.

The diamond district and Koningin Astridplein

The anonymous streets just to the southwest of Centraal Station along and around **Lange Kievitstraat** are home to the largest **diamond market** in the world. Behind these indifferent facades precious stones pour in from

The diamond trade

Antwerp's **diamond trade** is largely run by **Orthodox Jews**, whose ancestors mostly arrived here from Eastern Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, and whose presence is often the only outward indication that the business exists at all. They make most of their money by acting as middlemen in a chain that starts in South Africa, where around eighty percent of the world's diamonds are mined, the rate of production and distribution being controlled by a powerful South African cartel led by the **De Beers** company.

The cartel organizes ten **sights** in London every year, the quality of diamonds in each lot being controlled by the producers; guests – the sight-holders, of which there are 95 – are there by invitation only, and if they fail to buy on several consecutive occasions they aren't usually invited again. This system, established in the 1930s when diamonds flooded the market and prices collapsed, has been complemented by a sustained attempt by the cartel to mop up "spare" diamonds mined elsewhere. As a form of price-fixing, it was effective until the 1990s, when both the civil war in Angola and the break-up of the Soviet Union – which had always co-operated with the cartel – brought a veritable mountain of diamonds onto the market. The cartel continued to buy, but by the late 1990s it was sitting on a pile of surplus diamonds to the tune of \$5 billion – much too much to be absorbed even by them.

As an interim measure, De Beers abandoned its efforts to control the world supply of rougher diamonds and a more general relaxation has followed, with the company concentrating on trying to increase demand instead. To the relief of Antwerp's diamond cutters, polishers and traders, De Beers will, however, stick to providing rough mined diamonds rather than extending vertically into the rest of the industry.

every continent to be cut or recut, polished and sold. There's no show of wealth, no grand bazaar – though a rash of little diamond and gold shops does fringe **Pelikaanstraat**, which has recently undergone a major facelift – and no tax collector could ever keep track of the myriad deals which make the business hum.

Koningin Astridplein, the large square adjoining Centraal station, has recently been spruced up too, and is now home to the **Provinciaal Diamantmuseum**, at nos. 19–23 (daily except Wed 10am–5.30pm, but closed in Jan; €6), dealing with the geology, history, mining and cutting of diamonds in a series of clearly labelled, well-organized displays – all with the assistance of interactive gadgetry: visitors can even test the specific qualities of diamonds, such as colour, hardness, refraction of light, and thermal and electric conductivity. There are regular diamond-cutting and polishing demonstrations too (Mon–Fri), but the most popular exhibits are the diamonds themselves, set in all sorts of lavish styles and forms and held in three chambers guarded by heavy steel doors. Footsteps away, also on Koningin Astridplein, is Antwerp's **zoo** (daily 10am–4.45pm, later in summer; €17; 🌐 www.zooantwerpen.be), which accommodates no fewer than six thousand animals in a range of habitats and including an aviary, a reptile house and an aquarium.

South of the centre

Cutting south from Groenplaats, **Nationalestraat** was once prime real estate, its stately department stores a magnet for the bustles, parasols and top hats of the bourgeoisie. It hit the skids in the 1930s, but now it's on the way back with the construction of **ModeNatie**, a large-scale celebration of the city's fashion designers – incorporating a museum, MOMU – and the opening of lots of

designer clothes shops nearby. East of here, the **Museum Mayer van den Bergh** boasts an exquisite collection of fine and applied art, while it's south again along Nationalestraat to **Het Zuid** (The South), a residential district that is also reviving after decades in the doldrums. Lined with grand mansions in the French style, Het Zuid's wide avenues and symmetrical squares were laid out at the end of the nineteenth century on the site of the old Spanish citadel, of which nothing now remains. The district came complete with a large **dock**, but this was filled in years ago, becoming the wide and dreary square that now sprawls between Vlaamse and Waalse Kaai. Setting aside the neighbourhood's cafés and bars, the obvious target in Het Zuid is the **Museum voor Schone Kunsten**, which holds an extensive collection of Belgian art from the fourteenth century onwards.

Het Zuid is bounded by the **Amerikalei** and **Britselei** boulevards, which mark part of the course of a circle of city fortifications finished in the early years of the twentieth century. Enormously expensive and supposedly impregnable, the design was a disaster, depending on a series of raised gun emplacements that were sitting targets for the German artillery in September 1914. The Allies had expected Antwerp to hold out for months, but in the event the city surrendered after a two-week siege, forcing Churchill and his party of marines into a hurried evacuation just two days after their arrival. In themselves, the boulevards are without much interest, but just beyond lies the outstanding **Middelheim Open-Air Sculpture Museum**, with three hundred sculptures spread over extensive parkland.

ModeNatie - and MOMU

Heading south from Groenplaats along Nationalestraat, it takes about five minutes to reach **ModeNatie** (@www.modenatie.com), a lavish and extraordinarily ambitious fashion complex. Spread over several floors, the complex showcases the work of local fashion designers and incorporates both the

Fashion shopping in Antwerp

The success of Antwerp's **fashion designers** has spawned dozens of excellent designer shops and stores. To help visitors get a grip on it all, the tourist office produces two booklets entitled the **Antwerp Fashion Walk**, a long (€3) and a short version (€1.50), and these detail several walks in the city that take you past all the most innovative shops. There is, however, a particular concentration of **fashion shops** around the ModeNatie complex. Recommended places hereabouts kick off with the men's and women's wear of Dries van Noten's **Modepaleis**, Nationalestraat 16 – at the corner of Kammenstraat – and continue with the imported designer clothes of **Alamode**, Nationalestraat and **Veronique Branquinho's** shop, at Nationalestraat 73. Neighbouring Kammenstraat weighs in with the contemporary jewellery of **Anne Zellen**, at no. 47, and the club and streetwear of **Fish & Chips**, at no. 36, while Lombardenstraat, just to the east, is home to **Original**, at no. 10, and **Louis**, at no. 2, both of which feature the clothes of many designers, from Hilfiger to Junk de Luxe. There are a couple of secondhand clothes shop in the area too, with women's stuff at **Jutka & Riska**, Nationalestraat 87, and all sorts of interesting gear at **Episode**, Steenhouwersvest 34, just west of Nationalestraat.



△ Dries van Noten's Modepaleis, Antwerp

fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Flanders Fashion Institute. As such, it reflects the international success of local designers, beginning in the 1980s with the so-called “**Antwerp Six**” – including Dries van Noten, Dirk Bikkembergs, Marina Yee and Martin Margiela – and continuing with younger designers like Raf Simons and Veronique Branquinho; all are graduates of the academy. Part of the building contains a fashion museum, **MoMu** (Mode Museum; daily 10am–6pm; €7; @ www.momu.be), whose enterprising and thought-provoking temporary displays cover a lot of ground – everything from the walking stick as fashion statement through to the evolution of the trench coat.

The Museum Mayer van den Bergh

The appealing **Museum Mayer van den Bergh**, a five-minute walk east of ModeNatie at Lange Gasthuisstraat 19 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €4; English guide €3), comprises the art collection of the Berghs, a wealthy merchant family who gave their artistic hoard to the city in 1920. Very much a connoisseur’s collection, it offers examples of many different branches of applied arts, from tapestries to ceramics, silver, illuminated manuscripts and furniture, all crowded into a reconstruction of a sixteenth-century town house. There are also a number of outstanding paintings, beginning in **Room 2** with a charming portrait of a young brother and sister by the Dutchman Cornelis Ketel (1548–1616). Next door, in **Room 3**, is the earliest panel painting ever to be found in Belgium – a thirteenth-century Italian work entitled the *Virgin and Child Enthroned* by Simeone and Machilone of Spoleto – while pride of place in **Room 4** goes to a *Crucifixion* triptych by Quentin Matsys (1465–1530), with the unidentified donors painted on the wings. Intriguingly, the female donor is pictured alongside one of the family’s patron saints, Mary of Egypt, a repentant prostitute who spent her final years in the desert miraculously sustained by three little loaves.

Room 5 is almost entirely devoted to the **Bruegels** and it’s here you’ll find the museum’s best-known work, **Pieter the Elder’s** (1525–69) *Dulle Griet* or “Mad Meg”, one of his most Bosch-like paintings. Experts have written volumes on the painting’s iconography, but in broad terms there’s no disputing it’s a misogynistic allegory in which a woman, weighed down with possessions, stalks the gates of hell in a surrealistic landscape of monsters and pervasive horror. The title refers to the archetypal shrewish woman, who, according to Flemish proverb, “could plunder in front of hell and remain unscathed”. Hanging next to it is the same artist’s *Twelve Proverbs*, a less intense vision of the world, in which a sequence of miniatures illustrates popular Flemish aphorisms, including an old favourite – the man in a blue, hooded cape symbolizing the Cuckold. Moving on, **Room 6** is mainly devoted to small-scale medieval sculptures and decorative pieces and **Room 10** displays an early German carving of *St John Resting on the Breast of Jesus*, dating to around 1300. Here also are two tiny panels from a fifteenth-century polyptych that once adorned a travelling altar. The twin panels are beautifully decorated with informal scenes – St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, crosses a stream full of fish, and Joseph cuts up his socks to use as swaddling clothes for the infant Jesus.

To the Bourlaschouwburg

From the Bergh Museum, you can either proceed direct to the Maagdenhuis, just along the street (see opposite), or make a brief detour east along Arenbergstraat to the pleasant pedestrianized streets and squares fringing the **Bourlaschouwburg** (Bourla Theatre), an elegant nineteenth-century rotunda

with a handsomely restored interior. Just beyond, at the end of the Graanmarkt, lurks its modern concrete and steel equivalent, the huge and monstrous **Stadsschouwburg** (municipal theatre). From the Graanmarkt, it's the briefest of strolls north to the Rubenshuis (see p.265).

The Maagdenhuis

The **Maagdenhuis**, Lange Gasthuisstraat 33 (Maidens' House; Mon & Wed–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 1–5pm; €3), was formerly a hospital and orphanage for children of the poor, but is now occupied by the city's social security offices and a small museum. Created in the middle of the sixteenth century, the **orphanage** was strictly run, its complex rules enforced by draconian punishments. At the same time, those children who were left here were fed and taught a skill, and desperate parents felt that they could at least retrieve their children if their circumstances improved. To make sure their offspring could be identified, they were given **tokens**, usually irregularly cut playing cards or images of saints – one part was left with the child, the other kept by the parent – and there are examples here in the museum. If the city fathers didn't actually encourage this practice, they certainly accepted it, and several municipal buildings even had specially carved alcoves on their facades where foundlings could be left under shelter, certain to be discovered in the morning.

Entrance to the **museum** is through an ornamental **archway** decorated with figures representing some of the first girls to be admitted to the orphanage, depicted inside a tidy classroom so finely chiselled that you can discern the tiny bookshelves. Inside, five ground-floor rooms and a chapel display a varied but modest collection of art. To the right of the entrance, particular highlights in the **chapel** include a cabinet of foundling tokens and around fifty colourful, late medieval porridge bowls – the largest collection of its sort in Belgium. There's also Jan van Scorel's (1495–1562) tiny *Adoration of the Shepherds*, in which the finely observed detail so typical of Flemish painting is suffused by Italianate influences, notably the romantic ruin in the background. Scorel, a one-time Vatican employee, was the first Dutch artist of importance to live in Italy and, returning to the Netherlands in 1524, he was largely responsible for introducing the Italian High Renaissance to his fellow artists back home. In the **five rooms** to the left of the entrance, three paintings are also worth seeking out: at the end of the corridor is *Orphan Girl at Work* by Cornelius de Vos (1584–1651), a touching composition showing the young woman cheered by the offer of a red carnation, a symbol of fidelity; and in the end room on the right are both van Dyck's (1599–1641) mournful *St Jerome* and Jordaens' (1593–1678) profound study of Christ in his *Descent from the Cross*.

From the Maagdenhuis, it's an uninspiring twenty-minute walk southwest to the Museum voor Schone Kunsten; you're much better off doubling back to ModeNatie to pick up tram #8, which runs there from Groenplaats via Nationalestraat.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten

Reached by tram #8 from Groenplaats, the **Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Fine Art Museum; Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €6) occupies an immense Neoclassical edifice dating from the 1880s. Inside, the **lower level** is largely devoted to temporary exhibitions – for which there is usually a supplementary charge – plus the museum's modern art (from the late nineteenth century onwards), but the bulk of the permanent collection is squeezed into the lettered rooms of the **upper level**. Free **plans** of the museum are available at reception, and are extremely useful as everything is a little mixed up and the paintings are often

rotated. That said, the Flemish Primitives and their immediate successors are usually displayed in rooms Q, S and R, whilst the rest of the upper level features the seventeenth, eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries. The larger rooms in the middle – I and H – concentrate on Rubens and his cronies, van Dyck and Jordaens.

Early Flemish paintings

In Room Q, the early Flemish section includes two tiny but especially delicate works by Jan van Eyck (1390–1441), comprising a florid *Madonna at the Fountain* and a *St Barbara*, where a palm and prayer book, representing her faith and self-sacrifice, have replaced the usual symbol of the saint's imprisonment – a miniature tower held in the palm of her hand. Behind, a full-scale Gothic tower looms over her – a much more powerful indication of her confinement. Also in Room Q is Rogier van der Weyden's (1400–64) *Triptych of the Seven Sacraments*, painted for the Bishop of Tournai in 1445 and graced by an inventive frame, which merges with the lines of the Gothic architecture inside. Weyden's *Portrait of Philippe de Croy* is here too, the artist blending a dark background into the lines of his subject's cloak, a simple technique to emphasize the shape of the nobleman's angular face and his slender hands.

Next door, Room S has two paintings by **Hans Memling** (1433–94), the *Portrait of Giovanni de Candida* and the *Angels Singing and Playing Instruments*. Neither is among his most distinguished works, but they do have that finely textured quality for which he is famous. There are also two panel paintings by **Gerard David** (1460–1523), each cool and meticulous, though the finer is the evocative *Pilate and the High Priests*, and **Jean Fouquet** (1425–80), the most influential French painter of his day, chimes in with a *Madonna and Child* in which remarkable, orange-red, latex-like angels surround a chubby Jesus, who looks away from a pale, bared breast.

Late medieval paintings

From the early sixteenth century – and exhibited in Room R – look out for **Quentin Matsys**' (1465–1530) triptych of the *Lamentation*. Commissioned for the carpenter's chapel in Antwerp's Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal, it's a profound and moving work, portraying the Christ, his forehead flecked with blood, surrounded by grieving followers including Mary Magdalene, who tenderly wipes his feet with her hair as tears roll down her face. The panel on the left shows Salome presenting the head of St John the Baptist to Herod, and on the right is the martyrdom of St John. In the latter, the gargoyle-like faces of the men stoking the fire beneath the cauldron are fine illustrations of one of Matsys' favourite ways of representing evil.

Room R also features two miniature landscapes by **Joachim Patenier** (1475–1524), the *Flight from Egypt* and *Lot and the Flight from Sodom and Gomorrah*. Born in Dinant, Patenier moved to Antwerp in his twenties, becoming a member of the local artists' guild in 1515. Although very few of his paintings have survived, he appears to have been an important figure in the development of Flemish art. Here, for the first time in Flanders, Biblical characters are reduced to small elements in the broad sweep of a highly idealized, pastoral landscape – a style that was to be imitated by scores of later artists.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

In Room K, there are several Dutch genre paintings plus an enjoyable sample of the work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–69), notably two typically folksy pieces, *The Wedding Dance* and *St John the Baptist Preaching*, in which the crowd

are turned out in contemporary peasant gear. This, however, is small artistic beer compared with the large room next door – Room I – which displays a sequence of enormous canvases by **Pieter Paul Rubens** (1577–1640). Amongst them is an inventive *Last Communion of St Francis* (1619), showing a very sick-looking saint equipped with the marks of the stigmata, a faint halo and a half-smile: despite the sorrowful ministrations of his fellow monks, Francis can't wait for salvation. Also from 1619 is *Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves*, which, with its muscular thieves and belligerent Romans, possesses all the high drama you might expect, but is almost overwhelmed by its central image – you can virtually hear the tearing of Christ's flesh as the soldier's lance sinks into him. From 1624 comes the outstanding *Adoration of the Magi*, a beautifully free and very human work apparently finished by Rubens in a fortnight. No doubt he was helped by his studio, the major figures of which – van Dyck and Jordaens – are represented in Room H, where you'll spot **Jacob Jordaens'** (1593–1678) striking *Martyrdom of St Apollonia*. The painting relates the saint's story: during an anti-Christian riot in third-century Alexandria, Apollonia was seized by the mob, who extracted her teeth in a vain attempt to make her renounce her faith. Frustrated by her steadfastness, the crowd then built a bonfire and threatened to burn her alive, but Apollonia walked into the flames voluntarily – all in all, a grisly martyrdom for which she is honoured as the patron saint of toothache.

Smaller paintings by Rubens are often exhibited in Room C, but Room B next door makes an abrupt change of direction, featuring several earthy, sometimes raucous scenes of peasant life by **Adriaen Brouwer** (1605–38). Born in Flanders, apprenticed to Frans Hals in Haarlem, and very much influenced by Bruegel the Elder, Brouwer bridges the gap between Flemish and Dutch art. When he was imprisoned in 1633, the prison baker, **Joos van Craesbeeck**, became his pupil, and his pictures are in this room too, often outdoing even Brouwer in their violence.

Modern Belgian art

The museum has a large collection of modern Belgian art, which is usually exhibited on the right-hand side of the lower level. The paintings are regularly rotated, making it difficult to give particular recommendations, but you can expect to see the work of **James Ensor** (1860–1949), whose subdued, conservative beginnings, such as *Afternoon at Ostend* (1881), contrast with his piercing later works – for instance *Intrigue* and *Skeletons Fighting for the Body of a Hanged Man*. Also likely to be on show is **Paul Delvaux's** (1897–1994) much praised *Red Bow*, showing a classical city in the process of disintegration, and several canvases by **René Magritte** (1898–1967), most memorably the macabre *Madame Recamier* and *Storm Cape*. Look out too for **Constant Permeke** (1886–1952), a leading member of the artistic coterie who first congregated at the village of St-Martens-Latem near Ghent just before World War I. Dark and broody, Permeke's works are mostly Expressionistic studies of rural Flemish life, his style typified by *The Coffee Drinkers*, *Man with the Vest*, and *The Farmer*.

MUHKA and the Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen

One block west of the Museum voor Schone Kunsten, in between Vlaamse Kaai and Waalse Kaai, a large and dreary **square** marks the location of one of the city's nineteenth-century docks. There are two museums beside the square. The first, **MUHKA** (Museum of Contemporary Art; Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5; www.muhka.be), in a striking functionalist building at Leuvenstraat 32, specializes in large-scale, ambitious, avant-garde exhibitions – *Anti-art*,

Metalanguage and the like. A short walk away to the south, the **Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen** (Provincial Photography Museum; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €6; www.fotomuseum.be) at Waalse Kaai 47, mixes displays of all sorts of old photographic equipment with modern exhibitions of different photographic techniques, film showings, portfolio view days and so forth.

Openluchtmuseum voor Beeldhouwkunst Middelheim

The **Openluchtmuseum voor Beeldhouwkunst Middelheim** (Middelheim Open-Air Sculpture Museum; Tues–Sun: April & Sept 10am–7pm; May & Aug 10am–8pm; June & July 10am–9pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm; free) is one of Antwerp's most enjoyable attractions, comprising over three hundred modern sculptures spread amidst the manicured lawns and trees of **Middelheim Park**, about 6km south of the city centre. The original collection was assembled here in the 1950s at the instigation of an adventurous burgomaster – one Lode Craeybeckx – and has since grown to include examples of all the major modern schools – particularly Realism, Cubism and Surrealism. The open-air collection is supplemented by an indoor section, in which the more delicate pieces are displayed. There is a fair sprinkling of Belgian sculptors, one of the more talented of whom was the painter-sculptor Rik Wouters (1882–1916), plus a handsome sample of the work of leading foreign practitioners like Henry Moore, Tony Cragg, Panamareko, Auguste Rodin, Alexander Calder and Ossip Zadkine.

Middelheim Park is situated just beyond the ring road on Middelheimlaan. There are several ways to get there by public transport, one of the options being to take **tram #7** from the Meir – ask the driver to put you off; from the tram stop, it's a fifteen-minute walk. By car, take the Berchem–Wilrijk exit off the ring road.

Eating and drinking

Antwerp is an enjoyable and inexpensive place to eat, its busy centre liberally sprinkled with informal **cafés** and **restaurants**, which excel at combining traditional Flemish dishes with Mediterranean, French and vegetarian cuisines. There is a good range of slightly more formal – and expensive – restaurants too, though generally the distinction between the city's cafés and restaurants is blurred. There's a concentration of first-rate places on and around Pelgrimstraat, near the Grote Markt, and another in the vicinity of Hendrik Conscienceplein. These two areas are a better bet for good food than the gaggle of cafés on the Grote Markt and the Groenplaats, the prime tourist area, but even here you don't pay much of a premium. As for **opening hours**, most cafés open early-ish in the morning – by about 9am – till late at night, although those geared up for shoppers and office workers mostly close at 5 or 6pm. Restaurants are often open every day of the week from 11am or noon to about 11pm, though some close for a few hours in the afternoon and the smarter establishments sometimes only open in the evening; others have a regular weekly closing day – usually Sunday or Monday. Precise hours are given with the reviews below.

Antwerp is also a fine place to **drink**. There are lots of bars in the city centre, mostly dark and tiny affairs exuding a cheerful vitality. Some of them regularly feature live music, but most don't, satisfying themselves – and their customers – with everything from taped *chanson* to house. On sunny evenings, the pavement café-bars on the Groenplaats are the places to make for – a swirl of jabbering, good-humoured crowds. Bar **opening hours** are elastic, with many places only closing when the last customers leave – say 2 or 3am – and, unless otherwise stated in our listings below, all are open daily.

The favourite local tippie, incidentally, is De Koninck, a light ale drunk in a *bolleke*, or small, stemmed glass.

Unless otherwise stated, all the places below appear on the Central Antwerp map on p.256.

Restaurants

Aurelia Wijngaardstraat 22 ☎03 233 62 59.

Smart and smooth little restaurant in an immaculately restored old merchant's house metres from Hendrik Conscienceplein. Serves delicious seafood and meat dishes in the full French style with main courses averaging €25. Daily except Tues & Wed from 6pm.



Den Dobbelsesteen Pelgrimstraat 30

☎03 227 25 18. Pedestrianized Pelgrimstraat is chock-a-block with restaurants, but this is probably the pick, an intimate, cosy little place offering an excellent variety of Franco-Flemish dishes; the seafood is especially good. Main courses €20–25. Daily from 6.30pm.

Gin Fish Haarstraat 9 ☎03 231 32 07. Unusual little fish restaurant, minimally decked out and with guests sitting next to each other round the chef/server in American-diner style. A set menu of exquisitely prepared seafood costs €60, €75 with wine. Off Grote Pieter Potstraat, near the Grote Markt. Reservations essential. Tues–Sat 6.30–10pm.

Hippodroom Leopold de Waelplaats 10 ☎03 248 52 52. Polished, quite formal restaurant offering a wide range of Flemish and Franco-Flemish dishes from around €20 per main. You can eat outside in the garden in summer. Opposite the Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 6–11pm, Sat 6–11pm. See map, pp.250–251.

Hungry Henrietta Lombardenvest 19 ☎03 232 29 28. Something of a city institution, this family-owned restaurant is decorated to a modern spec and touches base with all the Flemish classics. Locals swear by the steaks. Mains average €22, but the daily specials cost half that. Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 6–9pm.



De Kleine Zavel Stooftstraat 2 ☎03 231 96

91. Much praised, bistro-style restaurant with wooden floors, old-style furniture and Franco-Belgian cuisine at its tastiest – the *jus* are simply wonderful and there's a particularly strong line in seafood. On a narrow side street in between the Grote Markt and the river. Mains from €23. Reservations essential. Mon–Fri & Sun noon–2pm, daily 6.30–10.30pm.

De Peerdestal Wijngaardstraat 8 ☎03 231 95 03. A few metres from Hendrik Conscienceplein, this popular, mid-range restaurant, with its rusticated decor, is the place to try a traditional Belgian speciality, horsemeat – *paardenvlees* (dishes from €20). Daily 11.30am–3pm & 5–10pm.

Pizzeria Da Antonio Grote Markt 6 ☎03 232 17 07. Central Antwerp literally heaves with Italian restaurants and this is one of the better ones, serving tasty pasta and pizza from as little as €10. Very popular and reasonably priced. On the corner of Suikerrui. Open daily.

De Stoempot Vlasmarkt 12 ☎03 231 36 86.

Straightforward, unpretentious little place where they serve that old Flemish standby, *stoemp* (mashed potato mixed with vegetables and/or meat), every which way. Mains €10–16. Closed Wed.

Varelli Plantinkaai 15 ☎03 485 88 82. The best Greek *mezze* in town are served here in this arty, informal restaurant, which occupies the ground-floor of an old riverside town house. Main courses €15. Mon–Fri 6–10.30pm, Sat 5–10.30pm, Sun noon–10.30pm.

Zoute Zoen Zirkstraat 15 ☎03 226 92 20. A short walk north of the Grote Markt, this small and polished bistro offers delicious Italian, French and Flemish dishes with main courses around €20, pastas €12–16. Closed Sat lunch and all day Mon.

Cafés and café-bars

L'Entrepôt du Congo Vlaamse Kaai 42. Well-known and very popular café-bar serving up fresh salads, sandwiches and pastas at low prices. In the fashionable Het Zuid part of town, near the Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Daily 7.30am–2am. See map, pp.250–251.

Facade Hendrik Conscienceplein 18. Laid-back, funky café with good music and inexpensive vegetarian, meat and fish dishes from as little as €10. Especially popular with students. Open for lunch during the week and every evening.



De Groote Witte Arend Reyndersstraat 18.

Eminently appealing café-bar occupying one wing and the courtyard of an old mansion. Great range of beers – including authentic gueuze and kriel – plus delicious Flemish dishes, including *stoemp* (mashed potato with veg) and *stoofvlees* (beef cooked in beer) – all to a classical music soundtrack. Mains average €13. Mon–Thurs & Sun 10.30am–midnight, Fri & Sat 10.30am–2am; kitchen daily 11am–10pm.

Hoffy's Lange Kievitstraat 52 ☎03 234 35 35. Outstanding, simply decorated traditional Jewish restaurant and takeaway, off Pelikaanstraat, near Centraal Station. Very reasonable prices. Try the

gefilte fisch. Daily except Sat 11am–9pm. See map, pp.250–251.

Mockamore Groenplaats 30. Straightforward café with a few modern stools and tables – and the best range of coffees in the city centre. Part of a small Belgian chain. On the northeast corner of the Groenplaats. Mon–Fri 8am–6.30pm, Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 11am–6pm.

Le Pain Quotidien Steenhoudersvest 48.

Distinctive, vaguely New Age café, where the variety of breads is the main event, served with delicious, wholesome soups and light meals at one long wooden table. Part of a small chain. Mon–Sat 7am–6pm, Sun 8am–5pm.

Pakhuis Vlaamse Kaai 76. Fashionable café-bar occupying an imaginatively converted two-storey warehouse. Uniformed waiters lend a brasserie air and the house beers are brewed on the premises. Daily from 11am till late. See map, pp.250–251.



Popoff Oude Kooymarkt 18. Tiny little café with the best desserts, tarts and gateaux in town. Tues–Sat noon–10.30pm, Sun noon–10pm.

Bars

De Duifkens Graanmarkt 5. Located on a pedestrianized square close to the Rubenshuis and behind the *Bourlaschouwburg*, this old-style Antwerp café-bar has long been a favourite haunt of the city's actors. See map, pp.250–251.

Het Elfde Gebod Torfbrug 10. On one of the tiny squares fronting the north side of the cathedral, this old bar has become something of a tourist trap, but it's still worth visiting for the kitsch, nineteenth-century religious statues which cram the interior; don't bother with the food.



Den Engel Grote Markt 3. Handily located, traditional bar with an easy-going,

occasionally anarchic atmosphere. Occupies the ground floor of a guildhouse on the northwest corner of the main square and attracts a mixture of business people and locals from the residential enclave round the Vleeshuis. Late-night dancing (of no particular merit) too.

De Faam Grote Pieter Potstraat 12. Cool, groovy bar in small, sparsely lit premises near the Grote Markt. An eclectic soundtrack – from *chanson* to jazz.

De Herk Reyndersstraat 33. Down a narrow alley and set around a courtyard, this tiny, modernist bar attracts a modish, twenty-something clientele and does a good range of beers and ales – including an excellent Lindemans gueuze.

Den Hopsack Grote Pieter Potstraat 22.

Postmodern bar – all wood and spartan fittings – with highbrow conversation, an amenable, low-key atmosphere, and a thirty-something clientèle.

Kulminator Vleminckveld 32–34. One of the best beer bars in Antwerp, serving over 500 varieties, with a helpful beer menu. Dark and atmospheric with New Age flourishes. A 5-min walk south of the centre – from the foot of Oude Kooymarkt, follow Kammenstraat, which leads into Vleminckveld. Mon 8pm–midnight, Tues–Fri 11am–midnight, Sat 5pm–midnight. See map, pp.250–251.



Café Pelikaan Melkmarkt 14. There's nothing touristy about the *Pelikaan*, a packed bar where locals get down to some serious drinking. On the east side of the cathedral. Closed Sun.

De Vagant Reyndersstraat 21. Specialist gin bar serving an extravagant range of Belgian and Dutch jenever in comfortable, laid-back surroundings. Small pavement terrace too.

Entertainment and nightlife

Antwerp has a vibrant and diverse **cultural scene** – and the best way to get a handle on it is to pick up the very useful, fortnightly **Zone 03** (www.zone03.be), a free Dutch-language newsheet which details all up-and-coming events, exhibitions and concerts; it's available from the tourist office and at newsstands all over the city centre. The city has its own **orchestra** and **opera** companies as well as several good Flemish **theatre** troupes, and there are occasional appearances by touring English-language theatre companies too. English-language **films** are almost always subtitled – as distinct from dubbed – and the city has a reliable, city-centre art-house cinema.

Antwerp's fluid **club scene** is in a rude state of health, with a handful of boisterous places dotted round the peripheries of the city centre. They get going at around midnight and admission fees are typically modest (€10 or so) except for big-name DJs. For special club nights and other showcase events, keep your eyes peeled for fly-posters. Antwerp has a flourishing **jazz** scene too – with a couple of good places in the centre.

As regards **festivals**, the city hosts a goodly portion of the **Festival van Vlaanderen** (Flanders Festival; www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be), which runs from May to November and features more than one hundred classical concerts performed in cities across the whole of Flemish-speaking Belgium. There's also **SFINKS** ([03 455 69 44](tel:034556944), www.sfinks.be), Belgium's best world music festival, held outdoors over the last weekend of July in the suburb of Boechout, about 10km southeast of downtown Antwerp.

Tickets for most concerts and events are on sale at the **Info Cultuur** office (Mon–Sat 9am–5.45pm, Sun 9am–4.45pm; [03 203 95 85](tel:032039585), www.infocultuur.be), which shares its premises with the tourist office at Grote Markt 13. A comparable service is provided at the Fnac store, Groenplaats 31 ([0900 00600](tel:090000600), www.fnac.be).

Theatres, cinemas and concert halls

Bourlaschouwburg Komedieplaats 18 [03 224 88 44](tel:032248844), www.toneelhuis.be. This handsomely

restored, nineteenth-century theatre is the city's premier venue for theatrical performances, and the home of the Het Toneelhuis repertory company.

Cartoons Kaasstraat 4, off Suikerrui [03 232 96 32](tel:032329632), www.cartoons-cinema.be. The most distinctive downtown cinema, showing both mainstream and arthouse films in three auditoria.

Koningin Elisabethzaal Koningin Astridplein 26 [0900 00 311](tel:090000311) (premium ticket line), www.elisabethzaal.be. Mixed bag of a venue with opera, rock, dance and theatre. The internationally acclaimed Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra (www.defilharmonie.be) is based here, though it also performs at the Bourlaschouwburg (see above).

deSingel Desguinlei 25 [03 248 28 28](tel:032482828), www.desingel.be. Antwerp is on the international circuit for big-name rock/pop artists, who mostly appear here at this modern performance hall. South of the centre near the ring road – tram #2 from Centraal Station (direction Hoboken).

Stadsschouwburg Theaterplein 1 [077 37 38 39](tel:077373839), www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be. A big bruiser of a modern building that mostly hosts musical concerts and theatrical performances. Near the Rubenshuis.

UGC Antwerpen Van Ertbornstraat 17 [0900 10 440](tel:09001440) (premium line), www.ugc.be. A vast multi-screen complex just west of Centraal Station, off De Keyserlei – though there's an entrance on this street too.

De Vlaamse Opera Frankrijklei 3 [70 22 02 22](tel:70220222), www.vlaamseopera.be. The excellent Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera (Royal Flemish Opera) usually performs here at this grand, early twentieth-century building on the ring road, about halfway between the Grote Markt and Centraal Station. The Koninklijk ballet van Vlaanderen (Royal Ballet of

Flanders; www.koninklijkballetvanvlaanderen.be) performs here too, but also has its own small, 300-seat venue at Westkaai 16.

Live music and clubs

Bar Tabac Waalse Kaai 43 [0495 50 62 49](tel:0495506249).

Boho-seedy café-bar that's at the centre of much of the scene in Het Zuid. Jam-packed late at night, especially when there's live music or DJ sounds. Open daily except Mon from 8pm.

Café d'Anvers Verversrui 15 [03 226 38 70](tel:032263870), www.cafe-d-anvers.com. Youthful, fashionable, energetic club, billed as a "temple to house music", but perhaps a little too well established to be cutting edge. North of the centre in the red-light district. Fri–Sun.

Café Hopper Leopold De Waelstraat 2 [03 49 33](tel:034933), www.hopperjazz.org. Laid-back, easy-going bar-café providing an excellent and varied programme of live jazz, sometimes with big international names.

Café de Muze Melkmarkt 15 [03 226 01 26](tel:032260126). With its bare brick walls and retro film posters, this funky café-bar is lively and popular, and regularly puts on jazz bands.

Petrol D'Herbouvillakaai 21 at General Armstrongweg [03 226 49 63](tel:032264963), www.petrolclub.be. Currently the hottest club in town for both DJ sounds and live concerts, housed in a former waste disposal centre. Always open Fri and Sat nights, check the website for weekday programme. Way south out of the city centre in an old industrial area beside the River Scheldt – take a taxi. Admission €8–10; in advance from Fnac bookshop (see above).

Red & Blue Lange Schipperskapelstraat 13 [03 213 05 55](tel:032130555), www.redandblue.be. Other nights have other incarnations, but Saturday night here is gay night (men only) with house and techno sounds – and a throbbing dance floor. From 11pm, but not much happens till 1am; closes at 6/7am. €8 entry.

Listings

Antwerp airport enquiries ☎ 03 285 65 00.

Banks and exchange There are plenty of banks in and around the city centre and lots of ATMs. One handy branch of KB Kredietbank is near the Grote Markt at Eiermarkt 20.

Bike rental Rent A Bike, on the north side of the cathedral at Lijnwaadmarkt 6 (☎ 03 290 49 62, www.antwerpbikes.be) and Fietshaven, at Centraal Station (☎ 03 326 99 68, www.fietshaven.be). Advance booking is recommended on the weekend and in the height of the summer.

Books English books and a wide range of Belgian road and hiking maps are available from Fnac (Mon–Thurs 10am–6.30pm, Fri 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–6.30pm), in the Grand Bazaar shopping mall on the Groenplaats: the mall's main entrance is on the left hand side of the *Hilton*. Standaard Boekhandel, at the corner of Huidevettersstraat and Lange Gasthuisstraat, is a good second bet (Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm).

Buses and trams Contact De Lijn (☎ 070 220 200, www.delijn.be) for all city and provincial bus and tram enquiries. De Lijn also operates a city transport information office at the underground tram station on the Groenplaats (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 8am–noon & 1–4pm) and a provincial information desk at the bus station on Franklin Rooseveltplaats (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm & Sat 8am–4pm).

Car rental Europcar, Plantin en Moretuslei 35 ☎ 03 206 74 44; Hertz, at Antwerp airport ☎ 03 239 29 21.

Emergencies Police ☎ 101; ambulance/fire brigade ☎ 100.

Gay scene If there is a centre to Antwerp's gay and lesbian scene it's Café Den Draak, Draakplaats (Tues–Sun from noon till late), a café-bar that is part of a larger gay and lesbian project, the Het

Roze Huis (☎ 03 288 00 84, www.hetrozehuis.be). Draakplaats is a 15-min walk south from Centraal Station: take Pelikaanstraat and its continuation Simonsstraat/Mercatorstraat and turn left down Grote Hondstraat. The best gay club in town is *Red & Blue* (see p.277).

Gin The De Vagant off-licence, opposite the bar of the same name at Reyndersstraat 21, sells a wide range of Dutch and Belgian gins. Mon & Wed–Sat 11am–6pm.

Internet Most of Antwerp's hotels and hostels as well as some B&Bs provide Internet access to guests either free or at minimum charge. Internet cafés come and go with alarming speed, but one of the more established is 2Zones, just east of the Grote Markt at Wolstraat 15 (daily 11.30am–midnight; www.2zones.com).

Left luggage Office and coin-operated lockers at Centraal Station.

Mail Main post office at Groenplaats 43 (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–noon).

Markets Theaterplein plays host to a general and bric-à-brac market, along with flowers and plants, on Saturday (8am–4pm); and more of the same plus birds on Sunday (8am–1pm). From Easter to October, there's also an antique and jumble market on Lijnwaadmarkt (Sat 9am–5pm), immediately to the north of Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal.

Pharmacies There's a pharmacy on the Grote Markt – W. Lotry, at no. 56. Details of 24-hr pharmacies are available from the tourist office; duty rotas should also be displayed on all pharmacists' windows or doors.

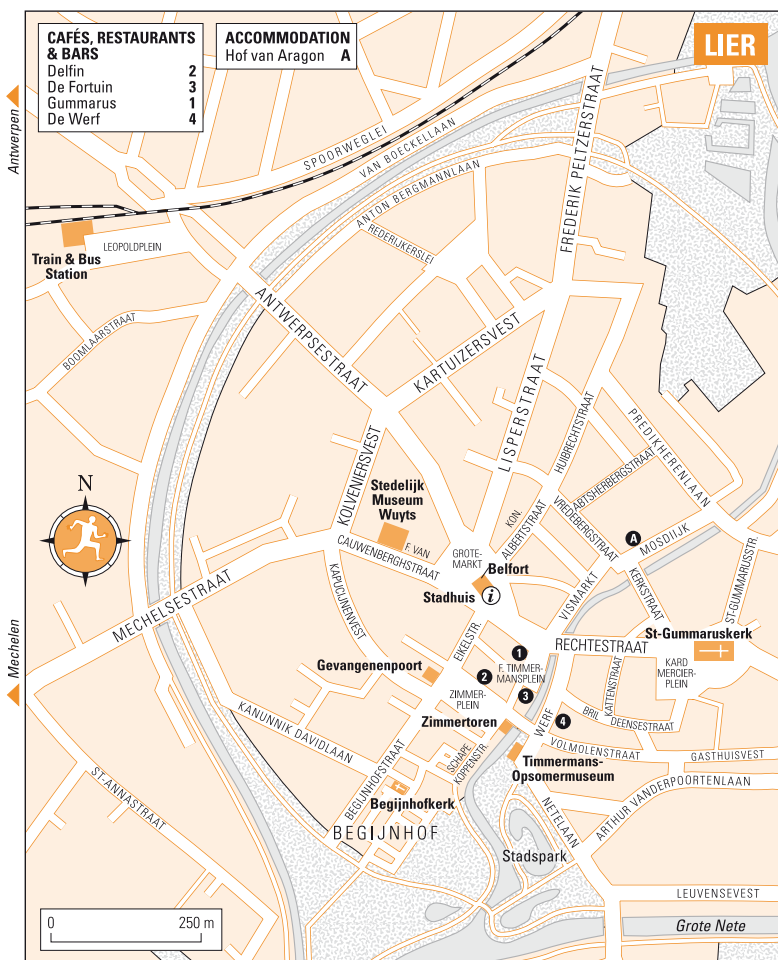
Taxis There are taxi ranks outside Centraal Station and at the top of Suikerrui, on the edge of the Grote Markt. Antwerp Taxi is on ☎ 03 238 38 38.

Train enquiries Belgian railways, NMBS (☎ 02 528 28 28, www.nmbs.be).

Lier

Likeable **LIER**, just 17km southeast of Antwerp, has an amenable, small-town air, its pocket-sized centre boasting a clutch of handsome medieval buildings, particularly **St-Gummaruskerk**, plus an enjoyable art museum. The town was founded in the eighth century, but despite its ancient provenance Lier has never managed to elude the shadow of its much larger neighbour Antwerp – even when **Felix Timmermans**, one of Belgium's best-known writers, lived here for almost all of his long life (1886–1947). That said, Timmermans did add a certain local sparkle – and it seems to have been needed: other Belgians once referred to Lier's citizens as “sheepheads”, a reference to their reputation for stubbornness and stupidity.

Lier is an ideal day-trip from Antwerp, from where it is readily reached by **train** in just twenty minutes.



Arrival, information and accommodation

Lier **train station** adjoins the **bus station** on the north side of the town centre, a ten-minute walk from the Grote Markt: veer left out of the train station, turn right at the main road, Antwerpsestraat, and carry straight on. The **tourist office**, in the basement of the Stadhuis on the Grote Markt (April–Oct daily 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm; ☎ 03 800 05 55, 🌐 www.toerismelier.be), can provide a free and glossy town brochure with a map and has a list of local **accommodation** – three hotels and half a dozen B&Bs (①–②), about half of which are in the centre. Of the **hotels**, easily the best option is the *Hof van Aragon*, Aragonstraat 6 (☎ 03 491 08 00, 🌐 www.hofvanaragon.be; ②), a small, unpretentious place occupying a pleasantly renovated old building a short walk east of the Grote Markt.

The Town

Central Lier spreads out from a large, rectangular **Grote Markt**, its old streets and alleys encircled and bisected by the waterways that mark the course of its old harbours and moat. At the centre of the Grote Markt is the turreted fourteenth-century **Belfort**, an attractively spikey affair incongruously attached to the classically elegant **Stadhuis**, which was built to replace the medieval cloth hall in 1740. Otherwise, the square is without much architectural distinction, though it's a pleasant enough spot to linger over a beer.

St-Gummaruskerk

From the Grote Markt, it's a brief stroll southeast to **St-Gummaruskerk** (Easter–Oct 10am–noon & 2–5pm; €1.25), which takes its name from a courtier of King Pepin of France, who, repenting of his sinful ways, settled in Lier as a hermit in the middle of the eighth century. Dating from 1425, the church is a fine illustration of the Flamboyant (or Late) Gothic style, its sturdy buttresses surmounted by a tiered and parapeted tower. **Inside**, chunky pillars rise up to support a vaulted roof, whose simplicity contrasts with the swirling embellishments of the **rood loft** below, which itself frames a passionate bas-relief of the Calvary and the Resurrection. Behind, the **high altar** is topped by a second fine carving, a fourteenth-century wooden altarpiece whose inside panels are alive with a mass of finely observed detail, from the folds of the bed linen to the pile of kindling underneath Abraham's son. The church's **stained-glass windows** are reckoned to be some of the finest in Belgium. They include five stately, elongated windows above the high altar, which were presented to the town by the Emperor Maximilian in 1516, along with a more intimate sequence by Rombout Keldermans from 1475, overlooking the first section of the left-hand side of the choir. The church also owns an extremely rare and very early (1516) copy of the **Turin Shroud**, the old linen cloth that supposedly bears the image of the crucified Christ, at one tenth the size of the original; it is, however, extremely sensitive to light, so it's only displayed a few weeks a year, usually behind the rood loft.

To the Timmermans-Opsomermuseum

Doubling back from St Gummaruskerk, it only takes a couple of minutes to get to **Werf**, once the main city dock, sitting tight against an arm of the River Nete as it gracefully slices Lier into two. At the far end of Werf is the **Timmermans-Opsomermuseum** (Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 1–5pm; €1, combined ticket with Stedelijk Museum €1.50), which celebrates the town's two most famous inhabitants, the writer Felix Timmermans (1886–1947) and the painter Isidore Opsomer (1878–1967). Timmermans and Opsomer were good friends and thought of themselves as leading custodians of Flemish culture, the one writing of traditional village life, most memorably in the earthy humour of his *Pallierter*, the other proud of his sea- and townscapes, and of his influence on contemporary Belgian painters. Inside, the spacious rooms of the first floor contain a comprehensive selection of Opsomer's work, including a whole batch of seriously bourgeois portraits along with a number of more immediately appealing rural scenes, such as the Expressionistic *Middelburg*. There's also a large, and laughable, pseudo-religious painting entitled *Christ Preaches to Lier*. An adjoining room is devoted to the work of their friend, the sculptor **Lodewijk van Boeckel** (1857–1944), whose old forge is surrounded by examples of his intricate, profoundly black ironwork.

Upstairs, there's a collection of writings by Timmermans, including several first editions, as well as paintings by and of him together with general details of

his life and times. During the German occupation of World War II, Timmermans edited a Flemish nationalist newspaper and had regular dealings with the governing regime, leading, with much justification, to accusations of collaboration. There is a small display on this period, but – like the rest of this floor – the labelling is only in Flemish.

The Zimmertoren

Cross the bridge a few metres from the Opsomermuseum and you come to the curious **Zimmertoren** (daily 9am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm; €2), an old tower on Zimmerplein which was formerly part of the city ramparts before being equipped with the colourful **Jubelklok** (Centenary Clock), whose many dials show the phases of the moon, the zodiac, the tides of Lier and just about everything else you can think of. The clock was the work of one Lodewijk Zimmer (1888–1970), a wealthy city merchant who constructed it in 1931 in an effort to dispel local superstition and show his fellow townspeople how the cosmos worked. However, judging by the woefully inaccurate diagram of the solar system inset into the pavement outside the museum, Lier would benefit from some more of his services. Inside the tower you can see the bevy of rotating dials which makes the clock tick, along with Zimmer's astronomical studio, while in an adjoining pavilion is Zimmer's no-less-detailed **Wonderklok** (Wonder Clock), which was exhibited at the World's Fairs of Brussels and New York in the 1930s. A guide explaining the internal works of the clocks and the meaning of all the dials is available in English for €1.50.

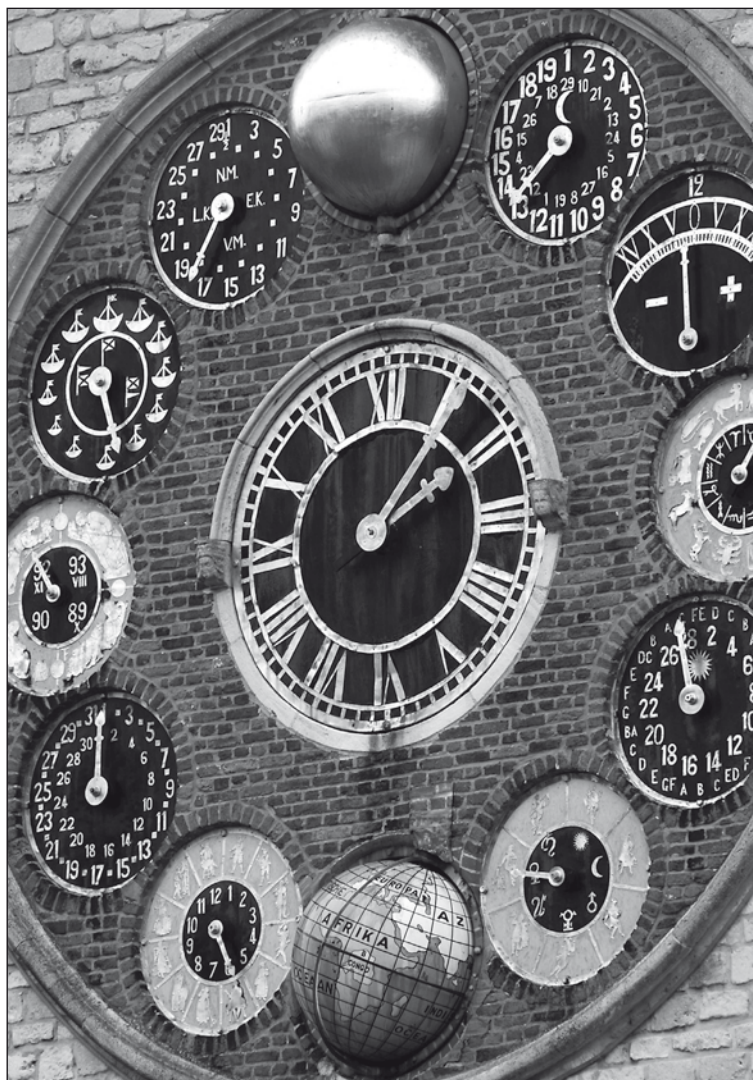
The Begijnhof and the Gevangenenoort

Schapekoppenstraat, in front of the Zimmertoren, leads southwest past a wry modern sculpture of a shepherd and his metal sheep to a side-gate into the **Begijnhof**, whose lovely old seventeenth-century cottages are mixed up with the slightly grander terraced houses that were inserted later. It's one of the region's best preserved *begijnhofs*, its narrow cobbled lanes stretching as far as the earthen bank that marks the line of the old city wall, and you can also pop into the appealingly ornate **Begijnhofkerk** (Easter to mid-Oct Sun only 2–5pm; free). For more on *begijnhofs*, see p.441.

On the far side of the Begijnhof, Begijnhofstraat leads back to the Zimmerplein through the arches of the **Gevangenenoort**, a strongly fortified medieval gate, which served as the town's prison for many a year. From here, it's just a few metres to the Grote Markt.

Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen & Baron Caroly

For a small town, Lier has a surprisingly good art gallery, the **Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen & Baron Caroly**, just off the Grote Markt's northwest corner at Florent van Cauwenberghstraat 14 (Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 1–5pm; €1, combined ticket with Opsomerhuis €1.50). Highlights of the collection, which is spread over half a dozen rooms, include several works by David Teniers the Younger (1610–90), who made a small fortune from his realistically earthy peasant scenes as demonstrated by *The Jealous Wife* and *The Pipe Smokers*. There's also a cruelly drawn *Brawling Peasants* by Jan Steen (1626–1679), a pious portrait of *St Theresa* by Rubens (1577–1640), and a small but well-chosen selection of nineteenth-century Belgian and Dutch landscapes. Pieter Bruegel the Younger (1564–1638) is also well represented by two intriguing paintings, *St John the Baptist Preaching to a Crowd*, who are dressed in rural Flemish attire, and his *Flemish Proverbs* (*Vlaamse Spreekwoorden*), illustrating



△ The Jubelklok on the Zimmerstoren, Lier

over eighty proverbs satirizing every vice and foolery imaginable. There are explanations below each picture in Flemish, but many – like the man pissing against the moon – speak for themselves.

Eating and drinking

For **food**, most day-trippers head for the row of terraced cafés edging the Grote Markt and the Zimmerplein, in front of the Zimmerstoren. Amongst

them, the *Delfin*, Zimmerplein 6, serves snacks and light meals that are as good as any of its rivals. For something a little more distinctive and tasty, make a beeline for 🦋 *De Werf*, Werf 17 (☎ 03 480 71 90; Tues–Fri noon–2pm & 7–9.30pm, Sat 7–9.30pm), a smart, modern restaurant specializing in French–Flemish cuisine made from fresh, local ingredients wherever possible; main courses start at €24.

The two liveliest **bars** in town are on tiny Felix Timmermansplein, beside the river just off Rechtestraat – between the Grote Markt and St-Gummaruskerk. Here you'll find the amenable *St Gummarus* and *De Fortuin*, a charming bar in ancient premises with a riverside terrace and a wide range of ales. Both are also good for a quick bite to eat.

Mechelen and around

Midway between Antwerp and Brussels, **MECHELEN** is the home of the Primate of Belgium and the country's ecclesiastical capital, its Christian past dating back to **St Rombout**, an Irish evangelist who converted the locals in the seventh century. Little is known for sure about Rombout, but legend asserts he was the son of a powerful chieftain, who gave up his worldly possessions to preach to the heathen – not that it did him much good: after publicly criticizing a stonemason for adultery, the ungrateful wretch chopped him up with his axe and chucked the body into the river. In the way of such things, Rombout's remains were retrieved and showed no signs of decay, easily enough justification for the construction of a shrine in his honour. Rombout proved a popular saint and pilgrims flocked here, ensuring Mechelen a steady revenue. By the thirteenth century Mechelen had become one of the more powerful cities of medieval Flanders and entered a brief golden age when, in 1473, the Burgundian prince, **Charles the Bold**, decided to base his administration here. Impetuous and intemperate, Charles used the wealth of the Flemish towns to fund a series of campaigns that ended with his death on the battlefield in 1477. His widow, Margaret of York, and his son's regent, the redoubtable **Margaret of Austria**, stayed in Mechelen and formed one of the most famous courts of the day. Artists and scholars were drawn here from all over Flanders, attracted by the Renaissance pomp and ceremony, with enormous feasts in fancy clothes in fancy buildings. For the men two particular peccadilloes were **pointed shoes** (whose length – up to about 60cm – reflected social status) and bright, **two-colour hoses**. This glamorous facade camouflaged serious political intent. Surrounded by wealthy, independent merchants and powerful, well-organized guilds, the dukes and duchesses of Burgundy realized they had to impress and overawe as a condition of their survival.

Margaret of Austria died in 1530, the capital moved to Brussels and Mechelen was never quite the same – the *Baedeker* of 1900 witheringly described the town as a “dull place totally destitute of the brisk traffic which enlivens most of the principal Belgian towns”. Things didn't pick up until the 1980s, with a well-conceived municipal plan to attract new investment and gee up Mechelen's several tourist attractions. The result is the pleasant and appealing town of today, but still, considering its proximity to Antwerp and Brussels, Mechelen has a surprisingly provincial atmosphere – arguably no bad thing. The town's key sights – primarily a cache of **medieval churches**, including a splendid cathedral, and a pair of superb Rubens'




Arrival, information and accommodation

From Mechelen's **train** and adjoining **bus station**, it's a fifteen-minute walk north to the town centre, straight ahead down Hendrik Consciencestraat and its continuation Graaf von Egmontstraat and then Bruul. The **tourist office** is across from the Stadhuis on the east side of the Grote Markt at Hallestraat 2 (April–Sept Mon 9.30am–7pm, Tues–Fri 9.30am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4.30pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat & Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; ☎070 22 28 00, 🌐www.inenuitmechelen.be). As well as supplying all the usual information, it has details of – and sells tickets for – upcoming festivals and events, and has a list of all the town's **accommodation**, which it will book on your behalf at no extra charge. There are about ten hotels and B&Bs in the centre, the best of which we've listed below.


Hotels, B&B and hostel

Jeugdherberg De Zandpoort Zandpoortvest 70 ☎015 27 85 39, 🌐www.vjh.be. IYHF-affiliated hostel in an idiosyncratic modern tower block with 112 beds in one-, two, three- and four-berth rooms. All rooms en suite, breakfast is included in the price and there's Internet access, a dining room and bar. No curfew. A dull 10-min walk northeast of the station via Stationsstraat. Beds from €17, doubles ①

 **Luna Luna** Jef Denynplein 4 ☎0486 29 67 98, 🌐www.lunaluna.be. Especially pleasant B&B in a substantial, old town house on a quiet side street, a brief walk from the Grote Markt. There's just one bedroom, but it's a commodious suite with a stripped-wood floor and a particularly large and comfortable bed. From the suite, you can see the spire of St-Romboutskathedraal. The owners work elsewhere, so arrange access before you arrive; no cards. ③

NH Mechelen Korenmarkt 22 ☎015 42 03 03 🌐www.nh-hotels.com. Proficient, modern chain hotel, with three stars and forty-odd comfortable if somewhat decoratively predictable rooms. A brief walk south of the Grote Markt via the Ijzerenleen. Substantial reductions on the weekend, otherwise ⑤

Novotel – Mechelen Centrum Van Beethovenstraat 1 ☎015 40 49 50, 🌐www.novotel.com. In a striking modern building, this efficient chain hotel has over one hundred bright but slightly spartan rooms – and a central location. ⑤, weekends ②

 **Vé Vismarkt** 14 ☎015 20 07 55, 🌐www.hotelve.com. Down near the river, a short walk south of the Grote Markt, this new hotel is an intelligent reworking of a 1920s factory building, its forty rooms kitted out in an attractive version of minimalist style with lots of beiges and browns. Four stars. ⑥

The Town

The centre of town is, as ever, the **Grote Markt**, a particularly handsome and expansive affair offering a superb view of the cathedral and flanked on its eastern side by the **Stadhuis**, whose bizarre and incoherent appearance was partly the responsibility of Margaret of Austria. In 1526, she had the left-hand side of the original building demolished and replaced by what you see today, an ornate arcaded loggia fronting a fluted, angular edifice, to a design by Rombout Keldermans. The plan was to demolish and rebuild the rest of the building in stages, but after her death in 1530 the work was simply abandoned, leaving Keldermans' extravagance firmly glued to the plain stonework and the simple gables of the fourteenth-century section on the right. The **interior** of the later section (occasional guided tours – ask at the tourist office) is just as garbled as the exterior, though there are a couple of interesting items on display. These are Coussaert's *A Sitting of the Parliament of Charles the Bold* and a fine sixteenth-century tapestry of the *Battle of Tunis*, glorifying an attack on that city by Emperor Charles V in 1535.

Op Signoorke

In front of the Stadhuis is a modern **sculpture of Op Signoorke**, the town's mascot, being tossed in a blanket. Once a generalized symbol of male irresponsibility, the doll and its forebears enjoyed a variety of names – *vuilen bras* (unfaithful drunkard), *sotscoop* (fool) and *vuilen bruidegom* (disloyal bridegroom) – until the events of 1775 redefined its identity. Every year it was customary for the dummy to be paraded through the streets and tossed up and down in a sheet. In 1775, however, a young man from Antwerp attempted to steal it and was badly beaten for his pains: the people of Mechelen were convinced he was part of an Antwerp plot to rob them of their cherished mascot. The two cities were already fierce commercial rivals, and the incident soured relations even further. Indeed, when news of the beating reached Antwerp, there was sporadic rioting and calls for the city burghers to take some sort of revenge. Refusing to be intimidated, the people of Mechelen derisively renamed the doll after their old nickname for the people of Antwerp – “Op Signoorke”, from “Signor”, a reference to that city's favoured status under earlier Spanish kings. It was sweet revenge for an incident of 1687 that had made Mechelen a laughing stock: staggering home, a drunk had roused the town when he thought he saw a fire in the cathedral. In fact, the “fire” was moonlight, earning the Mechelaars the soubriquet “**Maneblussers**” (Moondousers).

St-Romboutskathedraal

A little way west of the Grote Markt, **St-Romboutskathedraal** (April–Oct daily 9am–5.30pm, Nov–March until 4.30pm; free) dominates the town centre just as it was supposed to. It's the cathedral's mighty square **tower** that takes the breath away, a wonderful, almost imperial Gothic structure with soaring, canopied pinnacles and extraordinarily long and slender windows. It's matched down below by the church's heavy-duty buttressing, which supports a superb sequence of high-arched pointed windows that encircle the nave and the choir, rising up to the delicate fluting of a stone balustrade.

The carillon

It was during the fourteenth century that **bells** were first used in Flemish cities as a means of regulating the working day, reflecting the development of a wage economy – employers were keen to keep tabs on their employees. Bells also served as a sort of public-address system: pealing bells, for example, announced good news, tolling bells summoned the city to the main square, and a rapid sequence of bells warned of danger. By the early fifteenth century, a short peal of bells marked the hour, and from this developed the **carillon** (*beiaard*), in which the ringing of a set of bells is triggered by the rotation of a large drum with metal pegs; the pegs pull wires attached to the clappers in the bells – just like a giant music box. Later, the mechanics were developed so that the carillon could be played by means of a keyboard, giving the player (*beiaardier*) the chance to improvise.

Carillon playing almost died out in the nineteenth century, when it was dismissed as being too folksy for words, but now it's on the rebound, and several Flemish cities – including Bruges and Mechelen – have their own municipal carillon player. Belgium's **finest carillon**, a fifteenth-century affair of 49 bells, is housed in Mechelen's cathedral tower and resounds over the town on high days and holidays. There are also regular, hour-long **performances** on Saturdays (11.30am), Sundays (3pm), Mondays (11.30am), and from June through to mid-September on Monday evenings (8.30pm).

The construction of the church has not been without its problems. Work began with the draining of the marshes on which it was to be built in 1217, but the money ran out before the tower was erected, and the initial design had to be put on hold until the fifteenth century. In 1451, the Pope obligingly provided the extra funds when he put St Rombout on a list of specified churches where pilgrims could seek absolution for their sins without visiting Rome. The money rolled in and the tower was completed by 1546 – just before the outbreak of the religious wars that would surely have stymied the whole project. More recently, the cathedral literally started to break up as it sank unevenly into its foundations, prompting an enormously expensive – and long-winded – effort to stabilize it. The works have finally finished, but it remains to be seen if the job was properly done.

The nave and the transepts

The main **entrance** to the cathedral is just off the Grote Markt. Inside, the thirteenth-century **nave** has all the cloistered elegance of the Brabantine Gothic style, although the original lines are spoiled by an unfortunate series of seventeenth-century statues of the apostles. Between the arches lurks an extraordinary Baroque **pulpit**, a playful mass of twisted and curled oak dotted with carefully camouflaged animal carvings – squirrels, frogs and snails, a salamander and a pelican. The main scene shows **St Norbert** being thrown from his horse, a narrow escape which convinced this twelfth-century German prince to give his possessions to the poor and dedicate his life to the church.

Moving on, the chapel next to the **north transept** contains the tomb of Mechelen's **Cardinal Mercier** plus a plaque, presented by the Church of England, commemorating his part in coordinating the Mechelen Conversations. These investigated the possibility of reuniting the two churches and ran from 1921 up to the time of Mercier's death in 1926, but with little result. In Belgium, Mercier is more often remembered for his staunch opposition to the German occupation of World War I. His pastoral letters, notably "Patriotism and Endurance", proclaimed loyalty to the Belgian king, paid tribute to the soldiers at the front and condemned the invasion as illegal and un-Christian.

Across the church in the **south transept** is the cathedral's most distinguished painting, **Anthony van Dyck's** dramatic *Crucifixion*, which portrays the writhing, muscular bodies of the two thieves in the shadows to either side of the Christ, who is bathed in a white light of wonderful clarity. The painting now forms part of a heavy, marble Baroque altarpiece carved for the Guild of Masons, but it was only installed here after the French revolutionary army razed the church where it was originally displayed. Take a look also at the elaborate doors of the **high altar**, which hide the gilt casket containing the remains of St Rombout. They are only opened on major religious festivals, when the reliquary is paraded through the town centre.

The ambulatory

Exhibited in the **aisle of the ambulatory** are twenty-five **panel paintings** relating the legend of St Rombout. Such devotional series were comparatively common in medieval Flanders, but this is one of the few to have survived, painted by several unknown artists between 1480 and 1510. As individual works of art, the panel paintings are not perhaps of the highest order, but the cumulative attention to detail – in the true Flemish tradition – is quite remarkable, with all manner of folksy minutiae illuminating what would otherwise be a predictable tale of sacrifice and sanctity. The panels are exhibited in chronological order (from north to south), but they aren't labelled in English

The legend of St Rombout

Panel 1 Bishops and priests pray beside the tomb of the newly deceased Bishop of Dublin. Up above, an angel instructs them to select Rombout as his successor.

Panel 2 Rombout preaches to his Irish congregation. In the building in the background, an angel summons him to be a missionary.

Panel 3 Rombout crosses by boat to France, where he restores the sight of a blind man.

Panel 4 Rombout arranges an audience with the Pope so that he can surrender his bishop's ring of office.

Panel 5 Rome. Rombout receives the Pope's blessing for his mission to the heathens.

Panel 6 Back in France, Rombout exorcizes the devil from a madman.

Panel 7 Arriving in Mechelen, Rombout ticks off the locals for dancing on Good Friday – note the bagpipe player. A messenger arrives from the local lord, Count Ado, inviting him to his castle.

Panel 8 The count and countess receive Rombout. In the background, Rombout promises them a son, despite the countess's advanced years.

Panel 9 The countess's baby is christened.

Panel 10 In the foreground, St Rombout meets St Gommarus of Liege; in the background a messenger announces the death of Gommarus.

Panel 11 St Rombout's prayers revive Gommarus; Count Ado presents Rombout with a parcel of land; work begins on the construction of Rombout's first chapel.

Panel 12 Rombout admonishes an adulterous stonemason, whose face is a picture of guilt.

Panel 13 The mason kills Rombout, his workmate picks his pockets, and then they throw the body into the river.

Panel 14 Local Christians recover the body, guided by a celestial light.

Panel 15 St Rombout protects his chapel from Viking attack.

Panel 16 The Vikings are about to sail off, with Gerlindis, a devout nun, among their captives; St Rombout's prayers save her.

Panel 17 At Gerlindis's nunnery, a rooster crows the time for prayer, but one day a fox takes it. Rombout says a prayer and the fox returns the bird unharmed.

Panel 18 In St Rombout's chapel, a priest successfully prays for the return of his sight.

Panel 19 A knight wounded in a hunting-party is carried to St Rombout's chapel, where his health is restored.

Panel 20 As in Panel 19, but this time a knight has been attacked by devils.

Panel 21 Same again, though on this occasion healing comes to three possessed men and a woman with a lame hand.

Panel 22 A Flemish lord gives land to the chapel of St Rombout.

Panel 23 & 24 Battle scenes in which reliquaries of St Rombout bring victory to the Mechelaars.

Panel 25 The Brotherhood of St Rombout honours its patron saint.

at present and neither is their meaning always obvious, hence the explanatory box above. Many of the panels carry a sombre-looking, kneeling man and woman – these were the donors.

As for the ambulatory itself, it's not quite all that it seems: many of the columns are made of wood painted as marble, a trompe-l'oeil technique for which

Mechelen was once famous. Most of the ambulatory's nine **side-chapels** are really rather dreary, but the **Chapel of the Relics** – the eighth one along, again working from north to south – is an exception. The chapel is dedicated to a group of monks and priests whom the Protestants slaughtered near Dordrecht in the Netherlands in 1572, their supposed remains stored in the silver and gilt casket that occupies central stage. Here also are the coats of arms of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, a chivalric – or at least aristocratic – order invented by Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy and ruler of Flanders, in 1430.

To St-Janskerk

From the north side of the cathedral, Wollemarkt swerves its way past the refuge of the **Abdij van St-Truiden** (no public access), which sits prettily beside an old weed-choked and algae-covered canal, its picturesque gables once home to the destitute. Almost opposite, now on Goswin de Stassartstraat, an alley called Klapgat (“gossip”) threads through to **St-Janskerk** (April–Oct Tues–Sun 1.30–5.30pm, Nov–March till 4.30pm; free), whose decaying sandstone exterior belies its richly decorated, immaculately maintained interior. Almost everything is on the grand scale here, from the massive pulpit and the whopping organ through to two large and unusual canons’ pews, but it’s the Baroque high altarpiece that grabs the attention, a suitably flashy setting for a flashy but wonderful painting – **Rubens’ Adoration of the Magi**. Painted in 1619, the central panel, after which the triptych is named, is a fine example of the artist’s use of variegated lighting – and also features his first wife portrayed as the Virgin. The side panels are occasionally rotated, so on the left hand side you’ll see either Jesus baptized by John the Baptist or John the Baptist’s head on a platter; to the right it’s St John on Patmos or the same saint being dipped in boiling oil.

Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet

Heading west from St-Janskerk, turn right along Goswin de Stassartstraat for the five-minute walk to the **Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet**, at no.153 (Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance; Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–5pm, Fri 10am–1pm; closed Sat; free; @www.cicb.be). During the German occupation, Nazi officials chose Mechelen as a staging point for Belgian Jews destined for the concentration camps of eastern Europe. Their reasoning was quite straightforward: most of Belgium’s Jews were in either Antwerp or Brussels and Mechelen was halfway between the two.

Today’s museum occupies one wing of the old barracks that were adapted by the Gestapo for use as their principal internment centre. Between 1942 and 1944 over 25,000 Jews passed through its doors; most ended up in Auschwitz and only 1200 survived the war. In a series of well-conceived, multilingual displays, the museum tracks through this dreadful episode, beginning with Jewish life in Belgium before the war and continuing with sections on the rise of anti-Semitism, the occupation, the deportations, the concentration camps and liberation. It’s designed with older Belgian schoolchildren in mind, so you may share the museum with one or more school parties, but it’s still harrowing stuff and some of the exhibits bring a deep chill to the soul, none more so than the pleading postcard thrown from a deportation train. The final section, entitled “Personal Testimonies,” is particularly affecting, comprising video interviews given by some of the survivors.

The Museum Hof van Busleyden and the Beiaardschool

Doubling back from the Jewish Museum, turn left onto Van Hoeystraat and right at the end to reach the **Museum Hof van Busleyden** (Tues–Sun

10am–5pm; €2), which occupies a handsome high Gothic/Renaissance mansion set around a large courtyard that was built for Hieronymus Busleyden, a prominent member of Margaret of Austria's court, in the sixteenth century. Inside, the museum's rambling collection doesn't live up to its setting, but there are a few mildly diverting, mostly unattributed seventeenth-century paintings, as well as a seventeenth-century version of Op Signoorke (see p.286), and examples of the town's traditional crafts, most notably a whole room of the gold-inlaid leather wallpaper for which the town was once famous,

In the same complex, at the corner of St-Janstraat, is Mechelen's internationally renowned **Koninklijke Beiaardschool** (Royal Carillon School; no public access; @www.beiaardschool.be), which attracts students from as far away as Japan. Playing the carillon is, by all accounts, extremely difficult and the diploma course offered here takes no less than six years to complete.

The Veemarkt and St-Pieter en Pauluskerk

Across from the Museum Hof van Busleyden, Biest leads through to the **Veemarkt**, a wide square overlooked by the ornately Baroque **St-Pieter en Pauluskerk** (April–Oct Tues–Sun 1.30–5.30pm, Nov–March till 4.30pm; free). Built for the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, the church's somewhat dilapidated interior is pleasantly airy, its soaring nave supported by Corinthian columns and dripping with fancy scrollwork. The nave also holds a huge oak **pulpit** honouring the order's missionary work, with a globe attached to representations of the four continents that were known when it was carved by Hendrik Verbruggen in 1701.

From Veemarkt, it's a couple of minutes' walk back to the Grote Markt.

South of the Grote Markt

The innocuous **statue** of Margaret of Austria on the south side of the Grote Markt dates from 1849, but it was only moved here from the centre of the square a couple of years ago. Behind the statue stands the **Schepenhuis** (Aldermen's House), a good-looking Gothic structure of 1374 that marks the start of the **Ijzerenleen**, the site of one of the region's best Saturday food **markets** (8am–1pm).

At the far end of the Ijzerenleen, just before the bridge, turn right down **Nauwstraat** and keep going past the footbridge to the second bridge along, a quaint little pontoon spanning the River Dije over to **Haverwerf** (Oats Wharf), which is graced by three old and contrasting facades, each of which has been meticulously restored. On the right is **Het Paradijske** (The Little Paradise), a slender structure with fancy tracery and mullioned windows that takes its name from the Garden of Eden reliefs above the first-floor windows. Next door, the all-timber **De Duiveltjes** (The Little Devils), a rare survivor from the sixteenth century, is also named after its decoration, this time for the carved satyrs above the entrance. Finally, on the left and dating to 1669, is **St-Jozef**, a graceful example of the Baroque merchant's house. Its fluent scrollwork swirls over the top of the gable and camouflages the utilitarian, upper-storey door: trade goods were once pulled up the front of the house by pulley and shoved in here for safekeeping.

Kerk van Onze Lieve Vrouw over de Dije

From Haverwerf, it's a five-minute stroll southeast past the large and new **Lamot Congrescentrum** (Conference Centre) to Onze Lieve Vrouwstraat and the **Kerk van Onze Lieve Vrouw over de Dije** (Church of Our Lady across the River Dije; April–Oct Tues–Sun 1.30–5.30pm, Nov–March till

4.30pm; free), a massive, pinnaced and turreted affair that was begun in the fifteenth century and finally completed two hundred years later – hence the mix of late Gothic and Baroque features. The church took a direct hit from a V1 rocket in World War II, but although it was rebuilt and restored in the 1960s, it's currently under repair once again. Apart from its sheer size, the interior is really rather mundane, its mediocrity only redeemed by **Rubens' *Miraculous Draught of Fishes***, an exquisite triptych painted for the Fishmongers' Guild in 1618 and displayed in the south transept. The central panel has all the usual hallmarks of Rubens in his pomp – note the thick, muscular arms of the fishermen – but it's the glistening and wriggling fish that inspire.

Five minutes' walk away, on the southern edge of the centre at the foot of Hoogstraat, stands the **Brusselpoort**, the only survivor of Mechelen's twelve fourteenth-century gates, its striped brickwork and twin onion domes striking quite a pose.

Eating and drinking

Mechelen's **café and** restaurant scene has improved markedly in recent years and, although visitors are hardly overwhelmed with great choices, the town does have a couple of very good and distinctive places. Enjoyable **bars** are thinner on the ground, but there are certainly enough to be getting on with and, while you are here, be sure to try one particular local brew, **Gouden Carolus** (Golden Charles), a delicious dark-brown or blond barley beer once tipped by – or so they say – the Emperor Charles V. The town also boasts a spankily new cultural centre, the **Cultuurcentrum Mechelen** (☎015 29 40 00, 🌐www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be), just off the Grote Markt on Minderbroedersgang, which offers a varied programme of theatre, dance and debate.

Cafés, restaurants and bars

Den Akker Nauwstraat 11. Laid-back, vaguely New-Age bar with an outside terrace overlooking the river. Mon–Sat from 11.30am, Sun from 3pm.

't Ankertje Vismarkt 20. Cosy-verging-on-the-twee bar cum beershop cum brasserie, with a particularly good selection of ales. Tues–Fri from 3.30pm, Sat from 11am, Sun from 2pm.

 **Brasserie de Margriet** Bruul 52 ☎015 21 00 17. Popular brasserie in one wing of a former seminary, though this part of the building has been refurnished with standard-issue modern furnishings, so only the odd flourish – like the mullioned windows – gives a hint as to what went before. The menu covers all the Flemish bases, but there are a few culinary surprises, notably a local delicacy, the *Mechelse Koekoek* (Mechelen Cuckoo) – but before there's ornithological panic, it's just a (particularly succulent) variety of chicken. The

cuckoo costs €18, other mains about the same, but daily specials are as little as €10. Courtyard eating in the summertime too. Mon–Sat 9am–10/11pm.

De Gouden Vis Nauwstraat 7. As for *Den Akker* (see above), but next door. Mon–Fri from noon, Sat from 10am, Sun from 3pm.

Lord Nelson Wollemarkt 8. One of several bars lining up beside the cathedral on Wollemarkt, this musters up a neat package of ersatz nautical decoration plus several fine beers – the dark and malty Corsendonk Pater is recommended.

 **De Met** Grote Markt 29 ☎015 20 68 81. There are lots of restaurants on the Grote Markt, but this is the pick, a bright modern place offering a good range of Flemish dishes geared to the seasons and using, as often as not, local produce. The daily specials are especially tasty. Main courses €18–23. Mon–Sat noon–10.30pm.

Around Mechelen: Fort Breendonk

Located about 12km west of Mechelen, **Fort Breendonk** (daily 9.30am–5.30pm; €6; 🌐www.breendonk.be) was built as part of the circle of

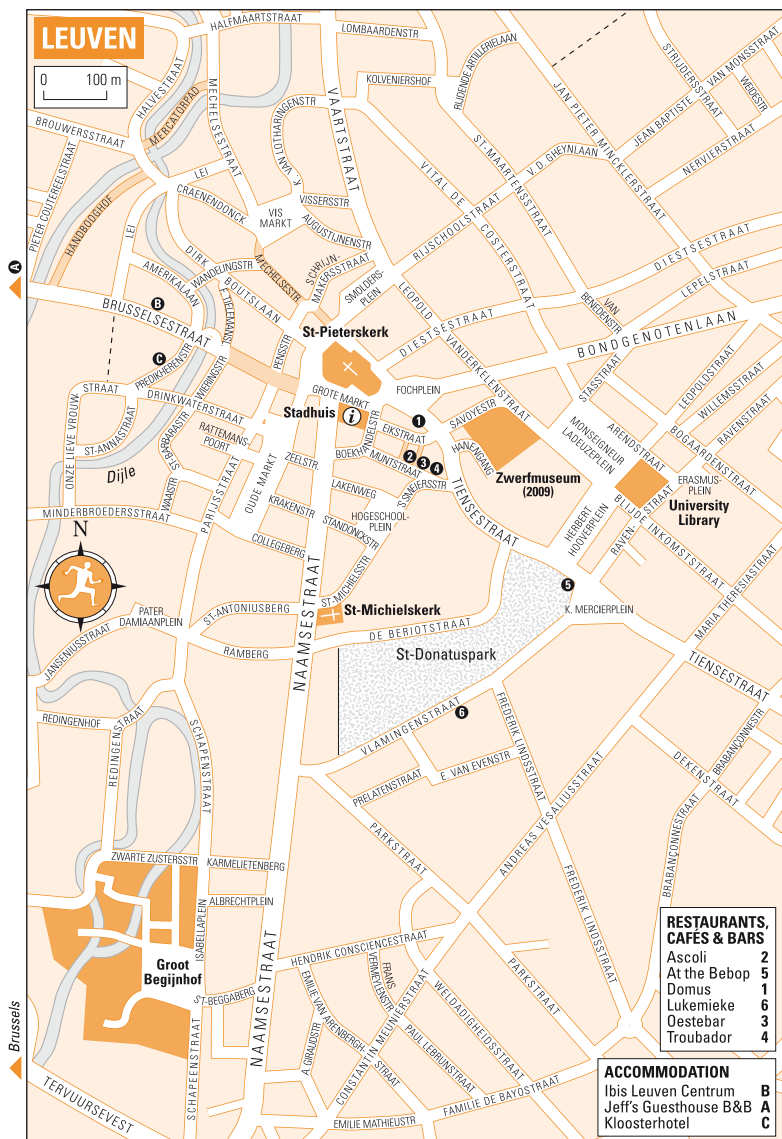
fortifications that ringed early-twentieth-century Antwerp, but became notorious as a Gestapo interrogation centre during World War II. The fort's low concrete buildings were originally encased in a thick layer of sand until the Germans had this carted away by their prisoners in 1940. After the war, Breendonk was preserved as a national memorial in honour of the four thousand men and women who suffered or perished in its dark, dank tunnels and cells. As you might expect, it's a powerful, disturbing place to visit, with a clearly marked tour taking you through the SS tribunal room, poignantly graffitied cells, the prisoners' barrack room and the bunker, which was used as a torture chamber. There's also a museum dealing with the German occupation of Belgium, prison life and the post-war trial of Breendonk SS criminals and their collaborators. Other displays explore the origins of Fascism and the development of the Nazi concentration camps.

By car, Fort Breendonk is a stone's throw from the A12 highway linking Antwerp and Brussels – just follow the signs. To get here from Mechelen **by public transport**, take the train to **Willebroek** (hourly; 10min) and the fort is on the edge of town, a 1500-metre walk west from the station along Dendermondsesteenweg.

Leuven

Less than half an hour by train from both Mechelen and Brussels, **LEUVEN** offers an easy and enjoyable day-trip from either. The town is the seat of Belgium's oldest university, whose students give the place a lively, informal air – and sustain lots of inexpensive bars and cafés. There are also a couple of notable medieval buildings, the splendid **Stadhuis** and the imposing **St- Pieterskerk**, which is home to three wonderful early Flemish paintings, and in the **Oude Markt** Leuven possesses one of the region's most personable squares. Otherwise, the centre is not much more than an undistinguished tangle of streets with a lot of the new and few remnants of the old. Then again, it's something of a miracle that any of Leuven's ancient buildings have survived at all, since the town suffered badly in both World Wars: in 1914 much of the town was razed during the first German offensive and thirty years later the town was heavily bombed. If you stay a while, you may also pick up on the division between town and gown; some of the students see themselves as champions of the Flemish cause, but the locals seem largely unconvinced.

The history of the **university** isn't a particularly happy one, though everything began rosily enough. Founded in 1425, it soon became one of Europe's most prestigious educational establishments: the cartographer Mercator was a student here and it was here that Erasmus (1466–1536) founded the *Collegium Trilingue* for the study of Hebrew, Latin and Greek, as the basis of a liberal (rather than Catholic) education. However, in response to the rise of Lutheranism, the authorities changed tack, insisting on strict Catholic orthodoxy and driving the university into educational retreat. In 1797 the French suppressed the university, and then, after the defeat of Napoleon, when Belgium fell under Dutch rule, William I replaced it with a Philosophical College – one of many blatantly anti-Catholic measures which fuelled the Belgian revolution. Re-established after independence as a bilingual Catholic institution, the university became a **hotbed of Flemish**



Catholicism, and for much of this century French and Flemish speakers were locked in a bitter nationalist dispute. In 1970 a separate, French-speaking university was founded at Louvain-la-Neuve, just south of Brussels – a decision that propelled Leuven into its present role as a bastion of Flemish thinking, wielding considerable influence over the region's political and economic elite.

Arrival, information and accommodation

It's an easy ten-minute walk west along Bondgenotenlaan from the **train** and adjacent **bus station** to the Grote Markt, the site of the Stadhuis and St-Pieterskerk. The **tourist office** is round the side of the Stadhuis at Naamsestraat 1 (Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; March–Oct also Sun 10am–5pm; ☎016 20 30 20, @www.leuven.be), issuing free maps and a comprehensive town brochure detailing the town's sights and attractions. The brochure also lists Leuven's **hotels**, of which about a dozen are in or near the centre, and its handful of B&Bs (1–2), though these are mostly on the outskirts of town.

Hotels and B&Bs

Ibis Leuven Centrum Brusselsestraat 52
☎016 29 31 11, @www.ibishotel.com. Standard-issue, modern chain hotel with a central location and inexpensive rooms. ②

Jeff's Guesthouse B&B Cardenberch 2
☎016 23 87 80 @www.jeffsguesthouse.be. Recently relocated, *Jeff's B&B* offers just one suite, decorated in slick modern style. A 10min walk west of town: head west along Brusselsestraat, turn left down

Goudsbloemstraat, then first right and first right again. ④

 **Kloosterhotel** Predikherenstraat 22
☎016 21 31 41, @www.hetklooster.com.

The most distinctive hotel in town by a long measure, this smooth and polished place occupies an immaculately renovated old mansion complete with mullioned windows and handsome brick gables. The forty-odd rooms are tastefully decorated, with beiges and reds predominant, and the hotel has a central location too. ⑥

The Town

The centre of Leuven is marked by two adjacent squares, the more easterly of which is the **Fochplein**, basically a road junction whose one noteworthy feature is the modern **Font Sapienza**, a wittily cynical fountain of a student literally being brainwashed by the book he is reading. Next door, the wedge-shaped **Grote Markt** is Leuven's architectural high spot, dominated by two notable late Gothic buildings – St-Pieterskerk and the Stadhuis. The **Stadhuis** is the more flamboyant of the two, an extraordinarily light and lacy confection, crowned by soaring pinnacles and a dainty, high-pitched roof studded with dormer windows. It's a beautiful building, though it is slightly spoiled by the clumsiness of its nineteenth-century statues, representing everything from important citizens to virtues and vices. Work finished on the Stadhuis in the 1460s, but the money ran out before the statues were added and the lavishly carved niches stood empty until 1850. In contrast, the niche bases are exuberantly medieval, depicting biblical subjects in a free, colloquial style and adorned by a panoply of grotesques. After the slender beauty of the exterior, the **inside** of the Stadhuis is something of an anticlimax, with guided tours (April–Sept Mon–Fri at 11am & 3pm, Sat & Sun at 3pm; Oct–March daily at 3pm; €2) taking you through a handful of rooms, including overblown salons in high French style and the neo-Gothic council chamber; tour tickets are sold at the tourist office.

St-Pieterskerk

Across the square, **St-Pieterskerk** (Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–4.30pm & Sun 2–5pm; mid-March to mid-Oct also Mon 10am–5pm; free) is a rambling, heavily buttressed late Gothic pile whose stumpy western facade defeated its architects. Work began on the present church in the 1420s and continued until the start of the sixteenth century when the Romanesque towers of the west facade, the last remaining part of the earlier church, were pulled down to make way for a grand design by Joos Matsys, the brother of the artist Quentin. It



△ Leuven

didn't work out – the foundations proved too weak – and finally, another hundred years on, the unfinished second-attempt towers were capped, creating the truncated, asymmetrical versions that rise above the front entrance today.

Inside, the church is distinguished by its soaring nave whose enormous composite pillars frame a fabulous **rood screen**, an intricately carved piece of stonework surmounted by a wooden Christ. The nave's Baroque **pulpit** is also striking, a weighty wooden extravagance which shows **St Norbert** being thrown off his horse by lightning, a dramatic scene set beneath spiky palm trees. It was this brush with death that persuaded Norbert, a twelfth-century German noble, to abandon his worldly ways and dedicate himself to the church, on whose behalf he founded a devout religious order, the Premonstratensian Canons, in 1120.

The ambulatory

The ambulatory accommodates the **Schatkamer** (Treasury; same times as church; €3), whose three key paintings date from the fifteenth century. There's a copy of Rogier van der Weyden's marvellous triptych, the *Descent from the Cross*, the original of which is now at the Prado in Madrid, and two of the few surviving paintings by Weyden's apprentice **Dieric Bouts** (c1415–75), who worked for most of his life in Leuven, ultimately becoming the city's official painter and an influential artist in his own right. Bouts' carefully contrived paintings are inhabited by stiff and slender figures in religious scenes that are almost totally devoid of action – a frozen narrative designed to stir contemplation rather than strong emotion. His use of colour and attention to detail are quite superb, especially in the exquisite landscapes that act as a backdrop to much of his work. Of the two triptychs on display here, the gruesome *Martyrdom of St Erasmus*, which has the executioners extracting the saint's entrails with a winch, is less interesting than the *Last Supper*, showing Christ and his disciples in a Flemish dining room, with the (half-built) Stadhuis just visible through the left-hand window; the two men standing up and the couple peeping through the service hatch are the rectors of the fraternity who commissioned the work. Dressed in a purple robe, the colour reserved for royalty, Jesus is depicted as taller than his disciples. It was customary for Judas to be portrayed in a yellow robe, the colour of hate and cowardice, but Bouts broke with tradition and made him almost indistinguishable from the others – he's the one with his face in shadow and his hand on his left hip. The change of emphasis, away from the betrayal to the mystery of the Eucharist, is continued on the side panels: to the left Abraham is offered bread and wine above a Jewish Passover; to the right the Israelites gather manna and below the Prophet Elijah receives angelic succour.

Also in the ambulatory is the **shrine** of St Margaret of Leuven, otherwise known as **Proud Margaret**, patron saint of serving girls. A thirteenth-century servant, she witnessed the murder of her employers, was abducted by the murderers, and then killed for refusing to marry one of them. Her shrine is in the eighth side-chapel along as you work your way round the ambulatory from the right – and her story is illustrated here in grim detail by the paintings of the eighteenth-century artist Pieter Verhagen.

Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens

At time of writing, the pick of the town's other museums, the **Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens**, just east of Fochplein on Savoyestraat, is being entirely revamped and enlarged. When it reopens as the **Zwerfmuuseum** in 2009 or 2010, the permanent collection will be displayed to better advantage, including, as it does, an eclectic assortment of stained glass, ceramics, Oriental porcelain, medieval and modern sculpture – notably a couple of pieces by Constantin Meunier (see p.120) – and a substantial sample of nineteenth-century Belgian land- and seascapes. A particular highlight is an exquisite *Holy Trinity* by Rogier van der Weyden, even though the painting has, at some point, actually been altered: if you look closely at Christ's shoulder, you'll spot a pair of bird's feet. Originally, these were the feet of the dove that represented the Holy Spirit, but somewhere along the line someone decided that God the Father and the Son would suffice.

To the Groot Begijnhof

The **Oude Markt**, a large cobblestoned square just to the south of the Grote Markt, is the boisterous core of Leuven's student scene, its assorted bars and

cafés occupying a handsome set of tall gabled houses that mostly date from the nineteenth century. To the immediate east of Oude Markt, Naamsestraat leads south past the florid Baroque facade of the Jesuit **St Michielskerk**, restored after wartime damage, towards the wonderfully preserved **Groot Begijnhof**, a labyrinthine sixteenth-century enclave of tall and rather austere red-brick houses tucked away beside the River Dijle: from Naamsestraat, turn right down the little lane called Karmelietenberg and then take the first left, Schapenstraat. Once home to around three hundred *begijns* – women living as nuns without taking vows – the Begijnhof was bought by the university in 1962, since when its buildings have been painstakingly restored as student residences, and very nice they are too.

Eating and drinking


With all those students to feed and water, Leuven offers an almost bewildering range of cafés, restaurants and bars in which to exercise your stomach and test your liver. For **restaurants**, the first place to head is **Muntstraat**, a narrow pedestrianized street just southeast of the Grote Markt, where you'll find several of the best places in town. If, on the other hand, you're on a tight budget, make your way to **Parijsstraat**, just west of the Oude Markt, which has heaps of ethnic choices, ranging from Thai and Mexican to Moroccan and Portuguese.

Leuven is chock-a-block with lively student **bars**. The best selection (and setting) is in the **Oude Markt**, almost all of whose old gabled houses have now been turned into drinking holes – the *Revue*, *Metropole* and so forth – with a sea of people sitting out in the square when it's warm enough. The bars around **Grote Markt** attract an older clientele, but again there's plenty of outdoor seating under the imposing shadow of the Stadhuis. Finally, Leuven is just 10km or so south of the small town of **Werchter**, which plays host to Belgium's most famous open-air music event, the four-day **Rock Werchter** (@www.rockwerchter.be), featuring international stars such as the Arctic Monkeys, Amy Winehouse and Marilyn Manson. It's held over the last weekend of June or the first weekend of July, with special festival buses taking fans from Leuven train station straight to the site.

Restaurants and bars

Ascoli Muntstraat 17 ☎016 23 93 64. Well-regarded Italian restaurant offering all the classics and then some. Mains from €12. Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri noon–10.30pm, Sat & Sun noon–midnight.

At the Bebop Tiensestraat 82 ☎016 20 86 04, @www.atthebebop.be. Mixed bag of a place with a café, a restaurant and a dance floor. Frequent live gigs, mostly jazz. Mon–Fri 4pm–4am, Sat 5pm–5am, Sun 8pm–2am.

 **Domus** Tiensestraat 8. If not the best bar in town, then certainly the most distinctive, spread over two large floors with ancient beamed ceilings, old bygonies on the walls and a small brewery out the back. Offers an excellent range of ales as well as a competent bar menu. Daily except Mon 9am–1am.

Lukemieke Vlamingenstraat 55 ☎016 22 97 05. Long-established vegetarian café with a good line in daily specials at around €8. Pleasant garden terrace for outside eating too. Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 6–8.30pm.

Oesterbar Muntstraat 23 ☎016 29 06 00. This smart place offers an international menu, but the big deal is seafood in general, and oysters in particular. Main courses hover around €30, oysters, in various formations, €6–19. Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–10.30pm.

Troubadour Muntstraat 27 ☎016 22 50 65. Formal, even slightly old-fashioned restaurant, offering all the Belgian classics as well as an excellent range of seafood. Mussels, served every which way, are the house speciality. Mains from €15, but mussels from €25. Daily except Tues 11.30am–3pm & 5.30–11pm.

Hasselt and around

HASSELT, the capital of the province of **Limburg**, is a busy, modern town that acts as the administrative centre for the surrounding industrial region. A pleasant but unremarkable place, the roughly circular city centre fans out from a series of small interlocking squares, with surprisingly few old buildings as evidence of its medieval foundation. To compensate for this lack of obvious appeal, the local authority has spent millions of euros on lavish and imaginative prestige projects, from an excellent range of indoor and outdoor sports facilities to a massive cultural complex that aims to attract some of the world's finest performers. But perhaps more than anything else, at least for the passing visitor, Hasselt is associated with the open-air museum of **Bokrijk**, some 8km northeast of town, an extraordinarily comprehensive evocation of traditional village life featuring buildings brought here from every corner of Flemish Belgium.

The Town

There's nothing special to look at in Hasselt itself, though the **Gerechtshof** (Court of Justice) on Havermarkt, in between the train station and the Grote Markt, is housed in the town's one surprise – a handsome Art Deco building, whose elegant interior of brown tiles, statuettes and lamps is in pristine condition. In addition, Hasselt possesses no fewer than seven **museums**, though ordinary mortals should settle – at most – for the best two, the Jenevermuseum and the Stedelijk Modemuseum; the tourist office sells a combined ticket for all seven museums for €11.

The town's most interesting museum is the **Nationaal Jenevermuseum**, at Witte Nonnenstraat 19 (Feb–March & Nov–Dec Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 1–5pm; April–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–5pm, plus Mon 10am–5pm in July & Aug; €3.50; ☎ www.jenevermuseum.be). Sited in a restored nineteenth-century distillery, it shows how jenever – a type of gin – is made and details the history of local production, with a free drink thrown in. To get here, head north from the Grote Markt down Hoogstraat/Demerstraat and watch for the turning on the right just before you reach the inner ring road. A left turn off Demerstraat opposite Witte Nonnenstraat brings you instead to the **Stedelijk Modemuseum**, Gasthuisstraat 11 (Feb–March & Nov–Dec Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 1–5pm; April–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5; ☎ www.modemuseumhasselt.be), with displays on the history of fashion from 1830 to the present.

Practicalities

From Hasselt's **train** and adjoining **bus station**, it's a ten-minute walk east to the Grote Markt: turn right out of the train station and proceed down Stationsplein/Bampslaan to the inner ring road; here, turn right again for a few metres, cross the road and follow Ridder Portmansstraat and its continuation Havermarkt. The town's **tourist office** is about 150m north of the Grote Markt, located down an alley off Hoogstraat at Lombaardstraat 3 (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm; April–Oct also Sun 10am–2pm; ☎ 011 23 95 40, ☎ www.hasselt.be). As well as issuing free maps and local information, it sells the combined museum ticket (see above), and has details of local B&Bs (1–2; though most are on the outskirts) and will supply a list of the town's hotels, half a dozen of which are in or near the city centre. Amongst these **hotels**, two of the better choices are the *Best Western Hassotel*, St-Jozefsstraat 10 (☎ 011 23 06 55, ☎ www.hassotel.be; 4), a well-equipped modern hotel with Art Deco

flourishes about five minutes' walk southeast from the Grote Markt – take Maastrichterstraat and turn first right; and *The Century*, a proficient and efficient modern place a few minutes' walk south from the Grote Markt along Koning Albertstraat at Leopoldplein 1 (☎011 22 47 99, 🌐www.thecentury.be; 🍷), which also has a terrace restaurant and a busy bar.

Finding somewhere good to eat isn't a hassle – indeed, Hasselt prides itself on its **restaurants**, and several of the best are strung along **Zuivelmarkt**, a short walk from the Grote Markt: head north along Hoogstraat, hang a right on Botermarkt and Zuivelmarkt is on the left at the end. Options here include *De Goei Goesting*, Zuivelmarkt 18 (daily 8.30am–10.30pm), a chic little place in a sympathetically renovated old mansion that serves Italian, French and Belgian dishes with élan (main courses from €12); and the cosy *De Karakol*, next door at Zuivelmarkt 16 (Tues–Sun noon–2pm & 6–11pm; ☎011 22 78 78), where the main event is the seafood (from €18). Alternatively, there are lots of cafés on the Grote Markt, notably the popular *Drugstore*, with a wide range of snacks served below a facade plastered with neon beer signs. Finally, Hasselt hosts one of Belgium's biggest rock festivals, **Pukkelpop**, which has something to suit just about everyone – from house to R&B – and is held in late August (🌐www.pukkelpop.be).

Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum

The **Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum** (April–Sept daily 10am–6pm; €7, €10 on Sun & in July & Aug; 🌐www.bokrijk.be) is one of the best museums of its type in the country, comprising a series of reconstructed buildings and villages from various parts of Flemish Belgium spread out within a substantial chunk of rolling fields and forest. Each village has been meticulously recreated, each building thoroughly researched, and although the emphasis is still largely on rural life, it's a bias partly redressed by the reconstruction of a small medieval cityscape in its southwest corner. Perhaps inevitably, it gives a rather idealized picture, and certainly the assembled artefacts sometimes feel out of context and rather antiseptic, but the museum is tremendously popular and some of the individual displays are outstanding. An excellent English guidebook provides a wealth of detail about every exhibit, and the whole museum is clearly labelled and directions well marked.

The museum's collection is divided into four main sections, each representing a particular geographical area and assigned its own colour code. The most extensive range of buildings is in the **De Kempen** sector, which holds a platoon of old farmhouses, from the long gables of a building from Helchteren to a series of compound farms that come from every quarter of the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. Other highlights include a lovely half-timbered blacksmith's workshop from the village of Neeroeteren, a bakehouse from Oostmalle, a fully operational oil-press from Ellikom, an entire eleventh-century church from Erpekom and a peat-storage barn from Kalmthout. In the same section – inside the wagon shed from Bergeyk – one particular curiosity is the skittle-alley and pall-mall. Throughout the Middle Ages, **skittles** was a popular pastime among all social classes, played in tavern and monastery alike. The original game had nine targets arranged in a diamond pattern, but this version was banned in the sixteenth century – because of the association of the diamond shape with gambling – and replaced by the more familiar ten-skittle game. **Pall-mall**, where heavy balls are driven through an iron ring with a mallet, was popular throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but is now confined to some of the more remote villages of Limburg.

The open-air museum occupies most of the western half of the sprawling **Bokrijk estate**, whose eastern portion comprises parkland, woods and lakes as well as several marked attractions, principally a fine arboretum, with over three thousand shrubs and trees, and a marshland nature reserve (Het Wiek Natuurreservaat). Crisscrossed by **footpaths**, this part of the parkland is open daily during daylight hours throughout the year and entrance is free.

Practicalities

Trains from Hasselt (hourly; 10min) drop passengers at Bokrijk train station, a five-minute walk from the museum's main entrance, where there is an **information centre**; the entrance is also the starting point for the toy-town autotrein that shuttles round the estate (but not the museum). Inside, straight ahead of the entrance, the museum's popular *St Gummarus* **restaurant** serves reasonable meals at affordable prices. There's nowhere to **stay** actually on the estate, and camping is not allowed, but accommodation is fairly near at hand in the **Bokrijk youth hostel**, which occupies a modern, school-like building at Boekrakelaan 30 (☎089 35 62 20, 🌐www.vjh.be; dorm beds €15, no doubles); the hostel is reachable through the park and lies some 5km north of the train station – pick up a map at the information centre.

South of Hasselt

Beginning south of Hasselt, the **Haspengouw** is an expanse of gently undulating land that fills out the southern part of the province of **Limburg**, its fertile soils especially suited to fruit growing. The area is at its best during cherry-blossom time, but otherwise the scenery is really rather routine, a description that applies in equal measure to many of the Haspengouw's towns and villages. The main exceptions are **Sint Truiden**, which is literally cluttered up with old churches, and more especially **Tongeren**, whose small-town charms and enjoyable range of historic monuments make it well worth a detour. The same is true of **Zoutleeuw**, whose splendid, pre-Reformation St-Leonarduskerk somehow managed to avoid the attentions of the Protestants and the Napoleonic army.

As regards public transport, there are regular **trains** from Hasselt to both Tongeren and Sint Truiden, but to get to Zoutleeuw you'll need to catch a **bus**.

Tongeren

Pocket-sized **TONGEREN**, 20km southeast of Hasselt, is the oldest town in Belgium, built on the site of a Roman camp that guarded the important road to Cologne. Its early history was plagued by misfortune – it was destroyed by the Franks and razed by the Vikings – but it did prosper during the Middle Ages in a modest sort of way as a dependency of the bishops of Liège. Nowadays, it's a small and amiable market town on the border of Belgium's language divide, quiet for most of the week except on Sunday mornings (from 7am), when the area around Leopoldwal and the Veemarkt is taken over by the stalls of a vast **flea and antiques market**, one of Belgium's largest.

The Onze Lieve Vrouwebasiliek

On the Grote Markt, the mainly Gothic **Onze Lieve Vrouwebasiliek** (Basilica of Our Lady; daily 8am–noon & 1.30–5pm; free) towers over the



town with an impressive, symmetrical elegance, its assorted gargoyles, elaborate pinnacles and intricate tracery belying its piecemeal construction: it's the eleventh- to sixteenth-century outcome of an original fourth-century foundation, which was the first church north of the Alps to be dedicated to the Virgin. Still very much in use, the dark tomb-like interior, with its cavernous, vaulted nave, has preserved an element of Catholic mystery, its holiest object a bedecked, medieval, walnut statue of Our Lady

of Tongeren – “**Mariabeeld**” – which stands surrounded by candles and overhung by a gaudy canopy.

At the back of the church are the well-preserved columns of the medieval **cloister** and at the side, on Graanmarkt, is the **Schatkamer** (Treasury; April–Sept Mon 1.30–5pm, Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 1.30–5pm; €2.50), crowded with reliquaries, monstrances and reliquary shrines from as early as the tenth century. Three artefacts stand out – a beautiful sixth-century Merovingian buckle, a pious, haunting eleventh-century *Head of Christ*, and an intricate, bejewelled, thirteenth-century *Reliquary Shrine of the Martyrs of Trier*, celebrating a large group of German Christians who came to a sticky end at the hands of the Romans in the third century AD.

Roman Tongeren

In front of the Schatkamer, in the middle of Graanmarkt, a small section of the second **Roman city wall** has been carefully excavated. Dating from the fourth century AD, the masonry you can see actually covers the remains of a luxurious third-century villa, evidence that the city was shrinking – and its inhabitants becoming fearful – as the Roman Empire declined. Metres away, the area immediately behind the Onze Lieve Vrouwebasiliek is currently being turned into a tourist attraction to trumpet Tongeren’s Roman beginnings. Scheduled for completion in 2009, it will incorporate an archaeological site within and without the cloisters plus an enlarged and updated version of the existing **Gallo-Romeins Museum**, which is temporarily closed. The museum has an extensive collection of Roman, Gallo-Roman and Merovingian archaeological finds – and at last there will now be the space to display them all.

The rest of the town

On the west side of the Grote Markt, the haughty **statue of Ambiorix** is supposed to commemorate a local chieftain who defeated the Romans here in 54 BC, although in fact this “noble savage” owes more to mid-nineteenth-century Belgian nationalism than historical accuracy.

Across the Grote Markt is the eighteenth-century **Stadhuis**, whose graceful lines are nicely balanced by an external staircase, the whole caboodle imitative of the town hall in Liège, and from here it’s a five-minute walk to the pretty cottages and terraced houses of the **Begijnhof**. Finally, just to the east of the Begijnhof you’ll soon spy the angular lines of the **Moerenpoort**, one of Tongeren’s six medieval gates and now marking the southern limit of the town’s well-known Sunday antique and flea market.

Practicalities

From Tongeren’s **train** and adjoining **bus station**, it’s a five-minute walk west to the Grote Markt, along Stationslaan and Maastrichterstraat. The town’s **tourist office** is currently in the Stadhuis, but is set to move to the top of the Vrithof, a few metres to the east in 2008/9 (April–Sept Mon–Fri 8.30am–noon & 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 8.30am–noon & 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; ☎012 39 02 55, 🌐www.tongeren.be).

Accommodation is thin on the ground. The tourist office has the details of a few **B&Bs** (1–2) but these are mostly on the outskirts of town, and the only recommendable central **hotel** is the three-star, twenty-room *Ambiotel*, a straightforward modern place with spacious rooms beside the east end of Maastrichterstraat at Veemarkt 2 (☎012 26 29 50, 🌐www.ambiotel.be; 4). Tongeren also has an IYHF-affiliated **youth hostel**, *Jeugdherberg Begeinhof*, St-Ursulastraat 1 (☎012 39 13 70, 🌐www.vjh.be), handily located in the Begijnhof

near the Moerenpoort. Designed with groups in mind, there are over seventy beds here in three- to ten-berth rooms; beds cost €16–18, including breakfast.

Tongeren has several good **restaurants**, with the best being *De Mijlpaal*, a smart and highly regarded establishment just west of the Grote Markt at St-Truiderstraat 25 (daily except Thurs noon–2.30pm & 7–9.30pm; ☎012 26 42 77); the menu is international, the tendency nouvelle, and main courses hover around €25–30. An excellent second choice – and much more economical – is *Giardini Romani*, Maastrichterstraat 17 (Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri & Sun noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10.30pm, Sat 5.30–10.30pm only; ☎012 23 04 85), a traditional, perhaps even old-fashioned, Italian restaurant, which covers all the classics, though its forte is pizza; mains average €15, pizzas €12. A third recommendation is the restaurant of the hotel *Ambiotel*, Veemarkt 2 (see above): the decor doesn't win any prizes – it's drably modern – but the home cooking is really very tasty, the seafood a treat; reckon on €18 for a main course.

The best **bar** in town is the 🐉 *Herberg de Pelgrim*, which occupies charmingly antique, wood-beamed premises in the Begijnhof at Brouwersstraat 9. There's also *Au Phare*, Grote Markt 21, though this is something of an acquired taste: nothing seems to have changed here for decades – as of yore, there are ornamental plates on the pelmet and rugs on the tables. The beer menu is wide-ranging and, if you're really lucky, you'll get Jim Reeves on the sound system rather than Engelbert Humperdinck; who knows how much longer the place will survive.

Sint Truiden

SINT TRUIDEN, a small market town about 20km west of Tongeren, grew up around an abbey founded by St Trudo in the seventh century, and is today surrounded by the orchards of the Haspengouw. Known for the variety, if not the excellence, of its ancient **churches**, Sint Truiden is a pleasant, easy-going sort of town, with a good-looking centre. It's also the best place to catch a bus to the spectacular village church of Zoutleeuw (see p.304).

The town's spacious **Grote Markt** – now an enormous car park – is edged by an elegant eighteenth-century **Stadhuis**, whose flowing lines have remained discordantly attached to an older **Belfort**, one of three imposing towers that puncture the skyline on the east side of the square. To the right, the spire of the **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** has been dogged by misfortune: erected in the eleventh century, it was ravaged by fire on several occasions and, in 1668, it gave everyone a shock when it simply fell off; it wasn't replaced for two hundred years. The third tower, the untidy and truncated **Abdijtoren**, which also dates from the eleventh century, is a massive remnant of the original religious complex that once dominated the medieval town. The old abbey has been replaced by a dull, modern seminary that spreads out from the tower, though the complex's two **gateways** do lighten the architectural gloom: the first gateway, at the top of Diesterstraat, just off the Grote Markt, has seen better days, but enough remains to appreciate the full ambition of its medieval builders; the second, just down the street, is a grimy Neoclassical whopper from 1799 with a carved relief showing the misogynistic legend attached to the abbey's foundation. The story goes that every time St Trudo tried to build a church, an interfering woman pulled it down; not to be thwarted, Trudo prayed fervently for God to give him a hand and, lo and behold, the woman was struck down and paralyzed.

The pick of Sint Truiden's many other churches is **St-Gangulfus** (daily 9am–5pm; free), a handsome Romanesque structure with a bare and unadorned interior; it's located a brief walk northwest of the Grote Markt down along Diesterstraat.

Practicalities

Sint Truiden's **train** and adjacent **bus station** are on the west side of the centre, a five-minute walk from the Grote Markt via Stationstraat and its continuation Stapelstraat. There is a reasonably frequent weekday bus service to Zoutleeuw (Mon–Fri every 1–2hr; 20min). The **tourist office** is at Grote Markt 44 (April–Sept daily 9am–5pm; Oct–March daily 9am–4pm; ☎011 70 18 18, 🌐www.sint-truiden.be); it stocks free town maps, rents bicycles and sell brochures with details of cycle routes in the surrounding countryside. As ever, **cafés and bars** line up along the Grote Markt, the most distinctive being *Théâtre* (daily except Wed 11am–9.30pm), in a good-looking older building on the south side of the square and offering a good range of pasta dishes (€13–15).

Zoutleeuw

In a sleepy corner of Brabant, the hamlet of **ZOUTLEEUEW**, some 7km west of Sint Truiden, was a busy and prosperous cloth town from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Thereafter, its economy slipped into a long, slow decline whose final act came three hundred years later when it was bypassed by the main Brussels–Liège road. The village has one claim to fame, the rambling, irregularly towered and turreted **St-Leonarduskerk** (April–Sept Tues–Sun 2–5pm; Oct Sun 2–5pm; €2), whose magnificently intact Gothic interior is crammed with the accumulated treasures of several hundred years, being the only major church in the country to have escaped the attentions of both the Calvinists and the revolutionary French. The church is devoted to the French hermit St Leonard, whose medieval popularity was based upon the enthusiasm of returning Crusaders, who regarded him as the patron saint of prisoners.

The church's tall and slender, light and airy **nave** is dominated by a wrought-iron, sixteenth-century double-sided image of the Virgin, suspended from the ceiling, and by the huge fifteenth-century wooden cross hanging in the choir arch behind it. The side chapels are packed with works of religious art, including an intricate altar and retable of St Anna to the right of the entrance in the second chapel of the south side aisle, and a fearsome St George and the Dragon in the Chapel of Our Lady on the opposite side of the nave. The **north transept** is dominated by the huge stone sacramental tower, nine tiers of elaborate stonework stuffed with some two hundred statues and carved by Cornelis Floris, architect of Antwerp's town hall, between 1550 and 1552. The **ambulatory**, much darker and more intimate than the nave, is lined with an engaging series of medieval wooden sculptures, most notably a captive St Leonard with his hands chained. There's also a figure of St Florentius, the patron saint of tailors, holding an enormous pair of scissors; and a thirteenth-century statue of St Catherine of Alexandria, shown merrily stomping on the Roman Emperor Maxentius, who had her put to death.

Practicalities

Buses from Sint Truiden (Mon–Fri every 1–2hr; 20min) drop passengers in the centre of Zoutleeuw, metres from both St-Leonarduskerk and the sixteenth-century Stadhuis, which is home to the **tourist office** (April–Sept Tues–Fri 10am–noon & 1–4pm, Sat & Sun till 5pm; Oct–March Tues–Fri 10am–noon & 2–4pm; ☎011 78 12 88, 🌐www.zoutleeuw.be). For something **to eat**, the *Restaurant Pannenhuis*, near the church at Grote Markt 25 (Tues,

Thurs & Fri–Sun noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm; ☎011 78 50 02, www.pannenhuiszoutleeuw.be), is a smart little place decorated in traditional style that does a good line in Flemish cuisine; mains from €15.

Travel details

Trains

Antwerp to: Amsterdam (hourly; 2hr); Bruges (hourly; 1hr 15min); Brussels (every 20–30min; 40min); Hasselt (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 1hr 30min); Lier (hourly; 15min); Mechelen (every 20–30min; 20min).

Hasselt to: Antwerp (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hrs; 1hr 30min); Bokrijk (hourly; 10min); Leuven (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 40min); Liège (hourly; 50min); Lier (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 1hr 15min); Sint Truiden (hourly; 15min); Tongeren (hourly; 20min).

Leuven to: Brussels (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 25min); Hasselt (hourly, Sat & Sun every

2hr; 40min); Mechelen (every 20–30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 25min).

Lier to: Antwerp (hourly; 15min); Hasselt (hourly; 1hr 15min).

Mechelen to: Antwerp (every 20–30min; 20min); Brussels (every 20–30min; 20min); Leuven (every 20–30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 25min).

Tongeren to: Hasselt (hourly; 20min); Liège (hourly; 30min).

Buses

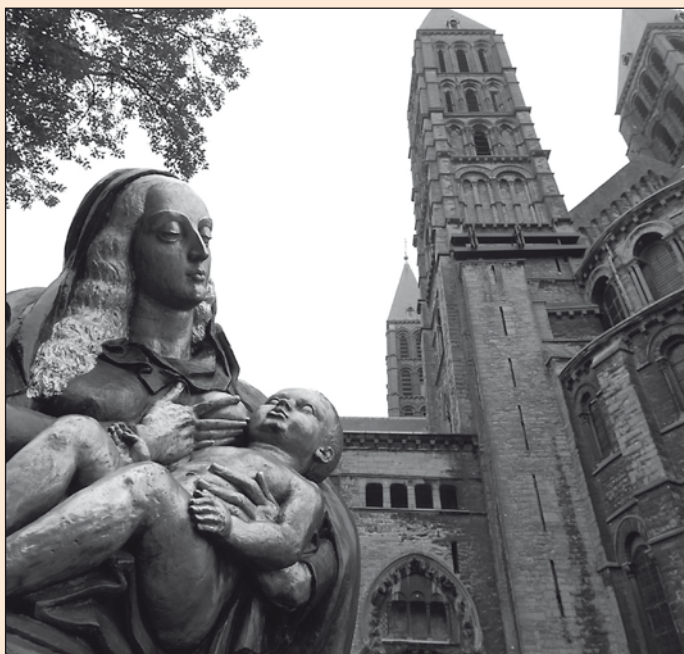
Sint Truiden to: Zoutleeuw (Mon–Fri every 1–2hr; 20min).

3

Hainaut and Wallonian Brabant



- * **Cathédrale Notre-Dame, Tournai** One of the most stunning cathedrals in the whole of Belgium. **See p.314**
- * **Grand Hornu – and Musée des Arts Contemporains** A converted mining complex whose industrial architecture frames a first-rate contemporary art museum. **See p.326**
- * **Binche Carnival** Probably the liveliest, most colourful carnival in the country. **See p.328**
- * **Abbaye de Villers, Villers-la-Ville** The ruins of this Cistercian abbey comprise one of the region's most evocative sights. **See p.331**
- * **Chimay** A charming country town with a picture-postcard Grand-Place and enjoyable country walks. **See p.340**



△ Tournai Cathedral

Hainaut and Wallonian Brabant

South of Brussels, the western reaches of **Wallonia** comprise the province of **Hainaut** and the French-speaking portion of Brabant, **Brabant Wallon**. The area has its beauty spots to be sure, with rolling farmland and wooded hills dotted across the entire region, but industry sets the general tone, especially between Mons and Charleroi, where an industrial – and post-industrial – rash stretches between the two towns with precious little interruption. Nevertheless, tucked away here and there are a clutch of fascinating old towns, the beautiful ruins of a medieval abbey and several grand châteaux.

The highlight of Hainaut is **Tournai** in the western part of the province, close to the French border. Once part of France, it's a vibrant, unpretentious town, with a number of decent museums, some good restaurants and a magnificent Romanesque/early Gothic cathedral. East of Tournai, the agreeable town of **Mons** is also home to a fine church, but its appeal is more in its ebullient street life and hilltop setting – a boon in this flat part of Belgium. Mons – and to a lesser extent Tournai – are also useful bases for seeing some of the region's more scattered attractions. Within easy striking distance of both are several châteaux – of which **Beloeil** is the grandest and **Attre** the most elegant – and **Soignies**, a workaday town with an imposing Romanesque church. East of here, **Nivelles**, the principal town of Brabant Wallon, boasts an even more impressive example of religious Romanesque architecture in its church of Ste Gertrude, while the elegiac ruins of the **Abbaye de Villers**, on the edge of **Villers-la-Ville**, lie in a wooded valley just a few kilometres further east again.

To the south, the industrial and engineering centre of **Charleroi** is the biggest city in Hainaut by a long chalk and, although few would call it pretty, it is gallantly attempting to reinvent itself as a city on the up. South of Charleroi, the rural **Botte du Hainaut** is actually an extension of the Ardennes and is named for its shape as it juts boot-like into France; most of the “boot” is part of Hainaut, but it also incorporates a narrow slice of Namur province, which for touring purposes we've included in this chapter. Largely bypassed by the industrial revolution, the area is a quiet corner of the country, its undulating farmland and forests dotted with the smallest of country towns. Among them, Namur's **Walcourt** is the most diverting, a quaint old place that culminates in an imposing medieval church, with **Chimay**, which merits a visit for its castle

Bruges

Ghent

Ghent

Oudenaarde

Kortrijk

WEST-VLAANDEREN

OOST-VLAANDEREN

Kerkhove
Kluisberg

Ronse

Escaut

Rhodes

Lille

Tournai

Ath

Attre

Brugelette

Belcail

Blaton

Maisieres

Valenciennes

BORINAGE

Mons

Cuesmes

Hornu

Maubeuge

Cambrai

FRANCE



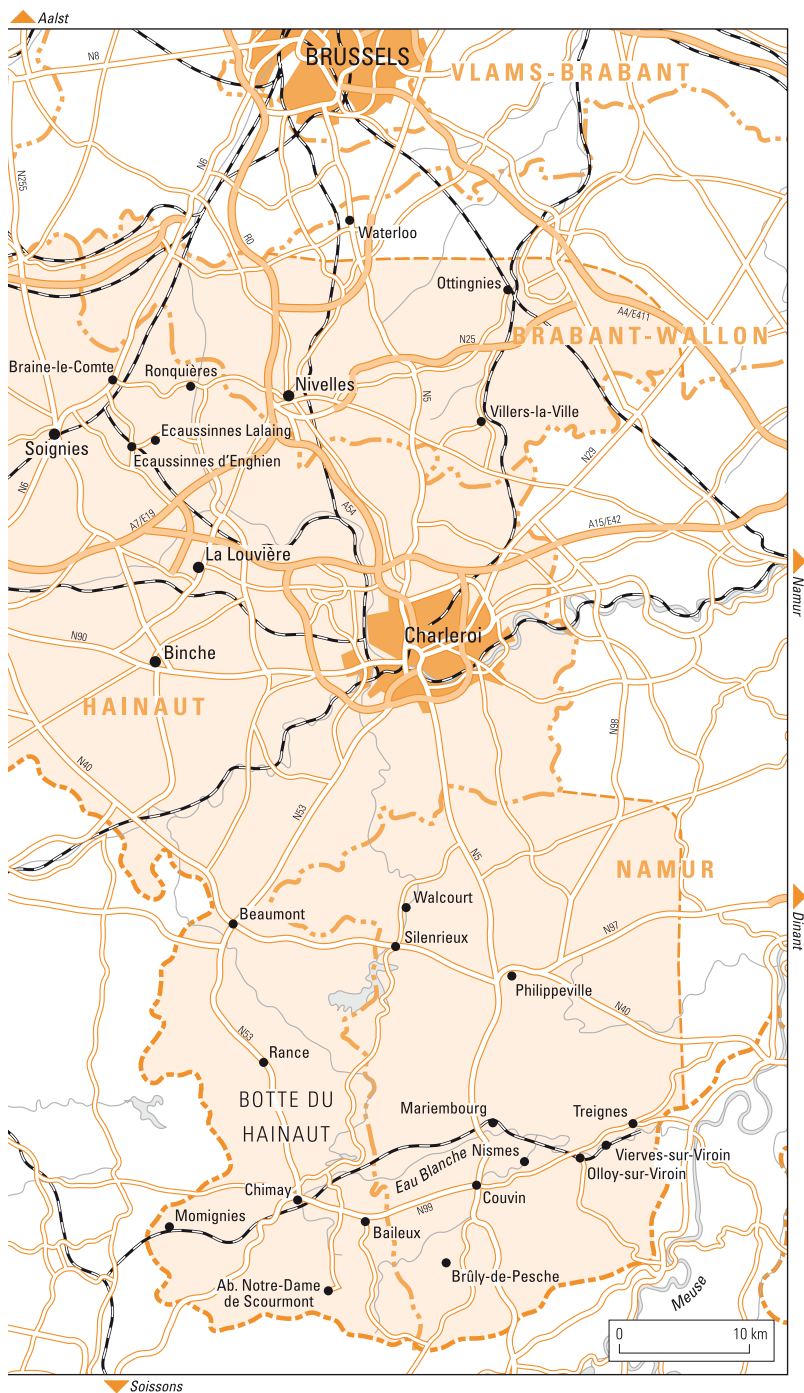
4

HAINAUT AND WALLONIAN BRABANT

HAINAUT & WALLONIAN BRABANT

St-Quentin

310



and pretty old centre, running a close second. Just to the east, **Couvin** is also fairly picturesque, and is well endowed with facilities for holidaymakers, since hundreds of vacationing Belgians hunker down in cottages in the surrounding countryside. Outside of these three towns, each of which is readily reached by public transport and has a small supply of hotels and B&Bs, you'll definitely need a car – and sometimes a tent.

Tournai

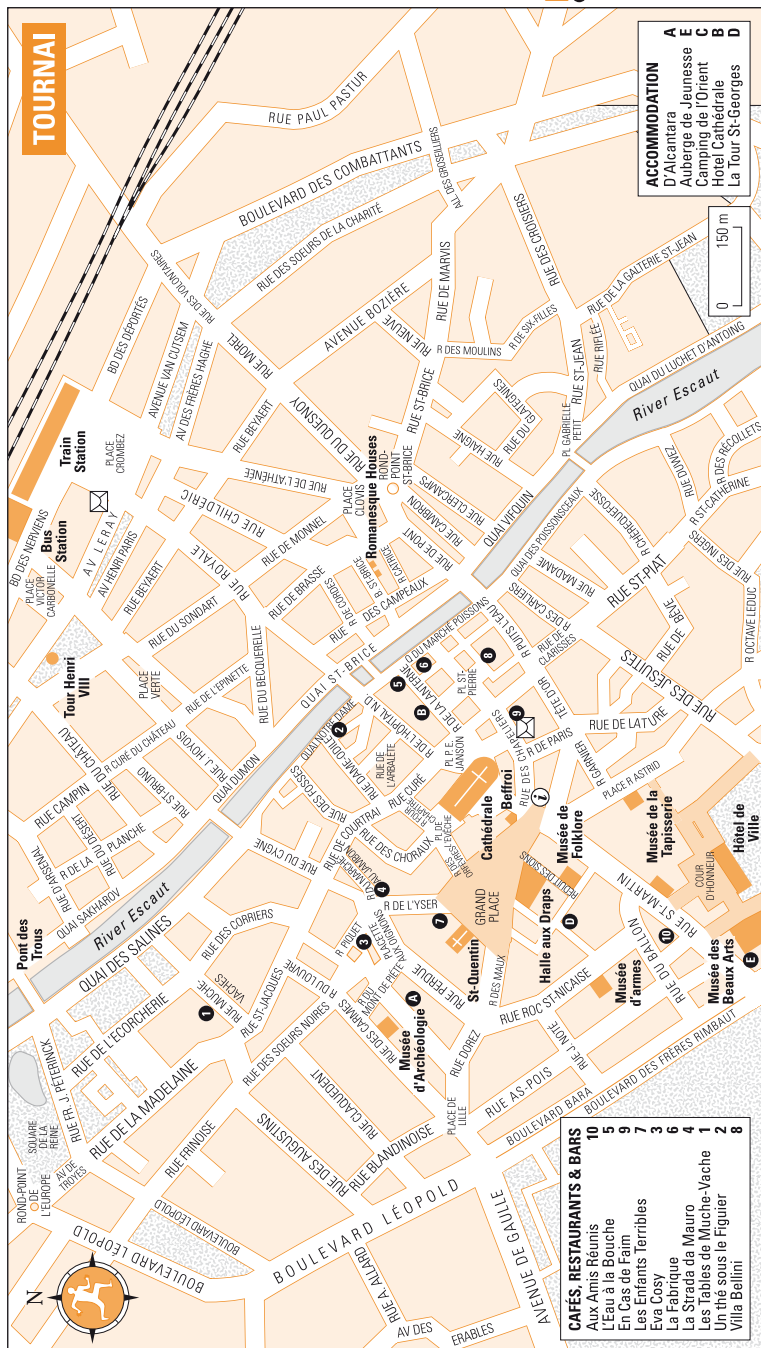
For many, **TOURNAI** is Wallonia's most interesting and enjoyable town, its antique centre latticed by narrow cobbled streets and straddling the sluggish, canalized River Escaut (Scheldt in Dutch). Tournai's pride and joy is its magnificent medieval **cathedral**, a seminal construction whose stirring amalgamation of Romanesque and early Gothic styles influenced the design of other churches far and wide. Most visitors zero in on the cathedral to the expense of everything else, but the town centre also holds lots of handsome eighteenth-century mansions in the French style – stately structures with double doors, stone lower and brick upper storeys, overhanging eaves, elongated chimneys and, often as not, fancy balconies and a central (horse-carriage) courtyard. Add to this several excellent restaurants, a clutch of lively bars and the town's proximity to the extravagant châteaux of **Beloeil** (see p.326) and **Attre** (see p.327), and you've reason enough to stay a night or two – especially as tourism here remains distinctly low-key, with barely a tour bus in sight.

The city was founded by the Romans as a staging post on the trade route between Cologne and the coast of France. Later, it produced the French monarchy in the form of the **Merovingians**, a dynasty of Frankish kings who chose the place as their capital – **Clovis**, the most illustrious of the line, was born here in 465. The Merovingians ruled until the late seventh century when they were deposed by a palace official, Pepin of Heristal, the ancestor of the Carolingians, but in the meantime Tournai had lost its capital status and reverted to the counts of Flanders. It was finally handed back to France in the twelfth century, remaining under French control for a large part of its subsequent history, and staying loyal to its king – despite English overtures – during the **Hundred Years War**. Indeed, the constancy of its citizens was legendary: Joan of Arc addressed them in a letter as “kind, loyal Frenchmen”, and they returned the compliment by sending her a bag of gold. Incorporated into the Habsburg Netherlands in the 1520s, Tournai was retaken by Louis XIV in 1667. This next period of French control only lasted fifty years or so, but Louis left his mark on the town with the heavyweight stone quays that still flank the river, and in scores of handsome mansions. Sadly, much of central Tournai was damaged by German bombing at the beginning of World War II, but enough has survived to reward a thorough exploration.

Arrival, information and accommodation

Tournai's **train and bus stations** are located on the northern edge of town, about ten minutes' walk from the centre: head straight down rue Royale and, with the cathedral clearly visible, cross the Escaut to reach the Grand-Place and the major sites on the south bank. The **tourist office** is at rue du Vieux Marché-aux-Poteries 14, metres from the cathedral and just off the Grand-Place (Easter–Sept Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 9.30am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon & 2.30–6pm; Oct–Easter Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.30pm, Sat

TOURNAI



ACCOMMODATION
 A D'Alicantara
 B Auberge de Jeunesse
 C Camping de l'Orient
 D Hotel Cathédrale
 E La Tour St-Georges

0 150 m

CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS & BARS
 10 Aux Amis Réunis
 5 L'Eau à la Bouche
 9 En Cas de Fam
 7 Les Enfants Terribles
 3 Eva Cosy
 6 La Fabrique
 4 La Strada da Mauro
 2 Les Tables de Mûche-Yache
 1 Un th sous le Figuer
 8 Villa Bellini

4

HAIGNAUT AND WALLONIAN BRABANT

10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 2.30–6pm; ☎ 069 22 20 45, 🌐 www.tournai.be). It has a reasonable range of provincial leaflets and sells both a town brochure and map (€1) and guides to walking and mountain biking just outside the city (€2) – see Mont St-Aubert (p.319). It also shows a twenty-minute film, *The Passage of Time*, which gives a potted history of the town, and is available in English if there is enough demand – or you reserve on the website (€2). If you plan to visit a number of the town's museums, ask about the discount entry tickets that are available. Finally the tourist office will assist in providing a list of Tournai's somewhat limited **accommodation** options, the pick of which are reviewed below.

Hotels

D'Alcantara rue des Bouchers St-Jacques 2 ☎ 069 21 26 48, 🌐 www.tournai.be/hotelalcantara. Friendly, family-run hotel, the best in town, slotted in behind an eighteenth-century brick and stone facade about 400m northwest of the Grand-Place. Some of the fifteen bedrooms have pleasant courtyard views. Ⓜ

Hotel Cathédrale place St-Pierre 2 ☎ 069 21 50 77, 🌐 www.hotelcathedrale.be. Right in the centre of town, close by the cathedral. Modern, medium-sized hotel with an attractive facade featuring three long rows of windows, and comfortable rooms with all conveniences. Ⓜ

La Tour St-Georges place de Nédonchel 2 ☎ 069 22 53 00. Dowdy, frugal rooms in an unprepossessing modern brick building just behind the Halle aux Draps, on the Grand-Place. No credit cards accepted. Ⓜ

Hostel and campsite

Auberge de Jeunesse rue St-Martin 64 ☎ 069 21 61 36, 🌐 www.laj.be. Occupying an attractive old mansion, a former music academy, a couple of minutes' walk south of the Grand-Place, the youth hostel is a well-cared-for, friendly place. It has around one hundred beds, the majority in dormitories of five or six, though there are also a handful of two- and four-bunk rooms. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and self-catering facilities are available too. Disabled access. Closed Jan. Dorm beds €14.50. Ⓜ

Camping de l'Orient rue Vieux Chemin de Mons 8 ☎ 069 22 26 35, ☎ 069 89 02 29. All-year campground situated in the Aqua Tournai leisure and water sports complex, about 3km east of the town centre off the chaussée de Bruxelles: turn south down rue de l'Orient before you reach the E42 motorway.

The Town

Tournai's town **centre** is bisected by the River Escaut and girdled by a ring road that follows the course of the old city ramparts. The best way to see Tournai is on foot – the town centre is only a few minutes' walk from end to end. Most things of interest are on the south side of the river, grouped around or within easy reach of the sprawling, roughly triangular **Grand-Place**. The principal sight, the **cathedral**, is just east of here.

The Cathédrale Notre-Dame

Dominating the skyline with its distinctive five towers is Tournai's Romanesque/early Gothic **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** (daily: April–Oct 9.15am–noon & 2–6pm; Nov–March 9.15am–noon & 2–5pm; free; 🌐 www.cathedraledetournai.be), built with the wealth of the flourishing wool and stone trades. The mammoth proportions of the cathedral in combination with the local slate-coloured marble were much admired by contemporaries and the design was imitated all along the Escaut (Scheldt) valley. The cathedral is the third church on this site, most of it completed in the latter half of the twelfth century, though the choir was reconstructed in the middle of the thirteenth. The full magnificence of the edifice is, however, difficult to appreciate through the jumble of humble, sometimes ancient buildings that crowd its precincts, the only half-reasonable vantage point being on the north side – from place Paul Emile Janson.

On this side too is the fascinating **Porte Mantile**, a Romanesque doorway adorned with badly weathered carvings of the Virtues and Vices. The scenes are hard to make out, but the animated, elemental force of the carvings is unmistakable. That said, you can spot Avarice, the man impeded by the money-bag round his neck, being carried off by a centaur-like Satan, and discern two knights engaged in brutal conflict, one soldier sticking his spear in the face of the other below. The **west facade**, on place de l'Evêché, also has some interesting carvings, with three tiers of sculptures filling out the back of the medieval portico. Dating from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the oldest effigies, along the bottom, are mainly drawn from the Old Testament and include Moses with the Sinai tablets and scenes from the story of Adam and Eve. The next tier up has reliefs illustrating the history of the local church, and finally come figures representing various apostles and saints. Adam and Eve appear again on the column between the double doors, this time almost life-size and separated by the Tree of Knowledge.

The interior

Today's **main entrance** is on the south side. Inside, the choir and nave are unexpectedly almost the same length, the stern simplicity of the design modulated by the tunnel-like communication galleries. The **nave** is part of the original cathedral structure, erected in 1171, as are the intricately carved capitals that distinguish the lowest set of columns, but the vaulted roof is eighteenth-century. The **capitals** were originally painted in bright colours, their fanciful designs inspired by illuminated manuscripts, imported tapestries and popular images of fearsome, mythological animals. The **choir** was the first manifestation of the Gothic style in Belgium, and its too-slender pillars had to be reinforced later at the base: the whole choir still leans slightly to one side due to the unstable soil beneath. In front of the choir, the Renaissance **rood screen** is a flamboyant marble extravaganza by Cornelis Floris embellished by Biblical events, such as Jonah being swallowed by the whale.

The ample and majestic late twelfth-century **transepts** are the most impressive – and most beautiful – feature of the cathedral. Apsed and aisled to a very unusual plan, they impart a lovely diffuse light through their many windows, some of which (in the south transept) hold superb sixteenth-century **stained glass** by Arnould de Nimegue, depicting semi-mythical scenes from far back in Tournai's history. Opposite, in the north transept, is an intriguing twelfth-century mural, a pock-marked cartoon strip relating the story of St Margaret, a shepherdess martyred on the orders of the Emperor Diocletian. Its characters are set against an exquisite blue background reminiscent of – and clearly influenced by – Byzantine church paintings. Take a look, too, at Rubens' characteristically bold *The Deliverance of Souls from Purgatory*, which hangs, newly restored, beside the adjacent chapel.

Be sure also to see the **trésor** (April–Oct Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm, Sat & Sun 2–6pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 2–5pm, Sat & Sun 2–5pm; €2), whose three rooms kick off with a splendid wood-panelled, eighteenth-century meeting room and a chapel hung with a rare example of a medieval Arras tapestry. The tapestry consists of fourteen panels depicting the lives of St Piat and St Eleuthère, the first bishop of Tournai. The third room is crammed with religious bric-a-brac – reliquaries, liturgical vestments and so forth. Among this assorted ecclesiastical tackle are two especially fine **reliquary shrines**. The earlier piece is the silver and gilded copper *châsse de Notre-Dame*, completed in 1205 by Nicolas de Verdun; it's festooned with relief figures clothed in fluidly carved robes, and the medallions depict scenes from the life

of Christ. The second shrine, the *châsse de St Eleuthère*, is slightly later and more ostentatious, but doesn't quite have the elegant craftsmanship of its neighbour. There's also an early sixteenth-century *Ecce Homo* by **Quentin Matsys**, showing Christ surrounded by monstrous faces, and a wonderful Byzantine Cross, a classic example of seventh-century Constantinople artistry, its squat arms studded with precious stones.

The Grand-Place

A short stroll from the cathedral's main entrance, virtually on the corner of the Grand-Place, **Le Beffroi** (belfry; April–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–1pm & 2–6.30pm; Nov–March Tues–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; €2) is the oldest such structure in Belgium, its lower portion dating from 1200. The bottom level once held a prison cell and the minuscule balcony immediately above was where public proclamations were announced. Climb the 257 steps to the top, where the carillon tower has been subjected to all sorts of architectural tinkering from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century – hence its ungainly appearance.

A few steps west of the belfry, the **Grand-Place** is an open and airy piazza equipped with a modern water feature, whose automated jets do very nicely. The middle of the square is occupied by a **statue** of Christine de Lalaing, in heroic “to the ramparts” pose, clad in armour and holding a hatchet. A local aristocrat, Lalaing led the locals in a last-ditch stand against the Spanish Habsburg army in 1581, but to no avail. The south side of the Grand-Place holds the seventeenth-century **Halle aux Draps** (Cloth Hall), a crisply symmetrical edifice, whose facade is graced by slender Renaissance pilasters and a row of miniature lions on the balustrade. The decoration has recently been picked in gold paint, but the interior, completely rebuilt after wartime bombing, is unremarkable. A few metres away, back towards the belfry, an alley – the *reduit des Sions* – leads through to the amiably old-fashioned **Musée de Folklore** (April–Oct daily except Tues 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon; €2.50), housed in an antique high-gabled brick mansion known as the *Maison Tournaisienne*. Here, several floors detail old Tournai trades and daily life in the nineteenth century, but the reconstructions of various workshops and domestic rooms that form the bulk of the collection are not terribly spectacular. The highlight is the replica cloister on the second floor, where one of the cells exhibits the pathetic tokens left by those impoverished parents forced to leave their children with the nuns. Particularly affecting are the letters and playing cards torn in half in the vain hope that they could be rejoined (and the child reclaimed) at a later date – something which rarely happened.

Musée de la Tapisserie

Just southeast of the Grand-Place on place Reine Astrid, the **Musée de la Tapisserie** (Tapestry Museum; April–Oct daily except Tues 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon; €2.50) features a small selection of old tapestries alongside modern work, temporary exhibitions and a restoration workshop. Tournai was among the most important pictorial tapestry centres in Belgium in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, producing characteristically huge works, juxtaposing many characters and several episodes of history, and leaving no empty space – usually there aren't even any borders. Major themes included history, heraldry and mythology, and although several of the best surviving Tournai tapestries are in Brussels, there are a handful of good examples here



△ Musée de la Tapisserie, Tournai

on the ground floor. The pick are the three tapestries recounting Homer's tale of **Hercules** and his dealings with Laomedon, the shifty king of Troy. Hercules, dressed here in medieval attire, saved the king's daughter from a sea-monster, but then the Trojan refused to pay him the promised reward. Hercules was obliged to sail away empty-handed, but swore vengeance, returning ten years later to capture Troy and slaughter the king. The tapestries are excellent, and still richly coloured, instances of the tendency to cram the picture with detail and wry observation.

Musée des Beaux Arts

Just along the street, you can cut up through the gardens to the eighteenth-century **Hôtel de Ville**, the grandest of several municipal buildings that share the same compound. Behind the town hall, the **Musée des Beaux Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; April–Oct daily except Tues 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon; €3) occupies an elegant, Art Nouveau edifice, designed by Victor Horta (see p.118) and surmounted by a rather overblown bronze entitled *Truth, Empress of the Arts*. Inside, the building's pillars, grilles and low, soft angles provide a suitably attractive setting for a small but enjoyable collection of mainly Belgian painting, from the Flemish primitives to the twentieth century. The paintings, displayed in a series of interconnected rooms that radiate out from a central hall, are sometimes rotated, but in general the earlier works are concentrated on the left-hand side, so you may want to work round the museum in a clockwise direction.

The first room on the left is usually devoted to the nineteenth-century medievalist Louis Gallait, two of whose vast and graphic historical canvases – of the *Plague of 1092* and the *Abdication of Charles V* – cover virtually a whole wall each. Subsequently, Room E accommodates an exquisite *St Donatius* by Jan Gossaert; *The Fowlers*, by Pieter Bruegel the Younger; and a couple of big, fleshy pieces by Jordaens. Here also is a *Holy Family* and a *Virgin and Child* by Rogier

van der Weyden, a native of Tournai known around here as Roger de la Pasture. Weyden's artistic output is further celebrated by a separate section containing photographs of all the paintings attributed to him and now exhibited round the world. The idea is to show what would be exhibited in the ideal Weyden gallery, a pleasant little conceit that works very well.

Among the more **modern** paintings are a number of works by French Impressionists. Manet's romantic *Argenteuil* and the swirling colours of Monet's *The Headland* – both in Room J – stand out, though they share the room with a couple of early, slightly tentative canvases by James Ensor, including *The Marsh*.

To the Archeological Museum

From the front of the Musée des Beaux Arts, a cobbled lane leads through to rue St-Martin. Turn right (towards the Grand-Place) and then first left and you soon reach **rue Roc St-Nicaise**, one of the town's best-looking streets, flanked by lovely old mansions of French inspiration with two lower levels of finely dressed stone beneath a third of brick. One of these old buildings, no. 59, now accommodates the **Musée d'Armes et d'Histoire Militaire** (April–Oct daily except Tues 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon; €2.50), though the museum's miscellaneous military hardware is of limited interest. Neighbouring rue des Carmes is of similar appearance, if not quite as polished, and here, at no. 8, the **Musée d'Archéologie** inhabits a rambling, rather forlorn old brick building (Nov–March Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 10am–noon; April–Oct daily except Tues 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm; €2), part of which used to be a pawnshop. On display is a hotchpotch of local archeological finds, the ground floor being where you'll find the best of these – a heavy-duty, Gallo-Roman lead sarcophagus and a smattering of rare **Merovingian** artefacts, from weapons and the skeleton of a horse through to brooches and bee-shaped jewellery. The latter are thought to have come from the tomb of the Merovingian king **Childeric**, which was accidentally unearthed in 1653 – on place Clovis, just north of the river. Interestingly, Napoleon adopted the Merovingian bee as his symbol in preference to the fleur-de-lys.

Quai Notre-Dame and Tour Henri VIII

Strolling northeast from the cathedral, you soon reach the riverside **quai Notre-Dame**, where many of the buildings were built during the Louis XIV occupation. Curiously enough Tournai was also English for five years from 1513 to 1518 when, having captured the town, Henry VIII promptly built himself a citadel here. Most of it disappeared centuries ago, but one of the towers lingers on, located in a tiny park near the train station. Known, logically enough, as the **Tour Henri VIII**, it's a cylindrical keep, with walls over 6m thick and a conical brick-vaulted roof. Also on the north side of the river are two restored **Romanesque houses** on rue Barre St-Brice – dating from the late twelfth century, they're said to be the oldest examples of bourgeois dwellings in western Europe. You can't go inside, but their precarious, leaning appearance is convincing enough.

Pont des Trous and Mont St-Aubert

Head back to the river from the Romanesque houses and turn right for the ten-minute walk to **Pont des Trous**, spanning the River Escaut and the only part of the town's medieval ramparts to have survived. This is the starting point

for a number of well-signposted **walks** out into the surrounding countryside, the most obvious target being **Mont St-Aubert**, 6km or so to the north of town. There are smashing views from the top of this 149-metre hill, which was long the focus of all sorts of pagan shenanigans – including solstice celebrations – until the Catholic church adopted it, naming it after St Aubert, an eighth-century French saint who founded France's hilltop Mont St-Michel. Free walking **maps** are available from Tournai tourist office (ask for *PICverts*) and the whole excursion takes about three hours.

Eating and drinking

Tournai's cafés and restaurants throng the town centre, offering plenty of choice for an affordable snack or meal. The more predictable places tend to be on the Grand-Place, while the more interesting congregate down towards the river, on and around rue de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame and quai du Marché Poissons. As you would expect in Wallonia, the general standard is extremely high and the best restaurants offer truly superb food. The city's liveliest bars are down by the river, too.

Restaurants

L'Eau à la Bouche quai du Marché Poissons 8 ☎069 22 77 20. French cuisine with an original flair served in this charming eighteenth-century house down by the riverside. Set menus available between €30 and €65 including wine. Bread is home-made. Booking recommended. Closed Mon all day & Thurs eve.

En Cas de Faim rue des Chapeliers 50 ☎069 56 04 84. This is a rare mix: a Belgian restaurant with a Norwegian chef, who specializes in Mediterranean cuisine. All the food they serve here is seasonal and freshly prepared, though the service can be somewhat haphazard. A two-course meal will set you back around €20. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm; Fri & Sat only 7–9.30pm.

Les Enfants Terribles rue de l'Yser 35 ☎069 84 48 22. Just off the Grand-Place, brasserie-style food in a contemporary, minimalist setting. You can watch the chef at work on the television screen behind the bar. Children are welcome – even little terrors. Starters €8–14, main course €10–20. Closed Sun.

La Strada da Mauro rue de l'Yser 2. Extremely popular Italian place, serving an excellent range of tasty pasta and pizza cooked in a stone oven. With mains from €10, this is one of the best deals in town. Closed Tues eve & Wed.

Les Tables de Muche Vache rue Muche Vache 9 ☎069 77 60 31. Set back off a cobbled street, in a building that has previously served as a textile mill and chocolate factory, this distinctive restaurant is decorated in minimalist style, its sharp lines warmed by lush velvet curtains. The menu is very French, with foie gras a house speciality. The set menus are the most

reasonable option, ranging from €34–70.

Open Mon noon–2.30pm & 7–9.30pm; Tues noon–2.30pm; Thurs & Fri noon–2.30pm & 7–9.30pm; Sat 7–9.30pm; Sun noon–2.30pm.

Un thé sous le Figuier quai Notre-Dame 26 ☎069 84 88 48. Tunisian riverfront restaurant serving up couscous and tajines in dishes you can buy when you've finished, along with all the lamps, teapots and other bric-à-brac. Prices range from €11–22 for a main course. Open Tues–Sat eve and Sun lunchtime.

Villa Bellini place St-Pierre 15 ☎069 23 65 20. Quality Italian food in the enjoyable surroundings of a tastefully converted apothecary – all porcelain drug jars and wooden shelving. It's reasonably priced, with pizzas hovering at around €12, other main courses – seafood and so forth – just a few euros more. Open daily.

Bars and cafés

Aux Amis Réunis rue St-Martin 89. Dating back to 1911, this traditional Belgian bar has a good range of domestic beers, and its wood-panelled walls and antique feel make it one of the town's most agreeable watering holes. It also has a table for *jeu de fer* – an ancient game that's like a cross between billiards and boules.



Eva Cosy rue Piquet 6. Café-tearoom with home-made cakes, biscuits and bread that is perfect for breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea. Try the maroccino – dark chocolate melted in an espresso. The decor is inviting too, with lots of original touches. Open daily until 6pm.

La Fabrique quai du Marché Poissons 13b. Busy, boisterous bar attracting a wayward, mostly twenty-something clientele.

Mons and around

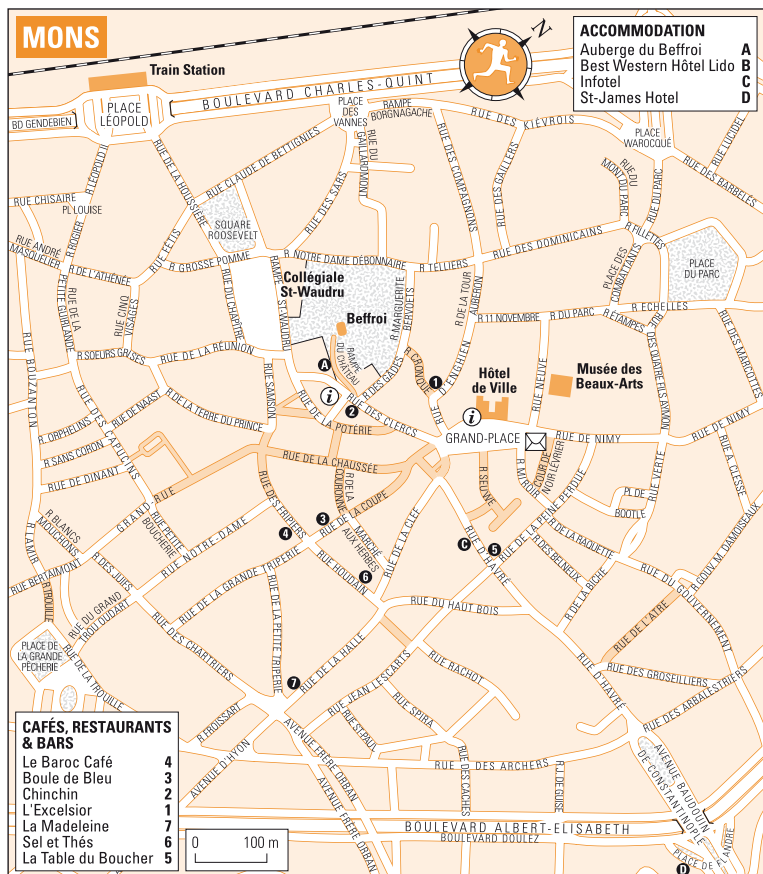
About forty minutes by train from Tournai, the name of **MONS** may be familiar for its military associations. It was the site of battles that for Britain marked the beginning and end of World War I, and in 1944 it was the location of the first big American victory on Belgian soil in the liberation campaign. It has also been a key military base since 1967, when Charles de Gaulle expelled

4

HAIGNAUT AND WALLONIAN BRABANT

Mons and around





NATO – including **SHAPE** (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe) – from Paris, SHAPE subsequently moving headquarters to Maisières, just outside Mons. Both continue to provide employment for hundreds of Americans and other NATO nationals – something which gives the town a bustling, cosmopolitan feel for somewhere so small. It's a pleasant town, with a good café society, spread over the hill that gave it its name.

Railways and roads radiate out from Mons in all directions, putting central Hainaut's key attractions within easy reach and making for several enjoyable day-trips; what's more, using Mons as a base avoids the difficulty of finding somewhere to stay – accommodation is thin on the ground hereabouts. The **Borinage**, a former coalfield southwest of the town, holds the most obvious sight, the disappointing **Vincent van Gogh house**, and, much better, the former colliery complex of **Grand-Hornu**, industrial heritage at its most diverting and given an extra edge by the addition of the **Musée des Arts Contemporains (MAC's)**. Elsewhere, to the north of Mons, well on the way to Tournai, lie two very visitable châteaux – imposing **Beloeil**, with its extensive grounds, and the even more enticing **Château d'Attre**; to

the east is the quaint little town of **Binche**, which boasts one of Belgium's most famous carnivals, while northeast is **Soignies**, with its splendid Romanesque church.

Arrival, information and accommodation

Mons **train station** and the adjacent **bus station** are on the western edge of the town centre, on place Léopold. From here, there's a free bus shuttle to the Grand-Place, or it's a ten-minute walk up the hill: take rue de la Houssière and its continuation rue du Chapitre, which rounds the massive church of Ste-Waudru, and then continue along rue des Clercs. The **tourist office**, at Grand-Place 22 (Mon–Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 9.30am–6.30pm; ☎ 065 33 55 80, 🌐 www.paysdemon.be), has some dated leaflets on the town as well as a brochure describing the battlefield sites on its outskirts. They also have details of the town's **hotels**, of which seven are in the centre – as is the HI **hostel**.

Hotels and hostel

Auberge du Beffroi rampe du Château 2 ☎ 065 87 55 70, 🌐 www.laj.be. Well-equipped, modern HI hostel in a great location – metres from the Grand-Place, at the foot of the belfry. Comes with bar, self-catering facilities, car parking and Internet access. There are 115 beds here in 29 one-to-four berth rooms. Prices from €16–30, doubles €21.60 per person. ①

Best Western Hôtel Lido rue des Arbalestriers 112 ☎ 065/32 78 00, 🌐 www.lido.be. Bright and breezy hotel in a distinctive modern building at the top of rue de Nimy, a ten-minute walk north of the Grand-Place. The rooms are decorated in standard chain style and there's a gym and sauna. ⑤

Infotel rue d'Havré 32 ☎ 065/40 18 30, 🌐 www.hotelinfotel.be. This oddly named but very friendly hotel has nineteen pleasantly appointed modern rooms, all with free wi-Fi. Part of the hotel occupies a refurbished eighteenth-century house, the rest was constructed in the 1990s. Great location too, just 100m from the Grand-Place. ②

 **St James Hotel** place de Flandre 8 ☎ 065/72 48 24, 🌐 www.hotelstjames.be. Newly established, small hotel in a solid stone-and-brick nineteenth-century house, about 600m east of the Grand-Place. Comfortable rooms kitted out in contemporary-modernist style. ②

The Town

Mons zeroes in on its **Grand-Place**, a long and wide square flanked by terrace cafés and framed by a pleasing medley of substantial stone merchants' houses and narrower brick buildings, both old and new. Presiding over the square is the fifteenth-century **Hôtel de Ville**, a considerably altered building whose over-large tower was stuck on top in 1718. The tiny cast-iron **monkey** on the front wall is reputed to bring at least a year of happiness to all who stroke him with their left hand – hence his bald, polished crown – which is rather odd considering it was once part of the municipal pillory. Inside, some of the rooms are open for guided tours in July and August (more information at the tourist office), though the odd fancy fireplace, tapestry and painting are hardly essential viewing. The porch of the double-doored gateway on the front of the Hôtel de Ville carries several commemorative plaques. One is for the food sent to the town by the Americans at the end of World War II, another recalls the Canadian brigade who liberated Mons in 1918 and yet another – the most finely executed – honours the bravery of the Irish Lancers, who defended the town in 1914.

Musée des Beaux Arts

Around the corner from the Hôtel de Ville, at rue Neuve 8, is the recently refurbished **Musée des Beaux Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; Tues–Sun noon–6pm; €2.50), whose permanent collection, comprising mainly Belgian

The Angels of Mons

Mons has figured prominently in both World Wars. During **World War I**, in the latter part of August 1914, the British forces here found themselves outnumbered by the advancing Germans to the tune of about twenty to one. The subsequent Battle of Mons began on August 26, and the British – in spite of great heroics (the first two Victoria Crosses of the war were awarded at Mons) – were inevitably forced to retreat. The casualties might have been greater, had the troops not been hard-bitten veterans. Meanwhile, back in England, the horror-story writer Arthur Machen wrote an avowedly fictional tale for the *Evening News* in which the retreating troops were assisted by a host of bowmen, the ghosts of Agincourt. Within weeks, rumour had transmogrified Machen's bowmen into the **Angels of Mons**, who had supposedly hovered overhead just at the point when the Germans were about to launch their final attack, causing them to fall back in fear and amazement. Machen himself was amazed at this turn of events, but the angel story was unstoppable, taking on the status of legend, and those soldiers lucky enough to return home obligingly reported similar tales of supernatural happenings on the battlefield. There's a painting of the angelic event, by one Marcel Gillis, in the Mons Hôtel de Ville.

This was, in fact, the first of many **myths** that were to take root among World War I troops: the sheer terror of their situation prompted all sorts of superstitions, legends and rumours, which had a morale-boosting effect both among them and at home, where the dreadful casualty figures were beginning to filter through. Angels or not, Mons remained in German hands until its liberation by the Canadians in November 1918.

paintings from the sixteenth century onwards, is supplemented by an ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions. The building is impressive too, and the top floor has a terrace with a good view over the Mons skyline. High points of the permanent collection, which is regularly rotated, include a striking *Ecc Homo* by the fifteenth-century artist Dieric Bouts, a mischievous *Soup Eater* by Frans Hals, and a ghoulish *The Entombment* by Paul Delvaux. There's also a good sample of the work of modern Hainaut artists, among whom the Expressionist **Pierre Paulus** (1881–1959) stands out – his *La Sambre* of 1912 is especially powerful, the figure of a desperate woman and child set by the eponymous river with a charred industrial landscape beyond. Trained as an architect, Paulus followed in the artistic footsteps of Constantin Meunier (see p.120), painting the coal mines and factories, spoil heaps and furnaces of Hainaut's industrial region with political intent. He was also a leading light of the **Nervia Group**, a school of artists who came together in Mons in 1928 determined to develop a distinctively Wallonian aesthetic, but unlike Paulus most of them preferred religious and allegorical themes and a classical style.

The belfry and park

To the southwest of the Grand-Place, **rue des Clercs** is one of the prettiest streets in town, shadowed by old mansions as it weaves around the hill that was once occupied by the medieval castle. On top of the hill today, at the end of a steep lane, stands the Baroque **beffroi** (belfry; no admission) and its miniature **park** (May to mid-Sept Tues–Sun 10am–8pm; mid-Sept to April Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; free), from where there are fine views over the town and its surroundings. The park incorporates a small tower that is pretty much all that remains of the medieval castle and the **Chapelle St-Calixte**, whose crypt was used as a bomb shelter in World War II.

Collégiale Ste-Waudru

From the hilltop, it's a brief walk down to the late Gothic **Collégiale Ste-Waudru** (Collegiate Church of St Waudru; daily 9am–6pm, 5pm on Sun; free), a massive and majestic church which displays a striking uniformity in its architecture, most memorably in the long, sweeping lines of the windows. The church is named after a seventh-century aristocrat, who did everything by the book: given away by her parents to a local bigwig, she was faithful in marriage and obligingly bore her husband four children, raising them to be singularly virtuous. One sort of duty successfully accomplished, she then had an amicable separation so that she could dedicate the rest of her life to the church, founding a small religious community here in Mons.

There is much to see inside the church, most importantly the work of the local sculptor, architect, builder and general factotum **Jacques du Broeucq**, whose alabaster rood loft (1535–39) was broken up by French Revolutionary soldiers in 1797, and is now spread around different parts of the church. Broeucq's high-relief carvings are simply wonderful, designed to explain the story of Christ to a largely illiterate congregation. To make deciphering easy, Broeucq stuck to certain clear conventions, dressing his soldiers in a rough approximation of Roman uniform and giving the disciples beards and gowns, but it's the detail that delights – from the gentle kiss at Gethsemane to the two incredulous fingers placed in Christ's wound after the Resurrection. The north transept holds the reliefs of the *Resurrection*, the *Ascension* and the *Descent of the Holy Ghost*, while the south transept has the *Flagellation of Christ* and the *Bearing of the Cross*, as well as Broeucq's **memorial plaque**. The *Last Supper* is displayed in the fourth ambulatory chapel on the north side of the church and is perhaps the finest piece of them all. The carving is so precise that you can spot the bread rolls and the chicken legs plus the face of Judas, turned away from the food as was the artistic convention.

The church **trésor** (March–Nov Tues–Fri 1.30–6pm, Sat & Sun 1.30–5pm; €2.50) is also of some interest for its assorted reliquaries and statuettes. Highlights include a thirteenth-century reliquary studded with no less than ten pieces from the Cross and several miniature tableaux by Jacques du Broeucq – King David playing the lyre, Moses with God's Tablets of Stone and so forth. Incidentally, the elaborate, eighteenth-century **Car d'Or**, with its flock of fat

The Doudou

Every year, in late May or early June on the weekend before Trinity Sunday, Mons hosts the festival of the **Doudou**. Events kick off with a solemn ceremony on the Saturday, when the reliquary holding the remains of Ste Waudru is given to the city's mayor. Locals flock into the Collegiate Church and sing their first rendition of the Doudou **folk song**, which will continue for the rest of the week. On **Sunday morning**, the reliquary is processed around the town in a golden carriage – the **Car d'Or** – accompanied by a some thousand-odd costumed participants, with everyone joining in to push the carriage back up the hill to the church with one huge shove: failure to get it there in one go will bring bad luck to one and all.

After the relics are safely back in the church, chaos erupts on the Grand-Place with a battle between **St George and the Dragon**, known here as “Lumeçon”. St George and his thirty-eight helpers (all good men and true) slug it out with the Dragon and his entourage (devils, the “Wild Men of the Woods” and the “Men in White”). The crowd helps St George by pulling ribbons off the dragon's tail as it whips through the air just above their heads, and inevitably, George and crew emerge victorious.

cherubs, by the north aisle, is the “golden carriage” used to transport the reliquary of Ste Waudru around town on Trinity Sunday (see box opposite).

Eating and drinking

Until fairly recently, Mons' **café, bar and restaurant scene** was really rather humdrum, but things are on the up with several good places appearing on and around Marché aux Herbes and rue de la Coupe to complement the more obvious spots on the Grand-Place.

Restaurants

Boule de Bleu rue de la Coupe 46 ☎065 84 58 19. Organic soups, salads and filled *focaccia* dominate the menu alongside a wide selection of teas and organic wines and beers. The interior is rustic and inviting, and there's a covered courtyard in the back. Especially popular are the coffee desserts served in glasses with ice cream and plenty of cream. Tues–Thurs 11am–3pm, Fri 11am–11pm, Sat 11am–6pm.

La Madeleine rue de la Halle 42 ☎065 35 13 70. Seafood restaurant where the house speciality is a plate of mixed shellfish and fish. The painted tiles on the walls are fishy too, and there's a good wine cellar. Main courses start at a very reasonable €20. Open daily for lunch and dinner except Sat lunchtime.



Sel et Thés rue de Houdain 6 ☎065 33 93 33. A fresh and inviting café across from the polytechnic, serving salads and cakes at lunchtime and more refined cuisine in the evening. The menu is small and seasonal and presentation matches the flairs and flourishes of the decor. Starters

around €10, main dishes €18. Open Tues–Thurs noon–6pm, Fri–Sat noon–11pm.

La Table du Boucher rue de Havré 49 ☎065 31 68 38. The best steaks in town at this clean and white, neat and trim restaurant. Starters €9–18, mains €12–25. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6.30–11pm.

Bars and cafés

Le Baroc Café rue des Fripiers 32 ☎0494 218 781. Tasty soups, salads and much more in a relaxing café above a shop of the same name. Open daily with shop and evenings with advance reservation.

Chinchin rue des Clercs 15. Cellar-bar that pulls in a youthful crew, who knock back shot glasses of the sweet, citrus-based house cocktail at an alarming speed.

L'Excelsior Grand-Place 29. There is no shortage of bars on the main square, but the leather benches and wooden panelling of this one give it a warm and welcoming feel. It hosts regular jazz concerts – details on ☎www.exceljazz.be.

Southwest of Mons: the Borinage

The region immediately to the southwest of Mons is known as the **Borinage**, a poor, densely populated working-class area that in the latter half of the nineteenth century was one of Belgium's three main coalfields, an ugly jigsaw of slag heaps and mining villages. The mining is finished, but the cramped terraced housing remains, a post-industrial sprawl that extends toward the French frontier. Gallantly making the most of this scarred landscape is the Fédération de la Chaîne des Terrils (Federation of the Chain of Spoil Heaps; ☎071 76 11 38, ☎www.terrils.be), which has helped pattern the region's slag heaps with hiking and cycling trails. The federation sells maps and guides, and you can rent a bike in Mons from *Pro Vélo*, rue de la Poterie 17 (☎065 84 95 81, ☎www.provelo.org).

The Vincent van Gogh house

In 1878, after a period in a Protestant school in Brussels, **Vincent van Gogh** was sent to the Borinage as a missionary, living in acute poverty and helping the villagers in their fight for social justice – behaviour which so appalled the church authorities that he was forced to leave. He came back the following year and lived in **Cuesmes**, on the southern outskirts of Mons, until his return to the Netherlands in 1881. It was in the Borinage that van

Gogh first started drawing seriously, taking his inspiration from the hard life of the miners – “I dearly love this sad countryside of the Borinage and it will always live with me” – but although the connection was instrumental in the development of the painter’s career, there’s actually very little to recall his time here. Even the tidily restored, two-storey brick **house**, at rue du Pavillon 3 (Tues–Sat 10.30am–noon & 1.30–6pm, Sun 10.30am–noon & 2–6pm; ☎065 35 56 11; €2.50), where van Gogh lodged, has merely a couple of period rooms and no original artwork. If you’re determined to make a thankless pilgrimage, take **bus #20** from outside Mons train station (every 30min; 10min) and ask the driver to put you off – the bus stop is 200m from the house.

Grand-Hornu

Between 1810 and 1830, in the village of **HORNU**, the French industrialist **Henri De Gorge** set about building the large complex of offices, stables, workshops, foundries and furnaces that comprises **Grand-Hornu** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €6, including MAC’s; audioguide €2 extra; 🌐www.grand-hornu.be). De Gorge owned several collieries in the area, so the complex made economic sense, but he went much further, choosing to build in an elegant version of Neoclassical style and constructing more-than-adequate workers’ houses just outside. This progressiveness did not necessarily win the affection of the workers – in 1830 the miners came within an inch of lynching him during an industrial dispute over wages – but De Gorge’s mines, as well as Grand-Hornu, remained in operation until 1954. Thereafter, the complex fell into disrepair, but, revived in the 1990s, it offers an intriguing insight into the region’s industrial history. Furthermore, the old office building now holds the **Musée des Arts Contemporain** (MAC’s; same times; 🌐www.mac-s.be), which has already established a regional reputation for the quality of its temporary exhibitions of contemporary art.

To get to Grand-Hornu, take **bus #7** or **#9** from Mons train station (every 15min) and alight at place Verte, from where it’s a five-minute walk.

Northwest of Mons: Beloeil

Roughly halfway between Mons and Tournai, the château of **BELOEIL** (April & mid-May Sat & Sun 1–6pm; mid-May–Oct daily 11am–6pm; €5; ☎069 68 94 26) broods over the village that bears its name with its long brick and stone facades redolent of the enormous wealth and power of the Ligne family, regional bigwigs since the fourteenth century. This aristocratic clan began by strengthening the medieval fortress built here by their predecessors, subsequently turning it into a commodious moated castle that was later remodelled and refined on several occasions. The wings of the present structure date from the late seventeenth century, while the main body, though broadly compatible, was in fact rebuilt after a fire in 1900. Without question a stately building, it has a gloomy, rather despondent air – and the interior, though lavish enough, oozing with tapestries, paintings and furniture, is simply the collected indulgences – and endless portraits – of various generations of Lignes. Despite all this grandeur, only one member of the family cuts much historical ice. This is **Charles Joseph** (1735–1814), a diplomat, author and field marshal in the Austrian army, whose pithy comments were much admired by his fellow aristocrats: most famously, he suggested that the Congress of Vienna of 1814 “danse mais ne marche pas”. Several of Beloeil’s rooms contain paintings of Charles’ life and times and there’s also a small

selection of his personal effects, including the malachite clock given to him by the Tsar of Russia. Otherwise, the best parts are the **library**, which contains twenty thousand volumes, many ancient and beautifully bound, and the eighteenth-century formal **gardens**, the largest in the country, whose lakes and flower beds stretch away from the house to a symmetrical design by Parisian architect and decorator Jean-Michel Chevotet.

To reach Beloeil by **public transport**, take the train from Mons or Tournai to **Blaton** (Mon–Fri every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min) and then take the bus #81A from there; check bus times and routings at Tournai or Mons tourist office before you set out.

North of Mons: Château d'Attre and Ath

Completed in 1752, the elegant, Neoclassical **Château d'Attre** (April–June & Sept–Oct Sun 2–6pm; July & Aug Sat & Sun 1–6pm; park and castle €4.50; park only €3.50; ☎068 45 44 60), just to the northeast of Beloeil, was built on the site of a distinctly less comfortable medieval fortress on the orders of the count of Gomegnies, chamberlain to the emperor Joseph II. It soon became a favourite haunt of the ruling Habsburg elite – especially the archduchess Marie-Christine of Austria, the governor of the Southern Netherlands. The original, carefully selected furnishings and decoration have survived pretty much intact, providing an insight into the tastes of the time – from the sphinxes framing the doorway and the silk wrappings of the Chinese room through to the extravagant parquet floors, the ornate moulded plasterwork and the archducal room hung with the first handpainted wallpaper ever to be imported into the country, in about 1760. There are also first-rate silver, ivory and porcelain pieces, as well as paintings by Frans Snyders, a friend of Rubens, and the Frenchman Jean-Antoine Watteau, whose romantic, idealized canvases epitomized early eighteenth-century aristocratic predilections. Neither is the castle simply a display case: it's well cared for and has a lived-in, human feel, in part created by the arrangements of freshly picked flowers chosen to enhance the character of each room. The surrounding **park** straddles the River Dendre and holds several curiosities, notably a 24-metre-high artificial rock with subterranean corridors and a chalet-cum-hunting lodge on top – all to tickle the fancy of the archduchess. The ruins of a tenth-century tower, also in the park, must have pleased her risqué sensibilities too; it was reputed to have been the hideaway of a local villain, a certain Vignon who, disguised as a monk, robbed and ravished passing travellers.

From the nearest train station, **Mévergnies-Attre**, on the Mons–Ath line, it's just over 1km to the château – just follow the road downhill from beside the station – but note that trains don't stop here at the weekend, which is precisely when the château is open; the nearest alternative is **Brugelette train station**, 3km or so east of the château, again on the Mons–Ath line (Mon–Fri hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr). The journey time from Mons to Brugelette is twenty minutes, ten from Ath.

ATH, just along the rail line from Attre, is a run-of-the-mill industrial town whose main claim to fame is its festival, the **Ducasse**, held on the fourth weekend in August and featuring the "Parade of the Giants", in which massive models, representing both folkloric and biblical figures, waggle their way round the town. If you're in the area around this time, don't miss it; otherwise, you'll probably want to change trains pretty promptly – both Tournai and Brussels are but a short ride away.

East of Mons: Binche

Halfway between Mons and Charleroi, **BINCHE** is a sleepy little town at the southern end of Hainaut's most decayed industrial region that comes to life in February with one of the best, and most renowned, of the country's **carnivals**. The rest of the year, the town is just about worth a visit for a couple of sights, including the **Grand-Place**, a spacious square edged by the onion-domed **Hôtel de Ville**, built in 1555 by Jacques du Broeucq to replace a version destroyed by the French the previous year. At the far end of the Grand-Place stands a statue of a Gille – one of the figures that dance through the city streets during carnival – sandwiched between the big but undistinguished **Collégiale St-Ursmer** and the modern **Musée International du Carnaval et du Masque** (Jan–Oct: Tues–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10.30am–5pm; €6; www.museedumasque.be), which claims to have the largest assortment of carnival artefacts in the world. Whether or not this is an exaggeration, its collection of masks and fancy dress from carnivals throughout Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America is certainly impressive, and it's complemented by an audiovisual presentation on the Binche carnival and temporary exhibitions on the same theme.

Behind the Gille – and in between the church and the museum – a small **park** marks the site of the town's medieval citadel and contains what little remains of the former palace of Mary of Hungary. The park is buttressed by the original **ramparts**, which date from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and curve impressively around most of the town centre, complete with 27 towers.

Practicalities

To get to Binche from Mons, take the hourly Charleroi **train** and change at La Louvière-Sud – allow forty to fifty minutes for the whole journey. Binche **tourist office** is located in the Hôtel de Ville on the Grand-Place (Tues–Fri 10am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm, Sat 10–6pm; May–Sept also Mon 10am–12.30pm; ☎064 33 67 27, www.binche.be), a ten-minute walk from the train station: take rue Gilles Binchois from the square in front of the station building and keep straight ahead until you reach the end of rue de la Gaieté, where you turn left.

Hotel **accommodation** is limited to the two-star *Hotel des Remparts*, rue St-Paul 28 (☎064 73 02 70, hoteldesremparts@skynet.be; 📍), a cosy little

Carnival in Binche

Carnival has been celebrated in Binche since the fourteenth century. The festivities last for several weeks, getting started in earnest on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, when thousands turn out in costume. During the main events on **Shrove Tuesday** itself, the traditional **Gilles** – males born and raised in Binche – appear in clogs and embroidered costumes from dawn onwards. In the morning they wear "green-eyed" masks, dancing in the Grand-Place carrying bunches of sticks to ward off bad spirits. In the afternoon they don their plumes – a mammoth piece of headgear made of ostrich feathers – and throw oranges to the crowd as they pass through town in procession.

The rituals of the carnival date back to pagan times, but the Gilles were probably inspired by the fancy dress worn by Mary of Hungary's court at a banquet held in honour of Charles V in 1549; Peru had recently been added to the Habsburg Empire, and the courtiers celebrated the conquest by dressing up in (their version of) Inca gear.

place in a revamped 1880s house with just six rooms, and a garden. It's situated about five minutes' walk from the church/park end of the Grand-Place. For **food**, the unfussy, family-run *Restaurant Industrie*, tucked away in a corner of the Grand-Place near the tourist office, serves hearty Walloon dishes at very reasonable prices – steak and chips for around €15. The most amenable **bar** in town is the *Cote de Chez Boule*, just off the Grand-Place at rue St-Paul 13, and complete with eye-catching Art Nouveau flourishes. The favourite local **brew** is *La Binchoise*.

Northeast of Mons: Soignies and around

About 15km northeast of Mons and on the Mons–Brussels train line, **SOIGNIES** is easy to reach, though there's nothing much to bring you here apart from the town's sterling Romanesque church, the **Collégiale St-Vincent** (daily 8am–5pm; free), bang in the centre on Grand-Place, a ten-minute walk from the train station via rue de la Station. The church is dedicated to one St Vincent Madelgar, a seventh-century noble who was both the husband of Ste Waudru of Mons and the founder of an abbey here in 650. Work began on the church in 965 and continued over the ensuing three centuries, the result being a squat and severe edifice with two heavy towers that still dominates the town centre today. Inside, the church's pastel-painted, twelfth-century **nave**, with its chunky Lombardic arches and plain arcades, is similar to that of Tournai, while the **transepts** are eleventh-century, their present vaulting added six centuries later. The oldest section is the huge **choir**, dating from 960 and containing one of the church's most outstanding features, a set of Renaissance choir stalls from 1576. Look out also for the finely crafted fifteenth-century terracotta entombment on the south side of the choir, and the fourteenth-century polychrome Virgin beneath the rood screen.

Around Soignies: Ronquières

To the east of Soignies lies one of the quietest corners of Hainaut, a pocket-sized district where drowsy little villages and *antique*, whitewashed farmhouses dot a bumpy landscape patterned by a maze of narrow country lanes. If you're travelling by car – and especially if you're heading for Nivelles (see p.330) – the district makes for a pleasant detour, but it's ill served by public transport.

The most obvious starting point is **RONQUIÈRES**, just off the N6 about 15km east of Soignies. Here, on the edge of the village – just follow the signs – is a massive **transporter lock** that's part of the Charleroi–Brussels canal. When it was completed in 1968, this gargantuan contraption cut the journey time between Charleroi and Brussels by around seven hours, a saving of around 25 percent. The lock consists of two huge water tanks, each 91m long, and a ramp, which together shift barges up or down 70m over a distance of 1500m. The main **tower** houses the winch room, runs a video explaining how the whole thing works and, best of all, gives a bird's-eye view of proceedings (April–Oct daily 10am–7pm; ☎067 64 66 80; €7). There are also hour-long boat trips through the lock (May–Aug Tues & Thurs–Sun 4 daily; €3.50, combined ticket with tower €8.50), though the tower should be quite sufficient for all but the most enthusiastic.

Ecaussinnes Lalaing

South of here, it's just 5km to the twin villages of **Ecaussinnes** – industrial d'Enghien to the west and prettier **ECAUSSINNES-LALAING** to the east – though be warned that the signposted route, along a baffling series of lanes, is

easy to lose and hard to rediscover; then again the scenery is delightful. There's just one specific sight in Ecaussinnes-Lalaing: its frumpy **castle** (April–June, Sept & Oct Sat & Sun 10am–noon & 2–6pm; July & Aug daily except Fri 10am–noon & 2–6pm; €5), an imposing towered and turreted edifice stuck on a rocky knoll. The earliest parts of the structure date from the twelfth century, though most of it is the result of much later modifications. Inside, the big and sparsely furnished rooms are hardly essential viewing, but highlights include two fine early sixteenth-century chimneypieces in the hall and armoury, an extremely well-preserved fifteenth-century kitchen and small but high-quality examples of glassware and Tournai porcelain. Outside, the castle's peacocks put on a feathery show.

Into Brabant: Nivelles and the Abbaye de Villers

Travel any distance north or east of Soignies and you cross the border into **Brabant**, whose southern French-speaking districts – known as **Brabant Wallon** – form a band of countryside that rolls up to and around Waterloo (see p.139), which is now pretty much a suburb of Brussels. **Nivelles** is the obvious distraction en route, an amiable, workaday town worth a visit for its interesting church as well as its proximity to the beguiling ruins of the Cistercian **abbey** at Villers-la-Ville, a short car ride away (train travellers have to make the trip via Charleroi).

Nivelles

NIVELLES grew up around its abbey, which was founded in the seventh century and became one of the most powerful religious houses in Brabant until its suppression by the French Revolutionary Army in 1798. Nowadays, the abbey is recalled by the town's one and only significant sight, the **Collégiale Ste-Gertrude** (daily 9am–5pm; free), a sprawling edifice erected as the abbey church in the tenth century and distinguished by a huge and strikingly handsome chancel. The church was founded by a Frankish queen, Ita, but is named after her daughter, whom she appointed as the first abbess. Little is known of Gertrude, though she certainly imported Irish priests to convert the locals, but her cult was very popular on account of her supposed gentleness – her symbol is a pastoral staff with a mouse running along it. The church has fared badly over the centuries, suffering fire damage on no less than nineteen occasions, most recently during World War II, but it's in better shape now than it has been for years following a long-winded restoration. The design is a rare example of an abbey church in the **Ottonian** style, the forerunner of Romanesque; the style was created when Byzantine, early Christian and Carolingian influences were brought together during the reign of the tenth-century Holy Roman Emperor Otto the Great, and his successors.

In terms of the Collégiale Ste-Gertrude, Ottonian precepts are reflected by the presence of a transept and a chancel at each end of the nave. The west chancel represents imperial authority, the east papal – an architectural illustration of the tension between the pope and the emperor that defined much of Otto's reign. The **interior** is extremely simple, its long and lofty nave equipped with a flat concrete roof painted in imitation of the wooden original. Between the pillars of the nave is a flashy oak and marble **pulpit** by the eighteenth-century

Belgian artist Laurent Delvaux, while the heavily restored, fifteenth-century **wooden wagon**, in the west chancel to the left of the entrance, was used to carry the shrine of Ste Gertrude in procession through the fields once a year. Unfortunately, the original thirteenth-century shrine was destroyed in 1940, but a modern replacement has been made and the traditional autumn procession has recently been revived.

The **guided tours** of the church are worth considering as they explore parts that are otherwise out of bounds. Although usually in French, they can be given in English if you book in advance (Mon–Fri at 2pm, Sat & Sun 2pm & 3.30pm; 1hr 30min; €5; reservations on ☎ 067 84 08 64). They begin by heading upstairs to the large Salle Impériale over the west choir. The function of this room is unknown, but today it's used to house a few ecclesiastical bits and pieces, including a copy of Ste Gertrude's shrine alongside what remains of the original. The tour continues to the large Romanesque crypt, where the foundations of a Merovingian chapel and church (seventh-century) and three Carolingian churches (ninth- and tenth-century) have been discovered, as well as the tombs of Ste Gertrude and some of her relations.

Practicalities

It's a ten-minute walk west down from Nivelles' **train station** to the L-shaped Grand-Place – and the Collégiale Ste-Gertrude – along rue de Namur. The **tourist office** is just south of the Grand-Place at rue des Saintes 48 (April–Sept daily 8.30am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm; ☎ 067 84 08 64, www.tourisme-nivelles.be).

With Brussels so near (30min by train), there's no real reason to hang around after you've visited the church, but the medley of **cafés** edging the Grand-Place are fine for a coffee and a snack. Alternatively, if you're after something more substantial, head for the *Restaurant Le 1er Avril*, rue Ste-Anne 5 (closed Tues & Sat lunch), where they serve quality French cuisine at affordable prices: a set three-course dinner costs in the region of €28, main courses €16; rue Ste-Anne runs north from the Grand-Place on the railway-station side of the square, to the right of the church.

The Abbaye de Villers

The ruined Cistercian **Abbaye de Villers** (April–Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–March daily except Tues 10am–5pm; €5; www.villers.be), nestling in a lovely wooded dell on the edge of **VILLERS-LA-VILLE**, just off the N93 some 16km east of Nivelles – and 30km south of Brussels – is altogether one of the most haunting and evocative sights in the whole of Belgium. The first monastic community settled here in 1146, consisting of just one abbot and twelve monks. Subsequently the abbey became a wealthy local landowner, managing a domain of several thousand acres, with numbers that rose to about a hundred monks and three hundred lay brothers. A healthy annual income funded the construction of an extensive monastic complex, most of which was erected in the thirteenth century, though the less austere structures, such as the Abbot's Palace, went up in a second spurt of activity some four hundred years later. In 1794 French revolutionaries ransacked the monastery, and later a railway was ploughed through the grounds, but more than enough survives – albeit in various states of decay – to pick out Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance features and to make some kind of mental reconstruction of abbey life possible.

From the entrance, a path crosses the courtyard in front of the Abbot's Palace to reach the **warming room** (*chauffoir*), the only place in the monastery where



△ The Abbaye de Villers

a fire would have been kept going all winter, and which still has its original chimney. The fire provided a little heat to the adjacent rooms: on one side the monks' **workroom** (*salle des moines*), used for reading and studying; on the other the large Romanesque-Gothic **refectory** (*réfectoire*), lit by ribbed twin windows topped with chunky rose windows. Next door is the **kitchen** (*cuisine*), which contains a few remnants of the drainage system, which once piped waste to the river, and of a central hearth, whose chimney helped air the room. Just behind this lies the **pantry** (*salle des convers*), where a segment of the original vaulting has survived, supported by a single column, and beyond, on the north-western edge of the complex, is the **brewery** (*brasserie*), one of the biggest and oldest buildings in the abbey.

The most spectacular building, however, is the **church** (*église*), which fills out the north corner of the complex. With pure lines and elegant proportions, it displays the change from Romanesque to Gothic – the transept and choir are the first known examples of Brabantine Gothic. The building has the dimensions of a cathedral, 90m long and 40m wide, with a majestic nave whose roof was supported on strong cylindrical columns. An unusual feature is the series of bull's-eye windows which light the transepts. Of the original twelfth-century **cloister** (*cloître*) adjoining the church, a pair of twin windows is pretty much all that remains, flanked by a two-storey section of the old monks' quarters. Around the edge of the cloister are tombstones and the solitary sarcophagus of the crusader Gobert d'Aspremont.

Practicalities

There is no **public transport** direct from Nivelles to Villers-la-Ville, but you can still make the trip by **train**. Every half-hour (hourly at the weekend) a service links Nivelles with Charleroi, from where an hourly train goes to Villers-la-Ville; allow about an hour for the whole journey, twenty minutes more on

the weekend. To get here from Brussels, catch a Namur train and change at Ottignies – reckon on an hour to an hour and a half depending on connections. The abbey is 1600m from **Villers-la-Ville train station**, which consists of just two platforms. Near the platforms you'll spot a small, faded sign to Monticelli; follow the sign and you'll head up and over a little slope until, after about 100m, you reach a T-junction; turn right and follow the road round and ultimately you'll see the ruins ahead. The abbey sells both an in-depth English **guide to the ruins** and a booklet (in French) detailing local walks. It also has details of the theatrical productions that are sometimes staged here in the summer. There's no accommodation.

Charleroi

The industrial – and post-industrial – peripheries of **CHARLEROI** are hardly inviting and the motorway, which slices through the city, does the place no scenic favours. At the start of the nineteenth century, glassworks, coal mines and iron foundries made Charleroi the epicentre of one of Belgium's main industrial areas and although the city is now trying to re-invent itself, there is a long way to go. That said, it does have several outstanding Art Deco and Art Nouveau buildings and, with three comfortable hotels, is a convenient place to break your journey if you're travelling south to the Botte du Hainaut (see p.336) or east to Namur (see p.348), perhaps via the abbey at Floreffe (see p.355).

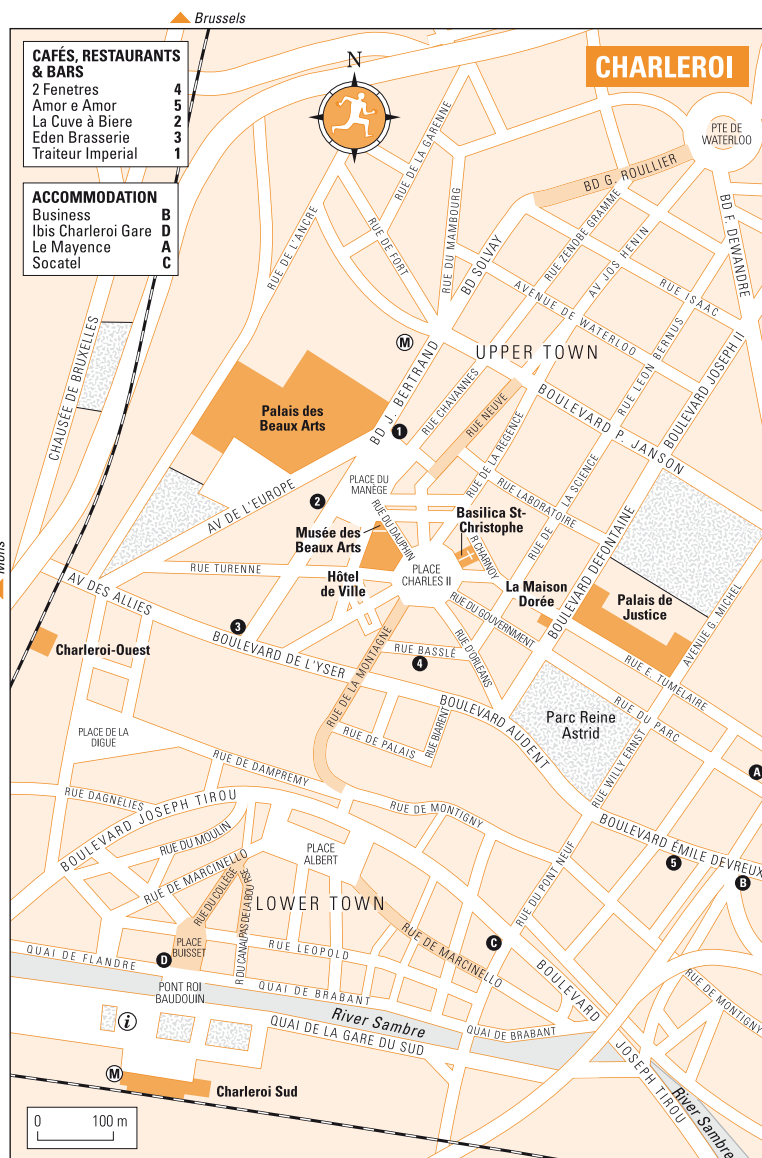
The City

Charleroi's large and untidy centre begins promisingly enough with the recently revamped area down by the main train station, where the canalized **River Sambre** has been cleaned up and spanned by the **Pont Roi Baudouin**, sporting two **statues** of workers by that champion of the working class, Constantin Meunier (see p.120). Before the railways, the Sambre was crucial to the industrialization of the region, its dark waters crowded with coal and iron-ore barges; it was into this very same river, just 3km east of town in Châtelet, that René Magritte's mother, Régina, threw herself when she committed suicide in 1912.

Beyond the bridge, turn right along the riverside **quai de Brabant** and first left up rue du Canal to reach the heart of the **lower town**, where the **Passage de la Bourse** is an attractive covered arcade, whose late nineteenth-century wooden-framed shops have survived in fine fettle. Push on north for **place Albert 1er** – home to a food market on the weekend – and struggle on across busy **boulevard Tirou** to get to cobbled **rue de la Montagne**, the main shopping street, which clammers up the steep ridge linking the lower to the upper town. On the way, look out for the *sgraffiti* decorating the facade of rue de la Montagne 38. It was the work of one of Belgium's most talented Art Nouveau painters and architects, **Paul Cauchie** (1875–1952), who specialized in *sgraffiti* – the decorative technique in which one colour is laid over another and the top coat then partly etched away to create the design.

Place Charles II and around

Rue de la Montagne emerges into the circular **place Charles II** at the heart of the **upper town** – and formerly the site of a substantial fortress, built on the top of the hill in the 1660s. Nothing remains of the fortress today, but the



area's gridiron street plan recalls its presence. Two fine Art Deco buildings flank place Charles II, the **Hôtel de Ville** of 1936 and the **Basilica de Saint Christophe**, whose pride and joy is a stunning 200 metre-square gold-leaf mosaic illustrating the book of Revelations, completed in 1957 to a design by local artist Jean Ransy.

The Hôtel de Ville is home to Charleroi's best art museum, the **Musée des Beaux Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; €1.50), though note that

the entrance is round the back at the far end of rue du Dauphin – and at the top of a handsome Art Deco staircase. The museum has a very good collection of Hainaut artists, supplemented by the work of other Belgian painters who lived or worked here. Highlights include the romantic Neoclassical paintings of Charleroi artist François Joseph Navez (1787–1869) as well as the contrasting naturalism of Constantin Meunier (see p.120), whose grim vision of industrial life was balanced by the heroism he saw in the working class. There are also a number of canvases by the talented Pierre Paulus (1881–1959), whose oeuvre takes up where Meunier's leaves off – and arguably with greater panache, as in *Jeunesse* and *La Berceuse*, in which a mother soothes her child. There are also six paintings by one-time Charleroi resident **René Magritte** (see p.102), most notably the whimsical *La Liberté de l'Esprit*, and an indifferent *Annunciation* by the Surrealist Paul Delvaux (1897–1994). Finally, a metal staircase leads up to the attic, where there's a display on the life and times of one **Jules Destrée** (1863–1936), a local poet, lawyer and socialist politician who campaigned hard for improvements in working conditions in Wallonia during the early years of the twentieth century.

Outside the museum is another large square, busy, bustling **place du Manège**, which is overlooked by the striking Art Deco lines of the **Palais des Beaux Arts**. From here, doubling back through place Charles II, it's a short walk east to the assorted greenery of the **Parc Reine Astrid** and another short stroll again to rue Tumelaire, where **La Maison Dorée**, at number 15, is a listed Art Deco building with a stunning facade, built in 1899 for the industrialist Adolphe Chauster.

Musée de la Photographie

Charleroi's other good museum is the inventive **Musée de la Photographie** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €4; @www.museephoto.be), housed in the imaginatively renovated neo-Gothic Carmelite monastery of Mont-sur-Marchienne. Unfortunately, it's a good 5km southwest from the centre, at av Paul Pastur 11, though it's reachable from Charleroi-Sud train station on buses #70, #71 and #170; ask the driver to let you off. The museum holds a thought-provoking collection of nearly sixty thousand creative and documentary-style photographs, which are displayed in rotation. There's also a well-organized and reasonably interesting permanent exhibition, which takes you through the history of photography to the present day. Temporary exhibitions are held regularly too.

Practicalities

Charleroi has two **train stations**, Charleroi-Sud by the River Sambre, where you're likely to arrive, and less important Charleroi-Ouest, a short walk west of the upper town. The city's **airport** – rather cheekily called Brussels-Charleroi – is 6km north of town; Ryanair flies here from the UK and Ireland (see p.27). The city's main **tourist office** is at place Charles II 20 (daily 9am–6pm; ☎071 86 14 14, @www.charleroi.be) and there is also a small kiosk in front of Charleroi-Sud station (Mon–Fri 9.30am–5pm; ☎071 86 61 52). Both hand out free city maps and leaflets. Charleroi-Sud station also acts as the hub for local **buses**, most usefully a shuttle service to the upper town's place du Manège – a route that is followed by the town's pocket-sized **métro**.

The most comfortable **hotel** in town is the three-star *Business*, which occupies a straightforward modern block to the east of the lower town at bd Pierre

Mayence 1A (☎071 30 24 24, 🌐www.businesshotel.be; 📍); it has around fifty pleasantly appointed modern rooms and those on the upper floors have views over town. Very similar is the four-star *Socatel*, bd Tirou 96 (☎071 31 98 11, 🌐www.hotelsocatel.be; 📍). A third choice is the three-star *Ibis Charleroi Gare*, in an older, thoroughly restored block overlooking the river and across from Charleroi-Sud station at quai de Flandre 12 (☎071 20 60 60, 🌐www.ibishotel.com; 📍). The rooms here are decorated in modern, chain style – hardly fuel for the imagination but perfectly adequate, especially for a quick break. Rather more distinctive and personal is the *Apart-hotel La Mayence*, in a newly renovated town house at rue du Parc 53 (☎071 20 10 00; 📍).

Charleroi has scores of **cafés** and **restaurants**, with several of the best clustered on and around place Charles II. One great choice is 🍷 *2 Fenêtres*, an authentic Italian restaurant in a converted garage at rue Basslé 27 (closed Sun & Mon; ☎071 63 43 03); it has an excellent selection of wine and the decor – with its original sculptures – is good fun too. Another good Italian place is *Traiteur Imperial*, place du Manège 20, a pleasantly old-fashioned restaurant, panelled and beamed and offering all the classics. For a lighter bite at lunchtime or before the theatre, try the bruschetta and tapas at *Amor e Amor*, bd Devreux 18, whilst beer lovers should target *La Cuve à Bière*, bd Jacques Bertrand 68, with enough variety to test the toughest of livers.

For **entertainment**, it's worth checking out what's happening at the Palais des Beaux Arts, on place du Manège. This and *Eden Brasserie*, the bar-cum-cultural centre just down the road at bd Jacques Bertrand 1, are Charleroi's – and the region's – cultural and entertainment centres, attracting some of the bigger names in opera, dance and rock music (information and reservations for both ☎071 31 12 12, 🌐www.charleroi-culture.be).

The Botte de Hainaut

A tongue of land jutting south into France, the **Botte de Hainaut** (Boot of Hainaut) is a natural extension of the Ardennes range further east, if a little flatter and less wooded. It's mostly visited for its gentle scenery and country towns, among which **Walcourt** and **Chimay** are the most appealing – the former graced by a handsome basilica, the latter by a charming château and perhaps the prettiest main square in the whole of Wallonia. Very much the runner-up is **Couvin**, a modest little town near to a couple of visitable cave systems as well as the tiny villages of the **River Viroin** valley, of which **Vierves-sur-Viroin** is the most appealing.

The Boot's one and only **train** line runs south from Charleroi to Walcourt, Philippeville and ultimately Couvin; local **buses** fill in most of the gaps – with a good service between Charleroi, Couvin and Chimay – but to tour beyond the towns you'll need a car. The other complication is that, apart from campsites, **accommodation** is extremely thin on the ground. Chimay has a couple of places and Walcourt and Vierves-sur-Viroin one apiece, so consequently advance reservations are advised – either direct or via the main regional websites 🌐www.botteduhainaut.com (French and Dutch only) and the more comprehensive 🌐www.paysdesvallees.be.

Walcourt

The straggling hillside settlement of **WALCOURT**, about 20km – and half an hour by train – from Charleroi, is a pleasant old town whose pride and joy is

its medieval, artichoke-domed **Basilique St-Materne** (daily 9am–5pm; free). Dominating the town from its hilltop location at the top of the Grand-Place, it's imperious from the outside, while its interior is distinguished by its Gothic rood screen, a marvellous piece of work adorned by a flurry of Renaissance decoration. It was presented to the church by the emperor Charles V on the occasion of a pilgrimage he made to the **Virgin of Walcourt**, a silver-plated wooden statue that now stands in the north transept. An object of considerable veneration even today, the statue is believed to have been crafted in the tenth century, making it one of the oldest such figures in Belgium. Equally fascinating are the late medieval **choir stalls**, whose misericords sport a folkloric fantasy of centaurs and griffins, rams locking horns and acrobats alongside Biblical scenes – Jonah and the Whale, David and Goliath and so on. Intricately carved, they are quite simply delightful; a booklet on sale at the back of the church (€3) gives the low-down to decipher them all. The **treasury** (€2.50) has, among its assorted monstrosities and reliquaries, a thirteenth-century reliquary cross in the style of Hugo d'Oignies (see p.351), a native of Walcourt.

That's it as far as sights are concerned, but the town has an easy-going, old-fashioned charm and you may well decide to hang around in one of the bars on the square – *Le Castel* has a popular local feel.

Practicalities

From Walcourt **train station**, it's a steep 1200-metre walk to the church – turn right outside the station building, hang a left down the short access road, turn right at the T-junction and then follow the road as it curves upwards. The **tourist office** is at the bottom of the wedge-shaped Grand-Place (Feb–June & Sept–Dec Mon–Fri 10am–noon & 1–5pm; July & Aug daily 10am–noon & 1–6pm; ☎071 61 25 26), just down from the church. There's only one recommendable **hotel**, the *Hôtellerie Dispa*, down a narrow side street near the station at rue du Jardinot 7 (☎071 61 14 23; closed late Feb & early March; Ⓢ). A tidy, well-cared-for place in a pretty old house with modern furnishings, the hotel also has the best **restaurant** in town, offering delicious seafood at commendably reasonable prices.

Philippeville and Mariembourg

From Walcourt, it's another short hop southeast by train to unexciting **PHILIPPEVILLE**, whose gridiron street plan reflects its origins as a fortress town. Built to the latest star-shaped design by Charles V in 1555, the fortress has all but disappeared – except for a couple of subterranean artillery galleries, the *souterrains*. Charles didn't actually intend to build the fort at all, but irritatingly the French had captured the emperor's neighbouring stronghold of **MARIEMBOURG**, just 12km to the south, and Charles was obliged to respond. Mariembourg is about as interesting as Philippeville – and here the fortress has sunk without trace. However, the town is the terminus of the **Chemin de fer à vapeur des Trois Vallées**, a refurbished steam engine that puffs its way east across the surrounding countryside to Treignes, near the French border (April–Oct 2–7 weekly; call ☎060 31 24 40 for times & tickets; €9). The steam train's terminus is 800m south from Mariembourg train station, which is on the Charleroi-Sud to Couvin line. Be warned that matters are confused by an uninspiring *autorail*, which plies the same route and is run by the same company. One other possibility is to combine a one-way train trip with a **bike ride**. Bikes can be rented in Mariembourg from P. Caussin, at rue de la Gare 57 (☎060 31 11 36), and you can take off along RAVeL 2, the

disused railway line turned cycle path, which begins behind the train station, in the direction **Hermeton-sur-Meuse**. Turn off towards **Treignes** at **Matagne-la-Petite** and you can jump on the steam train for the trip back to Mariembourg – bikes travel for free.

The best **restaurant** hereabouts is Philippeville's *Les Armes de Philippeville*, place d'Armes 3 (closed Tues & Wed; ☎071 66 62 41), which is famed for its rabbit cooked in beer.

Couvin

COUVIN, just 5km south from Mariembourg, was one of the first settlements in Hainaut to be industrialized, its narrow streets choked by forges and smelting works as early as the eighteenth century. In the event, Couvin was soon marginalized by the big cities further north, but it has battled gainfully on as a pint-sized manufacturing centre. Tourism has also had an impact as the town lies at the heart of a popular holiday area, a quiet rural district whose forests and farmland are liberally sprinkled with country cottages and second homes. The prettiest scenery hereabouts is to be found east of Couvin along the **valley of the River Viroin** (see below), which extends to Treignes and beyond across the French frontier.

Long and slim, and bisected by the River Eau Noire, Couvin is short on specific sights, but it does possess a good-looking **old quarter**, set on top of a rocky hill high above the river and the boringly modern main square, **place du Général Piron**. There are also a couple of **cave** complexes: the **Cavernes de l'Abîme**, by the river to the south of the centre on rue de la Falaise (April–June & mid-Sept to Oct Sat & Sun 10am–noon & 1.30–6pm; July to mid-Sept daily same hours; €5.50; ☎www.abime.be), and the **Grottes de Neptune** (April–Sept daily 10am–noon & 1.30–6pm; Oct–March Sat & Sun 10.30am–4pm; €8; combined ticket for both €12), about 5km northeast of Couvin on the road between the hamlets of Petigny and Frasnes. Both complexes have been inhabited since prehistoric times, but, despite the sound and light shows, it's all really rather tame. There's no public transport from Couvin to the Grottes de Neptune.

Practicalities

From Couvin **bus** and **train station** it's a ten-minute walk south to the main square, along rue de la Gare and its continuation, Faubourg St-Germain. The **tourist office** is on the way to the Cavernes de l'Abîme, at rue de la Falaise 3 (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; ☎060 34 01 40, ☎www.couvin.be).

Couvin's prime **restaurant** is the *Brasserie des Fagnes* (Oct–March Mon–Fri 3–9pm, Sat & Sun 10am–9pm; April–June & Sept Tues–Sun 10am–9pm; July & Aug daily 10am–9pm; ☎060 31 15 70), on the main road to Mariembourg, though be warned you may have to share the place with tour-bus groups. The brasserie does delicious, crispy pizza-breads topped with cheeses and ham, and also brews its own **beer**, *Super des Fagnes* – no less than five hundred varieties of the same, from the usual brown, blond and cherry brews to daily specials, like a coriander and orange flavoured ale.

The valley of the River Viroin

East from Couvin along the N99, it's just 4km to **NISMES**, a pretty little hamlet whose old stone houses are neatly tucked in between the River Viroin and a cluster of wooded hills. Nothing much happens here, but you can spend

time pleasantly enough nosing round the ruins of a medieval castle, picnicking down by the river or hiking out into the surrounding countryside. One spot worth a visit – and not too far from the village – is the **Fondry des Chiens**, an impressive limestone rock formation. Maps and other information are available from the riverside **tourist office**, rue Vieille Église 2 (Mon–Fri 8.30am–4.30pm, Sat & Sun 9am–4.30pm; ☎060 31 16 35, 🌐www.viroinval.be). As for somewhere to stay, Nismes has a friendly **bed and breakfast**, 🏠 *La Calestienne*, occupying a substantial brick villa on the edge of the village at rue St-Roch 111 (☎060 31 32 00, 🌐www.lacalestienne.be; 📍; no cards). The English-speaking owner serves up a wholesome breakfast with home-made jam and local honey, will provide information on local walks and rents out mountain bikes. There are several **campsites** in the vicinity; one good one is the all-year *Camping Try des Baudets*, rue de la Champagne 1 (☎ & 📠 060 39 01 08, 📧campingtrydesbaudets@hotmail.com), around 5km to the east of Nismes in tiny **Olloy-sur-Viroin**.

Pushing on from Nismes, it's a further 7km east along the N99 to **VIERVES-SUR-VIROIN**, in handsome, hilly countryside near the border with France. This is the prettiest village in the valley, its narrow streets sloping up from the river flanked by crumbly stone houses. Presiding over the scene and the minuscule main square is an antique **watchtower**, which comes complete with a dinky onion dome, but it's the bucolic charm of the place that is its main appeal. There's one **hotel** here, *Le Petit Mesnil*, a briskly modern affair in the centre at rue de la Chapelle 7 (☎060 39 95 90, 🌐www.lepetitmesnil.be; 📍).

Brûly-de-Pesche

Heading south out of Couvin on the N5, it's a couple of kilometres to the five-kilometre-long turning that weaves its way up into the wooded hills bound for **BRÛLY-DE-PESCHE**. Now no more than a handful of log chalets and cabins scattered around an old stone church, Brûly was the site of Hitler's advance headquarters during the invasion of 1940. At the beginning of the war, both the French and the British were convinced that Hitler would attack through northern Belgium. They concluded that the wooded hills of the Ardennes – and the Botte de Hainaut – would be impassable to the Germans, or at least they would take so much time to cross that the Allies would have plenty of time to prepare their response. It was a disastrous miscalculation: the Germans rushed through the hills and smashed through the light French defences in just a few days and thereafter the fall of France was inevitable. On the edge of the village, the decrepit concrete bunker – the **Abri d'Hitler** (mid-April to June & Sept Tues–Sat 10.30am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat same hours; Oct Sat & Sun same hours; €4) – where Hitler reviewed progress has survived and is now one part of a larger museum, which occupies a couple of small timber buildings. In one is a very competent explanation of the 1940 campaign, in the other a display on the Resistance.

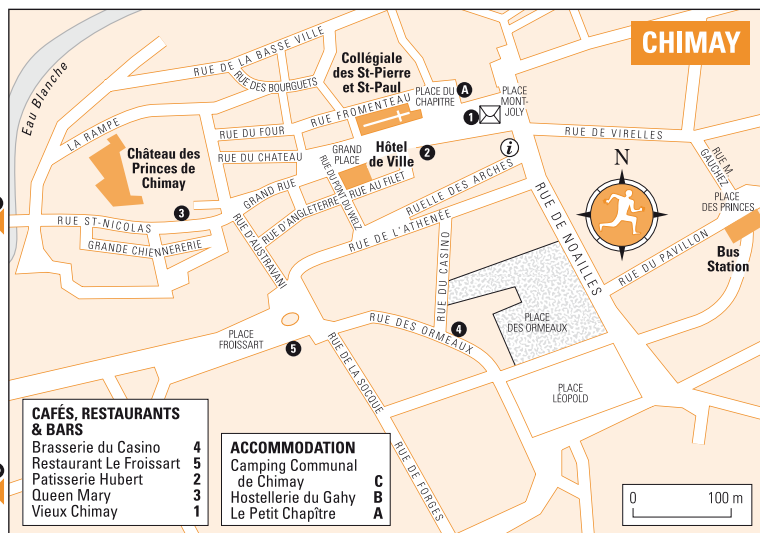
Hitler went straight from Brûly to Compiègne, in France, to accept the French surrender. He insisted that this would take place in the same clearing in the woods – and in the same railway carriage – where the Germans had capitulated in 1918. The war correspondent William Shirer observed proceedings, commenting that “Hitler's face was grave, solemn, yet brimming with revenge”. All the end of the war, Hitler had his engineers blow the carriage up.

Chimay

Best known for the beer brewed by local Trappists, the small and ancient town of **CHIMAY**, 14km west of Couvin, is a charming old place, governed for several centuries by the de Croy family, a clan of local bigwigs enlivened by a certain **Madame Tallien** (1773–1835), born Jeanne Cabarrus, the daughter of a Spanish banker. Her credentials were impeccably aristocratic until the French Revolution when, imprisoned and awaiting the guillotine, she wooed a revolutionary leader, Jean Tallien. He saved her, they got married, and she became an important figure in revolutionary circles, playing a leading role in the overthrow of Robespierre that earned her the soubriquet – “Notre-Dame de Thermidor”. Later, seeing which way the political wind was blowing, she divorced Tallien and hung about for another aristocrat – this time getting a de Croy, whom she married in 1805. Living out the rest of her life in the tranquil environment of Chimay, she died in 1835 and was interred here inside the **Collégiale des Sts Pierre et Paul** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–4.30pm, Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm; free), a mostly sixteenth-century limestone pile with a high and austere vaulted nave. The church is dotted with the graves of Madame Tallien’s adoptive family, most notably the splendid **mausoleum** of Charles de Croy, a recumbent alabaster figure carved in the 1520s, clad in armour and reposing in the choir. The church is bang in the middle of town and its walls crowd the slender **Grand-Place**, an eminently bourgeois and exceedingly pretty little square surrounding the dinky **Monument des Princes**, a water fountain erected in 1852 in honour of the de Croys.

The Château des Princes de Chimay

From the Grand-Place, an elegant sandstone arch leads through to the **Château des Princes de Chimay**, the old home of the de Croy family (April to early Sept daily guided tours by reservation at 10am, 11am, 3pm & 4pm; €7; ☎060 21 44 44, www.chateaudechimay.com). A considerably altered structure, it was originally built in the fifteenth century, but was reconstructed in the



seventeenth, then badly damaged by fire and partly rebuilt to earlier plans in the 1930s. Today the main body of the building is fronted by a long series of rectangular windows, edged by a squat turreted tower. Inside there are mainly old family portraits and a hotchpotch of period furniture, although the carefully restored, gaudy **theatre** (modelled on the Louis XV theatre at Fontainebleau) is worth a look, and there are good views over the river valley and encompassing woods from the château's gardens.

Chimay's beer-brewing Trappists

Chimay's other sights are to do with the locale's beer-brewing monks, the **Trappists** – or, to be precise, the monks of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance. They live in the **Abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont**, an architecturally dull complex dating from the 1850s located near the French border about 10km south of Chimay. The monastery itself is out-of-bounds, but you can wander the grounds and visit the church, though frankly this is not exactly riveting stuff. The Trappists no longer brew beer at the abbey – the modern brewery is some way away and is also closed to the public – but you can sample their beers and cheeses at *L'Auberge de Poteaupré*, a restaurant-brasserie in a converted school about 500m from the abbey on rue de Poteaupré (Easter to mid-Sept Tues–Sun 10am–10pm; mid-Sept to Easter Tues–Thurs 11am–5pm & Fri–Sun 11am–10pm; ☎060 21 14 33, 🌐www.chimay.com).

Practicalities

With regular connections from Charleroi and Couvin, Chimay's **bus station** sits on the edge of the town centre, a five-minute walk from the Grand-Place. The **tourist office** is a few paces east of the Grand-Place at rue de Noailles (July–Aug daily 8.30am–6pm; rest of year Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; ☎060 21 18 46, 🌐www.botteduhainaut.com). Apart from the usual gubbins, it issues a comprehensive town guide for free and sells a useful French-language booklet, *Promenades Pédestres Bois* (€7), detailing **local walks** in the woods and along the River Eau Blanche.

There are no hotels in Chimay, but *Le Petit Chapitre* is a delightful **B&B** comprising a handful of period rooms in attractive old premises, metres from the Grand-Place at place du Chapitre 5 (☎060 21 10 42 or 0477 76 70 60, ✉brim@skynet.be; ③). Alternatively, there's the almost equally enticing, six-room, three-star *Hostellerie du Gahy*, rue de Gahy 2 (☎060 51 10 93; ②), in an imaginatively converted farmhouse, about 12km west of Chimay in Momignies. Chimay also has a rudimentary **campsite**, the *Camping Communale de Chimay*, just west of the centre at allée des Princes 1 (April–Oct; ☎060 21 18 43).

Among several **cafés** and **restaurants**, one of the best is *Restaurant Le Froissart*, place Froissart 8 (☎060 21 26 19; closed Wed & Thurs), which serves up traditional French cuisine at reasonable prices – fish dishes weigh in at about €15, other main courses a little less. Another good choice is the *Brasserie du Casino*, place des Ormeaux 27 (☎060 21 49 80; closed Mon), where they serve *Escaveche*, a mix of eels, trout, onions, white wine and vinegar that is a speciality of the Botte. Another of the town's specialities is the *Bernadins de Chimay biscoit* made with almonds, honey and brown sugar, which can be sampled at the *Pâtisserie Hubert*, Grand-Place 32. The two best **bars** are the *Queen Mary*, rue St-Nicolas 22, a cosy and popular place with Chimay Triple on tap, and the rather more original *Vieux Chimay*, Grand-Place 22 (closed Tues), whose interior also houses a tobacconist's; the beer menu here clocks up over forty brews and there's an outside terrace.

Rance and Beaumont

Straggling along the main road 11km north of Chimay, **RANCE** is an uninviting town famous for its red marble quarries, which have spawned buildings worldwide, from Versailles to St Peter's in Rome. There is, however, nothing to stop for, and anyway it's only 12km further to **BEAUMONT**, marginally more interesting as an old if somewhat dilapidated town crouched on a hill close to the French border. An important regional stronghold from as early as the eleventh century, Beaumont's fortifications are still partly intact, most notably the **Tour Salamandre** (May, June & Sept daily 9am–5pm; July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; Oct Sun only 10am–5pm; €2.50), a thick-walled rectangular structure overlooking the river valley a brief, signposted walk away from the main square. Inside, there's a small museum of regional history, but this is scraping the tourist barrel and really you climb the 136 steps purely for the view. From Beaumont, it's 20km northeast to Charleroi (see p.333) and 30km northwest to Mons (see p.320)

Travel details

Trains

Charleroi-Sud to: Brussels (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 50min); Couvin (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 1hr); La Louvière-Sud (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Mariembourg (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 1hr); Mons (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 30min); Namur (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 40min); Nivelles (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Ottignies (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 40min); Villers-la-Ville (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 30min); Walcourt (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 30min).

La Louvière-Sud to: Binche (hourly; 15min); Charleroi (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Mons (hourly; 15min).

Mons to: Ath (hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 30min); Brugeslette (hourly, Sat & Sun every

2hr; 20min); Brussels (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 45min); Charleroi-Sud (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 30min); La Louvière-Sud (hourly; 15min); Mévergnies-Attre (Mon–Fri hourly; 25min); Soignies (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Tournai (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 40min).
Tournai to: Ath (hourly; 20min); Brussels (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 1hr); Mons (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 40min).

Buses

Charleroi to: Beaumont (hourly; 30min); Binche (hourly; 40min); Chimay (hourly; 1hr 10min).

Chimay to: Binche (hourly; 30min); Charleroi (hourly; 1hr 10min); Couvin (every 2hr; 30min).

Couvin to: Chimay (every 2hr; 30min); Namur (hourly; 1hr 15min); Nismes (hourly; 10min).

The Ardennes



- * Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies, Namur** Exquisitely crafted, jewel-encrusted metalwork from the thirteenth century is on show here. **See p.351**
- * Bouillon's Château** The best preserved medieval castle in the whole of the country. **See p.371**
- * Rochehaut** Delightful little place perched high above the River Semois, with some smashing places to stay. **See p.373**
- * La Roche-en-Ardenne** Picture-postcard Ardennes resort; an ideal spot for some walking, camping and canoeing. **See p.379**
- * The River Ourthe valley** Offers delightful walks through handsome countryside, or you can amble along the river by canoe or kayak. **See p.381**
- * Les Thermes de Spa** Pure relaxation in the mineral-rich waters of Spa – be sure to try the delightfully retro copper baths. **See p.392**
- * Stavelot's Carnival** One of Belgium's most flamboyant; watch out for the Blancs Moussis, with their white hoods and long red noses. **See p.396**
- * Hautes Fagnes** Windy moorland and forest, Belgium's highest terrain with genuinely wild walking. **See p.399**



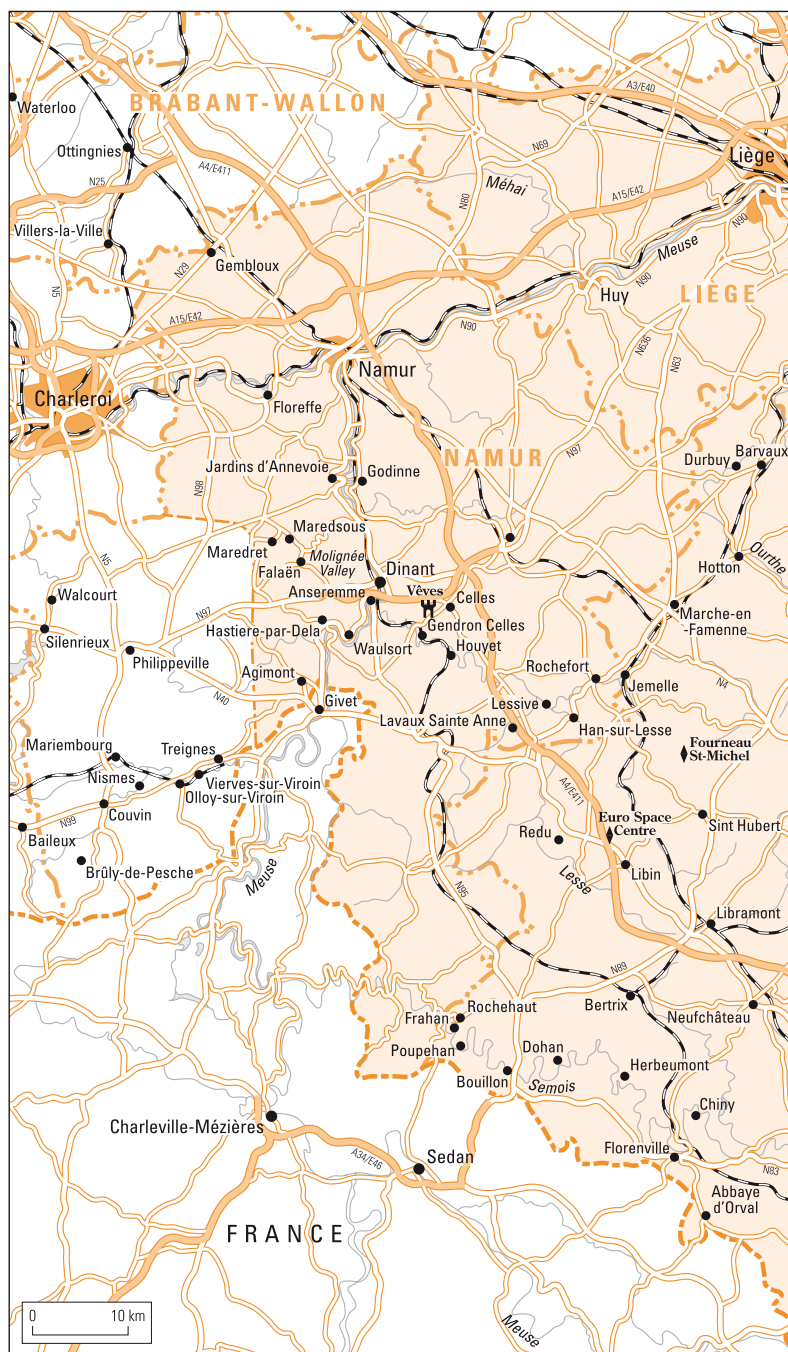
△ Durbuy, Ourthe Valley

The Ardennes

Belgium's southern reaches are a striking contrast to the crowded, industrial north, for it's here in the south that the cities give way to the rugged, wilderness landscapes of the **Ardennes**. Beginning in France, the Ardennes stretches east across Luxembourg and Belgium before continuing on into Germany, covering three Belgian provinces en route – Namur in the west, Luxembourg in the south and Liège in the east. The highest part, lying in the German-speaking east of the country, is the **Hautes Fagnes** (the High Fens), an expanse of windswept heathland that extends from Eupen to Malmédy. But this is not the Ardennes' most attractive or popular corner, which lies farther west, its limits roughly marked by Dinant, La Roche-en-Ardenne and Bouillon. This region is given character and variety by its **river valleys**: deep, wooded, winding canyons, at times sublimely and inspiringly beautiful, reaching up to high green peaks. The Ardennes' **cave systems** are also a major pull, especially those in the Meuse, Ourthe and Lesse valleys, carved out by underground rivers that over the centuries have cut through and dissolved the limestone of the hills, leaving stalagmites and stalactites in their wake.

The obvious gateway to the most scenic portion of the Ardennes is **Namur**, strategically sited at the junction of the Sambre and Meuse rivers, and well worth a visit in its own right. The town's pride and joy is its massive, mostly nineteenth-century citadel – once one of the mightiest fortresses in Europe – but it also musters a handful of decent museums, great restaurants and (for the Ardennes) a lively bar scene. From Namur you can follow the Meuse by train down to **Dinant**, a pleasant – and very popular – journey, before going on to explore the **Meuse Valley** south of Dinant by boat or taking a canoe up the narrower and wilder **River Lesse**. From Dinant, routes lead east into the heart of the Ardennes – to workaday **Han-sur-Lesse**, surrounded by undulating hills riddled with caves, to prettier **Rochefort**, and to **St-Hubert**, with its splendid Italianate basilica. The most charming of all the towns hereabouts, however, is **Bouillon**, a delightfully picturesque little place whose narrow streets trail alongside the River Semois beneath an ancient castle. Bouillon is situated close to the French frontier, on the southern periphery of the Belgian Ardennes and within easy striking distance of some of the region's most dramatic scenery, along the valley of the Semois. In terms of good looks, its closest rival is **La Roche-en-Ardenne** to the northeast, a rustic, hardy kind of town, pushed in tight against the River Ourthe beneath wooded hills, and renowned for its **smoked ham** and game.

If you're visiting the eastern Ardennes, the handiest starting point is big and gritty **Liège**, an industrial sprawl from where it's a short hop south to the historic





resort of **Spa** – the perfect spot to take the waters – and the picturesque town of **Stavelot**, with its marvellous carnival. You can use Spa or Stavelot as a base for hiking or canoeing into the surrounding countryside and to venture into the **Hautes Fagnes**, though the attractive little town of Malmédy is nearer.

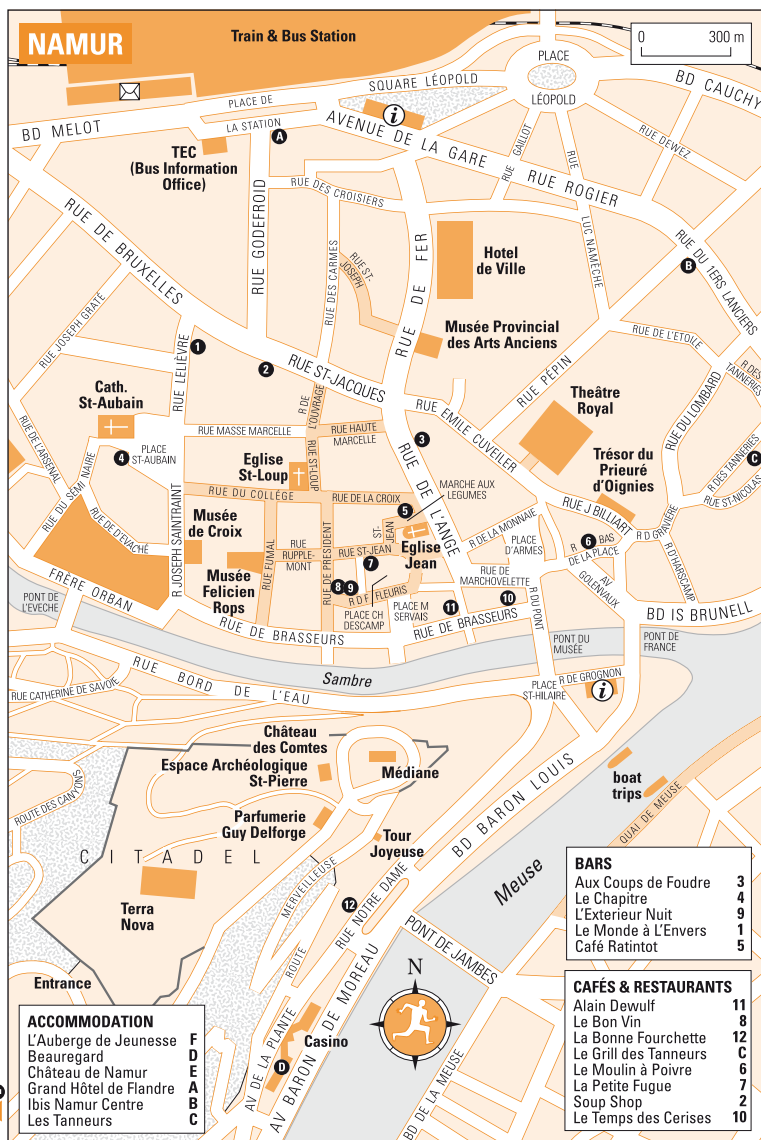
Getting around the Ardennes is difficult – or at least time-consuming – without your own transport. The region is crossed by three main rail lines, but by and large they miss the more appealing places and to get to them you'll be reliant on connecting buses, which, although the distance may be short, can involve a long wait and several changes. Information on bus services is available through the regional bus provider **TEC** (see p.400), and local tourist offices will usually have a good set of timetables at hand. **Accommodation** is not always entirely straightforward either. **Hotels** are fairly thin on the ground – most of the region's towns only have a handful – and rooms are often in short supply in high season (late July & Aug) and at carnival time (Feb). **Holiday cottages** and **B&Bs**, which are comparatively plentiful, are one way of getting round the problem – the region's tourist offices have all the local info – and **camping** is another, though here again many campsites are hard to reach without a car (or bike). Given all this, it's perhaps best to find a place you like and stay put, which gives you a chance to get stuck into the outdoor pursuits that attract so many visitors. Wherever you are, **walking** is the obvious pastime, rarely strenuous and often getting you out into some genuinely wild areas. **Canoes** can be rented at most river settlements, and **mountain bikes** are often available. Cross-country and – in some places – on-piste **skiing** are popular in winter too.

Namur and around

Just 60km southeast of Brussels, **NAMUR** is a logical first stop if you're heading into the Ardennes from the north or west, and is refreshingly clear of the industrial belts of Hainaut and Brabant. Many of Belgium's towns and cities have suffered at the hands of invading armies and the same is certainly true of Namur, so much so that from the sixteenth century up until 1978, when the Belgian army finally moved out, Namur remained the quintessential military town, its sole purpose being the control of the strategically important junction of the rivers Sambre and Meuse. Generations of military engineers have pondered how to make Namur's hilltop **citadel** impregnable – no one more so than Louis XIV's Vauban – and the substantial remains of these past efforts are now the town's main tourist attraction. Down below, the **town centre** crowds the north bank of the River Sambre, its cramped squares and streets lined by big old mansions in the French style and sprinkled with several fine old churches and a handful of decent museums. There are some top-flight **restaurants** in the centre too, but despite a substantial student presence, the **nightlife** is a little sedate, not that you'd guess if you visit during one of the town's main **festivals**: in particular, the four-day Namur en Mai (mid-May; 🌐 www.namurenmai.be) packs the streets with jugglers, stilt-walkers and all sorts of spectacles, and also showcases the talents of some internationally acclaimed performers.

Arrival and information

Namur's **train station** is on the northern edge of the town centre, beside place de la Station. Here you'll also find the bus station and, at place de la Station 25, La Maison du TEC, a central office providing lots of information about bus services across the whole of French-speaking Belgium (daily 9.30am–6pm;



☎ 081 25 35 55, 🌐 www.tec-namur-luxembourg.be). Two minutes' walk away from the train station – just to the east of place de la Station – is the main **tourist office**, on square Léopold (daily 9.30am–6pm; ☎ 081 24 64 49, 🌐 www.namurtourisme.be). It can help with accommodation, issue free town maps and brochures, give details of guided tours and provide information on what's on in the town and its environs.



△ Namur

From the train station, it takes about ten minutes to walk to the River Sambre via the **main street**, variously rue de Fer and rue de l'Ange. East of the foot of rue de l'Ange, the Pont de France spans the river to reach the tip of the "V" made by the confluence of the two rivers (the *grognon* or "pig's snout"). The **information chalet** on the *grognon* (April–Oct daily 9.30am–6pm; ☎081 24 64 48) offers almost the same services as the main tourist office and is also the starting point for most guided tours of the citadel (see pp.353–354).

Accommodation

Namur has relatively few hotels, and finding **accommodation** in high season can be a real pain if you haven't booked in advance. The cheapest **hotels** are close by the train station, but there are two much more appetizing (and expensive) places – one right in the town centre, the other a short walk to the south on the banks of the River Meuse. Alternatively, the tourist office has a stock of **B&Bs** (①), though these are mostly a good way from the town centre, as is Namur's **hostel**.

Hotels and hostel

Auberge de Jeunesse av Félicien Rops ☎081 22 36 88, @www.laj.be. In a big old house beside the Meuse, this well-equipped hostel has a kitchen, a

laundry, a café and Internet access. It's about 3km from the train station, south past the casino – or take bus #3 or #4. Has 100 beds in two- to twelve-bedded rooms. Dorm beds €15–17, doubles ①

Boat trips

From April to September, **boat cruises** regularly sally forth from the quai de Meuse and the *grognon* to make the most of Namur's location at the confluence of the Meuse and Sambre rivers. One of the most popular is the three-and-a-half-hour excursion to Dinant with **La Compagnie des Bateaux** (mid-July to late Aug Sun only; €14 one-way, €20 return; ☎082 22 23 15, @www.bateaux-meuse.be).

Beauregard av Baron de Moreau 1 ☎081 23 00 28, www.benotel.com. Part of the town's casino complex, this hotel has attractive, large and modern rooms, some with a river view and balcony. It's a 10-min walk south of the centre, on the banks of the Meuse below the citadel. An excellent breakfast is included in the price. ③

Château de Namur av de l'Ermitage 1 ☎081 72 99 00, www.chateaudenamur.com. This medium-sized, four-star hotel, with thirty well-appointed rooms, occupies a large old mansion built in the style of a French château in the wooded park at the top of the citadel. Gastronomic weekends are the hotel's speciality and there's an excellent Sunday brunch too. ⑤

Grand Hôtel de Flandre place de la Station ☎081 23 18 68, www.hotelflandre.be. Competent, newly revamped three-star hotel with

spick-and-span modern rooms; handily located opposite the train station. ②

Ibis Namur Centre rue du Premiers Lanciers 10 ☎081 25 75 40 www.ibishotel.com. Straightforward, mid-range chain hotel in a handy downtown location and with 90 comfortable if characterless, modern rooms. ②

 **Les Tanneurs** rue des Tanneries 13 ☎081 24 00 24, www.tanneurs.com. Down a quiet alley close to the town centre, this extremely comfortable, four-star hotel occupies a lavishly and imaginatively renovated seventeenth-century brick building with two good restaurants, lots of marble and the occasional sunken bath. There's a range of rooms, from the democratically priced right up to palatial suites costing €210 a night. Off-season and at the weekend, it's worth asking about discounts on the more expensive rooms. ②–⑤

The Town

Central Namur fans out from the confluence of the rivers Sambre and Meuse, with the hilltop citadel on one side of the Sambre and the main part of the town centre on the other. Citadel and centre are connected by a pair of bridges, the **Pont de France** and the **Pont du Musée**. The main square, the **place d'Armes**, is a few metres north of these two bridges and a stone's throw from the main shopping streets, **rue de l'Ange** and its extension **rue de Fer**. Namur possesses several good museums as well as some fine old buildings – and, with the exception of the citadel, all the sights are within easy walking distance of each other.

Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies

The **place d'Armes** is modern and mundane, but close by lies the pick of the town's museums, the **Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies** (Treasury of the Oignies Priory; Tues–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; €2), housed in a convent at rue Julie Billiat 17. This unique collection, which fills just one small room, comprises examples of the exquisitely beautiful gold and silver work of **Brother Hugo d'Oignies**, one of the most gifted of the region's medieval metalworkers. Hugo's works were kept at the Abbey of Oignies in Hainaut until the late eighteenth century, when, with the French revolutionary army closing in, the monks hid them. It was a good job they did – the soldiers trashed the abbey and subsequently the monks smuggled their treasures to Namur for safekeeping, where they've remained ever since. The nuns provide a guided tour and their enthusiasm is infectious; most of them speak excellent English.

From the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the River Meuse valley was famous for the skill of its craftsmen. The **Mosan style** they developed was essentially Romanesque, but its practitioners evolved a more naturalistic and dynamic approach to their subject matter, a characteristic of early Gothic; Hugo's work, dating from the early thirteenth century, demonstrates this transition quite superbly. Hugo was also an innovator in the art of **filigree**, raising the decoration from the background so that the tiny human figures and animals seem to be suspended in space, giving depth to the narrative. Another technique of which he was fond is **niello**, in which a black mixture of sulphur or lead is used to incise lines into the gold.

Whatever Brother Hugo's chosen technique, they're wonderful **devotional pieces**, elaborately studded with precious and semiprecious stones and displaying an exquisite balance between ornament and function. Most of the figures hold sacred relics that were brought back from the Holy Land by one Jacques de Vitry, a Parisian ecclesiastic who met Hugo in 1208. The filigrees themselves are lively and realistic, often depicting minute hunting scenes, with animals leaping convincingly through delicate foliage, and sometimes engraved with a Christian dedication, or embossed with a tiny picture of the artist offering up his art to God in worship. In particular, look out for the intricately worked double-crosses, the dazzling reliquary cover for St Peter's rib, the charming songbird and a magnificent Book of the Gospels cover, with Christ crucified on one side, God the Father in majesty on the other.

The Musée Provincial des Arts Anciens

From the convent, it takes about five minutes to walk northwest along rue Emile Cuvelier to rue de Fer where, at no. 24, the **Musée Provincial des Arts Anciens** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €3) occupies one of the finest of Namur's eighteenth-century mansions, an elegant structure set back from the street behind a formal gateway and courtyard. The collection begins with an enjoyable sample of devotional metalwork from the Mosan, most memorably the dinky geometrics of the brass enamels (*cuivre émaillé*). The craftsmanship is not, perhaps, as fine as that of Hugo d'Oignies, but it's still excellent and it's put into artistic context by the museum's (modest) collection of medieval sculptures and painted wooden panels. Of the museum's many paintings, the most distinguished are by Henri met de Bles, an early-sixteenth-century, Antwerp-based artist who favoured panoramic landscapes populated by tiny figures. Look out also for the temporary exhibitions, most of which are displayed in the gatehouse.

West to the Cathédrale St-Aubain

Leaving the museum, it's a short stroll southwest to the finest of Namur's churches, the **Église St-Loup**, a Baroque extravagance overshadowing the narrow pedestrianized rue du Collège. Built for the Jesuits between 1621 and 1645, the church boasts a fluently carved facade and a sumptuous interior of marble walls and sandstone vaulting. The high altar is actually wood painted to look like marble – the ship carrying the last instalment of Italian marble sank and the Jesuits were obliged to finish the church off with this imitation.

At the west end of rue du Collège, on place St-Aubain, the **Cathédrale St-Aubain** might well be the ugliest church in Belgium, a monstrous Neoclassical pile remarkably devoid of any charm. The interior isn't much better, with acres of creamy white paint and a choir decorated with melodramatic paintings by Jacques Nicolai, one of Rubens' less talented pupils. Accessible from the cathedral, the attached **Musée Diocésain et Trésor de la Cathédrale** (reservations only on ☎081 44 42 85; €2.50) displays objects gathered from diocesan churches across Namur and Luxembourg provinces. Highlights include a golden crown reliquary with thorns supposedly from Christ's crown of thorns, a twelfth-century portable altar with eleventh-century ivory carvings, and a silver statuette of St-Blaise.

The Musée Felicien Rops

Heading south from the cathedral towards the river, turn left along rue des Brasseurs and then first left for the **Musée Felicien Rops**, rue Fumal 12 (July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; rest of year closed Mon; €3), which is devoted to the life and work of the eponymous painter, graphic artist and illustrator and with

a large sample of his works. Born in Namur, **Felicien Rops** (1833–98) settled in Paris in the 1870s, acquiring a reputation for delving into the occult and for his “debauched” lifestyle. He also dabbled in art and illustrated the works of Mallarmé and Baudelaire. Rops was, apparently, greatly admired by the latter, but he is better known for his erotic drawings, which reveal an obsession with the macabre and perverse – skeletons, nuns and priests are depicted in oddly compromising poses, and old men are serviced by young, partly clad women. He also drew many satirical cartoons, savagely criticizing the art establishment with which he never had much of a rapport, partly because his Impressionistic paintings were (justifiably) considered dull and derivative.

The citadel

The result of centuries of military endeavour, Namur’s **citadel** is an immense complex, which clambers and crawls all over the steep and craggy hill that rises high above the confluence of the rivers Sambre and Meuse. Understanding quite what was built, when and why is well-nigh impossible, though salient features are easy enough to decipher.

The first people to be attracted by Namur’s defensive capabilities were the Aduatuci, a Gallic tribe who named the place Nam, after one of their gods. Later, in medieval times, a succession of local counts elaborated each other’s fortifications and by the fourteenth century the town was protected by four sets of walls, which guarded the riverfront and climbed steeply up the hill behind. By the early sixteenth century, it was clear that improved artillery had rendered stone walls obsolete and every major European city set about redesigning its defences. Here in Namur the riverside fortifications were gradually abandoned while the section near the top of the hill – now loosely known as the **Château des Comtes** – was incorporated into a partly subterranean fortress, the **Médiante**, whose ramifications occupy the eastern portion of the present citadel. This part of the fortress was always the most vulnerable to attack and for the next two hundred years successive generations of military engineers, including Vauban and the Dutchman Von Coehoorn, tried to figure out the best way to protect it. The surviving structure reflects this preoccupation, with the lines of defence becoming more complex and extensive the further up you go. To further strengthen the fortress, in the 1640s the Spanish completed the **Terra Nova** bastion at the west end of the citadel, separating the two with a wide moat; the bastion is now the departure point for most visits. Altogether, this made Namur one of the strongest fortresses in Europe, but its importance guaranteed the attentions of Louis XIV, who besieged the town in 1692, and of William of Orange just three years later. The Dutch rebuilt the citadel between 1816 and 1825, and much of today’s remains date to this period.

Visiting the site

The plateau which comprises the top of the citadel can be reached by car and bike as well as on foot. Furthermore, a **minibus** cruises the town centre and then travels up to the citadel at regular intervals every day during the summer months; one of its stops is at the tip of the *grognon*.

The tourist office produces a glossy, easy-to-use leaflet entitled “Storming the Citadel,” which suggests five colour-coded **walking routes**; the shortest takes forty minutes, the longest nearly three hours. Well-signed and featuring interpretative plaques along the way, each focuses on a different theme, but the two most interesting are the yellow “1000 years of time”, which takes in parts of both the Médiante and the Terra Nova, and the purple “History of the Siege

of 1692”, concentrating on the Terra Nova. Both start on the plateau at the top of the citadel, whereas the red, green and blue walks begin at the tip of the *grognon* and thus involve a dull and mildly exerting walk up the flanks of the fortress; comfortable walking shoes are recommended.

The citadel is open all year and there’s no admission fee, though certain additional attractions are seasonal and impose charges. The most popular of these is the hour-long electric train **guided tour** of the citadel, which includes a visit to the underground casements of the Terra Nova and an audiovisual display on Namur’s history (daily April – Oct, first train 11am, last 5pm; €7.50). Also inside the citadel, and free to visit, are the **Espace Archéologique St-Pierre** on the east edge of the Terra Nova (March–Dec Tues–Sun noon–5pm), which has temporary displays on local archaeological digs and discoveries; and a perfume shop and mini-factory, the **Atelier de Parfumerie Guy Delforge**, in the old casements (July & Aug daily 9.15am–5.30pm, Sun 2.15–5.30pm; rest of year closed Mon).

Eating and drinking

Namur has a first-rate selection of **cafés** and **restaurants** as well as a good supply of **bars**, many of them clustered in the quaint, pedestrianized squares just west of rue de l’Ange – on and around place Marché-aux-Légumes and neighbouring place Chanoine Descamps.

Cafés and restaurants

Alain Dewulf rue du Bailli 10 ☎081 22 70 10.

Smooth and polished modern restaurant, where you can watch Alain at work in the kitchen while sampling his seasonal dishes. A gourmand’s delight. Set menu €24. Open Thurs–Sat eves only.

Le Bon Vin rue du Président 43 ☎081 22 28 08. Christiane and Willy Delcour have created a popular organic café here on the corner with rue des Fossés Fleuris. The food is freshly prepared and seasonal and, as the name suggests, there is a good selection of wine – all organic too. Three courses and a *quart* of wine will set you back about €30. Tues–Sat lunchtime and Fri & Sat eve.

La Bonne Fourchette rue Notre Dame 112 ☎081 23 15 36. Pint-sized, informal, family-run restaurant down below the citadel on the way to the casino. Prices are very reasonable, with a set menu for €19, and the food, in true Franco-Belgian style, is delicious. Evenings only.

Le Grill des Tanneurs rue des Tanneries 13 ☎081 24 00 24. Situated on the first floor of the Hôtel Les Tanneurs (see p.351), this excellent restaurant features French-style cuisine in smooth (and convincing) repro-antique surroundings. Main courses start at a very reasonable €14. Open for lunch daily and every evening except Sun.

Le Moulin à Poivre rue Bas de la Place 19 ☎081 23 11 20. Cosy little restaurant offering tasty Franco-Belgian food. Mains from as little as €10. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

La Petite Fugue place Chanoine Descamps 5 ☎081 23 13 20. Outstanding, chic-minimalist

restaurant with mouthwatering Franco-Belgian dishes – €35 for a three-course feast, but worth every cent. Summer terrace. Daily noon–2pm & 7–10pm.

Soup Shop rue de Bruxelles 35. For a hearty and healthy lunch, this the place to come. As you would expect from the name, soup is the main event, but the salads, quiches and desserts are delicious too – and great value, all at less than €10. Mon–Sat daytime only.

Le Temps des Cerises rue des Brasseurs 22 ☎081 22 53 26. Intimate, cherry-coloured and themed restaurant offering a quality menu of French and Basque dishes. Main courses average around €18. Tues–Sat from 6.30pm & Tues–Fri noon–3pm.

Bars

Aux Coups de Foudre place de L’Ange. Trendy bar on the northern end of the square with a large and very popular summer terrace.

Le Chapitre rue du Séminaire 4. Unassuming, sedate little bar with an extensive beer list; tucked away behind the cathedral.

L’Extérieur Nuit place Chanoine Descamps. Bustling brasserie-cum-bar with occasional live music.

Le Monde à L’Envers rue Lelièvre 28. Lively bar just up from the cathedral. A favourite spot for university students.

Café Ratintot place Marché-aux-Légumes. With attractive antique decor, including an old French cockerel or two, this is one of central Namur’s most original bars.

Around Namur

Namur is a pleasant place to spend two or three days, which gives you time to visit its leading local attractions: the splendid hilltop **L'Abbaye de Floreffe**, to the west of town; the classically landscaped **Jardins d'Annevoie**, set beside the Meuse about 18km south of town; and, south again, the abbeys of **Maredsous** and **Maredret** (good for beer and cheeses or fruit juice and jam respectively). A visit to the gardens is readily incorporated into a longer day-trip (by car or train) along this stretch of the **Meuse**. The river is too wide to be all that dramatic, but it's still an enjoyable journey as it passes through a varied landscape of gentle wooded slopes interrupted by steep escarpments capped by ruined castles. The Namur area has long been popular with rock-climbers, one of whom was King Albert I, who fell to his death in a climbing accident here in 1934.

L'Abbaye de Floreffe

Founded in 1121, **L'Abbaye de Floreffe** lies some 10km west of Namur towards Charleroi (French-language guided tours only: April–Sept daily at 1.30pm, 2.30pm, 3.30pm, 4.30pm & 5.30pm, plus July & Aug at 10.30am & 11.30am; 1hr; €2.50; ☎081 44 53 03, 🌐www.abbaye-de-floreffe.be). The town of **Floreffe** is itself drab and dreary, but the abbey, with its well-kept grounds populated by a flock of peacocks, occupies a splendid hilltop location above the town with wide views over the River Sambre. Little remains of the original complex and the imposing brick buildings of today are mainly eighteenth-century, the main exception being the **abbey church**, a hotchpotch of architectural styles with Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque features. The interior is best known for its remarkable carved oak **choir stalls**, the work of one man, Pierre Enderlin, who took sixteen years (1632–48) to complete them. In a superb state of preservation and displaying a marvellous inventiveness and intricacy, the stalls are carved with a stunning variety of figures, including biblical characters, eminent and holy persons, and some 220 angels – each one of them unique. Many of the faces are obviously portraits, humorous, sometimes satirical in tone, and there's a self-portrait of the artist hidden among them. Below the main complex, the **Moulin Brasserie** (Mon–Fri 11am–6pm, Sat & Sun 11am–8pm), comprising the creatively refurbished old mill and brewery, showcases the abbey's products, principally beer and cheese. Amongst the abbey's several brews, the most distinctive are Floreffe La Meilleure (8.5 percent), a strong, dark and tangy brew, and Temps des Cerises (3.5 percent), a cherry-flavoured beer; both are served from the barrel.

The abbey makes a comfortable half-day excursion by car from Namur, but getting there by **public transport** is a bit awkward. There are buses (#28) but they run infrequently – every two hours or so – and the Namur–Charleroi train, which is more frequent (hourly; 10min), drops passengers on the other side of the town from the abbey, a 1.5km walk away: turn right outside the station and keep going along the main street.

Les Jardins d'Annevoie

Les Jardins d'Annevoie (April–June & Sept–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm, July & Aug daily 9.30am–6.30pm; €7.50; ☎082 67 97 97, 🌐www.jardins.dannevoie.be), in the wooded hills above the River Meuse about 18km south of Namur, is a highly recommended stop on the road between Namur and Dinant. The gardens are generally reckoned to be among the most appealing in the whole

of the country, hence their popularity with day-trippers. The estate – both gardens and manor house – has been in the hands of the Montpellièrs since 1675 and one of the clan – a certain Charles Alexis – turned his hand (or rather those of his gardeners) to garden design in the 1770s. Charles was inspired by his travels in France, Italy and England, picking up gardening tips which he then rolled into one homogeneous creation. From the French came formal borders, from the Italians the romance of mossy banks and arbours, while the English influence is most obvious in the grotto of Neptune. The common denominator is water – everywhere you look there are fountains, jets and mini-waterfalls, all worked from natural pressure with the tree-lined Grand Canal, immediately above the gardens, acting as a reservoir. If you visit in July, you can also taste the raspberries in the *framboiserie* at the end of the walking circuit. Otherwise there is a pleasant café above the shop offering views over the garden and the local Maredsous beer on tap.

The nearest **train station** is Godinne, 2km east of the gardens and served by hourly trains on the Namur–Dinant line; to reach the gardens, walk up the ramp of the flyover from the station, turn right at the top and then hang a left to cross the bridge over the Meuse. It isn't a pleasant walk though – there's too much traffic. Alternatively, **bus** #21 Namur–Maredsous (3–6 daily; 30min) stops just outside the gardens, while the Namur–Dinant bus #34 (Mon–Fri 1 daily; 30min) pulls into the *Annevoie - route de Dinant* bus stop a ten-minute walk from the gardens along the N932.

Maredsous and Maredret abbeys

Pushing on along the River Meuse from Les Jardins d'Annevoie, it's about 6km to the narrow country road – the **N971** – which weaves its way west the 12km to the **Abbaye de Maredsous** (📞 www.maredsous.be). Founded in the 1870s, the neo-Gothic architecture of the abbey is decidedly routine, but the monks come up trumps with their beers and cheeses, all on sale at the **St-Joseph visitor centre** (daily 9am–6pm; free). There's more abbatial gastronomy nearby in the **Abbaye de Maredret** (daily 9.30am–1pm and 2.15–6.30pm; 📞 www.maredret.be), where the nuns make their own apple juice and jams from their fruit orchards. Afterwards, with a good hiking map in hand, you can stroll out into the beautiful **Molignée valley**, though you might instead opt for a journey by **railbike**. These bikes, which carry four people, move along the disused railway tracks between Falaën, 4km south of Maredsous, and Warnant, about 10km to the northeast; you pick them up from the Railbike premises in Falaën at rue de la Gare 82 (☎ 082 69 90 79; daily 11am, 1pm, 3pm & 5pm; single person from €15 and groups from €13 per person).

Bus #35 from Dinant train station (2–3 daily; 35 min) and bus #21 from Namur bus station (2–4 daily; 50min) both stop at or near the Abbaye de Maredsous.

Dinant

Slung along the River Meuse beneath craggy green cliffs, **DINANT**, 30km from Namur, has a picture-postcard setting, its distinctive, onion-domed church of Notre-Dame lording it over the comings and goings of the barges and cruise boats. The Romans were the first to put the place on the map, occupying the town and naming it after Diana, the goddess of the hunt, but the town's heyday came much later, in the fourteenth century, when it boomed from the profits

of the metalworking industry, turning copper, brass and bronze into ornate jewellery known as *dinanderie*. Dinant's prosperity turned rival cities, especially Namur, green with envy, and they watched with some satisfaction as local counts slugged it out for possession of the town. They may have been even happier when, in 1466, Charles the Bold decided to settle his Dinant account by simply razing the place to the ground. One result of all this medieval blood and thunder was the construction of an imposing **citadel** on the cliff immediately above the town and, although Dinant was sacked on several subsequent occasions and damaged in both World Wars, the fortress has survived to become the town's principal attraction.

Nowadays, Dinant makes a healthy living both as a base for visiting Les Jardins d'Annevoie (see p.355) and as the centre of the tourist industry on the **rivers Meuse** and **Lesse** (see p.360), its cruise boats, canoes and kayaks providing watery fun and games for thousands of visitors – though frankly the scenery is not nearly as wild as you'll find deeper in the Ardennes, whilst the town itself is distinctly frayed around the edges. The other quibble is that Dinant gets much too crowded for comfort in the height of the season, when its long main street – **rue Grande** – literally chokes with traffic.

Arrival, information and getting around

Dinant's **train station** is about 300m from the bridge that spans the Meuse over to the church of Notre-Dame, next to what passes for the main square, place Reine Astrid. **Buses** arrive and leave from outside the train station. The **tourist office** is beside the west (train-station) end of the bridge at av Cadoux 8 (Easter–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–4.30pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 8.30am–7pm, Sat 9.30am–7pm & Sun 10am–6pm; Nov–Easter Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 9.30am–4pm, Sun 10.30am–2pm; ☎082 22 28 70, @www.dinant-tourisme.be). It has an excellent range of local information, including cycling and walking **maps**, principally the Institut Géographique National's *Dinant et ses anciennes communes* (for walks along the River Lesse, see p.361). **Mountain bikes** can be rented from Adnet Cycles at rue St-Roch 17 for €20 per day (☎082 22 32 43); rue St-Roch is about 700m south of the bridge, off rue Léopold, the continuation of rue Grande. **Boat cruises** depart from along avenue Winston Churchill, just south of the bridge and there's a **téléphérique** (cable car) up to the citadel from place Reine Astrid.

Accommodation

Hotel accommodation is thin on the ground in Dinant and its immediate environs, though the tourist office does have the details of a few **B&Bs** (①).

By boat from Dinant

Despite its serpentine profile, the River Meuse south of Dinant is not especially scenic, though the town's boat-tour operators still drum up lots of business for their river cruises. There are several different companies, but all boats depart from avenue Winston Churchill, one block from the main street, rue Grande; prices and itineraries are pretty standard whichever company you choose. Two good bets are the cruises to Anseremme (mid-March to Oct every 30min; €5; return trip 45min), where you can hike off into the surrounding countryside (see p.361); and Freÿr (May to mid-Sept 2.30pm; €9; return trip 1hr 45min). There are also boats north along the Meuse to Namur (see p.348) on Sundays from mid-July to late August (€14 one-way, €20 return).

There is no hostel, but there are plenty of **campsites**, one of the better ones being the well-appointed *Camping Villatoile* (☎082 22 22 85, 🌐www.villatoile.be; March–Oct), in a wooded setting beside the River Lesse in **Anseremme**, about 4km south of town.

Hotels

Hotel Aquatel rue du Vélodrome 15, Anseremme ☎082 21 35 35, 🌐www.ansiaux.be. Basic, one-star hotel with hostel-style rooms and kayak rental – it's beside the River Lesse, 4km or so south of Dinant. Rooms for two or five and a dormitory for eighteen. ❶

Hotel Le Freyr chaussée des Alpinistes 22, Anseremme ☎082 22 25 75, 🌐www.lefreyr.be. Well-tended, four-star hotel, with just six reasonably

comfortable rooms, plus a first-rate restaurant in a good-looking older building close to the Meuse; about 4km south of Dinant. Closed Feb & March. ❷

Hotel Ibis Dinant Rempart d'Albeau 16 ☎082 21 15 00, 🌐www.ibishotel.com. Chain hotel in a new and conspicuous brick block metres from the river, 1km or so south of the town bridge. No points for originality, but this Ibis does what it does proficiently enough, with most of its neat and trim, modern rooms looking out over the river. ❸

The Town

Dinant's most distinctive landmark is the originally Gothic **church of Notre-Dame** (daily 10am–5pm; free), topped with the bulbous spire that features on all the brochures. Rebuilt on several occasions, there's actually not much of interest to see inside, but it's worth a quick look for its cavernous, high-vaulted nave and a couple of paintings by Antoine Wiertz, who was born here (and has his own museum in Brussels; see p.109). Neither painting is especially inspiring, one a desultory black and white affair, the other, *The Assumption*, a typically crude and harsh vision, even without any of the ghoulish tricks for which Wiertz was famous.

The church is next to the main square, the inconsequential **place Reine Astrid**, which is the starting point for the **téléphérique** (cable car) up to the citadel (see below). The square also marks the start of the narrow main street, **rue Grande**, which trails south, one block in from the riverside. Proceeding down rue Grande, take the first left turn onto rue en Rhée for the enjoyable **Maison de la Pataphonie**, at no.51 (Wed 2.30pm & Sun 2pm & 4.30pm by reservation; €5; ☎082 21 39 39), which supplies an interactive journey into the life and sounds of Dinant's own **Adolphe Sax** (1814–94), the inventor of the saxophone. Saxophiles will also want to visit the musician's old home, marked by a commemorative **plaque** and a neat stained-glass mural of a man blowing his horn, just north of the bridge at rue Adolphe Sax 35.

Back on rue Grande, heading south from rue en Rhée, take the second turning on the right for the place du Palais de Justice, home to the big and blousy, château-style **Palais de Justice**, which dates from the 1880s. Returning to rue Grande, it's a couple of minutes south to **square Lion**, which is – oddly enough – flanked by mock-Tudor, half-timbered houses in the English style. Wiertz makes an appearance here too in the form of a badly weathered **statue**, *The Triumph of the Light*, a melodramatic piece that comes close to being absurd.

The citadel

Visible from just about anywhere in town, the austere stone walls of Dinant's **citadel** (April–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct to mid-Dec & mid-Feb to March daily except Fri 10am–4.30pm; €6.50; 🌐www.citadelledinant.be) roll along the clifftop high above the church of Notre Dame. There are three ways to get there: you can drive out of town and approach the citadel from the east (and pay when you get there), or you can pay the admission fee at

the foot of the cliff beside the church and either climb the four hundred-odd steps, or save yourself the sweat by catching the cable car – the *téléphérique*. From the top, the views out over the Meuse valley are extensive, but the citadel is itself only mildly diverting. The French destroyed the medieval castle in 1703 and the present structure, mostly dating from the Dutch occupation of the early nineteenth century, largely consists of a series of stone-faced earthen bastions.

The citadel saw heavy **fighting** in both World Wars. In 1914, the Germans struggled to dislodge the French soldiers, who had occupied the stronghold just before they could get here. Peeved, the Germans took a bitter revenge on the townsfolk, whom they alleged had fired on them, executing over six hundred and deporting several hundred more before torching the town. The Germans took the citadel again in 1940, and it was the scene of more bitter fighting when the Allies captured Dinant in 1944. There's a memorial to those who gave their lives here and part of the interior has been turned into what is essentially a historical museum, with models recreating particular battles and the Dutch occupation, plus a modest military section with weapons from the Napoleonic era to the last war. You can also see the wooden beams which supported the first bridge in Dinant, built nine hundred years ago by monks and found again by accident in 1952, as well as prison cells and the kitchen and bakery of the Dutch fortress.

Eating and drinking

Catering for Dinant's passing tourist trade is big business, which means that run-of-the-mill **cafés and restaurants** are ten-a-penny, whereas quality places are thin on the ground. That said, there are still a couple worth mentioning and several enjoyable neighbourhood **bars** too.

Cafés and restaurants

Les Amourettes place St-Nicolas 11 ☎082 22 57 36. Mid-range Franco-Italian restaurant with an original/inventive menu and a nice terrace on the square in the summer. Claims to be a romantic setting, but tends to the kitsch. Main courses around €15. Place St-Nicolas is about 500m from the town bridge, just off rue Léopold, the southerly continuation of rue Grande. Closed Mon.

Brasserie Casanova av Churchill 9. Just south along the river from the bridge, this informal, mid-range Italian restaurant offers substantial pasta and pizza dishes from around €9. Open daily.

La Broche rue Grande 22 ☎082 22 82 81. Smart and well-regarded French restaurant, boasting lobster as one of its specialities. À la carte and a three-course menu for €23. Closed Tues & Wed lunch.

Pâtisserie Jacobs rue Grande 147. Patisserie with a small café section at the back. Fine display of *couques de Dinant*, a honey-flour combination that's better admired than consumed unless you have the teeth of a horse. Staff will assure you the

harder they are, the fresher. Tarts and cakes too. March–Dec daily 9am–6pm.

Le Thermidor rue de la Station 3 ☎082 22 31 35. The best restaurant in town: the English owner has revamped the decor and the menu of this slightly old-fashioned place, and it offers a good line in seasonal and local specialities, as well as fresh fish. Main courses hover around €25. Near the train station. Closed Mon eve, Tues & Wed lunchtime.

Bars

Café Lefte rue Adolphe Sax 2. Café-bar serving very average food, the compensation being the first-floor terrace overlooking the river and the town bridge.

Le Sax place Reine Astrid 13. Unpretentious bar with a good beer selection; sit outside when the traffic has calmed down and peer up at the floodlit citadel.

Le Themis rue du Palais de Justice 26. Relaxed and easy-going neighbourhood joint with a better-than-average beer menu. A short walk south of the church along rue Grande – the third turning on the right.

South of Dinant: the Meuse and the Lesse river valleys

Beyond Dinant, the **River Meuse** loops its way south to Givet, across the border in France. This stretch of the river is pleasant enough, but certainly not exciting – it's too wide and sluggish for that – and neither is the scenery more than mildly inviting, its best feature being the steep, wooded cliffs framing portions of the river bank. The tiny settlements lining up along the river are pretty bland too, the only real exception being **Hastière-Par-Delà**, which boasts a charming Romanesque-Gothic church. This part of the river can be explored by cruise boat from Dinant (see box, p.357) and, at a pinch, by local bus: the Givet bus, departing from outside Dinant station, calls at all the riverside villages, but operates no more than twice daily.

Wilder and prettier, the **River Lesse** spears off the Meuse in **Anseremme**, an inconsequential town some 3.5km south of Dinant along the N96. The basic drill here is to head upstream by catching the train from Dinant – or one of the special minibuses run by canoe and kayak rental outlets in Anseremme – and then paddle back. There are, however, no boat cruises along the Lesse.

The **Dinant tourist office** (see p.357) sells the Institut Géographique National's **map** *Dinant et ses anciennes communes* (1:25,000; €7.50), which shows fifteen numbered **circular walks** in the Dinant area. Each of the walks has a designated starting point at one of the district's hotels. Also shown on the map are one cycling circuit and five **mountain bike routes**, the latter ranging from five to forty kilometres in length; to see the most attractive scenery you need to get out on the longer routes 19 and 20. You can rent mountain bikes from Kayaks Ansiaux in Anseremme (see p.361).

Along the River Meuse

Heading south from Anseremme, it's 2.5km to the solitary **Château de Freÿr**, a crisply symmetrical, largely eighteenth-century brick mansion pushed up against the main road and the river. The compulsory guided tour (April–June & Sept Sat & Sun 10.45am–12.45pm & 2–5.45pm; July & Aug Tues–Sun 10.30am–12.45pm & 2–5.45pm; Oct–March Sun 2–4.15pm; €7; 1hr 30min; ☎082 22 22 00, @www.freyr.be) traipses through a series of opulent rooms, distinguished by their period furniture and thundering fireplaces. Running parallel to the river are the adjoining **gardens**, laid out in the formal French style, spreading over three terraces and including a maze. A pavilion at the highest point provides a lovely view over the château and river.

Pushing on downstream, pint-sized **HASTIÈRE-PAR-DELÀ**, about 15km from Dinant, holds the fascinating **Église Notre Dame** (May–Sept daily 10am–5pm; free), a finely proportioned church built at the behest of a colony of Irish monks in the 1030s, though the Gothic choir was added two hundred years later. Subsequent architectural tinkering followed two attacks – one by Protestants in 1568, the other by the French revolutionary army in the 1790s – but most of the medieval church has survived intact, with a flat wooden roof, plain square pillars and heavy round arches. The **triumphal arch** bears a faded painting dating from the original construction and is underpinned by gallows (wooden scaffolding), which in their turn support an unusual German fifteenth-century Calvary, depicting Christ, Mary and St John standing on a dragon. Close by, the wooden thirteenth-century **choir stalls** are among the oldest in Belgium, with unique misericord carvings – some allegorical, some satirical and some purely

decorative. Curiously, a number of them were replaced with a plain triangle in 1443 on the grounds that they were blasphemous – or at least disrespectful. Finally, next to the baptismal font are two **statues** of the Virgin, one of which – the one on the left in the glass case – is an exquisite sixteenth-century carving, whose graceful posture has earned it a place in several national exhibitions.

After you've explored the church, you can pop across the road to *Le Côte Meuse*, a pleasant **café** with a good line in crepes and waffles. As regards **moving on**, the N915 cuts southeast across country from Hastière to the N95, which has turnings to Houyet (see below).

Along the River Lesse

Unlike the Meuse, there isn't a road along the **Lesse river valley** and although a network of country lanes reaches most of its nooks and crannies, driving and cycling here can be very confusing. Fortunately, an hourly **train** runs south from Dinant, stopping at Anseremme before proceeding up the Lesse to Gendron-Celles and Houyet. Trains take five minutes from Dinant to Anseremme, with Houyet another ten minutes away. **Beyond Houyet** the train leaves the Lesse valley bound for the rail junction of **Bertrix**, where you can change for either Libramont (for Arlon & Luxembourg), or Florenville (see p.376) and Virton. The River Lesse continues to worm its way southeast from Houyet, largely inaccessible until it reaches **Rochefort** (see p.362), a short drive from Dinant – and best reached via Namur if you're travelling on from Dinant by train.

Anseremme to Houyet

There's precious little point in hanging around in **ANSEREMME**, though its **train station** is a good starting point for local hikes and is also just a couple of minutes' walk from the river – and two reputable **canoe and kayak** rental

Walking and biking along the River Lesse

Among the **walks** detailed in the specialist map *Dinant et ses anciennes communes* sold by the Dinant tourist office, the five-kilometre-long **Walk 5** takes in much of the locality's most pleasant scenery, weaving its way along and around the River Lesse between the hamlets of Anseremme and Pont à Lesse. Walk 5 involves some reasonably testing ascents, whereas **GR route 126** offers about three hours of gentle walking along the Lesse between Houyet and Gendron-Celles, both of which have a train station. Take the train timetable along with your picnic and you can plan to arrive at Gendron-Celles in time for the return train to Dinant.

The eight-kilometre-long **Walk 8** is not one of the more spectacular routes – much of it is over tarmac road – but it does allow you to visit a couple of places of some interest. From **Gendron-Celles train station**, the route leads about 2km northeast along a country road – and beside a small tributary of the Lesse – to **Vèves**, whose fifteenth-century **château** is perched on a grassy mound overlooking the surrounding countryside (May, June & Sept Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; Oct Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5.50; @ www.chateau-de-veves.be). With its spiky turrets and dinky towers, the château is inordinately picturesque, but the interior is disappointingly mundane – mostly eighteenth-century period rooms. A couple of kilometres further on, **Celles** is one of the prettier villages hereabouts, gently filling up the slope of a wooded hill, underneath the huge tower and Lombard arches of the Romanesque **Église St-Hadelin** (daily 9am–6pm; free). There's a sporadic bus service from here to Dinant or you can return to Gendron-Celles train station via the Bois de Hubermont. If you're driving, note that Celles is on the N94, about 9km east of Dinant.

outlets. Operating from April to October, these are Kayaks Ansiaux (☎082 21 35 35, @www.ansiaux.be) and Lesse Kayaks (☎082 22 43 97, @www.lessekayaks.be); both rent out a variety of boats, principally one- and two-seater kayaks, three-person canoes and large piloted boats for up to twenty passengers; advance reservations are required. Reckon on paying €17 for a single canoe for a day, €20 for a double.

The **standard itinerary** for potential canoeists and kayakers begins at Anseremme, where most take the train (or special minibus) to either **Gendron-Celles** (for the 11km, 3hr paddle back) or **Houyet** (21km, 5hr). If you're travelling by train to begin with, you can go straight to Gendron or Houyet from Dinant and pick up a boat there – but remember that advance reservations are well-nigh essential. The Lesse itself is wild and winding, with great scenery, though be warned that sometimes it gets so packed that there's a veritable canoe log jam. Consequently, it's a good idea to set out as early as possible to avoid some of the crush – though if you're paddling back from Houyet you really have to get going early anyway. Both Gendron-Celles and Houyet train stations are metres from the river – and the boats – and also make good starting points for hiking the surrounding countryside.

Rochefort, Han and around

A few kilometres upstream from Houyet, to the southeast, lies one of the Ardennes' most beautiful regions, centring on the tourist resorts of **Han-sur-Lesse** and **Rochefort**. The district offers one or two specific sights, most notably the Han-sur-Lesse caves as well as a scattering of castles, but the real magnet is the splendid countryside, a thickly wooded terrain of plateaux, gentle hills and valleys, and with quiet roads perfect for cycling. The best base for these rural wanderings is Rochefort, a middling sort of place with a good range of accommodation – and few of the crowds that swamp Han-sur-Lesse.

As for **public transport**, access is difficult from Dinant (and Houyet), from where the best bet is to backtrack to Namur and take the train from there to **Jemelle**, east of Rochefort and on the Brussels–Namur–Luxembourg line; regular trains also go to Jemelle from Liège. From Jemelle station, it's about 3km west to Rochefort, 6km more to Han, and there is an hourly **bus** service linking all three.

Rochefort

Situated in the midst of some lovely scenery, the pocket-sized town of **ROCHEFORT** is an excellent base for exploring the Ardennes. It's not an especially attractive place in itself, but it has none of the crass commercialism of neighbouring Han, and does have a good range of cheap accommodation, as well as other facilities like bike rental.

Rochefort follows the contours of an irregularly shaped hill, its long and pleasant main street, **rue de Behogne**, slicing through the centre from north to south, although the only things of tangible interest are actually outside the centre. The big deal is the **Grotte de Lorette** (April–June daily except Wed 10.30am–noon & 1.30–4.30pm; July & Aug daily 11am–5pm; Sept–Oct daily except Wed 10.30am–noon & 1.30–3pm; hour-long guided tours May–Aug every 45min, otherwise every 2hr; €7.25), a ten-minute walk from the central crossroads, where rue de Behogne intersects with place Albert 1er: walk down rue Jacquet and follow the signs. The caves are at the top of rue de Lorette. First

discovered in 1865 by a man walking his dog (the dog disappeared suddenly through a hole in the ground), the caves are cold and eerie, their most impressive feature the huge Salle du Sabbat (Hall of the Sabbath), no less than 85m high. Close by the entrance, the small and still-in-use **Lorette Chapel** dates from the 1620s. Built for a local countess, it's a reproduction of the Santa Casa chapel in Loreto, Italy; according to local legend, a monkey stole the countess's child and she promised to build the chapel if the child was returned unharmed.



Château Comtal

Doubling back from the caves, turn left along rue Jacquet for Rochefort's other main attraction – the ruins of the medieval **Château Comtal** (April–Oct daily 10am–6pm; €1.80), which offers fine views from its rocky outcrop. The original castle dates from 1155, although there was almost certainly some sort of fortification here a lot earlier. In the 1740s, the local count decided to convert it into a more informal, less forbidding place, demolishing the keep and incorporating the old walls into a new palace. Within a century, however, the owners had run into financial trouble and the château was gradually demolished; some of the massive stones were used in the adjoining Maison Carré (square house), built in 1840, and in the new neo-Gothic castle of 1906, which now houses the ticket office. Other fragments of the old castle were sold off to local builders and the distinctive, irregular limestone stones are now incorporated in buildings all over the town.

Unsurprisingly, there's not an awful lot left of the old castle now, but it's a pleasant enough place to wander for an hour or so. Alongside the remains of the old walls there are a couple of **wells** that were dug out of the bare rock while, in the small **park** just below the entrance, you can see the eighteenth-century arcades added to prop up the fashionable formal gardens. A tiny museum in the castle has objects from down the centuries: old cannonballs, ceramics, oyster shells, wine bottles and so forth.

Abbaye de St Rémy

The town's surroundings also reward exploration (see box, p.366 for suggested routes). Thirty minutes' walk through the woods to the north, the **Abbaye de St Rémy** is a Cistercian monastery founded in 1230, best known today for producing the Rochefort Trappist beer. The monastery buildings are closed to the public, but you are welcome to attend the daily services in the church (times from the tourist office – see below). The church is down the slope to the right and then on your left after you enter the monastery grounds.

Practicalities

Buses to Rochefort pull in along the main street, rue de Behogne. The town's friendly and well-organized **tourist office** is at rue de Behogne 5 (Sept–May Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm & Sun 10am–4pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–5pm; ☎084 34 51 72, 🌐www.valdelesse.be). They have oodles of local information and will make accommodation bookings at no charge.

Accommodation

Of the handful of central **hotels**, easily the pick is 🏠 *Le Vieux Logis*, at rue Jacquet 71 (☎084 21 10 24, 🌐www.levieuxlogis.be; 📍), housed in a lovely old building with an immaculate, antique interior and attractive gardens; it's a popular spot, so advance reservations are well-nigh essential. Rue Jacquet is a southerly continuation of rue de Behogne and is also home to *La Fayette*, at no. 87 (☎084 21 42 73, 🌐www.hotellafayette.be; 📍), a two-star establishment with just eight plain and simple rooms, half of which are en suite; it's housed in an old, whitewashed brick building.

The tourist office also has the details of local **B&Bs** (📍–📍); there are half a dozen in town and more on the outskirts. There's a convenient **campsite**, *Camping Communal* (☎084 21 19 00; April–Oct) a ten-minute walk east of rue de Behogne via rue de Marche – take the first left after the river along rue du Hableau.

Eating and drinking

La Gourmandise rue de Behogne 24, opposite the tourist office. Superb crepes and simple, good-value meals (pasta, salads) from around €10.

Le Limbourg place Albert 1er 21. Does a good line in local specialities, with main courses averaging about €15. Closed Wed out of season.

Pizzeria Bella Italia rue de Behogne 50. A good choice, offering substantial pizzas, pasta dishes and truly splendid calzone from €12, as well as an extensive menu of good-value Belgian cuisine.

Han-sur-Lesse

Just 6km southwest of Rochefort, tiny **HAN-SUR-LESSE** is well known for its caves, which are the most impressive in the Ardennes – with the result that in summer at least the village is jam-packed. There are masses of hotels and eating places to absorb the invasion, most in the immediate vicinity of the centre, but the frantic atmosphere will probably make you want to curtail your visit.

In fact there's not much to actually see in Han apart from the **Grottes de Han**, located outside the village a little way downriver (April–June & Sept–Oct daily 10am–noon & 1–4/4.30pm; July & Aug daily 10am–noon & 1–5/5.30pm; plus occasional holiday opening Nov–March; €10.75; www.grotte-de-han.be). The caves were discovered at the beginning of the nineteenth century and measure about 8km in length, a series of limestone galleries carved out of the hills by the River Lesse millions of years ago. Access is only possible by special **tram** (no extra charge), dinky little things that leave from the centre of the village, beside the ticket office, on the corner of rue Joseph Lamotte and rue d'Hamptay. The **tours** visit a small part of the cave system (April, Sept & Oct hourly, May–Aug every 30min), taking in the so-called Salle du Trophée, the site of the largest stalagmite; the Salle d'Armes, where the Lesse reappears after travelling underground for 1km; and the massive Salle du Dôme – 129m high – which contains a small lake. After the tour, you make your own way back to the village on foot, which is a five- to ten-minute walk.

For an insight into how the caves were formed, head to the **Musée du Monde Souterrain**, at place Théo Lannoy 3 (daily: April, Sept & Oct 10am–4pm; May & June 10am–5pm; July & Aug 10am–5.30pm; €3.50); it's behind the tourist office and church, across the street from the caves' ticket office. A section of the museum explains the process, while other sections display the prehistoric artefacts unearthed during a series of archaeological digs in and around the caves. Most were found where the Lesse surfaces again after travelling through the grottoes – among them flints, tools and bone ornaments from the Neolithic period, as well as weapons and jewellery from the Bronze Age.

Practicalities

Buses to Han pull in close to the main crossroads, where rue Joseph Lamotte meets both rue d'Hamptay and rue des Grottes. Close to the crossroads is the **tourist office** (May–Sept daily 10am–4.30pm; ☎ 084 37 75 96, www.valdelesse.be), which occupies a chalet opposite the caves' ticket office. They will make hotel bookings on your behalf for free and also have a substantial list of local **B&Bs** (①–②).

Han has several central **hotels**, including the three-star *Hostellerie Henry IV* (☎ 084 37 72 21; ②) in a modern, three-storey building with a terrace at rue des Chasseurs Ardennais 59, the road to Rochefort. The rooms are hardly inspiring, but the *hostellerie* does have the advantage of being removed from Han's summer hubbub. There are also two **campsites**, both by the river's edge and open all year: *Camping du Piro* (☎ 084 37 72 90) on rue de Charleville, which is near the bridge,

Walking, cycling and canoeing around Rochefort

Crisscrossed by rivers, the handsome countryside around Rochefort provides lots of opportunities for walking, canoeing and mountain-biking. **Walkers** need the Institut Géographique National's map, *Rochefort et ses villages* (on sale at the tourist offices in Rochefort and Han), which lists almost thirty numbered walks, as well as eight routes for **mountain bikers** and three for **cyclists**. Kayaks Lesse et Lomme in Han rents out mountain bikes and regular bikes, and organizes excursions involving a combination of canoeing and cycling (see below); mountain bikes can also be rented from the tourist office in Rochefort.

Walks from Rochefort

The Résurgence d'Eprave – **Walk 12** – is one of the most scenically varied, a twelve-kilometre circular route. Take rue Jacquet out of town past the château and the route is signposted to the right, through **Hamerenne** with its tiny Romanesque chapel of St Odile, and across fields full of wildflowers, to the River Lomme. Follow the riverbank to the spot where the River Wamme emerges from underground to join the Lomme; don't try to cross the river but double back and turn right for the stiff climb uphill past the Eprave Grotto for grand views over the cornfields. Fifteen minutes' walk further on, the village of **Eprave** has a restored mill with a working waterwheel and, opposite, the *Auberge du Vieux Moulin*, an immaculate four-star hotel with ultra-modern rooms on rue de l'Aujoule, which makes a delightful place to stay or eat (☎084 37 73 18, 🌐www.eprave.com; 🍽️). The restaurant is open daily in July and August (noon–3pm & 7–9pm), but closes on Sunday and Tuesday evening as well as all of Monday at other times of the year; the menu is firmly nouveau with main courses beginning at about €17. The walk back to Rochefort from here is rather dull, following the road, and you may want to retrace your steps, or join **Walk 4**, Grotte d'Eprave, to Han for the hourly bus back to Rochefort.

A couple of good shorter walks around Rochefort include **Walk 7**, Lorette, a thirty-minute climb up through the woods above town, taking in the Lorette chapel and some decent views over the castle. Head up rue de Lorette towards the caves and turn left, keeping to the left where the track is signposted. The six-kilometre **Walk 10**, Abbaye de Saint Rémy, goes the other way out of town, across the bridge and cutting north off the main road through some thickly wooded scenery as far as Abbaye de St Rémy, before looping back to Rochefort.

Canoeing and kayaking on the River Lesse

To mess about on the river, **canoes and kayaks** can be rented from Kayaks Lesse et Lomme, near the bridge in Han (☎082 22 43 97; May to mid-Sept daily 9.30am–6pm, April, late Sept & Oct Sat & Sun 9.30am–6pm). They have a few canoes and pedal boats for splashing around town, but it's much more scenic and fun to join one of their **excursions**; on offer are several different types of trip and a choice of transport – bus or mountain bike and kayak. The shortest (and least expensive) trip is the two-hour jaunt to Lessive, 6km away on the river and 4km back by bike (about €20 per person, €30 for two, all-inclusive). The longest is to Wanlin, 19km by kayak and 13km return by bike or bus. You can start the shortest trip anytime between 10am and 4pm, or 10am to noon for Wanlin. Incidentally, in high summer the water level on the Lesse can drop low enough to make canoeing impossible; call ahead to confirm.

about 200m west of the tourist office at the end of rue Joseph Lamotte; and the equally convenient *Camping de la Lesse* (☎084 37 72 90), about 300m from the tourist office along rue d'Hamptay and its continuation, rue du Grand Hy.

The day-tripping hordes keep prices up and quality down in many of Han's **cafés** and **restaurants**. An exception is *La Stradella*, at rue d'Hamptay 59, a

proficient Italian place serving pizzas and pastas from €9, but the *Belle Vue Café*, at rue Lamotte 1 (closed Mon out of season), has a more imaginative menu, offering good-quality, traditional Belgian cuisine at affordable prices, with main courses from around €18.

St Hubert and around

ST HUBERT, about 20km southeast of Rochefort, is another popular Ardennes resort, albeit one with an entirely different feel from its neighbours, largely on account of its solitary location, up on a plateau and surrounded by forest. A small town with just six thousand inhabitants, it's well worth a visit, though, after you've explored its star turn, the **basilica**, and maybe hiked out into the surrounding woods, there's not much to detain you: the **town centre** is too dishevelled to be particularly endearing and the lack of quality accommodation may make you think twice about staying.

Basilique St Hubert

The **Basilique St Hubert** (daily 9am–6pm, Nov–Easter 9am–5pm; free) is easily the grandest edifice in the Ardennes and has been an important place of pilgrimage since the relics of the eponymous saint were moved here in the ninth century. A well-respected though shadowy figure, **St Hubert** (c.656–727 AD) spent years in the Ardennes preaching against the prevailing animism. He seems to have died as result of a fishing accident, but this wasn't didactic enough for the Church, which concocted a much fancier tale. In this, Hubert becomes Count Hubert, a Frankish noble whose hedonistic lifestyle comes to an abrupt end on a hunting trip he irreligiously organized on a Good Friday. Just when Hubert's hounds corner a stag, the beast turns to reveal, between his antlers, a luminous vision of Christ on the Cross. Shocked to his cotton socks, Hubert promptly abandons the hunt, gives his money away and dedicates his life to the Church, becoming a (Belgian) bishop. This was all copybook stuff and sufficient justification for Hubert's canonization – as patron saint of hunters and trappers.

The first abbey here predated the cult of St Hubert, but things really got going after the saint's relics arrived and the abbey – as well as the village that grew up in its shadow – was named in his honour. In medieval times, the abbey became one of the region's richest and a major landowner. The French Revolutionary army suppressed the abbey in the 1790s, but the abbey church – now the basilica – plus several of the old abbey buildings survived; the latter flank the grand rectangular **piazza** that leads to the basilica's main entrance.

From the outside, the basilica's outstanding feature is the Baroque **west facade** of 1702, made of limestone and equipped with twin pepper-pot towers, a clock and a carving on the pediment depicting the miracle of St Hubert. Inside, the clear lines of the Gothic nave and aisles have taken an aesthetic hammering from both an extensive Baroque refurbishment and a heavy-handed neo-Gothic makeover in the 1840s. The result doesn't sit easily on the eye, but there are one or two redeeming features, most notably the fetching pink and black stripes on the columns in the nave. Also of interest are the whopping **choir stalls**, typically Baroque and retelling the legend of St Hubert (on the right-hand side) and St Benedict (on the left), as well as the elaborate **mausoleum** of St Hubert, at the beginning of the ambulatory, on the left. The mausoleum was carved in the 1840s, with King Léopold I, a keen huntsman,

picking up the bill. Beside the mausoleum is the only stained-glass **window** to have survived from the sixteenth century, a richly coloured, wonderfully executed work of art.

Practicalities

The nearest **train station** to St Hubert is Poix St Hubert, 7km away to the west on the Namur–Libramont/Arlon line. From here, there are regular **buses** into St Hubert (Mon–Fri 12 daily, Sat & Sun 4 daily; 20min), which stop at place du Marché, metres from the basilica. The **tourist office**, at rue St Gilles 12 (daily 9am–5pm; ☎061 61 30 10, 🌐www.sthubert.be), is just across the street from the beginning of the piazza that leads to the basilica entrance. They sell **maps** of the area's marked walks, including the functional *Carte des Promenades Pedestres*, which details eleven circular routes (**Walk 5** is perhaps the best of the bunch, a two- to three-hour jaunt through the woods and onto the edge of open moorland), as well as stocking plenty of other Ardennes literature.

Of the handful of **hotels** in the town centre, the *Hôtel de l'Abbaye*, opposite the basilica at place du Marché 18 (☎061 61 10 23, 🌐www.hotelabbaye.be; 📍), has a real claim to fame as the place where Hemingway hunkered down in 1944 as he advanced across Europe with the US army. Perhaps surprisingly, the hotel doesn't make much of the connection and, although it occupies an attractive old building and the public rooms are pleasantly old-fashioned, its twenty rooms – of which fourteen are en suite – are very plain and frugal. Somewhat more enticing is the three-star *Le Cor de Chasse*, at avenue Nestor Martin 3 (☎061 61 16 44, 🌐www.lecordechassesainthubert.be; 📍), which occupies a modest, inter-war terraced house, though its ten guest rooms are a tad more commodious than those of its rivals. To get there, walk down rue St Gilles, past the tourist office, and it's at the end of the street, 300m or so from the basilica. The nearest **campsite** is the large, family-oriented *Europacamp* on route de Martelange, 2km southwest of town (☎061 61 12 69).

The **restaurant** of the *Hôtel du Luxembourg*, at place du Marché 7 (☎061 61 10 93), specializes in Ardennes dishes with a *plat du jour* working out at a very reasonable €13. The premises are enjoyable too – decorated in a sort of neo-baronial style with acres of wood panelling and stuffed animal heads on the walls.

Around St Hubert

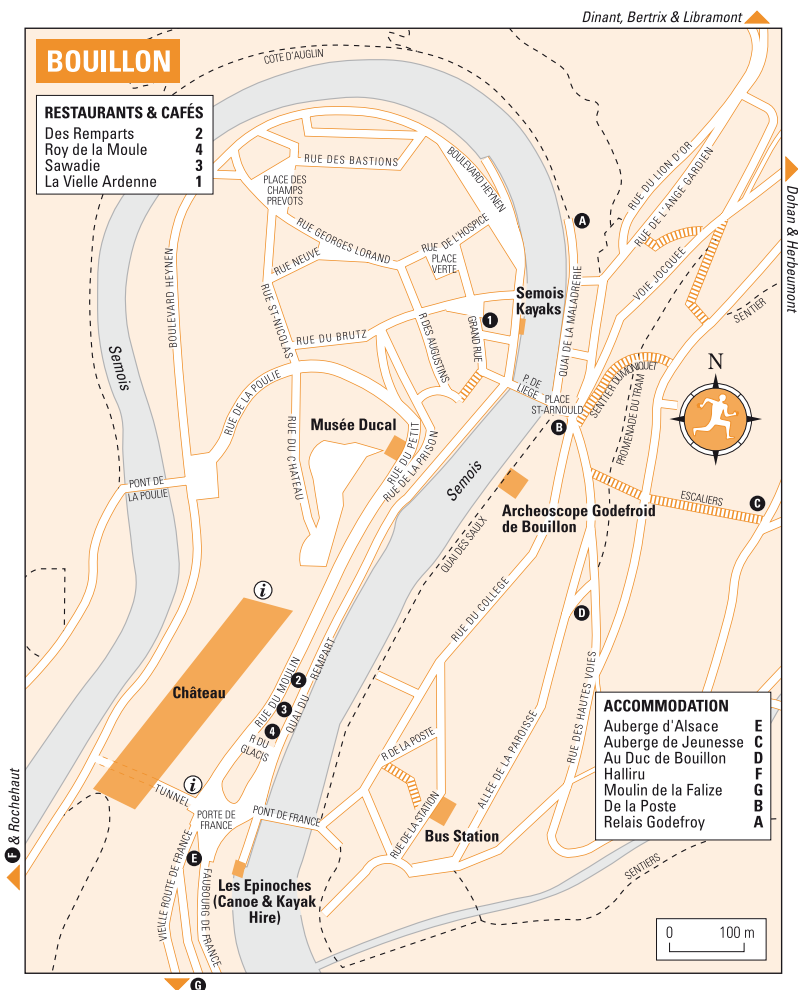
Some 12km **west** of St Hubert, right by the E411 (Exit 24), the **Euro Space Center** is a hugely popular attraction (☎061 65 01 33, 🌐www.eurospacecenter.be; April–June & Sept–Oct daily except Mon 10am–4pm; July & Aug daily 10am–5pm; but some variations during school terms & limited opening Nov–March; €11). Easily identified by the space rocket parked outside, its hangar-like premises house a hi-tech museum telling you everything you ever wanted to know about space travel and the applications of space and satellite technology. There are lots of buttons for kids to press in the many interactive displays, as well as full-scale models of the space shuttles and of the Mir space station.

From the Space Centre, it's a further 6km west, across the E411, to **Redu**, a small village that has reinvented itself – à la Hay-on-Wye – as a bibliophile's paradise at the instigation of a local antiquarian bookseller, one Noel Anselot. The village now heaves with bookstores, selling new and used books, prints and pictures (Mon–Sat), and offers a programme of literary events to match. Obviously most of the books are in French or Flemish, but several bookstores have a reasonable selection of English titles – try De Boekenwurm, at Voie d'Hurleau 51, for starters.

Bouillon and around

Beguiling **BOUILLON**, forty-odd kilometres southwest of St Hubert, close to the French border, is a well-known and extraordinarily handsome resort on the edge of the Ardennes, enclosed in a loop of the River Semois and crowned by an outstanding castle. It's a relaxed and amiable place, with a healthy supply of hotels and restaurants, and, what's more, it's an excellent base for exploring – by foot, cycle or car – the wildly dramatic scenery of the **Semois river valley**.

Bouillon isn't on the train network, but there are regular **buses** from the nearest mainline train station, **Libramont**, 30km to the northeast (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat & Sun 1–2 daily; 50min); Libramont is on the Namur/Luxembourg line. En route, some (but not all) of these buses call at **Bertrix train station**, 20km northeast of Bouillon. There are also branch-line trains to Bertrix from Libramont



(every 2hr; 10min) and Dinant (Mon–Fri hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 1hr). For **TEC bus** timetables, contact ☎061 53 10 00, 🌐www.infotec.be.

Arrival and information

Though Bouillon is a small town, getting your bearings can be a little difficult at first. The thing to remember is that the **quai du Rempart**, the main street, is below and to the east of the castle, its north end marked by the Pont de Liège, the south by the Pont de France. The quickest way to get from one side of the castle to the other is via the tunnel beside the Pont de France.

Buses pull in at the quai du Rempart and beside the river; they then proceed south to the **bus station**, just across the Pont de France. The **tourist office** (☎061 46 62 57, 🌐www.bouillon-sedan.com) is based in the castle, and shares its complex opening times (see p.371); there's also an **information chalet** beside the Pont de France (Easter–June & Sept Sat & Sun 10am–1pm & 2–6pm; July–Aug daily 10am–1pm & 2–7pm). Both have oodles of local information, book accommodation at no extra cost and sell local hiking maps.

Accommodation

Bouillon has a good range of **accommodation**, with around a dozen hotels, a hostel and a couple of campsites. In addition, the tourist office has the details of a handful of **B&Bs** (①–②), both in town and on the outskirts.

Hotels

Auberge d'Alsace Faubourg de France 3, at the east end of the Pont de France ☎061 46 65 88, 🌐www.aubergedalsace.be. Cosy and smart hotel with traditional décor and a sombre brown and beige exterior. Very comfortable rooms, most of which have pleasant river views. The adjacent Hôtel de France (same details) is part of the same complex. Closed Jan. ②

Hôtel Au Duc de Bouillon rue des Hautes Voies 2 ☎061 46 63 20, 🌐www.ducdebouillon.be. Straight-forward two-star hotel in refurbished premises above – and a short, stiff walk from – the Pont de Liège. Great views over to the castle (from some rooms). ②

Hôtel de La Poste place St Arnould 1 ☎061 46 51 51, 🌐www.hotelposte.be. There's been a hotel

here, right by the Pont de Liège, since the 1730s. The present incarnation claims four stars and sixty odd sprightly decorated rooms. The main building is a good-looking affair dating from the early twentieth century, but the annexe is modern and comparatively dull. There are great views of the castle from one side of the hotel, so be sure to get a room facing west, and preferably high up in the hotel tower. ②

Hôtel Relais Godefroy quai de la Tannerie 5 ☎061 46 62 04, 🌐www.relaishgodefroy.be. Neat and trim hotel in a tastefully refurbished old block just north along the river from the Pont de Liège, with thirty modern, well-appointed rooms, most of which have river views. A good bet. ②

Hostel and campsites

Auberge de Jeunesse chemin du Christ 16 ☎061 46 81 37, 🌐www.laj.be. Large and well-equipped HI hostel with dorm beds and family rooms, plus kitchen, laundry and café. It's east across the river from the castle, on the hill opposite – a long walk by road, but there is a shortcut: the steps leading up from rue des Hautes Voies, just above place St Arnould, go there directly. Reservations advised. Closed Jan & early Feb. Dorm beds €15,

Halliru route de Corbion ☎061 46 60 09. Reasonably well-equipped campsite down by the

river, some 2km southwest of the town centre on the road to Corbion. It's an easy walk – go through the tunnel next to the information chalet, turn left and keep going. Open April–Sept. Tent and two occupants about €10 per night.

Moulin de la Falize Vieille route de France 62, ☎061 46 62 00, 🌐www.moulindelafalize.be. Campsite with all the trimmings, including laundry, café, sauna and playground. About 1km south of town from the west end of the Port de France. Open Easter to early Nov. Tent and two occupants around €15 per night.

The Town

Bouillon's pride and joy is its impossibly picturesque **Château**, set on a long and craggy ridge that runs high above town (March, Oct & Nov daily 10am–5pm; April–June & Sept Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6.30pm; July & Aug daily 10am–6.30pm, plus Tues, Wed & Fri–Sun until 10pm; Dec–Feb Mon–Fri 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €6, combined ticket with museum €8). The castle was originally held by a succession of independent dukes, who controlled most of the land hereabouts. There were five of these, all



5

THE ARDENNES

Bouillon and around

called **Godfrey de Bouillon**, the fifth and last of whom left on the First Crusade in 1096, selling his dominions (partly to raise the cash for his trip) to the prince-bishop of Liège. Later, Louis XIV got his hands on the old dukedom and promptly had the castle refortified to the design of his military architect **Vauban**, whose handiwork defines most of the fortress today.

The castle is an intriguing old place, and paths wind through most of its courtyards, along the battlements and towers, and through dungeons filled with weaponry and instruments of torture. Most visitors drive to the entrance, but walking there is easy enough too – either via rue du Château or, more strenuously, by a set of steep steps that climbs up from rue du Moulin, one street back from the river. A brochure in English, on sale at the entrance, describes the various parts of the stronghold and is well worth picking up. Among the highlights, the **Salle de Godfrey**, hewn out of the rock, contains a large wooden cross sunk into the floor and sports carvings illustrating the castle's history; there's also the **Tour d'Autriche** (Austrian Tower) at the top of the castle, with fabulous views over the Semois valley.

Le Musée Ducal

Downhill from the castle, just to the north on rue du Petit, is **Le Musée Ducal**, which exhibits a wide-ranging collection in an attractive eighteenth-century mansion (Easter to mid-Nov daily 10am–5/6pm; €4, combined ticket with castle €8; @www.museeducal.be). Of particular interest are the artefacts relating to the fifth Godfrey, most notably a replica of his tomb in Jerusalem, where he died in 1100. The Crusaders had captured Jerusalem the year before and speedily elected Godfrey their king. However, he barely had time to settle himself before he became sick – either from disease or, as was suggested at the time, because his Muslim enemies poisoned him. The museum also has some gruesome, medieval paraphernalia, including assorted weaponry and several vicious, spiked dog collars for wolf hunting, while another section concentrates on the folklore and history of the town and region. Downstairs, there's a large-scale model of the town in 1690, various shooting and hunting accessories, and a room devoted to the printing activities of local author **Pierre Rousseau** (1727–85), who printed the work of some of the authors of the Enlightenment in Bouillon after they were banned in France. Upstairs, a series of period rooms showcases local industries from weaving to clog making.

Archéoscope Godefroid de Bouillon

For yet more on old Godfrey, head for the **Archéoscope Godefroid de Bouillon** (Feb Tues–Fri 1–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; March–April daily 10am–4pm; May–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct & Nov Tues–Sun 10am–4pm; Dec Tues–Fri 1–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; €6, combined ticket with castle & museum €13; @www.archeoscopebouillon.be), occupying an old convent near the Pont de France at quai des Saulx 14. A new historical centre, its exhibitions on the Crusades, Arab culture, castle building and so forth kick off with a multimedia show on the duke himself.

Eating and drinking

Bouillon heaves with **cafés** and **restaurants**, nowhere more so than on the quai du Rempart. Some are geared up for the day-trippers, serving some pretty innocuous stuff, but there are lots of good places too. Note also that many places close down fairly early, especially out of season, and after 10pm, or even 9pm in winter, you'll be struggling to get yourself fed.

Les Remparts quai du Rempart 31 ☎061 46 75 82. This cosy restaurant offers delicious Walloon cuisine, both set meals and à la carte. Main courses hover around €18. Closed Thurs.

Le Roy de la Moule quai du Rempart 42 ☎061 46 62 49. Mussels-every-which-way restaurant with a good choice of beers.

Le Sawadie quai du Rempart 34 ☎061 46 67 92. Competent, straightforward and inexpensive Thai

restaurant, which often stays open until late. Closed Mon.

La Vieille Ardenne Grand-rue 9 ☎061 46 62 77. Slightly old-fashioned restaurant specializing in regional dishes. Main courses average around €18. Also has an extensive beer menu. Near the Pont de Liège.

Around Bouillon: the Semois valley

To the west of Bouillon, quiet country roads negotiate the **Semois river valley**, repeatedly climbing up into the wooded hills before careering down to the riverside. Holidaying Belgians descend on this beautiful area in their hundreds, and today the hardy farmers who once tilled the land, grazed their flocks and harvested the forests are well-nigh invisible, their old cottages turned into myriad gîtes. Of all the villages hereabouts, the most appealing is **Rochehaut**, a simply delightful little place perched high above the river and with a couple of great places to stay; the runner-up is **Frahan**, a secluded hamlet with a charming, bucolic setting. To the east of Bouillon, the Semois valley is pleasantly rural, but no more; the most worthwhile target here is **Herbeumont**, an attractive little place with a ruined medieval castle.

There are local **buses** along the Semois valley, but these are few and far between, and realistically you're going to need a car or bike to get around.

Poupehan and Frahan

Heading west from Bouillon along the N810, it's just 12km to **POUPEHAN**, an inconsequential village that straggles the banks of the River Semois. The target of one of the most popular canoe trips from Bouillon, Poupehan makes a healthy living from its many visitors, most of whom are here to enjoy the peace and quiet and to mess around in the river. The village has two **hotels**, the more appealing of which is the *Hôtel Chaire à Prêcher* (☎061 46 61 54; 🍷), a modest two-star establishment with an attractive riverside location. There are also three **campsites** in the village, including the well-equipped and well-appointed *Île de Faigueul*, on the river at rue de la Chérizelle 54 (April–Oct; ☎061 46 68 94, 🌐www.camping-iledefaigueul.com).

West along the N810 from Poupehan, it's just 1km or so to the 2km-long turning that leads to the hamlet of **Frahan**, a huddle of stone houses draped over a steep hillock, tucked away in a tight bend in the river and surrounded by meadows. A footbridge crosses the Semois here and there are footpaths on both sides of the river that make for nice walks.

Rochehaut

Back at Poupehan, cross the bridge and it's a steep four-kilometre drive up through the woods to **ROCHEHAUT**, a beguiling hilltop village whose rustic stone cottages amble across a gentle dip between two sloping ridges. Gîtes rule the roost here, but the old stone **church**, with its stocky tower, is a reminder of more agricultural days, when this isolated community eked out a living from the land. Nowadays, most visitors come here to **hike**, exploring the locality's steep forested hills and the valley down below by means of a network of marked trails. Local hiking maps are available at all the local **hotels**. Among them, the pick is the three-star 🍷 *Auberge de la Ferme* (☎061 46 10 00, 🌐www.aubergedelaferme.be; 🍷; closed most of Jan), which offers lodgings in a

The **River Semois** snakes its way across much of southern Belgium, rising near Arlon and then meandering west until it finally flows into the Meuse in France. The most impressive part of the Semois river valley lies just to the west of Bouillon, the river wriggling and worming beneath steep wooded hills and ridges – altogether some of the most sumptuous scenery in the whole of the Ardennes.

Before setting out, **walkers** should get hold of the *Cartes des Promenades du Grand Bouillon* map (on sale at the tourist office), with nine “grandes promenades” marked and a further ninety circular walks that begin and end in Bouillon or one of the nearby villages. The routes are well marked, but you need to study the map carefully if you want to avoid having to walk on major or minor roads; the map also gives (pretty generous) suggested times for completing the walks. Note that the marked river crossings are not bridges, so you may well end up with wet feet. The tourist office also sells a map detailing suggested **cycling** routes, while **mountain bikes** can be rented from Semois Kayaks (see below).

Walks

From Bouillon's Pont de France, **Walk 11** (7km; 2hr) heads south to the French border, a pretty walk through woods, although the return is mostly along a main road. A better option is to take **Walk 12** (4km; 1hr 30min) through the arboretum and down to the *Halliru* campsite by the river, joining **Walk 13** along the riverbank up to the Rocher du Pendu and as far as Moulin de l'Épine, where you can wade across the river to a superb restaurant-bar (with great local food at around €16 for a main course) and the minor road that leads back to town above the Semois. More serious walkers can pick up **Walk 37** (7km; 3hr) or **Walk 72** (16km; 6hr) at Moulin de l'Épine for some fabulous views either side of the river, Walk 72 being particularly glorious as it heads around Le Tombeau du Géant. If you just want a brief walk around Bouillon, **Walk 16** (5km; 1hr 30min) is a good choice – a brief walk that climbs up out of town, with great views of the castle and surrounding countryside, and back through the outskirts of the Ferme de Buhan.

In the other direction from Bouillon, the Semois twists its way to the resort-village of **Dohan**. The mammoth **Walk 19** (23km; 7hr) runs direct to Dohan from Bouillon, although it's more attractive to follow the river via **Walk 17** (11km; 3hr) as far as **Saty**, from where you can either canoe back to Bouillon (see below), or join Walk 19 towards Dohan. Finally, for an ambitious and varied day's walking, you can take **Walk 7** (21km; 6hr) from the Pont de France in Bouillon across the Ferme du Buhan and through Saty and Dohan as far as **La Maka**. Here you can pick up **Walk 45** (3.5km; 2hr), which incorporates the **waterfalls** at Saut de Sorcières and the lovely views over the river valley from Mont de Katron. From Les Hayons, **Walk 6** (23km; 7hr) runs directly back to Bouillon through Moulin Hideux.

Canoeing

As regards canoeing, the riverscape is gentle and sleepy, the Semois slow-moving and meandering – and the whole shebang is less oversubscribed than, say, Dinant. Bouillon has two main **canoe rental** companies: Les Epinoches, by the Pont de France (☎061 25 68 78, 🌐www.kayak-lesepinoches.be); and Semois Kayaks (☎0475 24 74 23, 🌐www.semois-kayaks.be), whose shorter trips depart from beside the Pont de Liège. Both companies offer a similar range of excursions at comparable prices and provide transport either to the departure point or from the destination. Advance reservations are strongly advised. The most popular options are the trips downriver from Bouillon to Poupehan (15km; 3hr; €36 for a two-seater) or from Poupehan to Frahan (5km; 1hr; €20). For an active day out, you can canoe to Poupehan and either pick up walking routes back to Bouillon or walk one of the circular routes around the village. If you do the latter, check when the last of the canoe company's minibuses return to Bouillon.

tastefully modernized old stone inn, an immaculately renovated barn, a new annexe and a converted farmhouse. The **restaurant** is excellent too, but you can also eat more informally – and just as well – in the bar. A first-rate alternative is the *Auberge de L'An* (☎061 46 40 60, 🌐www.an1600.be; ④; closed Jan & late June–early July), whose ten rooms and top-quality restaurant occupy a charming whitewashed cottage. There are superb views over the Semois from the edge of the village, and it's here you'll also find the aptly named *La Pointe de Vue*, a plain and simple café-bar with a terrace.

Herbeumont

In the opposite direction from Bouillon, some 15km to the east, is **HERBEUMONT**, a pleasant village distinguished by the ruins of its medieval **château** (open access; free), perched on a bluff above the Semois, five minutes' walk from the centre of the village. The castle is little more than a shell now, but worth the scramble up the hill for the panoramic views. The other specific sight is the splendid early-twentieth-century **viaduct**, just outside the village off the main road towards Florenville, but the main activity hereabouts is **walking**. The **tourist office**, at rue des Combattants 7 (Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 1.30–5pm; ☎061 41 24 12, 🌐www.herbeumont-tourisme.be), has a brochure detailing fifteen routes along the Semois and out through the Forêt d'Herbeumont just to the east.

Herbeumont has three **hotels**, all on the main square, the Grand-Place. The most recommendable is *La Renaissance*, at no. 3 (☎061 41 10 83; ④), a friendly, well-kept and unassuming hotel with ten en-suite rooms, behind a modern half-timbered facade. The other good bet is *La Châtelaine*, at no. 8 (☎061 41 14 22, 🌐www.chatelaine.be; ⑤), a compact three-star affair, also with modest but perfectly adequate rooms. Note, however, that *La Châtelaine* is closed from January to mid-March, in June and early July as well as in late August and early September. There are several **campsites**, the handiest being the *Bains et Garenne*, at rue de la Garenne 8 (☎061 41 25 93; April–Nov), by the river about 300m from the village. As for **food**, the restaurant of *La Renaissance* offers smashing Ardennes specialities at affordable prices, as does *L'Herbeumont*, at Grand-Place 4. There's also a very good creperie, *L'Abri*, just off the Grand-Place at rue des Ponts 4.

The Gaume and Arlon

Stretching south from the River Semois to the French frontier, the **Gaume** is a compact, very rural district comprised of tiny villages amid thickly wooded hills. It is thought to be named after the Gaumains, porters who once carried locally mined iron ore north to Liège, but no one knows for sure. More certainly, the locals did develop a distinctive dialect, an amalgamation of Walloon and Luxembourgish, but in the last decades a tide of incomers has diluted this considerably. Nowadays, the Gaume is dotted with second homes and gîtes, leaving slim pickings for the passing tourist, with accommodation especially thin on the ground. Neither is there anywhere special you'll want to head for – the most likely exception the beer-producing **Abbaye d'Orval** – though, on a positive note, the countryside is very attractive. The Gaume ends just to the southwest of **Arlon**, the capital of Luxembourg province, but a bit of a disappointment considering its long history.

The **train** network here extends as far as Florenville and Virton, but otherwise you'll be reliant on local **buses** and services are very patchy; to get around the

Gaume, therefore, you really need a car (or bike). No such problems affect Arlon, which is on the main Brussels–Luxembourg train line.

Florenville

Close to the French border, on a branch rail line and an important crossroads, unassuming **FLORENVILLE** straggles up and over a sandstone ridge beside the River Semois. The town took a pasting in 1940, and thus much of it is modern, but it's an attractive little town nonetheless, set around a large and pleasant square and with a bustling main street. There are panoramic views over the river valley from the terrace behind the **church**, a conspicuous structure rebuilt in 1950, but that's pretty much it as far as specific sights go; most visitors use the town merely as a pit-stop. In this regard, the **tourist office**, right on the main square (Mon–Sat 9am–noon & 2–6pm; ☎061 31 12 29, 🌐www.semois-tourisme.be) has plenty of information.

Abbaye d'Orval

Some 9km south of Florenville, beside the main road, the **Abbaye d'Orval** (daily: March–May & Oct 9.30am–6pm; June–Sept 9.30am–6.30pm; Nov–Feb 10.30am–5.30pm; €4.50; 🌐www.orval.be) is a place of legendary beginnings. It was founded, so the story goes, when Countess Mathilda of Tuscany lost a gold ring in a lake and a fish recovered it for her, prompting the countess to donate the surrounding land to God for the construction of a monastery. A fish with a golden ring is still the emblem of the monastery, and can be seen gracing the bottles of **beer** for which the abbey is most famous these days; the abbey is itself of only moderate architectural interest.

Originally a Benedictine foundation, then Cistercian, the abbey has always been first and foremost a working community, making beer, cheese and bread (samples of which are on sale in the abbey shop). Indeed, of the original twelfth- and thirteenth-century buildings, only the ruins of the Romanesque-Gothic **church of Notre-Dame** are left, with the frame of the original rose window and Romanesque capitals in the nave and transept. Most of the medieval abbey disappeared during an eighteenth-century revamp, but much of this was, in its turn, destroyed by the French Revolutionary army in 1793. Thereafter, the abbey lay abandoned until 1926, when the **Trappist** order acquired the property and built on the site to the eighteenth-century plans, creating an imposing new complex, complete with a monumental statue of the Virgin. You can wander around the ruins, and they are picturesque enough, but many of the new buildings are closed to the public. The only parts you can visit are the eighteenth-century **cellars**, which come complete with a small museum and a model of how the abbey looked in 1760.

Driving to the abbey is quick and easy, but getting there by **public transport** is difficult – there's an infrequent bus from Florenville, the nearest town on the train network. Not far from the abbey, beside the N840, **accommodation** is available at the rusticated, half-timbered *Nouvelle Hostellerie d'Orval* (☎061 31 43 65; 🍷; closed Mon). Besides six simple but comfortable rooms, it has a **restaurant** serving good-value Belgian fare, with three-course lunch menus from €12, as well as bar snacks, including large platters of Orval cheese.

Arlon

The capital of Luxembourg province, **ARLON** is one of the oldest towns in Belgium, a trading centre for the Romans as far back as the second century AD.



Belgian Food

Few people realise that Belgium has a significant culinary tradition, meaning that you can eat better here than almost anywhere in Europe. And it's not just mussels and chips either. There is a great deal more variety than you would expect for such a small country, with an emphasis on fresh, local produce and artisanal methods of production – much like neighbouring France, though with none of the pretentiousness that you sometimes find there. Food really is one of the joys of travelling in Belgium.

Street food and snacks

They may be known almost everywhere as French fries, but the fact is **frites** are a Belgian invention, and nowhere in the country are you far from a *frietkot* or *friture* stall. To be truly authentic, they must be made with Belgian potatoes and parboiled before being deep-fried. They're also not quite the same unless you eat them

with a wooden fork out of a large paper cone, preferably with a large dollop of mayonnaise on top – or one of the many different toppings available, ranging from curry to goulash sauce.

The other street food that you'll see often, and one that is equally Belgian, is the **waffle** or *gaufre* – a mixture of butter, flour, eggs and sugar grilled on deep-ridged waffle irons and sold on the street in most cities. There are two types of waffle: you'll most likely come across the Brussels waffle, a gridlike slab of yeasty batter dusted with sugar and served with whipped cream, ice cream, chocolate or fruit. Its rival – the so-called Liège waffle – is a smaller and more intensely sweet affair, cooked with a sugar coating and more usually available from bakeries than street stands.



▼ Brussels waffles

Food events and festivals

Belgium's preoccupation with food is reflected in the many food-related festivals and events that take place annually all over the country, and there are more springing up all the time. Two of the most recent are Bruges's annual chocolate festival, held every April, and Antwerp's August *Bollekesfeest*, which displays the best of local produce in

▼ Malmédy's giant omelette



various open-air locations around the city, including a fish market and organized picnics. Oostduinkerke, on the Flemish coast, sees fishermen on horseback catch shrimps during the last weekend in June and then cook them up in the town; while in Malmédy, in the Ardennes, they make a giant omelette every August using ten thousand eggs and then distribute it among the keen and hungry.

Main courses and cheeses

The Belgian national dish is of course *moules frites* or **mussels** and chips, which can be found more or less everywhere when mussels are in season (ie when there is an 'r' in the month – May to August is not mussels season and although you can find mussels during this time the most authentic places won't serve them). They're best eaten the traditional way, served in a vast pot with chips and mayonnaise on the side, either 'à la marinière' (steamed with white wine, shallots and parsley or celery), or à la



▼ Waterzooi

crème (steamed with the same ingredients but thickened with cream and flour). Discard the shells in the pot lid or scoop up the juices with them, and accompany the whole thing with lashings of crusty bread. The other way to eat mussels, but less fun and not nearly as satisfying, is baked, with a variety of sauces.

There are many other very **traditional Belgian dishes** you should try, and what's on offer may vary depending on which part of the country you're in, although you can find most things in Brussels. There's *carbonnades à la flamande* (*stoofvlees* in Flemish), a rich beef stew with beer that is often served with mashed potato (*stoemp*) with cabbage or other diced root vegetables; *waterzooi*, a creamy Flemish stew native to Ghent and around, made with chicken or white fish, leek and plain boiled potatoes; and, on the vegetable front, chicory or endive, the Belgian variety of which is said to be the world's best. It's served in a variety of ways, but most often gratinée (with cheese). *Lapin à la gueuze*, or rabbit cooked in the local beer of Brussels, is another favourite countrywide.



▼ Diners at pavement café



▲ Cheese stall

Among other specialities, the Ardennes produces great **cured hams** – much like Parma ham – good coarse liver pate, and its restaurants often have game like wild boar on the menu. And although it has nothing like the variety of France, Belgium boasts some decent **cheeses** too, among which Herve, from the Liège province town of the same name, is one of the best and most common. It's a rind cheese, a bit like the French Pont l'Évêque, but stronger. Others, like Chimay, are made by monks in the Trappist monasteries, where the cheese-making tradition still exists alongside that of brewing. All provide proven ballast for beer drinking, and you'll often be served a small plate of cheese to accompany your chosen brew – one of Belgium's many civilized traditions.

No one can resist the Chocolatier!

The Belgians have a notoriously sweet tooth, and this is manifest in the country's obsession with chocolate. The country produces a massive 172,000 tonnes of the brown stuff every year, and there are around two thousand chocolate shops around the country; even the smallest town or village will have at least one. There are some brands you will see everywhere – Leonidas is perhaps the most ubiquitous; others include Godiva, Neuhaus and Moeder Babelutte – and you won't go far wrong buying from one of these places (it's worth remembering that Belgian chocolates are a lot cheaper in Belgium!). But try also to seek out the independent places, for example Wittamer or Pierre Marcolini in Brussels (see p.137), or Chocolate Line in Bruges (see p.215), which may be a little more expensive but will often be higher quality and more interesting.



These days it's an amiable country town, perhaps a little down on its luck, but with a relaxed and genial atmosphere that makes for a pleasant break in any journey – although there's not a lot to see. The modern centre of the town is **place Léopold**, with the clumping Palais de Justice at one end and a World War II tank in the middle, commemorating the American liberation of Arlon in September 1944. Behind the Palais de Justice, to the left, the **Musée Archéologique**, at rue des Martyrs 13 (Tues–Sat 9am–noon & 1.30–5pm, mid-April to mid-Sept also Sun 1.30–5pm; €4), has a good collection of Roman finds from the surrounding area, many of which are evocative of daily life in Roman times. There are pieces from the Merovingian era, too, as well as a marvellously realistic sixteenth-century retable. A couple of minutes' walk from place Léopold, up a flight of steps, is Arlon's diminutive **Grand-Place**, where there are more fragments from Roman times, namely the **Tour Romaine** (no public access), formerly part of the third-century ramparts.

Arlon **train station** is five minutes' walk away from the south side of the town centre. The **tourist office** is just off the main square at rue des Faubourgs 2 (Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 9am–4pm; ☎063 21 63 60, 🌐www.ot-arlon.be). For **food**, the *Maison Knopes*, at Grand-Place 24 (☎063 22 74 07) serves tasty crepes as well as more substantial meals (from €13) and does a great line in coffee. Note that Arlon in general closes early – after 8pm or 9pm you'll be struggling to find anywhere to eat.

Bastogne

BASTOGNE, thirty-odd kilometres north of Arlon, is a brisk modern town and important road junction, whose strategic position has attracted the attentions of just about every invading army that has passed this way. Indeed, the town is probably best known for its role in World War II, when the Americans held it against a much larger German force in December 1944 – a key engagement of the Battle of the Bulge. The American commander's response to the German demand for surrender – “Nuts!” – is one of the more quotable, if apocryphal, of martial rallying cries. Nowadays, there's no strong reason to



△ Tank commemorating the Battle of the Bulge, Bastogne

The Battle of the Bulge

Though there's not a lot to see now beyond parked tanks, cemeteries and the odd war memorial, the Ardennes was the site of some of World War II's fiercest fighting during the **Battle of the Bulge**. The Allied campaign of Autumn 1944 had concentrated on striking into Germany from Maastricht in the north and Alsace in the south, leaving a lightly defended central section, whose front line extended across the Ardennes from Malmédy to Luxembourg's Echternach. In December 1944, Hitler embarked on a desperate plan to change the course of the war by breaking through this part of the front, the intention being to sweep north behind the Allies, capture Antwerp and force them to retreat. To all intents and purposes, it was the same plan Hitler had applied with such great success in 1940, but this time he had fewer resources – especially fuel oil – and the Allied airforce ruled the skies.

Von Rundstedt, the veteran German general who Hitler placed in command, was acutely aware of these weaknesses – indeed he was against the operation from the start – but he hoped to benefit from the wintry weather conditions which would limit Allied aircraft activity. Carefully prepared, Von Rundstedt's offensive began on December 16, 1944, and one week later had created a “bulge” in the Allied line that reached the outskirts of Dinant – though the American 101st Airborne Division held firm around Bastogne. The success of the operation depended on rapid results, however, and Von Rundstedt's inability to reach Antwerp meant failure. Montgomery's forces from the north and Patton's from the south launched a counterattack, and by the end of January the Germans had been forced back to their original position. The loss of life was colossal – 75,000 Americans and over 100,000 Germans died in the battle.

overnight here, but there are several sights, the more interesting of which are connected with the events of 1944.

As a token of its appreciation, the town renamed its main square **place McAuliffe**, after the American commander, and plonked an American **tank** here just to emphasize the point. Wide and breezy, the square is the most agreeable part of town and very much the social focus, flanked by a string of busy cafés. From the northeast corner of the square, **Grand-rue** – the long main street – trails off to place St Pierre, a ten-minute walk away, where the **Église St-Pierre** sports a sturdy Romanesque tower topped by a timber gallery. Inside, and more unusually, the vaulting of the well-proportioned Gothic nave is decorated with splendid, brightly coloured frescoes, painted in the 1530s and depicting biblical scenes, saints, prophets and angels. Of note also are a finely carved Romanesque baptismal font and a flashy Baroque pulpit.

Close by, the chunky **Porte de Trèves** is the last vestige of the town's medieval walls – as illustrated in the nearby **Maison Mathelin**, at rue G. Delperdange 1 (July & Aug Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 1–5pm; €2), which has a model of the medieval town among a series of rooms tracking through Bastogne's history. Several rooms are devoted to the Battle of the Bulge, but the story is more fully told at the **American Memorial** (open access; free), situated 2km north of town on Mardasson hill; from place St Pierre, take rue G. Delperdange and keep going. This large, star-shaped memorial, inscribed with the names of all the American states, probably looks a great deal better from the air than it does from the ground, but the panels around the side do an excellent job of recounting different episodes from the battle, and the crypt, with its three altars, is suitably sombre. It's possible to climb up onto the roof for a windswept look back at Bastogne and the slag heaps and quarries of the surrounding countryside. Next door to the memorial, the **Bastogne Historical Center** (daily: March–April & Oct–Dec 10am–5.30pm; May–Sept 9.30am–6pm; €8.50;

🌐 www.bastognehistoricalcenter.be) collects together all manner of war-related artefacts – uniforms, vehicles, etc – in an impressive and imaginative series of displays, and shows a film of the battle compiled from live footage.

Practicalities

Bastogne is not on the train network, but there are connecting **buses** from the nearest train station, at **Libramont**. The journey takes about forty minutes and buses stop at the main square, place McAuliffe, which is where you'll find the **tourist office** (mid-June to mid-Sept daily 8.30am–6.30pm; mid-Sept to mid-June daily 9.30am–12.30pm & 1–5.30pm; ☎ 061 21 27 11, 🌐 www.paysdebastogne.be). They supply free town maps, have a variety of brochures on the Battle of the Bulge and will book accommodation on your behalf for free.

Bastogne has five **hotels**, the most agreeable of which is the *Hotel Collin* (☎ 061 21 43 58, 🌐 www.hotel-collin.com; 📍), a smart and tasteful conversion of an older building, complete with Art Deco flourishes, at place McAuliffe 8. For **food**, head for the cafés and restaurants on and around place McAuliffe. Among them, the best is the Hotel Collin's *Café 1900*, a smart and well-turned-out café that's good for snacks and light meals. Alternatively, try the bright and cheerful *Le Grill*, at place McAuliffe 21, which does a tasty line in mussels, plus delicious meat and fish dishes from around €18.

La Roche-en-Ardenne and around

About 30km northwest of Bastogne and 25km northeast of St Hubert, **LA ROCHE-EN-ARDENNE** is amazingly picturesque, hidden by hills until you're right on top of it, and crowned by romantic castle ruins. It's a strange mixture: a hidden place, geographically cut off from the rest of the world and surrounded by some of the wildest scenery in the Ardennes, yet it teems with people during the summer (most of whom come to get out into the countryside on foot or by canoe) and – by Ardennes standards – has a relatively animated nightlife, with plenty of bars and late-night restaurants. Near here too, to the north, is **Durbuy**, a pretty little place with excellent accommodation and great walking.

The Town

The greying stone **centre** of La Roche squeezes into one small bend of the River L'Ourthe, its main street winding between the two bridges, an unashamedly exploitative stretch of shops flogging Ardennes ham, knick-knacks and camping gear. That, however, is about it as far as development goes, and the streets around are unspoiled and quiet. The only tangible sight is the **château** (April–June, Sept & Oct daily 11am–5pm; July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 1–4pm, Sat & Sun 11am–4.30pm; €4), construction of which began in the ninth century and continued over four hundred years. It was destroyed in the late eighteenth century on the orders of the Habsburgs – to stop it falling into the hands of the French – and today its ruins still command sweeping views over the valley and of the surviving fragments of the curtain wall that once enclosed the town. To get to the castle, take the steps that lead up from place du Marché, at the south end of the high street.

On the high street itself, the **Musée Bataille des Ardennes** (daily 10am–6pm; €6) holds a small collection of military artefacts dedicated to the Battle of the Bulge (see p.378), but frankly it's eminently missable, especially if you've been to

the superior museum at Bastogne (see p.378). Curiously enough, the corner of the high street and rue de la Gare, a few metres to the north of the museum, is the spot where US and British soldiers met on January 11, 1945, as their respective armies converged on The Bulge; a commemorative **plaque** depicts the wintry scene.

Practicalities

La Roche is not on the rail network; the nearest **train station** is **Melreux-Hotton**, about 15km to the northwest and on the Jemelle–Liège line. From here, there are nine **buses** a day on a weekday (four on Sat & Sun) to La Roche. Buses pull in along the town's high street before proceeding to the **bus station**, over the bridge on the northern edge of town.

The **tourist office** is located at the south end of the high street, at place du Marché 15 (daily: July & Aug 9.30am–6pm; Sept–June 9.30am–noon & 1.30–5pm; ☎084 36 77 36, 🌐www.la-roche-tourisme.com). They have maps and booklets on the town and bus timetables, and sell a combined walking and cycling map (*Carte des Promenades Pedestres et Circuits Cyclotouristes*). **Canoes, kayaks** and **mountain bikes** – as well as skis in winter – can be rented from Ardennes-Aventures by the north bridge (☎084 41 19 00, 🌐www.ardenne-aventures.be).

Accommodation

The tourist office has details of local accommodation, including plenty of **B&Bs** (①–②) and a platoon of **hotels**, but nevertheless advance booking is advisable in season. One good and inexpensive choice is the pleasant *Le Luxembourg*, at avenue du Hadja 1a (☎084 41 14 15, 🌐www.luxembourgprovence.be; ②), with eight simple rooms – four en suite – in a pleasant, three-storey building just beyond the bridge on the north side of the centre. Moving upmarket, there's the delightful, three-star *Les Genets* (☎084 41 18 77, 🌐www.lesgenetshotel.com; ③), with eight cosy rooms in an immaculate lodge-like stone building that also provides superb views over the town from its perch at corniche de Deister 2. It's a steep, ten-minute climb up from the high street: walk south from place du Marché towards the bridge, turn left out of town up rue Clerue and veer left again up rue St Quoilin. Not quite as appealing, but still first-rate, is the four-star *La Claire Fontaine*, about 2km out of town on the road to Marche-en-Famenne (☎084 41 24 70, 🌐www.clairefontaine.be; ③). With expansive gardens and on the edge of the forest, the hotel consists of a lovely old lodge, strewn with antiques (including a giant bellows) and an architecturally harsh 1970s extension, though in fairness the rooms here are large and extremely well appointed.

There are no fewer than nine **campsites** in the vicinity, most of them packed with trailers. Among the closest is a group along rue de Harzé by the River Ourthe, north of town. Here you'll find *Le Benelux*, about 800m out along rue de la Gare from the north bridge (☎084 41 15 59; April–Sept); *Camping de l'Ourthe* (☎084 41 14 59; mid-March to mid-Oct) and *Le Grillon* (☎084 41 20 62; April–Oct) are just beyond.

Eating and drinking

La Roche boasts lots of **cafés and restaurants**, though given the number of day-trippers, it's hardly surprising that standards are very variable. There is, however, a cluster of excellent places on and around place du Bronze, next to the south bridge. These include *La Sapinière*, at rue Nulay 4, which serves good-value Belgian country food, as does *Restaurant L'Apero*, a small, family-run restaurant with fine local cooking just across the bridge from place du Bronze

Walking, cycling and canoeing in the Ourthe valley

The tourist office in **La Roche** sells a (rather rudimentary) walking map (*Carte des Promenades*), with a dozen circular walks marked in the vicinity. The longest and most attractive of these routes is the thirteen-kilometre-long **Walk 5**, which takes about six hours and is mildly strenuous. It starts on rue Bon Dieu du Maka, near place du Bronze, and rises steeply before levelling out through the woods above town and across fields of wildflowers. The walk follows GR route 57, dropping sharply to the river at **Maboge**, where several cafés offer lunch, then rejoining the main road for 500m until it turns left alongside a tributary of the Ourthe as far as the farm at Borzee. From here the route is easy to find, again heading through the woods with fabulous views, but when it descends towards the town keep your eyes peeled for a right and then an immediate left down an unpromising footpath that drops you onto the main road by the river. From here, take the second right for a final gentle stretch above the road, with good views over the town. Allow around three hours' walking time for the 13km; to extend the route by an hour or so, pick up **Walk 12** at Borzee, joining **Walk 11** as far as the small town of Samree and returning through the forest to La Roche.

If you're after a shorter hike, follow **Walk 4**, a six-kilometre route that takes about two hours. From the tourist office, head for place du Bronze and before you cross the bridge turn left on rue Clerue and sharp left again up rue St Quolin. Then turn left at the top to **St Margaret's Chapel**, built in 1600 and once connected to the castle by an underground passageway. Just left of the chapel, a scramble up the steep slope leads up to a look-out point with views over La Roche, while continuing up the footpath brings you to the attractive but rather twee and often crowded **Parc Forestier du Deister**. The tourist office has a map of the park, including descriptions of where various types of tree have been planted. If you continue through the park you'll rejoin Walk 4, looping briefly north and then dropping back to town, all along the roadway.

Alternatively, **GR route 57** provides a full half-day's walking between La Roche and the hamlet of Nadrin, a distance of around 15km. **Nadrin** is home to a belvedere – actually a high tower with a restaurant attached – from which you can see the River Ourthe at six different points on its meandering course in and out of the tightly packed hills. The return journey can be completed by bus, but this only runs twice daily, so be sure to check times with the tourist office before you leave.

Cycling, canoeing and other activities

Obviously enough, renting a **mountain bike** allows you to see more of the surrounding forests: eight circular routes are set out in the *Carte des Circuits Cyclotouristes*, on sale at the tourist office. Bikes can be rented from Ardenne-Aventures by the north bridge (☎084 41 19 00, 🌐www.ardenne-aventures.be). They also organize **canoeing** trips on the Ourthe, bussing you (or letting you mountain bike) to Maboge for the 10km paddle downstream to La Roche (€15 per person, €30 with the bike ride), or to Nisramont for the strenuous 25-kilometre river trip (€20). They also organize **river rafting** and **cross-country skiing** in the winter.

at rue Clerue 5. Alternatives include the cheap pizzas of the brash *Mezzogiorno*, at place du Bronze 1, while gastronomes can head for the *Hôtel Clairefontaine*, whose wonderful set menus – try the wild boar – start at €27.

Around La Roche: Durbuy

Inordinately pretty, tiny **DURBUY**, a circuitous 25km northwest of La Roche, is tucked into a narrow ravine beside the River L'Ourthe and below bulging wooded hills. Perhaps inevitably, the town (it's been a town since the fourteenth century) attracts far too many day-trippers for its own good, but out of season and

late in the evening it remains a delightful spot. Its special appeal is its immaculately maintained huddle of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century **stone houses**, set around a cobweb of cobbled lanes, and you can always escape the crush by hiking up into the surrounding hills. Also firmly set against all the razzmatazz is Durbuy's **château** (no access), whose turrets and towers are locked away on a knoll and behind iron gates. You'll need your own transport to get there.

Practicalities

Durbuy's **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 1–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; ☎086 21 24 28), on the large and modern main square, place aux Foires, has a long list of suggested activities, from canoeing and fishing through to catching the electric train that shuttles round town. They also sell local **hiking maps** – there are nine, mostly short trails in the hills around town – and will book accommodation on your behalf for free.

There are several top-flight **hotels** here, most memorably the four-star 🏠 *Clos des Récollets*, in a charming, partly whitewashed and half-timbered house right in the centre on place des Récollets (☎086 21 29 69, 🌐www.closdesrecollets.be; Ⓜ). One other very good hotel is close by: the ivy-clad, three-star *Hôtel Victoria*, at rue des Récollectines 4 (☎086 21 23 00, 🌐www.prevote.be; Ⓜ).

As for **food**, the restaurants at both the *Clos des Récollets* (closed Wed) and the *Hôtel Victoria* are excellent, with main courses, featuring French and Walloon specialities, costing in the region of €20. Several less expensive places flank place aux Foires – *La Brasserie Ardennoise* is as good as any, offering a wide range of meat and fish dishes plus snacks.

Huy

Midway between Namur and Liège, and easily accessible by train from either, the bustling town of **HUY** – aside from Liège, the major centre of the northern Ardennes – spreads across both sides of the River Meuse. One of the oldest settlements in Belgium and for a long time a flourishing market town, the place was badly damaged by Louis XIV in the late seventeenth century and mauled by several passing armies thereafter. Consequently, little remains of the old town, but Huy is certainly worth a brief stop, mainly for its splendid church, the Collégiale Notre-Dame, and dramatic citadel.

The Town

The imposing Gothic bulk of the **Collégiale Notre-Dame** (daily 9am–noon & 2–5pm; free) dominates Huy's compact centre, towering over the banks of the River Meuse with the high cliffs and walls of the citadel behind. Built between 1311 and 1536, the church's interior is decked out with fine stained glass, especially the magnificent **rose window**, a dazzling conglomeration of reds and blues. On the right side of the nave as you enter, stairs lead down to a Romanesque **crypt**, where the relics of Huy's patron saint, St Domitian, were once venerated. His original twelfth-century shrine stands upstairs in the **trésor** (same times; €3) under the rose window, along with three other large shrines from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, crafted by the Mosan gold- and silversmiths for which Huy was once famous. They're somewhat faded, but the beauty and skill of their execution still shines through. Outside, on the side of the church facing the town centre, look out for the **Porte de Bethléem**, topped by a mid-fourteenth-century arch decorated with scenes of the nativity.

Heading east, it's a short walk from the church across busy avenue des Ardennes to the **Grand-Place**, whose ornate bronze fountain of 1406 is decorated with a representation of the town walls interspersed with tiny statues of the same saints commemorated in the church; the wrought-iron and stone vats were added later, in the eighteenth century. The square is flanked by the **Hôtel de Ville**, a self-confident, château-style edifice dating from the 1760s, behind which is **place Verte**, overlooked by an attractive Gothic church and at the start of a pretty maze of narrow lanes and alleys that stretch north to rue Vankeerberghen.

The citadel

The severe stone walls of the citadel, **Le Fort de Huy** (April–June & Sept Mon–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 1–4.30pm, Sat & Sun 11am–6pm; July & Aug daily 11am–7pm; €4), perch on top of a wooded outcrop high above the River Meuse and the Collégiale Notre-Dame. There's been a fortress here since the ninth century, if not before, though the medieval castle that once occupied the site was demolished in 1717 and the present structure, partly hewn out of solid rock, was erected by the Dutch in the early nineteenth century. The fort is a massive complex, only parts of which can be visited, the main section being the dozen or so rooms used by the Germans as prison cells and interrogation rooms during World War II, when no fewer than seven thousand prisoners passed through this grim place.

There are two ways of getting to the fort: on foot, it's accessible from the quai de Namur by taking the path up to the left just beyond the tourist office; or you can use the **téléphérique** (cable car; June & Sept Sat & Sun 11am–12.15pm & 1–6.30pm; July & Aug daily 11am–12.15pm & 1–6.30pm; one-way €3.50, €4.50 return) from avenue De Batta on the other side of the river: cross over the Pont Roi Baudouin and turn left.

Practicalities

Huy's **train station** is on the opposite (west) side of the river from the town centre, a fifteen-minute walk: head straight out of the station down to the river, turn right and cross the Pont Roi Baudouin to reach the Collégiale Notre-Dame. The **tourist office** (Oct–March Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; April–June & Sept Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10.30am–5.30pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 10.30am–6pm; ☎085 21 29 15, 🌐www.pays-de-huy.be) is right by the entrance to the church. There are just two central **hotels**: the modern *Hôtel du Fort*, chaussée Napoleon 5 (☎085 21 24 03, 🌐www.hoteldufort.be; 📍), five minutes' walk along the river past the tourist office, with a range of variously sized and equipped rooms; and the more upmarket *Best Western Sirius*, a medium-sized hotel in a low-slung modern block on the west side of the river, north of the Pont Roi Baudouin at quai de Compiègne 47 (☎085 21 24 00, 🌐www.hotelsirius.be; 📍). Nevertheless, you might just as well stay in Liège or in a pleasanter spot further south.

The town centre has plenty of convivial **cafés and restaurants**. *Le Central*, in the Grand-Place, has reasonably priced *plats du jour*, while *Aux Origines*, rue Vierset Godin 3, beside place Verte, has an international range of teas and coffees. There are two good restaurants just south of the Grand-Place too, *Le Coin Cusinée*, rue Griange 16 (☎085 21 64 41; closed Mon, Tues–Thurs eve & Sat lunchtimes), which offers tasty French cuisine with main courses costing from €18; and *La Villa Romana del Casale*, an upmarket Italian restaurant at rue des Brasseurs 21 (☎085 31 01 10; closed Tues, Wed & Sat lunchtimes), where

the seafood is first-rate. Most people do their **drinking** on and around the Grand-Place: there are plenty of places to choose from, but if you're hankering after a pint of bitter, try the painfully authentic *Big Ben* pub in the corner.

Liège

Though the effective capital of the Ardennes, and of its own province, **LIÈGE** isn't the most obvious stop on most travellers' itineraries. It's a large, grimy, industrial city, with few notable sights and little immediate appeal. However, it's hard to avoid if you're heading on down this way to Luxembourg, and, once you've got to grips with the place, Liège has a few pleasant surprises, not least the excellence of its restaurants. Certainly, if you're overnighing here, give yourself at least half a day to nose around.

For most of its history, Liège was an independent principality; from the tenth century onwards it was the seat of a long line of **prince-bishops**, who ruled over bodies and souls until 1794, when the French revolutionary army expelled the last prince-bishop, torching his cathedral to hammer home the point. Later, Liège was incorporated into the Belgian state, rising to prominence as an industrial city. The coal and steel industries hereabouts date back to the twelfth century, but it was only in the nineteenth century that real development of the city's position and natural resources took place – not least under one John Cockerill (1790–1840), a British entrepreneur whose family name you still see around town, though unfortunately for Liège and its workers, heavy industry is now in steep decline and today the city is ringed by post-industrial sprawl. Another name to conjure with is **Georges Simenon**, the famously priapic crime writer who spent his early life here – the tourist office has a leaflet describing a “Simenon Route”.

Arrival, information and city transport

Liège has three **train stations**. All trains stop at the main terminal, **Guillemins**, about 2km south of the centre – and recently revamped by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, who was responsible for the Olympic Stadium in Athens. Most services also call at Liège's other two stations – **Jonfosse**, not far from boulevard de la Sauvenière just to the west of the centre, and **Palais**, near place St-Lambert in the city centre. Note, however, that express trains from Brussels and Luxembourg City only stop at Guillemins. To get to the centre of town from Guillemins station, either take the train to Palais station or catch a city bus to place St-Lambert; the taxi fare for the same journey is about €10.

The main city **tourist office** is located about 400m to the east of place Lambert at Féronstrée 92 (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–4.30pm & Sun 10am–2.30pm; ☎04 221 92 21, 🌐www.liege.be). They supply all the usual gubbins, including free city maps, and sell a leaflet describing the “Simenon Route”, a walking tour through the Outremeuse district, where author Georges Simenon spent his childhood. There's also a **provincial tourist office** bang in the centre of town at place St-Lambert 35 (daily 9.30am–5.30pm; ☎04 237 92 92, 🌐www.ftpl.be).

Liège is a large, rambling place, and to get from one side of town to the other you'll need to take a **bus** (operated by TEC; ☎04 361 94 44). Tickets cost €1.30 for a journey in the city centre, either from the driver or from one of the ticket booths located at major bus stops such as place St-Lambert, place de la Cathédrale or the train station. If you're staying for a couple of days, it's worth investing in a book of eight tickets for €5.80.

Accommodation

Liège suffers from a paucity of **hotels** and most of them are located in less than perfect parts of the city – your best bet is to aim for the new town, on the west bank running south of place de la République Française. On the plus side, the city's low ranking as a tourist destination means its hotels are rarely full, especially at weekends, when discounts are legion. Be aware, however, that room rates rocket during the annual Formula 1 Belgium Grand Prix, which is held at the nearby Spa-Francorchamps circuit, currently in September.

Hotels and hostel

L'Auberge de Jeunesse Georges Simenon rue Georges Simenon 2 ☎04 344 56 89 @www.laj.be. Modern, well-equipped hostel in a pleasant old building with self-catering facilities, a café, Internet access and a laundry. Two hundred beds in four- to sixteen-bedded rooms, though doubles are available on request. In the heart of Outremeuse, 1km or so east of place Lambert. Closed most of Jan. Dorm beds €17, doubles ①

Bedford quai St-Léonard 36 ☎04 228 81 11, @www.hotelbedford.be/liege/index. Liège's most luxurious hotel. The rooms are large but dated and despite the hefty price-tag it's in a disappointingly run-down and inconvenient location, on the busy road which runs along the riverfront. The rack rate is €235, though weekend discounts can cut this price by half. Breakfast included. ⑥

Best Western Univers Hotel rue des Guillemins 116 ☎04 254 55 55, @www.univershotel.be. Comfortable, recently renovated, three-star hotel opposite Guillemins train station; all rooms come with TV and phone. ③

Cygne d'Argent rue Beeckman 49 ☎04 223 70 01, @www.cygneargent.be. Small and friendly place occupying a townhouse in a quiet side street, with comfortable old-fashioned rooms. It's a 20min walk from Guillemins station: head straight ahead out of the station down rue Guillemins, turn left along rue Dartois and keep going straight until you reach rue du Jardin Botanique on your right; turn right here and rue Beeckman is the first on the left. Breakfast €9. ②

Ibis Liège Centre Opera place de la République Française 41 ☎04 230 33 33, @www.ibishotel.com. Functional, modern chain hotel – nothing special but modestly priced and excellently located right in the centre of town. ②

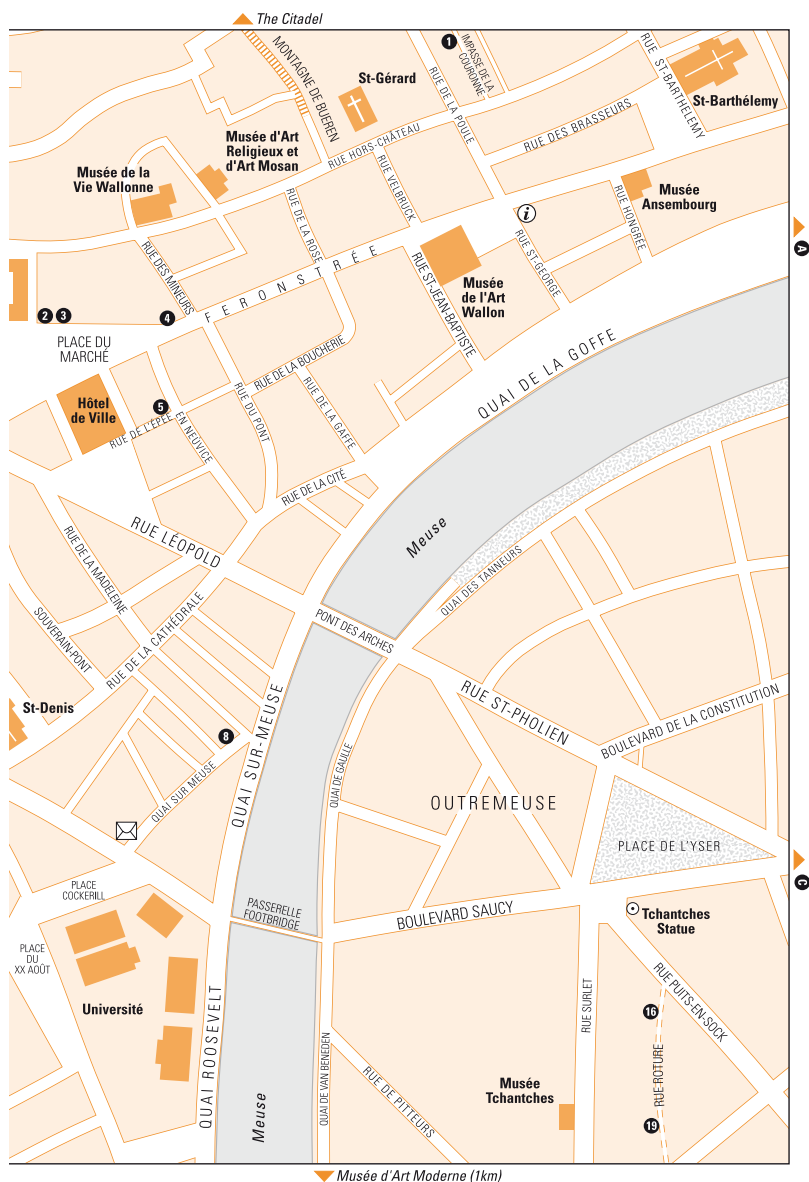
Les Nations rue des Guillemins 139 ☎04 252 44 14, @www.hotellesnations.be. Bargain-basement hotel opposite Guillemins station that attracts a backpacking clientele. All the rooms come with shower, and there's a café. ①

The City

Liège straddles the River Meuse. On the west bank are the three **squares** that together make up what amounts to the centre of the city, place St-Lambert, place du Marché and place de la République Française. The **old town** runs east from place du Marché, with Féronstrée as its spine, but although it holds the city's best museums, it's not nearly as pleasant as the so-called **new town**, nudging south from place de la République Française. To the east of the river, on what is in effect an island in the Meuse, the district of **Outremeuse** harbours a cluster of fine bars and restaurants and its own distinctive traditions and dialect.

Place St-Lambert

The nominal centre of the city is **place St-Lambert**, a vast and really rather cheerless gravel expanse that was formerly the site of the great Gothic cathedral of St-Lambert, destroyed by the French in 1794. Ivy-clad columns mark where the church once stood, but the square's only real touch of distinction is provided by the long frontage of the **Palais des Princes Evêques** (Palace of the Prince-Bishops), a mainly neo-Gothic edifice mostly dating from the middle of the nineteenth century. It's now used as a combination of law courts and provincial government offices, and you can usually wander into its two courtyards during



Place du Marché and place de la République Française

The eastern edge of place St-Lambert narrows into the smaller, tree-lined and much more attractive **place du Marché**, whose northern side is flanked by a row of atmospheric bars and restaurants, behind which looms the curiously Russian-looking onion dome of the **Église Saint-André**. The south side of

the square is occupied by the run-of-the-mill eighteenth-century **Hôtel de Ville**, while in the middle stands **Le Perron**, a grandiose symbol of civic independence, comprising a cumbersome water fountain of 1697 surmounted by a long and slender column.

To the west of place St-Lambert lies the third of the main central squares, the **place de la République Française**, edged on one side by the shed-like Neoclassical Théâtre Royale, in front of which stands a statue of the Liège-born composer André Grétry, whose heart is contained in the urn just below. The square marks the start of the new town (see p.389).

The old town

From place du Marché, **Féronstrée** heads east to form the backbone of the so-called **old town**, a rather optimistic description for a district now largely occupied by a rag-tag assortment of cut-price shops and 1960s concrete blocks. The area does, however, contain the city's densest concentration of **museums** and a smattering of historic buildings, though in general the streets are strangely devoid of life, except on Sunday mornings, when the vigorous **La Batte market** takes over the river bank.

For an impressive, panoramic view over the whole of Liège, make for **rue Hors-Château**, on the northern edge of the old town, from where the four hundred or so steps of the very steep **Montagne de Bueren** lead up to the **citadel**, which is now little more than a set of ramparts enclosing a modern hospital. The views, however, are superlative, worth the genuinely lung-wrenching trek, looking right out over the city and the rolling countryside beyond. To elaborate the excursion, pick up the "Hillsides of Liège" leaflet at the tourist office before you head up. This details four **walks** in the gardens and points out some of the sixty listed monuments hidden among the trees. The walks will take you back into the centre of the city by way of rue du Pery and rue Volière, which brings you out behind Gare du Palais.

Musée de la Vie Wallonne

The first turn off Féronstrée to the left, rue des Mineurs, leads up to the **Musée de la Vie Wallonne** (Tues–Sat 10am–5pm & Sun 10am–4pm; €3.80), the most impressive of the three old town museums devoted to Walloon culture. Housed in a former Franciscan friary, and recently revamped, the museum offers an absorbing glimpse into the past traditions and superstitions of the Liège area. There's an extensive collection of exhibits covering local trades, including candlemaking, coopering, pipe making and slate cutting, plus a quaint selection of wooden **puppets** from various Liège marionette theatres. The puppets feature personages both religious and secular – a diminutive Napoleon shares a case with Herod – and among them is an engaging selection of rakish **Tchantchès** puppets, depicting the town's folkloric hero (see p.390). The museum periodically arranges puppet shows in which you can see the marionettes in action. Other sections are devoted to the region's quirky folk traditions, with cases packed full of tarot cards, horoscopes, horseshoes and other, more outlandish exhibits including a piece of waffle in the form of a crucifix, a bone necklace to protect against jaundice, and a piece of fetal membrane carefully preserved in a small bag, which was thought to confer luck on its owner.

Musée de l'Art Wallon

Doubling back to Féronstrée, it's 250m east from the foot of rue des Mineurs to the **Musée de l'Art Wallon**, Féronstrée 86 (Tues–Sat 1–6pm, Sun 11am–4.30pm; €3.80), which comprises an attractive selection of works by

French-speaking Belgian artists. The collection is arranged chronologically, starting at the top and leading down in a descending spiral. It begins with the wonderfully varied sixteenth-century paintings of Henri Blès, plus a few canvases by Liège's greatest artist, **Lambert Lombard** (1505–66), including the wonderfully irascible self-portrait that once adorned the nation's 100-franc note. It's the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sections which are the strongest, however, ranging from the Manet-inspired portraits of Léon Philippet to the Seurat-like landscapes of Albert Lemaître, punctuated by moments of high pretension, such as Antoine Wiertz's immense and wonderfully overblown *Greeks and Trojans in Dispute over the Body of Patrocles*, boasting a wall-full of splendidly superfluous male flesh. Look out too for the small group of works by Delvaux and Magritte, notably the former's wacky *L'Homme de la Rue*, showing a bowler-hatted businessman imperviously reading his newspaper amid a landscape of classical ruins and cavorting nymphs.

The Musée d'Ansembourg and St-Barthélemy

From the Musée de l'Art Wallon, it's about 200m further east to Féronstrée 114, where the **Musée d'Ansembourg** (Tues–Sun 1–6pm; €3.80) occupies a grand, eighteenth-century mansion, whose interior is distinguished by its sweeping wooden staircase, stucco ceilings and leather wallpaper. This provides a suitably lavish setting for a sumptuous collection of period furniture, Delftware, a selection of clocks (including a unique six-faced specimen by Hubert Sarton from 1795), and portraits of various local bigwigs – including several of Liège's prince-bishops – in various stages of self-importance.

Metres away, just north of Féronstrée, the church of **St-Barthélemy** (Mon–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; €2) is a ponderous Romanesque edifice dating back to the twelfth century. The interior, which was entirely re-equipped six centuries later, is uninspiring, but it does hold a supreme example of Mosan (Romanesque) sculpture in a magnificent bronze **baptismal font** of 1118. The work of a certain Renier de Huy, the font is decorated with a graceful, naturalistic relief depicting various baptisms in progress, and rests on ten oxen, who bend their heads and necks as if under the weight of the great bowl.

The new town

Stretching south from place de la République Française (see p.388), Liège's **new town** is an altogether livelier and more engaging quarter than the old town and home to the bulk of the city's shops, bars, restaurants and nightlife. Specific sights are, however, few and far between, though you might drop by the **Eglise St-Denis** (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm), just to the southeast of place de la République Française, not for the architecture, which is gloomy and formless, but for a striking early sixteenth-century wooden retable, standing a good five metres high, which is displayed in the south transept. The top – and principal – section has six panels showing the Passion of Christ, very Gothic in tone, full of drama and assertively carved. The bottom set of panels is later and gentler in style, with smaller figures telling the story of St Denis from baptism to decapitation.

Cathédrale St-Paul

From the Eglise St-Denis, rue de la Cathédrale leads down to **place Cathédrale**, a tree-lined square where the pavement cafés supply a welcome touch of elegance. Looming over the southern side of the square is the spartan **Cathédrale St-Paul** (daily 8am–5pm; free), whose imposing grey steeple makes a useful city landmark. Work began on the church in the thirteenth century, but was only completed six hundred years later, by which time, after

the destruction of St-Lambert cathedral in 1794, it had been promoted to the rank of cathedral. Inside are some swirling roof paintings of 1570 and a late-thirteenth-century polychrome Madonna and Child at the base of the choir. Of most interest, however, is the **trésor** (treasury; Tues–Sun 2–5pm; €4), entered via the cloisters, whose small collection features a mammoth 90kg bust reliquary of St Lambert, the work of a goldsmith from Aachen, and dating from 1512. It contains the skull of the saint and depicts scenes from his life – the miracles he performed as a boy, his burial in Maastricht and the translation of his body from Maastricht to Liège by St Hubert, who succeeded him as bishop. There are also some lovely examples of ivory work from the eleventh century, and a similarly dated missal, stained by the waters of a 1920s flood that inundated the church.

Outremeuse

Across from the centre of Liège, the bulbous island in the middle of the River Meuse holds the **Outremeuse**, a working-class quarter that's said to be the home of the true Liégeois. Prince-bishop or no prince-bishop, the inhabitants of the Outremeuse were long known for their forthright radicalism, rioting against their masters on many occasions and refusing, during the German occupation of World War I, to keep the small-arms factories that were then a feature of the city in production. Their appointed guardian was the folkloric figure known as **Tchantchès** (Liège slang for "Francis"), the so-called "Prince of Outremeuse", an earthy, independent-minded, brave but drunken fellow, who is said to have been born between two Outremeuse paving stones on August 25, 760. In later life, legend claims, he was instrumental in the campaigns of Charlemagne, thanks to the use of his enormous nose. Nowadays, Tchantchès can be seen in action in traditional Liège puppet shows such as those arranged by the Musée de la Vie Wallonne (see p.388); he's also represented in a **statue** on place l'Yser, the traditional place of his death, carried as a symbol of freedom by a woman dressed as a coal miner.

Incidentally, one of Belgium's most acclaimed writers, **Georges Simenon** (1903–89), creator of Inspector Maigret, was born in Liège; his family moved to the Outremeuse when he was two years old, and the "Simenon Route" walking-tour leaflet, available from the tourist office, will guide you around the areas where he misspent his youth.

Eating

Liège can be an excellent and often inexpensive place **to eat** – a quick trawl round the main streets of the new town reveals a wide range of cuisines, everything from Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian to Spanish, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Thai, not to mention plenty of places dishing up classy French and Walloon cooking. The best options are concentrated in the rectangle of streets northeast of the cathedral, but it's also worth a trip across the river to Outremeuse's **rue Roture**, a narrow (and easy-to-miss) alleyway which spears right off the main shopping thoroughfare of rue Puits-en-Sock, and which is thick with restaurants and bars.

The new town

Bruit qui Court bd de la Sauvenière 142 ☎04 232 18 18. Trendy eatery serving simple and reasonably priced meals – and vegetarian friendly to boot; there's also a lively bar in the old converted bank vault downstairs. Mains average €10–12. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight.

La Cantina rue St-Denis 2 ☎04 221 35 35. Italian delicatessen and restaurant, offering delicious food and friendly service - highly recommended. Count on at least €30 for a three-course meal, *plats du jour* from €10. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 7–9.30pm.
Cucinella rue de la Casquette 26 ☎04 222 36 52. Top-quality Italian restaurant providing an oasis of

calm in a crazy area. Garden in the back for summer evenings. Four-course menu for €30, otherwise fresh pasta for around €12 or *Escalope Milanese* for €16. Closed Sun.

L'Ecailler rue des Dominicains 26, ☎04 222 17 49. Behind the Théâtre Royale, this popular restaurant is a good place for fish and seafood; main courses from €18. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

Espace Saveurs rue St-Remy 16 ☎04 222 96 11. A vegetarian nirvana for a healthy and tasty snack or lunch, but only open Mon–Fri 7.30am–4pm.

Osteria Cose Così bd de la Sauvenière 153 ☎04 250 10 06. Simple and tasteful Italian cuisine, with homemade fresh pasta – from €8 – served in the warmly red interior. Set menu on Fri and Sat for €25. Daily except Tues & Sun 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–10.30pm.

La Perle d'Asie rue du Pot d'Or 49 ☎04 223 11 70. Excellent and authentic Vietnamese food, including good seafood choices, with set lunch menus from €7 and dinner menus from €10 – prices that attract students by the score. Daily except Mon 11.30am–2pm & 6–11pm.

The old town

Café Lequet quai sur-Meuse 17 ☎04 222 21 34. For the famous *boulets à la liégeoise* (meatballs) head for the popular **Café Lequet** near the footbridge. Main courses from €12. Daily except Tues & Sun noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

Drinking and nightlife

The grid of streets in the new town running north from rue Pont d'Avroy to rue de la Casquette is the hub of the city's **nightlife**, with loads of good, largely student-oriented **bars**. Rue Pont d'Avroy itself has lots of drinking haunts, but most of the best establishments are on the narrower streets behind, especially in the tiny alleyways of rue Tête de Boeuf and the parallel rue d'Amay. Finally, there's also a clutch of more sedate venues on and around the place du Marché.

L'Ange Vin place du Marché 43. A wine bar, as the name suggests, which gets pretty lively in the evenings and attracts a mixed gay and straight crowd.

L'Aquarelle Corner of rue Pot d'Or and rue Tête de Boeuf. Dim student hangout pumping out mainstream rock and pop.

Le Café Chez Boldou rue Tête de Boeuf 15. Entertainingly decorated bar full of eclectic bric-à-brac. It's popular with students and there's live music at weekends (no cover charge), as well as a nightclub – *En Bas* (Fri & Sat 11pm–8am; free) – downstairs.

Casa Paco Corner of rue Pot d'Or and rue St-Jean en l'Isle. Attractively tiled tapas bar with

Le Thème Impasse de la Couronne 9 ☎04 222 02 02, @www.letheme.com. Excellent and quite reasonably priced French cuisine in an intimate setting on a tiny alleyway in the old town, with three-course (€28) and five-course (€34) menus. Great website too. Mon–Sat eves only from 7pm; reservations essential.

Toccata place du Marché 11 ☎04 222 31 00. Good spot for lunch with a selection of omelettes, *piadina* and tapas as well as fresh juices and an array of teas, though the main pull is the coffee.

Vin sur Vin place du Marché 9 ☎04 223 28 13. Mainly French cuisine, but with some highly original touches including fruit served every which way. A three-course meal will set you back about €40. Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 7–10pm & Sat noon–2pm

Outremeuse

Le Canaillou rue Roture 18 ☎04 343 19 44. Franco-Belgian cuisine, with excellent three-course menus for €30 and à la carte dishes from €16, all served in a traditional rustic setting. Fri–Sun only; reservations essential.

La Fondue Royale rue Roture 68 ☎04 342 64 23. Twenty-odd varieties of every imaginable kind of fondue, including the traditional meat and cheese (from €12) and the original chocolate (€6). Mon, Thurs, Fri & Sun noon–2pm & 6–10pm; Tues & Sat noon–2pm only.

Iberian tipples, Latin music and cheap snacks, salads and tapas.

Celtic Ireland bd de la Sauvenière 143. Every city has an Irish pub and Liège is no exception. A good pint of Guinness and regular live music on offer, with a smattering of football for good measure.

La Maison du Peket rue de l'Epée 4. The place to taste the local drink *peket* – a type of gin – in 250 varieties from guava and mango in the fruit section, to the aged dusty bottles of the vintage shelves.

La Notte rue Tête de Boeuf 10. Popular music venue with regular live jazz.

East of Liège: Spa and Eupen

East of Liège, the River Vesdre winds through attractive wooded countryside, with sharp hills plunging down into deep wooded valleys, before it reaches the humdrum textile town of **Verviers**, from where it's a short drive – or train ride – south to **Spa**, an engaging little town that is famous for its thermal waters. Also near Verviers, but this time east, is **Eupen**, an unassuming and modest town on the edge of open moorland – the **Hautes Fagnes** (see p.399).

There are frequent **trains** from Liège-Guillemins station to Verviers-Central and Eupen; change at Verviers-Central for the hourly service to Spa.

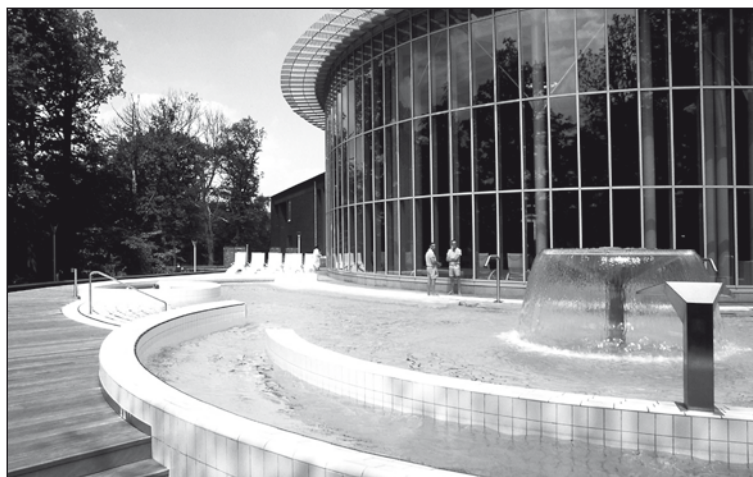
5

Spa

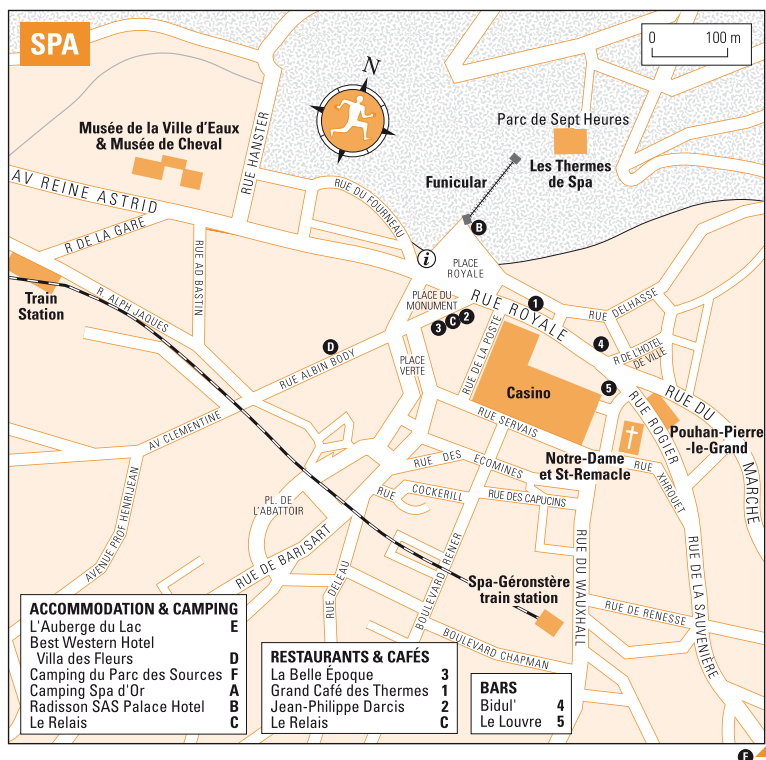
SPA, about 20km south of Verviers, 30km southeast of Liège, was the world's first health resort, established way back in the sixteenth century: Pliny the Elder knew of the healing properties of the waters here and Henry VIII was an early visitor, but it was Peter the Great who clinched the town's fame, heralding it as “the best place to take the waters”. Since then the town has given its name to thermal resorts worldwide, reaching a height of popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was known as the “Café of Europe”, being graced by monarchs, statesmen, intellectuals and aristocrats from every corner of the continent. Later the town went into slow decline – when the poet Matthew Arnold visited in 1860, he claimed it “astonished us by its insignificance” – but Spa is now on the way back following the opening of a new thermal complex, **Les Thermes de Spa**, on the hill overlooking the resort. Furthermore, the town below still preserves an endearing sense of faded distinction and continues to draw a loyal clientele of elderly locals, whilst also making a good base for excursions into the Hautes Fagnes (see p.399), a short drive to the south and southeast.

Arrival and information

Rather surprisingly for such a small place, Spa has two **train stations**, but the one you want for the town centre is **Spa-Géronstère**, at the end of the line



△ Les Thermes de Spa



from Verviers–Central station and located a five-minute walk south of the casino. The **tourist office** is in a pavilion near the old baths at place Royale 41 (April–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; ☎087 79 53 53, 🌐www.spa-info.be). It is extremely well stocked with books, maps and leaflets describing walking routes and cycle circuits. **Guided walks** in the area (€1.25) are organized three or four times a week at Easter, Christmas and in July and August and on Sundays throughout the year – both half- (6–8km) and full-day (10–12km) excursions. The town also has a good **flea market** in the Leopold II Gallery just behind the tourist office on Sunday morning (8am–1pm).

Accommodation

Spa has no fewer than thirteen **hotels** dotted in and around the centre and competition keeps prices down to manageable levels. There are also a couple of decent **campsites**, *Camping Spa d'Or*, 5km northeast of town at Stockay 17 (☎087 47 44 00, 🌐www.campingspador.be), and *Camping du Parc des Sources* at rue de la Sauvenière 141 (☎087 77 23 11, 🌐www.campingparcdessources.be).

L'Auberge du Lac Lac de Warfaaz 2 ☎087 77 17 72, 🌐www.lejardindeselfes.be. Five recently modernized guest rooms at this semi-rusticated lakeside hotel a couple of kilometres east of town. 2

Best Western Hotel Villa des Fleurs, rue Albin Body 31 ☎087 79 50 50 🌐www.villadesfleurs.be. Right in the centre of Spa, this smart, four-star hotel occupies a handsome old town house dating from the 1880s. Just twelve guest rooms decorated

in a modern version of period style – the public rooms are grander and a tad more aesthetically successful. Private garden too. ③

Radisson SAS Palace Hotel place Royale 39 ☎087 27 97 00, 🌐www.radissonsas.com. Standard-issue luxury – and discounts at Les Thermes – at this smart, 120-room chain hotel

next to the casino. Discounts commonplace, otherwise ⑦

Le Relais place du Monument 22 ☎087 77 11 08, 🌐www.hotelrelais-spa.be. Small, well-cared-for hotel with just eleven guest rooms, each kitted out in functional modern style. Handy, central location too. ②

The Town

Spa's tidy **town centre** holds a striking cluster of grand Neoclassical buildings, presided over by the three towering steeples of the church of Notre-Dame et St-Remacle. Chief among these are the former thermal baths, no longer in use and still awaiting a new role. The neighbouring **casino**, the oldest in the world, was founded in 1763 under the improbable auspices of the prince-bishop of Liège, though the current building dates only from 1919. Curiously enough, it hosts the annual *Francofolies* festival playing tribute to the heady world of French *chanson* (🌐www.francofolies.be).

A little further along down rue Royale is **Pouhan-Pierre-le-Grand**, the town's main mineral spring (daily: April–Oct 10am–noon & 1.30–5pm; Nov–March 1.30–5pm; free), spouting an average of twenty-one thousand litres per day. It's housed in a barn-like Neoclassical pavilion and named after Peter the Great, who appreciated the therapeutic effects of its waters and visited often; for €0.25 you can try a cup of the cloudy water, which contains iron and bicarbonate of soda, allegedly beneficial for lung and heart ailments as well as rheumatism. A number of Spa's **other springs** – notably Tonnelet, Barisart, Géronstère and Sauvenière – can be visited on the *baladeuse*, a kind of toy train on wheels, which plies around the outskirts of town, but you're not normally allowed to get off and there's precious little to actually see. The *baladeuses* leave from a stop on the main square; trips (there's a variety of itineraries) cost about €5.

Five minutes' walk west of the town centre, situated in the former mansion of Queen Marie-Henriette, the **Musée de la Ville d'Eaux**, av Reine Astrid 77, displays posters and objects relating to the resort and its waters (mid-March to June & Oct–Nov Sat & Sun 2–6pm; July–Sept daily except Tues 2–6pm; €3 combined ticket with the Musée du Cheval). The stables next door have been turned into the **Musée du Cheval** (same times), exhibiting all things equine.

Les Thermes de Spa

On the hill immediately above central Spa – and easily reached on the funicular from place Royale (€1 each way) – stands the town's pride and joy, **Les Thermes de Spa** (Mon–Thurs & Sat 9am–9pm, Fri 9am–10pm, Sun 9am–8pm; €17 for 3hr, €27 for the day; ☎087 77 25 60, 🌐www.thermesdespa.com), a thermal complex offering a multitude of treatments. On arrival you can sample three different types of Spa spring water – Reine, Clementine and the iron-rich Marie-Henriette – and beyond there is both an outdoor and indoor pool with water-massage jets and Jacuzzis galore. Upstairs is reserved for saunas and steam rooms and a relaxation area with chill-out music and a panoramic view of the valley below. For massage, mud wraps or water treatments in the famous retro copper baths, you need to book well in advance.

Lac de Warfaaz

When you've finished lazing around Les Thermes, the most obvious walk is the easy and pleasant stroll to **Lac de Warfaaz**, about 2km east of the centre. To get there, leave Spa along rue du Marché and its continuation boulevard des Anglais,

then turn down avenue Amédée Hesse and keep going. The lake, which was created in 1880, is surrounded by wooded hills and a clear footpath circumnavigates it. The dam that holds the lake in check has a **tower**, from the top of which there are panoramic views, or you can rent a pedalo (€4 for 30min) at *L'Auberge du Lac* (see p.393) and thrash away to your heart's content.

Eating and drinking

There's plenty of choice when it comes to **eating out** in Spa. One very good option is the restaurant of the *Hotel Le Relais* (daily from 6.30pm, plus Sat & Sun lunch; ☎087 77 11 08), with a four-course "Ardennes menu" for €20 alongside the à la carte options. A few doors along, at place du Monument 15, there's also the elegant *La Belle Époque* (closed Mon & Tues; ☎087 77 54 03), where delicious fish dishes start at €17 and three-course menus are around €25. Alternatively, the chocolatier *Jean-Philippe Darcis* has a café at place du Monument 23, where the lunches are good, the cakes are great and the hot chocolate sublime, or you might wander over to the *Grand Café des Thermes*, opposite the old baths on rue Royale, which does snacks and meals from €9 – inexpensive if not terribly atmospheric, but with nice outdoor seating. Spa is never going to win any awards for nightlife, but if you fancy a late **drink**, *Bidul'*, rue Royale 49, and neighbouring *Le Louvre*, near the casino, are both popular local bars.

Eupen

Pleasant but unexceptional is the best way to describe the little town of **EUPEN**, some 15km east of Verviers. It is, however, the capital of the German-speaking region of Belgium, a pint-sized area pushed tight against the German border. Once part of Prussia, the area was ceded to Belgium by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I in 1919, but German remains the main language. Eupen certainly has a distinctive Rhineland feel, not least in the curvy twin towers of the eighteenth-century church of **St-Nicholas**, standing on the main Marktplatz and sporting some ornate Baroque altarpieces and an extravagant pulpit that could be straight out of rural Bavaria. Sweet-toothed visitors might also fancy a visit to the **Musée du Chocolat** (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; ☎087 59 29 67, 🌐www.chocojacques.be; €2), on the northern outskirts of town at Industriestrasse 16. Part of the Chocolaterie Jacques factory, the museum has exhibits and videos on the history and production of the stuff; you're also given a bird's-eye view of the factory floor, while a resident chocolatier dishes out free samples in a room upstairs.

Practicalities

From Eupen **train station**, it's a ten-minute walk southwest to the main square, the Marktplatz, where the **tourist office** is at no. 7 (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 9am–3pm; ☎087 55 34 50, 🌐www.eupen-info.be). There are two **hotels**, the better of which is the comfortable, four-star *Ambassador Hôtel Bosten*, in a five-storey block on the southern edge of town at Haasstrasse 81 (☎087 74 08 00, 🌐www.bestwestern.be; ⚡). The tourist office has the details of several **B&Bs** (⚡), though these also tend to be a good long walk from the centre.

For a generous and tasty bowl of pasta, head for *La Dolce Vita*, an authentic Italian restaurant just south of the Marktplatz at Kirchstrasse 37 (closed Wed). Alternatively, there's good regional food at the *Sel et Poivre*, a wine bar and restaurant east of Marktplatz at Gospertstrasse 3 (☎087 55 33 08; closed Sun); main courses here start at €17.

Stavelot, Malmédy and the Hautes Fagnes

Southeast of Liège, the character of the landscape changes as you slip into the **Ardennes**, with rearing wooded hills rising high above winding rivers. The first obvious port of call is **Stavelot**, easily the most interesting town hereabouts, boasting both the substantial remains of its abbey and an attractive upland setting. Moving on, neighbouring **Malmédy** and **Robertville** are in themselves two fairly inconsequential tourist resorts, but either – as well as Stavelot – is a good base for hiking the high moorland of the Hautes Fagnes.

There are regular **trains** from Liège-Guillemins station to **Trois Ponts station**, from where there is a reasonably frequent connecting **TEC bus** service (📞 www.tec-namur-luxembourg.be) to Stavelot and Malmédy.

Stavelot

Fifty minutes from Liège, **Trois Ponts train station** is the starting point for the bus (every 2hr; 10min) to **STAVELOT**, a small and tranquil town that rambles up the hill from the River Amblève. The town grew up around its **abbey**, home to a line of powerful abbot-bishops, who ran the area as an independent principality until the French revolutionary army ended their privileges at the end of the eighteenth century. The town was also the scene of fierce fighting during the Ardennes campaign of the last war, and some of the Nazis' worst atrocities in Belgium were committed here.

These days Stavelot is a pleasant old place, the pretty streets of its tiny centre flanked by a battery of half-timbered houses that mostly date from the eighteenth century. The best time to be in Stavelot is for its renowned annual **carnival**, the **Laetare**, first celebrated here in 1502 and held on the third weekend before Easter, from Saturday to Monday evening; the main protagonists are the **Blancs Moussis**, figures with white hoods and long red noses. There are also festivals of theatre and music in July and August respectively, with performances in the abbey buildings. For more information, consult the tourist office (see p.397).

The Town

To the south of the attractively cobbled main square, **place St-Remacle**, the lower part of town is largely occupied by the former **abbey**, a sprawling complex of mainly eighteenth-century buildings. Nothing remains of the medieval abbey, though the soaring **archway**, one of its most conspicuous features today, does date back to the sixteenth century. The buildings now house a new cultural and tourist complex including three museums, all recently refurbished, plus a restaurant and souvenir shop. The most notable of the museums is the **Musée d'histoire de l'ancienne principauté de Stavelot-Malmédy** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €6.50 for a combined ticket for all three museums; 📞 www.abbayedestavelot.be), which traces the history of the principality from the seventh century to the present day by means of religious artefacts, town crafts and folkloric exhibits alongside multimedia displays. In the vaulted cellars of the abbey, a second museum, the **Musée du Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps** (same times) contains a collection of racing cars and motorcycles from the nearby racetrack, home of the Belgium Formula 1 Grand Prix. Just over the courtyard, on the second floor of the Hôtel de Ville, is the third museum, the **Musée Guillaume Apollinaire** (same times), which

was set up to commemorate the eponymous French writer, who spent the summer of 1899 in the town and wrote many poems about Stavelot and the Ardennes. The museum pays tribute to the man who – despite his early death in 1918 – was one of the most influential poets of his period.

Back in the upper part of the town, around the corner from place St-Remacle, the church of **St-Sebastien** (Mon–Sat 10am–12.30pm & 2–5pm; free) has an enormous thirteenth-century shrine of St Remacle, the seventh-century founder of Stavelot abbey. You'll see him elsewhere too, most notably on the town's coat of arms, building the abbey with the aid of a wolf he supposedly tamed for the purpose. Mosan in style, the shrine is of gilt and enamelled copper with filigree and silver statuettes, though you can normally view it only from a distance. A short walk downhill, the little **chapel of St-Laurent** was founded in 1030 by St Poppon, Abbot of Stavelot, and contains the sarcophagus that originally held his remains. To get there, turn left out of the abbey gateway, walk downhill across the bridge, and take the first left.

Practicalities

Stavelot's **tourist office** is at place St-Remacle 32 (Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; ☎ 080 86 27 06, 🌐 www.stavelot.be). It issues all the usual municipal gubbins, including free town maps, and sells a **walking map**, the *Carte des Promenades de Stavelot*, which details fourteen circular routes starting either here in town or in one of the surrounding villages; the most attractive walks lead east from Stavelot along the River Amblève towards Warche.

Accommodation can be difficult to find during carnival time, but shouldn't be a problem otherwise, though there are few budget options – ask at the tourist office for *chambres d'hôtes* (B&B) possibilities (1). As for **hotels**, first up must be the charming *Hôtel d'Orange*, in a handsome old townhouse a couple of minutes east of place St-Remacle at rue Devant-les-Capucins 8 (☎ 080 86 20 05, 🌐 www.hotel-orange.be; 3); the five guest rooms are each decorated in a pleasant, vaguely rustic style. A second good choice is *La Maison*, in a handsome old stone terrace building at place St-Remacle 19 (☎ 080 88 08 91, 🌐 www.hotel-la-maison.be; 2, weekends 3); recently revamped, the rooms here are kitted out in brisk, modern style. The town's plushiest hotel is the four-star *Le Val d'Amblève*, in an Edwardian-style country house ten minutes' walk out of town at rte de Malmédy 7 (☎ 080 28 14 40 🌐 www.levaldambleve.com; 4).

For **food**, the intimate *Restaurant à l'Abbaye*, place St-Remacle 9, has good French meat and fish dishes from €14, while *Pizzeria Figaro*, on place du Vinâve 4, has tasty pizzas and pasta from €8. *La Maison* and *Le Val d'Amblève* both have good French restaurants offering three- and four-course menus from €30 and €40 respectively. If you're just after a **drink**, try *Aux Vieilles Caves d'Artois*, with outdoor seating overlooking the abbey buildings at av Ferdinand Nicolay 27, or the arty *Mal Aimé* bar at rue Neuve 12 – Apollinaire once stayed here and his poems are scrawled over the walls.

Malmédy and around

About 8km northeast of Stavelot, and connected to it (and Trois Ponts) by regular buses, the bustling resort of **MALMÉDY** is a popular destination for Belgian tourists, its attractive streets flanked by lively restaurants, smart shops and cheap hotels. There's not much to the town, but it's a pleasant place to spend a night or two and makes a relatively inexpensive base for the Hautes Fagnes. Malmédy is also home to the **Cwarmê**, one of Belgium's most famous festivals, held over the four days leading up to Shrove Tuesday. The festival's

main knees-up is the Sunday, during which roving groups of masked figures in red robes and plumed hats, the so-called **Haguètes**, wander around town seizing people with long wooden pincers – derived, it's thought, from the devices that were once used to give food to lepers.

Malmédy's compact centre runs between **place de Rome** and the town's main square, **place Albert 1er**, with the imposing but somewhat plain eighteenth-century **cathedral** (guided visits July & Aug; 10am–noon & 2–5pm) halfway between the two, surrounded by a clutch of fancy Germanic buildings. In terms of specific attractions, you're limited to the **Musée du Cwarmê** (Tues–Fri 2–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–noon and 2–5pm; €2.50), on place de Rome, which is devoted to Malmédy's annual carnival, and the **Musée National du Papier** in the same building (same times and ticket), which is about as interesting as its name suggests.

Practicalities

The well-equipped **tourist office**, on place Albert 1er (daily 10am–6pm, but closed Mon & Tues in winter ☎080 33 02 50 🌐www.malmedy.be), has truckloads of information on the town and its environs. **Accommodation** is notable for its quantity rather than quality, with a long list of hotels in and around town: all are comfortable and inexpensive, though there's little to distinguish one hotel from another. Options include *La Forge* (☎080 79 95 91, 🌐www.hotel-la-forge.be; ②), a well-maintained modern hotel just south of place de Rome at rue Devant-les-Religieuses 31; and the comparable *Saint-Géréon*, place St-Géréon 7–8 (☎080 33 06 77, 🌐www.saintgereon.be; ②), on a square just off place Albert 1er. There's also *Le Chambertin*, a slightly more upmarket hotel in an older building just west off place Albert 1er at Chemin-rue 46 (☎080 33 03 14, 🌐www.hotel-fagnes.be; ②).

Malmédy's popularity with holidaymakers means that there are plenty of places **to eat**, with several good cafés and restaurants strung along Chemin-rue, which connects place Albert 1er and place de Rome. It's here, at no.21, you'll find *Le Saint Célien* (☎080 33 78 74; Mon–Wed, Fri & Sun noon–2pm & 6–9pm, Sat 6–9pm), a smart restaurant offering a seasonal menu for €24 and regional specialties à la carte at €12–15; here also, at no. 47, is *Au Petit Louvain* (☎080 33 04 15; closed Mon, Tues & Wed), whose menu focuses on game and fish, with main courses from €20. Finally, *Casa Cairra*, place Albert 1er 42, is fine for Italian pasta and ice cream.

Around Malmédy: Robertville and Reinhardstein Castle

ROBERTVILLE, 9km northeast of Malmédy, is a bland resort that has grown up around the lake created by the **barrage** of the same name. There's little to do in the town itself, but it does make a useful base for the surrounding area and there is a **tourist office**, at rue Centrale 53 (☎080 44 64 75).

Robertville has several good **hotels** on rue du Barrage, most notably the family-run, three-star *La Chaumière du Lac*, at no. 23 (☎080 44 63 39, 🌐www.chaumieredulac.be; ②), which also offers gastronomic weekends. A second, somewhat more distinctive choice is *La Relais de Poste*, rue de Lac 16 (☎080 44 57 70, 🌐www.relaisdeposte.be; ③), occupying an old stone post house in a handsome rural setting.

The lake itself is the start of a lovely kilometre-long walk to the **Château de Reinhardstein** (mid-June to mid-Sept guided tours on Tues, Thurs, Sat & Sun, call for times; 1hr 15min; €6; ☎080 44 68 68, 🌐www.reinhardstein.net), a postcard-pretty stone structure nestled in a forested valley. The castle was

originally built in the fourteenth century, but slowly went to ruin until 1969 when it was bought up and then faithfully rebuilt according to the medieval plan; it now houses the usual array of weaponry and old paintings – a mildly enjoyable insight into the life of your average Belgian aristocrat.

The Hautes Fagnes

The high plateau that stretches north of Malmédy up as far as Eupen is known as the **Hautes Fagnes** (in German, Hohes Venn, or High Fens) and is now protected as a national park. This area marks the end of the Ardennes proper and has been twinned with the Eifel hills, which stretch east from the German border, to form the sprawling Deutsch-Belgischer Naturpark. The Hautes Fagnes accommodates Belgium's highest peak, the Signal de Botrange (694m), but the rest of the area is boggy heath and woods, windswept and rather wild – excellent hiking country, though often fearsome in winter.

Some 7km north of Robertville, on the road to Eupen, the **Centre Nature Botrange** (daily 10am–6pm; €3; ☎080 44 03 00, 🌐www.centrenaturebotrange.be) provides a focus for explorations of the Hautes Fagnes national park. A **bus** runs to the centre from Eupen (7 daily; 20min), but otherwise you'll need your own car to get there. At the centre, multilingual headphones guide you around a permanent exhibition, *Naturama*, which describes the flora and fauna of the area and explains how the *fagnes* were created and how they've been exploited. There's a coffee shop, a bookstore and, most importantly, a roaring log fire when the weather turns cold. The centre also rents out skis in winter and runs organized hikes (see box).

A kilometre or two further up the main road is the **Signal de Botrange**, Belgium's highest point, though the high-plateau nature of the Hautes Fagnes means it actually doesn't feel very high at all. A tower marks the summit, offering a good panorama over the *fagnes*, and there's a restaurant that's ultra-popular with coach parties and walkers alike.

Walking the Hautes Fagnes

Large parts of the **Hautes Fagnes** are protected zones and are only open to walkers with a registered guide. Three- and six-hour walks in these areas are arranged by the **Centre Nature Botrange** (see above) on most weekends from March to November (€4–6). Each walk is organized around a feature of the local ecology, from medicinal plants to the endangered tetras lyre bird. In summer the walks can feel a bit crowded, and the guide's patter is normally in French or German, but they're a good way to see some genuinely wild country that would otherwise be off-limits.

To see some of the moorland on your own, ask staff at the centre for their free **map** (*Ronde de Botrange*) showing footpaths in the area. Many of them run along the edges of the protected areas, giving you a chance to see something of the *fagnes* even if you can't get on a guided walk. Dozens more local routes are marked on the map *Promenades Malmédy*, also available from the centre or from any local tourist office, though most are south of the Hautes Fagnes around Robertville, Xhoffraix and Malmédy. The varied eleven-kilometre **route M6** can be picked up in Botrange, crossing the heath as far as the main road before dropping down through the woods and along the river to Bayhon, returning through some attractive, almost Alpine scenery. From M6 you can take a detour north to incorporate the Fagne de la Poleur, or cross the main road and join **route M9**, which winds through the woods to Baraque Michel and then cuts south across the moors on the edge of the protected Grande Fagne.

Travel details

5

THE ARDENNES

Travel details

Trains

Arlon to: Jemelle (hourly; 50min); Libramont (hourly; 30min); Luxembourg City (hourly; 20min); Namur (hourly; 1hr 40min).

Dinant to: Anseremme (hourly; 5 min); Bertrix (every 2hr; 1hr); Gendron-Celles (hourly; 10min); Houyet (hourly; 20min); Libramont (every 2hr; 1hr 20min); Namur (hourly; 30min).

Jemelle to: Brussels (hourly; 1hr 40min); Libramont (hourly; 20 min); Luxembourg City (hourly; 1hr 20min); Namur (hourly; 40 min).

Libramont to: Bastogne (hourly; 40min); Bertrix (hourly; 10min); Florenville (every 2hr; 25min); Poix St-Hubert (every 2hr; 10min); Luxembourg City (hourly; 50min); Virton (every 2hr; 40min); Namur (hourly; 1hr).

Liège-Guillemins to: Barvaux (every 2hr; 50min); Brussels (hourly; 1hr 20min); Coo (every 2hr; 50min); Eupen (hourly; 40min); Huy (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Jemelle (every 2hr; 1hr 10min); Leuven (every 30min; 40min); Luxembourg City (every 2hr; 2hr 30min); Melreux-Hotton (every 2 hours; 1hr); Namur (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 45min); Trois Ponts (every 2hr; 50min); Verviers (hourly; 20min). **Change at Verviers-Central** for Spa (hourly; 25min).

Namur to: Arlon (hourly; 1hr 40min); Bruxelles (hourly; 1hr); Charleroi (hourly; 40min); Dinant

(hourly; 30min); Floreffe (Mon-Fri hourly, Sat & Sun every 2hr; 10min); Godinne (hourly; 20min); Huy (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 20min); Jemelle (hourly; 40min); Libramont (hourly; 1hr); Liège (every 30min, Sat & Sun hourly; 45min); Luxembourg City (hourly; 2hr).

Buses

All buses are operated by **TEC** and bus timetables are detailed on its website www.tec-namur-luxembourg.be.

Bertrix train station to: Bouillon (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr).

Dinant to: Hastière (hourly; 20min).

Jemelle train station to: Han-sur-Lesse (June–Aug Mon–Fri every 2hr, Sat & Sun hourly; Sept–May Mon–Fri 4 daily, Sat 3 daily, no Sun service; 15min); Rochefort (as for Han-sur-Lesse; 10min).

Libramont train station to: Bouillon (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 50min).

Melreux-Hotton train station to: La Roche-en-Ardenne (Mon–Fri every 2hr, Sat & Sun 6 daily; 30min).

Namur to: Annevoie (1–4 daily; 40min).

Poix St-Hubert train station to: St-Hubert (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat & Sun 3 daily; 15min).

Trois Ponts train station to: Malmédy (every 2hr; 25min); Stavelot (every 2hr; 10min).

6

Luxembourg

6

LUXEMBOURG



*** Chemin de la Corniche**

Fabulous views over the capital's bastions and bulwarks from this panoramic walkway.

See p.415

*** The Schueberfouer**

Luxembourg City's annual funfair, held over the last week in August and first two weeks of September.

See p.419

*** Echternach**

A lovely little town with a splendid abbey and an imposing basilica, not to mention some excellent hiking in the surrounding wooded hills and valleys. See p.423

*** Vianden**

Luxembourg at its picture-postcard best, with the little town of Vianden set beneath an inordinately pretty castle, atop a steep, wooded hill. See p.427



△ Luxembourg City

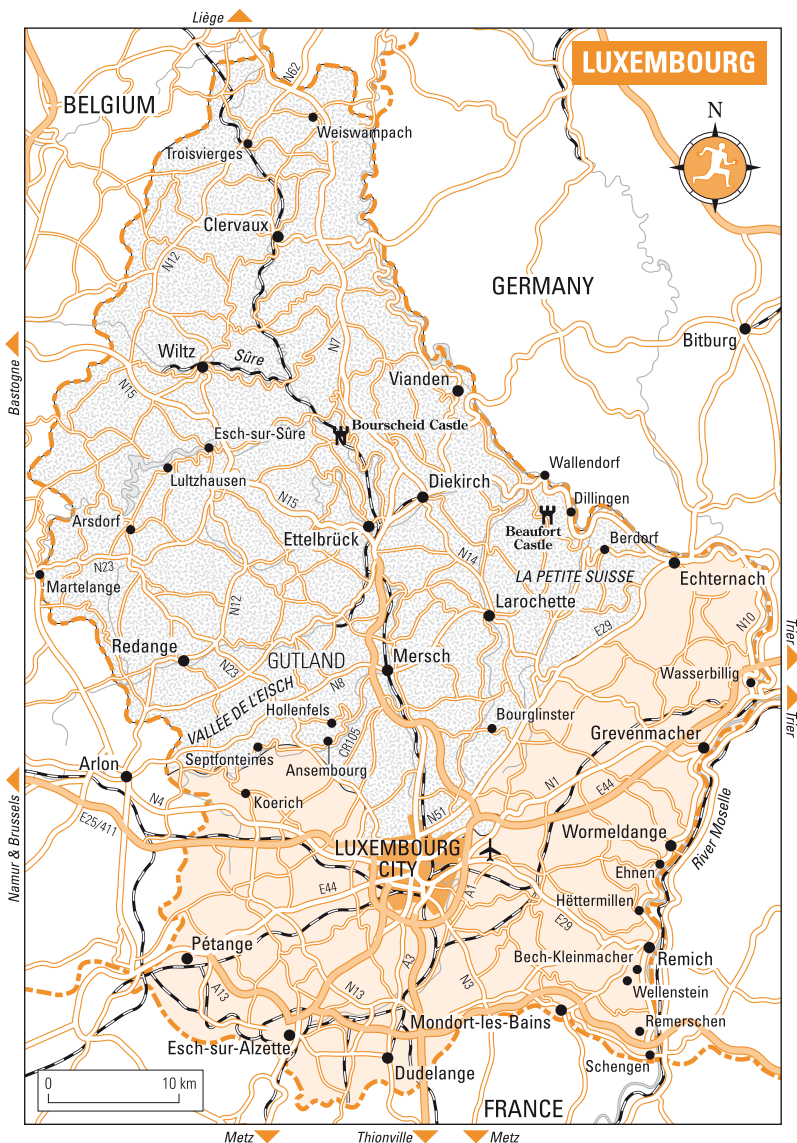
Luxembourg

Across the border from the Belgian province of Luxembourg (with which it has a closely entwined history), the **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg** is one of Europe's smallest sovereign states, a mere 85km from tip to toe. As a country it's relatively neglected by travellers, which is surprising considering its varied charms, not least its marvellous scenery: the rearing green hills and deep forested valleys that stretch along much of its eastern edge make for glorious **hiking**, and there's more of the same further to the west. The sharp, craggy hills that punctuate this dramatic landscape are crowned with often stunningly handsome **châteaux** – around 130 altogether, some austere, fortified castles, others lavish country mansions. In other ways, Luxembourg lives up to its popular reputation: it's ultra clean, efficient, well-maintained, with most buildings freshly painted in bright colours, and its inhabitants are friendly though generally not very outgoing, which is perhaps why – Luxembourg City apart – many villages and towns seem almost eerily deserted at night and you're as likely to meet another tourist as you are a local.

The obvious place to start a visit is **Luxembourg City**, once the Habsburgs' strongest fortress, and now one of the best-looking capital cities in Europe, home to a fifth of Luxembourg's population. Portions of its massive bastions and zigzag walls have survived in good order, while the broken terrain, with its deep winding valleys and steep hills, has restricted development, making the city feel more like a grouping of disparate villages than an administrative focus for the EU and a world financial centre. It's true that the city is not overly endowed with sights, but there's compensation in the excellence of its restaurants and the liveliness of its bar and club scene.

Within easy striking distance of the capital, in the southeast corner of the country, are the **vineyards** that string along the west bank of the **River Moselle**, the border with Germany. Tours and tastings of the wine cellars (*caves*) are the big deal here and, among a scattering of small riverside towns, the most appealing – in a low-key sort of way – are **Remich** and **Ehnen**. To the southwest of the capital is an industrial belt of little attraction – though you might consider a day-trip to the Duchy's second city, **Esch-sur-Alzette**. A much better bet is to head north into the **Gutland**, whose rolling farmland is intercepted by gentle river valleys, the most diverting of which is the **Vallée de l'Eisch**.

Further afield, beyond the Gutland, the northeastern corner of the Duchy boasts spectacular scenery with rugged gorges gashing a high, partly wooded plateau. This beautiful district is commonly known as **La Petite Suisse Luxembourgaise** – less fancifully Das Mullerthal in Luxembourgish – and



the inviting town of **Echternach**, which boasts a fine old abbey and is easily the best base hereabouts. Similarly delightful, and just a few kilometres further to the north in the **Luxembourg Ardennes**, is **Vianden**, an extremely popular resort, surrounded by craggy green hills and topped by a glistening and glowering castle. Nothing in the Duchy quite matches Echternach and Vianden – both are outstanding – but **Diekirch**, a much more humdrum town in between the two, does hold a couple of decent museums, one of

Luxembourg passes

Available from Easter to October, the **Luxembourg Card** gives substantial discounts on a variety of attractions across the Grand Duchy and also covers unlimited use of public transport. The cards, available from tourist offices, hotels and campsites, are valid for one (€10), two (€17) or three days (€24) and there are family cards as well (2–5 people; €20 for one day, €34 for two days, €48 for three days). In addition, Luxembourg City sells its own card, **La Carte-Musée**, which runs on similar principles but is available all year and is, of course, only of use in the city. It's sold for three-day periods only and costs €9 per person and €7 for people under the age of 26. A **day-pass** valid for the whole of the Duchy's public transport system – both trains and buses – lasts from the time of initial use (when you first punch your ticket in one of the orange machines on buses and station platforms) until 8am the following morning and costs €5. The day-passes are available from bus drivers and at bus and train stations.

6

LUXEMBOURG

which details the Battle of the Bulge, much of which was fought in the northern part of the country. Diekirch is also a handy base for venturing north into another beguiling part of the Luxembourg Ardennes, tracking along the valley of the **River Sûre** from the imposing castle of **Bourscheid** to the village of **Esch-sur-Sûre**, clasped in the horseshoe bend of its river.

Luxembourg has a very good public-transport system. With Luxembourg City as its hub, the **rail network** has four main lines. One reaches up through the centre of the country, connecting the capital with Ettelbruck, Clervaux and ultimately Liège in Belgium; a second runs west bound for Arlon, Namur and Brussels; a third heads east passing through Wasserbillig on the Moselle before proceeding on into Germany; and a fourth links the city with Metz. Two branch lines respectively link the capital with Esch-sur-Alzette and Ettelbruck with Diekirch. **Buses** supplement the trains with regular and reliable services to and from all the larger towns and villages not on the rail network, including Echternach and Vianden. The smaller villages can, however, be much more difficult to reach, especially as some local services are geared to the needs of commuters and schoolchildren rather than the tourist. **Free timetables** are available at train and bus stations, and at all but the smallest tourist office.

Some history

Before **Napoleon** rationalized much of western Europe, Luxembourg was but one of several hundred petty kingdoms dating back to medieval times, and perhaps the most surprising thing about the modern state is that it exists at all: you'd certainly think that Luxembourg, perilously sandwiched between France and Germany, would have been gobbled up by one or the other, which is precisely what would have happened but for some strange quirks of history.

The **Romans** incorporated the region into their empire, colonizing Luxembourg City, which lay at the intersection of two of their military roads, after the conquest of Gaul (including present-day Belgium) by Julius Caesar in 58–52 BC. Roman control lasted until the middle of the fifth century, when “Luxembourg” was overrun by the Franks, firstly the Rhineland Franks and then the Salian Franks, who had absorbed the area into their **Merovingian** empire by 511. Four hundred years later, with no dominant power, middle Europe had broken up into dozens of small principalities and one of these was established by **Count Siegfried of Lorraine** when he fortified the site of what is now Luxembourg City in 963. Siegfried and his successors ensured that

Luxembourg's linguistic mix

Luxembourg has three **official languages**: French, German and **Luxembourgish** (Lëtzebuergesch), a Germanic language derived from the Rhineland and Salian Franks, who overran the area in the fifth century AD. Most education is in **French** and **German**. French is the official language of the government and judiciary, but many Luxembourgers speak German with equal ease. **English** is widely understood – and usually spoken well – by the younger generation, many of whom also speak **Italian** and **Portuguese**, a reflection of several decades of southern European immigration. The industrial districts of the south as well as Luxembourg City are noticeably cosmopolitan, the more rural districts less so. Nonetheless, there is a palpable sense of national identity, with one indication being the Duchy's motto, which can be seen engraved or painted on buildings around the country: *Mir Wöelle Bleiwe Wat Mir Sin* (We want to remain what we are). Attempts by visitors to speak Lëtzebuergesch are well received – though sometimes locals are too surprised to seem exactly pleased.

<i>Moien</i>	Good morning/hello
<i>Äddi or a'voir</i>	Goodbye
<i>Merci (villmols)</i>	Thank you (very much)
<i>Pardon</i>	Sorry
<i>Entschëllegt</i>	Excuse me
<i>Wann-ech-gliff</i> (pronounced as one word)	Please
<i>Ech verstin lech nët</i>	I don't understand you
<i>Ech versti kee Lëtzebuergesch</i>	I don't understand any Luxembourgish

Luxembourg City remained – as it had been under the Romans – a major staging point on the trade route between German Trier and Paris, its strategic importance enhanced by its defensibility, perched high above the sheer gorges of the Pétrusse and Alzette rivers. These counts ruled the area first as independent princes and then as (nominal) vassals of the Holy Roman Emperor, but, in the early fourteenth century, dynastic shenanigans united Luxembourg with Bohemia. In 1354 Luxembourg was independent again, this time as a **duchy**, and its first dukes – John the Blind and his son Wenceslas – extended their lands up to Limburg in the north and down to Metz in the south. This state of affairs was also short-lived; in 1443, Luxembourg passed to the dukes of Burgundy and then, forty years later, to the **Habsburgs**. Thereafter its history mirrors that of Belgium, successively becoming part of the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands before occupation by Napoleon.

Things got really complicated in the early nineteenth century. In 1814, the Congress of Vienna decided to create the **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg**, nominally independent but ruled by **William I** of Orange-Nassau, who doubled as the newly appointed king of the newly created united Kingdom of The Netherlands (including Belgium). This arrangement proved deeply unpopular in Luxembourg and when the Belgians rebelled in 1830, the Luxembourgers joined in. It didn't do them much good. The Great Powers recognized an independent Belgium, but declined to do the same for Luxembourg, which remained in the clutches of William. Even worse, the Great Powers were irritated by William's inability to keep his kingdom in good nick, so they punished him by giving a chunk of Luxembourg's Ardennes to Belgium – now that country's *province* of Luxembourg. By these means, however, Luxembourg's survival was assured: neither France nor Germany could bear to let the Duchy pass to its rival and London made sure the Duchy was declared neutral. The city was demilitarized in 1867, when

most of its fortifications were torn down, and the Duchy remained the property of the Dutch monarchy until 1890 when the ducal crown passed to another (separate) branch of the Orange-Nassaus.

In the **twentieth century**, the Germans overran Luxembourg in 1914 and again in 1940, when the royal family and government fled to Britain and the USA via Lisbon. The second occupation was predictably traumatic. At first, the Germans were comparatively benign, but as the tide of war turned against them, so the occupation grew harsher. They banned the Luxembourgish language, dispatched local conscripts to the Russian front, and took savage reprisals against any acts of resistance. **Liberation** by US forces led by General Patton came in September 1944, but the suffering didn't end there. In December of that year, the Germans launched an offensive through the Ardennes between Malmédy in Belgium and Luxembourg's Echternach. The ensuing **Battle of the Bulge** (see p.378) engulfed northern Luxembourg: hundreds of civilians were killed and a great swathe of the country was devastated – events recalled today by several museums and many roadside monuments.

In the **postwar period**, Luxembourg's shrewd policy of industrial diversification has made it one of the most prosperous parts of Europe. It has also discarded its prior habit of neutrality, joining NATO and becoming a founder member of the EEC, now the EU. It remains a **constitutional monarchy**, ruled by Grand Duke Henri (b.1955), who succeeded his long-serving father, Jean, in 2000. Luxembourg **politics** have a relaxed feel, with a number of green and special-interest parties vying with the more established centre-left and conservative parties – and the telephone directory lists direct lines for all ministers.

Luxembourg City

LUXEMBOURG CITY is one of the most spectacularly sited capitals in Europe. The valleys of the rivers Alzette and Pétrusse, which meet here, cut a green swath through the city, their deep canyons once key to the city's defences, but now providing a beautiful, leafy setting. These gorges have curtailed expansion and parcel the city up into clearly defined sections. There are four main districts (*quartiers*), beginning with the pint-sized **Old Town (Vieille Ville)**, the location of almost all the sights and most of the best restaurants, high up on a tiny plateau on the northern side of the Pétrusse valley. Today's Old Town dates from the late seventeenth century, by which time it had been rebuilt after a huge gunpowder explosion in 1554, though wholesale modifications were made a couple of hundred years later. Furthermore, over half of its encircling **bastions and ramparts** were knocked down when the city was demilitarized in 1867 – boulevards Royal and Roosevelt are built on their foundations – though the more easterly fortifications have survived pretty much intact. These give a clear sense of the city's once formidable defensive capabilities, and were sufficient to persuade UNESCO to designate the city a World Heritage Site in 1994.

Below the Old Town and its ramparts are the **river valleys**, a curious – and curiously engaging – mix of old stone houses, vegetable plots, medieval fortifications and parkland. They are well worth a leisurely exploration – allow an hour or two – unlike the mundane, early-twentieth-century **modern quarter**, which trails south from the Pétrusse valley to the train station and beyond. It's here you'll find the majority of the city's hotels plus some rather

LUXEMBOURG CITY

0 200 m

BARS & CLUBS

Melusina 2
Pygmalion 1



Centre Européen

Philharmonie Luxembourg

Mudam

Ciné Utopia

PONT G D CHARLOTTE

See Old Town map

Palais Grand Ducal

Cathedral

Pont Viaduc

Train Station

ACCOMMODATION

Mercure Grand Hotel B
Sieweburen A
Walsheim C

6

LUXEMBOURG

7

Findel Airport

unsavoury bars and strip joints. The fourth part of the city, the **Kirchberg plateau**, lies to the northeast of the Old Town, on the far side of the Alzette valley and reached by the imposing modern span of the Pont Grand-Duchesse Charlotte, usually known as the “Red Bridge” for reasons that will be immediately apparent. Kirchberg accommodates the **Centre Européen**, which is home to – among several EU institutions – the European Investment Bank and the Court of Justice. Recent developments have made this previously uninviting part of the city a must-go for architecture and art connoisseurs with the new **Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean** (Mudam) and **Philharmonie** the highlights.

Arrival

Findel, Luxembourg’s **airport**, is situated 6km east of the city on the road to Grevenmacher. There are a number of ways of getting into town from here. **Bus** #16 (Mon–Sat every 15–20min, Sun every 30min) runs to the **bus station** in the Old Town on place E. Hamilius, and then proceeds on to the train station. The whole journey takes about half an hour and costs a flat-rate €1.50, plus a small extra charge for any large items of luggage. Travelling by **taxi**, expect to pay €25 to get to the city centre.

The **train station** is in the city’s modern quarter, a ten- to fifteen-minute walk from the Old Town. The station has a left-luggage office and coin-operated luggage lockers and many of the city’s cheaper hotels are located nearby. Most **long-distance buses** stop beside the train station. Almost all of the city’s buses are routed via the train station, and the vast majority go on to (or come from) the bus station.

Information

Luxembourg National Tourist Office is inside the train-station concourse (June–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 9am–12.30pm & 1.45–6pm; Oct–May daily 9.15am–12.30pm & 1.45–6pm; ☎42 82 82 20, 🌐www.visitluxembourg.lu). It supplies free city maps, all manner of glossy leaflets, details of guided tours and can advise on – and book – accommodation right across the Grand Duchy. There’s also a busy **Luxembourg City Tourist Office**, in the middle of the Old Town on place Guillaume II (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–6pm; ☎22 28 09, 🌐www.lcto.lu), which offers a similar service, though – as the name suggests – deals only with the city. The city office also dishes out free copies of the monthly French-language **listings magazine**, *Rendez-Vous*.

These services are supplemented by a network of **interactive computer terminals** in a variety of locations, including the airport and several motorway service areas. Besides giving tourist information of a general nature, these allow hotel bookings to be made with a credit card.

City transport and bike rental

Luxembourg City has an excellent public-transport system, with **buses** from every part of the city and its surroundings converging on the **bus station** on place E. Hamilius in the Old Town, about ten minutes by foot from the train station. Usefully, most services are also routed via the train station. The Old Town itself, where you are likely to spend most time, is very small and is most readily explored on foot. **Tickets** on the city’s buses cost a flat-rate €1.50 and are valid for an hour, while a block of ten tickets costs €10;

alternatively, you can buy day-tickets for the whole of the Duchy's public transport system (see p.405). Before collapsing into a **taxi**, bear in mind that Luxembourg's are expensive – the fixed rate during the day is €1.02 per kilometre, with a ten percent surcharge at night, and a whopping 25 percent supplement on Sunday.

To take advantage of the **cycle trail** which encircles the city, you can **rent a bike** from an outlet at rue Bisserwe 8, Grund (☎ 47 96 23 83; April–Oct daily 10am–noon & 1–8pm; advance booking is advised), charging €5 an hour, €12.50 for a half-day, €20 a day, and €75 for a week, with twenty-percent discounts available for groups and under-26s. They'll provide you with details of the cycle route (also available from the tourist office) and offer a repair service as well.

Guided tours

To orient yourself, you may want to take a **guided tour**, though the multilingual commentary that accompanies most of them is a tad wearying. The bright, red and green “Hop-on, Hop-off” **buses** (daily: March–May every 30min 9.40am–5.20pm; June–Oct every 20min 9.40am–6.20pm; ☎ www.sightseeing.lu) charge €12 per person (or €30 per family) to whisk you through the Old Town and Kirchberg Plateau. A ticket is valid for 24 hours and can be purchased at the place de la Constitution. Alternatively, the tourist office organizes an excellent programme of **guided walks**. The main options are a City Promenade (Easter–Oct daily at 1pm, Nov–Easter Mon, Wed, Sat & Sun at 2pm; 2hr; €7) and the excellent Wenzel Walk (Easter–Oct Sat 3pm; 2hr; €8), which is touted as “a thousand years in a hundred minutes”. The latter starts from the Casemates du Bock, and takes you right around the fortifications on the east side of the Old Town. Reservations are advised in person at the city tourist office.

Finally, a **miniature train** – the Pétrusse Express – travels along the floor of the Pétrusse valley from Pont Adolphe to Grund and up to the plateau du Rham immediately to the east. This hour-long tour gives a good idea of the full extent of the city's fortifications and takes in some pleasant parkland too. The train leaves at regular intervals from place de la Constitution (mid-March to early Nov daily 10am–6pm; ☎ www.sightseeing.lu), where you buy tickets – €8.50 per person or €27 per family.

Accommodation

Most of the city's **hotels** are clustered near the train station, which is disappointing as this is the least interesting part of town – and indeed the side streets opposite the station (rue d'Epernay etc) are, at least by Luxembourg standards, a little seedy. All in all, you're much better off staying in the Old Town and won't necessarily pay much more, though you are limited to just a handful of places. The main budget alternative is the IYHF-affiliated **hostel**. Hotel – and hostel – locations are marked either on the map on p.408 or p.412

Hotels

Français place d'Armes 14 ☎ 47 45 34, ☎ www.hotelfrancais.lu. This attractive three-star hotel has smart and spotless rooms furnished in a crisp modern style. Great location too, on the main square in the Old Town, though late-night revellers can be irritating if you are a light sleeper. See map, p.412. 5



Grand Hôtel Cravat bd Roosevelt 29
☎ 22 19 75, ☎ www.hotelcravat.lu.

Charming, medium-sized, four-star hotel in the heart of the Old Town. The exterior is a little sombre, but the inside has oodles of atmosphere: instead of a designer make-over, the hotel has accumulated its furnishings and fittings, from the antique lift, fresco and chandelier to the signed

sepia photographs of distant celebrities and heroes. The rooms are in similar style, with appealing views over place de la Constitution from the front rooms making up for the burnt patches and scratches on the furniture. You won't do better – but it doesn't come cheap. See map, p.412. ⑤

Mercure Grand Hôtel Alfa place de la Gare 16 ④49 00 111, ⑥www.mercure.com. Occupying an attractive Art Deco building, this flashy, four-star hotel has every convenience. Opposite the train station. See map, p.408. ⑦

Rix bd Royal 20 ④47 16 66, ⑥www.rixhotel.lu. Smart, four-star hotel conveniently situated a couple of minutes' walk west of place d'Armes, just outside the Old Town on a road that's home to many of the city's offshore banking businesses – hence the high-rise office blocks. The public rooms are in plush antique style, all gilt mirrors, chandeliers and big fireplaces. There are just twenty rooms, each tastefully decorated and most with balconies. See map, p.412. ⑥

Simoncini rue Notre Dame 6 ④22 28 44. Under renovation at the time of writing, the *Simoncini* will be the first designer hotel in the centre of the Old Town. See map, p.412. ⑤

Sieweburen rue des Septfontaines 36 ④44 23 56, ⑥siewebur@pt.lu. Alpine-lodge-style accommodation in the countryside just 2km northwest of the Old Town in the district of

Rollingergrund. Three-star hotel plus a popular restaurant. Bus #2. ④

Walsheim pl de la Gare 28 ④48 47 98, ⑥hotel.walsheim@internet.lu. No great shakes, but this modest two-star hotel, with 24 en-suite rooms in a well-kept building opposite the station, is more than competent. The cheerful flower boxes set the tone and free underground parking, a rarity in the city, is included. See map, p.408. ②

Hostel and camping

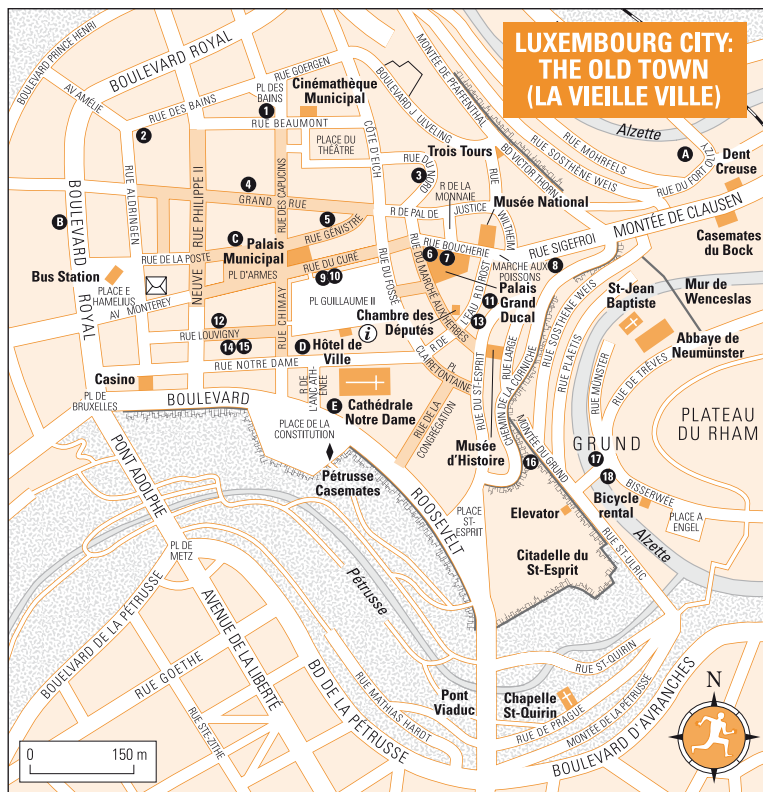
L'Auberge de Jeunesse rue du Fort Olisy 2 ④22 68 89 20, ⑥www.youthhostels.lu. Modern, well-equipped, IYHF-affiliated hostel located down below the Bock fortifications in the Alzette valley. Reachable from the airport on bus #9 and from the train station on bus #9, but ask the driver to put you off as otherwise you risk whistling by on the main road, about 300m from the hostel; on foot it takes about 30min to cover the 3km from the train station. 30 four-bedrooms, all with shower and toilet, and 20 six-bedrooms, some with shower and toilet; plus a laundry, a café, Internet access and 24-hr reception. See map, p.412. Dorm beds €19.50, including breakfast.

Camping Bon Accueil rue du Camping 2 ④36 70 69. The nearest campsite to the centre, just 5km south of the city on the banks of the River Alzette, in the village of Alzingen. Open April–Oct.

The City

No more than a few hundred metres across, **The Old Town** (La Vieille Ville) is not actually very old, its tight grid of streets flanked by mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings, though the mazy street plan does itself date back to medieval times. The Old Town boasts one very good museum, the rambling **Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art**, but the main pull is the old stone, rock and brick **fortifications** that march along the east side of the centre. The earliest surviving portions flank the Montée de Clausen, linking the Old Town with Clausen in the valley below, but these medieval bits and pieces are really rather insignificant when compared with the mighty bastions and ramparts that are seen to best advantage along the superbly scenic **chemin de la Corniche** walkway. These later works reflect the combined endeavours of generations of military engineers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, as does the honeycomb of subterranean artillery **casemates**, portions of which can be entered on both the Montée de Clausen and the place de la Constitution.

In the **river valley** to the east of the Old Town – directly below the chemin de la Corniche – lies the cluster of antique houses that constitute **Grund**, an attractive village-like enclave that once housed the city's working class, but is now partly gentrified. From Grund, it's a few minutes' walk round to the long and verdant **park** that stretches along the valley to the south of the Old Town – and beneath the Pont Adolphe and Pont Viaduc bridges. Incidentally, note that you can reach the Pétrusse and Alzette river valleys from the Old Town by road, steps or **elevator**: the main elevator runs from place St-Esprit to the Grund (daily 6.30am–3.30am).

**ACCOMMODATION**

L'Auberge de Jeunesse
Français
Grand Hôtel Cravat
Rix
Simoncini

A
C
E
B
D

CAFÉS & RESTAURANTS

Apoteca
Basta Così
Le Bouquet Garni
Brasserie Guillaume
Brasserie La Taverne
El Compañero
Français

7
12
11
10
E
13
C

Kaempff-Kohler
Maison des Brasseurs
Mosconi
Oberweis
L'Océan
Wengé

9
4
17
5
15
14

BARS & CLUBS

Café des Artistes
Chiggeri
Scott's
The Tube
Urban
V.I.P Room
Vis à Vis

16
3
18
8
6
2
1

Place d'Armes and place Guillaume II

At the centre of the Old Town is **place d'Armes**, a shady oblong fringed with pavement cafés and the sturdy Palais Municipal of 1907. It's a delightful spot and throughout the summer there are frequent free concerts – everything from jazz to brass bands – as well as a small (and expensive) flea market every second and fourth Saturday of the month. Near the square are the city's principal shops, concentrated along **Grand-rue** and rue des Capucins to the north, rue du Fossé to the east, and rue Philippe II running south.

The passage from the southeast corner of place d'Armes leads through to the expansive **place Guillaume II**, in the middle of which is a jaunty-looking equestrian statue of William II. The square, the site of Luxembourg's main fresh-food market on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, is flanked by pleasant old townhouses as well as the solid Neoclassical **Hôtel de Ville**, adorned by a pair of gormless copper lions. There's also a modest stone water fountain bearing a

cameo of the Luxembourg poet and writer **Michel Rodange** (1827–76), who created something of a stir with his best-known work, *Rénert the Fox*, a satirical exploration of the character of his fellow Luxembourgers.

Cathédrale Notre-Dame

From place Guillaume II, it's a brief stroll south down the steps beside the Rodange fountain to rue Notre-Dame, where an ornate Baroque portico leads into the back of the **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** (daily 7am–8pm; free), whose slender black spires dominate the city's puckered skyline. It is, however, a real mess of a building: the transepts and truncated choir, dating to the 1930s, are in a clumping Art Deco style and they have been glued onto the (much more appealing) seventeenth-century nave. Items of interest are few and far between, but there is a **plaque** in the nave honouring those priests killed in World War II, and the Baroque **gallery** at the back of the nave is a likeable affair – graced by alabaster angels and garlands of flowers, it was carved by a certain Daniel Muller in 1622. In the apse is the country's most venerated **icon**, *The Comforter of the Afflicted*, a seventeenth-century, lime-wood effigy of the Madonna and Child which is frequently dressed up in all manner of lavish gear with crowns and sceptres, lace frills and gold brocade.

A door on the west side of the chancel leads through to the side entrance of the cathedral. On the way, you'll pass the stairs down to the **crypt**, where more sterling Art Deco architecture precedes a barred chapel containing a number of ducal tombs. Here also is the Baroque **tomb** of John the Blind – Jean l'Aveugle – which depicts the Entombment of Christ in a mass of mawkish detail. John was one of the most successful of Luxembourg's medieval rulers, until he came a cropper at the battle of Crécy in 1346.

Pétrusse Casemates and the Casino

Across from the side entrance to the cathedral, **place de la Constitution** sits on top of one of the old bastions, whose subterranean depths – the **Casemates de la Pétrusse** (Easter, Whitsun & July–Sept guided tours daily 11am–4pm; €2) – are entered via a stone stairway. The Spaniards dug these artillery chambers in the 1640s and they make for a dark and dank visit. Place de la Constitution also acts as the starting point for the Pétrusse Express (see p.410).

A couple of hundred metres away to the west, at rue Notre Dame 41, is the **Casino**: it's not a "Casino" in the sense of gaming at all, but an old bourgeois salon that has been turned into a gallery for **contemporary art** (Mon, Wed & Fri 11am–7pm, Thurs 11am–8pm, Sat & Sun 11am–6pm; €4; www.casino-luxembourg.lu), featuring exhibitions that are often challenging or downright obtuse.

The ducal palace and the Chambre des Députés

From place de la Constitution, pleasant **rue Chimay**, lined by shops and cafés, leads back towards place Guillaume II. Just to the east of the square, on rue du Marché aux Herbes, stands the **Palais Grand-Ducal** (guided tours mid-July to Aug daily except Wed; 4pm in English; 45min; €6), originally built as the town hall, but adopted by the Luxembourg royals as their winter residence in the nineteenth century. Remodelled on several occasions, the exterior, with its dinky dormer windows and spiky little spires reveals a Moorish influence – though the end result looks more Ruritanian than anything else. The interior is, as you might expect, lavish in the extreme, with dazzling chandeliers, Brussels tapestries, frescoes and acres of richly carved wood panelling. Tours are very popular, so book at least a day in advance at

the tourist office. To the right of the palace, an extension of 1859 houses the Luxembourg Parliament, the **Chambre des Députés**, in plainer but similarly opulent surroundings.

Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg

South of the Chambre des Députés, rue du St-Esprit offers the **Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs till 8pm; €5; 📍 www.musee-hist.lu). Converted from four historic houses, this hi-tech museum tells the story of the city, taking full advantage of interactive displays and models to enliven the exhibits, which include wooden models of the city through the ages. One of the highlights is a 360-degree panorama painted by Antoine Fontaine showing city life in 1655, a perfect example of a trompe-l'oeil, making you feel slightly giddy when you stand in the middle. In addition, a large part of the museum is dedicated to temporary exhibitions mostly to do with the city and its inhabitants.

Heading north from the museum, it only takes a couple of minutes to reach **Marché aux Poissons**, an attractive little plaza flanked by immaculately restored, antique buildings, all turrets and towers, arcaded galleries, pastel paintwork and stone balconies; it's here you'll find the city's best museum.

Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art

On Marché aux Poissons, the large and lavish **Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5; 📍 www.mnha.lu) has been cleverly shoehorned into a cluster of patrician mansions with extra space provided by a series of underground galleries. The museum's wide-ranging permanent collection begins in the basement with the prehistoric section and then works its way up chronologically to the Middle Ages. Above these sections, there are two floors devoted to fine art, mostly from Luxembourg and Belgium and stretching from medieval times to the early twentieth century. A further floor is devoted to an ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions, though some of these are large enough to prompt a rejigging of the whole museum.

The extensive **Gallo-Roman** section is one special high point. Southern Luxembourg has proved particularly rich in Roman artefacts with archeologists unearthing literally truckloads of bronzes and terracottas, glassware, funerary objects, busts and mosaics. In particular, look out for a fine albeit weathered marble bust of a certain Septimius Severus and a magnificent mosaic from Vichten.

Highlights of the **Fine Art** section include an enjoyable sample of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings, most memorably an exquisite *Pietà* by Adriaen Isenbrandt and a madly romantic *Bacchus, Venus and Love* by Rosso Fiorentino. Later works include the lively *Paysage de Cannes au Crépuscule* by Pablo Picasso, *La Montagne Sainte* by Paul Cézanne, and two paintings by Turner, who spent a lot of time in Luxembourg, beaver- ing away at its landscapes. You might also look out for the forceful Expressionism of Luxembourg's own Joseph Kutter (1894–1941).

Leaving the museum, the obvious option is to head east to the Bock (see p.415) and then proceed down to Clausen. There are, however, three other worthwhile **routes**. One leads south to Grund along rue Large and its continuation Montée du Grund, which passes through some of the city's medieval fortifications; the other two begin by heading north round the side of the museum along cobbled rue Wiltheim. Where the road forks, one alley, the rue du Palais de Justice, weaves uphill through one of the most attractive parts of the Old Town, while the other tunnels down to the

medieval Porte des Trois Tours gateway, beyond which there are wide views over the Alzette valley.

The Bock

In 963 a powerful local lord, Count Siegfried of Lorraine, decided to build a castle on the **Rocher du Bock**, a sandstone outcrop rising high above the Alzette just to the east of today's Marché aux Poissons. The city of Luxembourg originated with this stronghold, but precious little survives of Siegfried's construction – it was incorporated into the much more impressive fortifications that were built round the city from the seventeenth century onwards. The only significant piece of masonry to survive is the so-called **Dent Creuse** (Hollow Tooth) stone tower on the north side of the rue Sigefroi/Montée de Clausen. This same road, linking the Old Town with the suburb of Clausen, makes it doubly difficult to appreciate the layout of the original castle, which was – in medieval times – linked to the Marché aux Poissons by a drawbridge. That said, the views looking out over the spires, outer fortifications and aqueducts of the Alzette valley are superb.

In 1745, the Spaniards began digging beneath the site of Siegfried's castle. Eventually, they honeycombed the Bock with around 20km of tunnels and galleries, within which they placed bakeries, kitchens, stables and all the other amenities necessary to support a garrison. Today a tiny portion of the tunnels can be visited on a guided tour of the **Casemates du Bock** (March–Oct daily 10am–5pm; €2). It's a rather damp and draughty way to spend half an hour, and there's nothing much to see beyond a few rusty old cannons, but it's good fun all the same; an audiovisual presentation gives the historical low-down.

The chemin de la Corniche

From just above the Casemates du Bock on rue Sigefroi, you can follow the pedestrianized **chemin de la Corniche** along the ramparts that marked the eastern perimeter of the main fortress. The views are absolutely spectacular



△ The view from the chemin de la Corniche, Luxembourg City

and there's no better way to get a sense of the strength of the city's fortifications, which several major European powers struggled to improve, no one more than the French who, after 1684, made Luxembourg into one of the continent's most strongly defended cities – the so-called “Gibraltar of the north”. After a few minutes you emerge at place St-Esprit and more fortifications in the form of the **Citadelle du St-Esprit**, a colossal, stone-faced bastion built in 1685. Its flattened top is where you'll find the main **elevator** down to Grund and, beyond in a grassy little **park** that's also above the bastion, there are views over the Pétrusse Valley and the Pont Viaduc, which leads south toward the train station.

The Alzette river valley

Below and to the east of the Old Town, the **Alzette river valley** is dotted with ancient, pastel-painted houses and the battered remains of the outer fortifications – with the walls of the main fortress rising steeply above. The best approach, down **Montée de Clausen**, brings you to the somewhat dishevelled district of **Clausen**. From here, rue de la Tour Jacob tracks along the riverside to reach the medieval curtain wall – the **Mur de Wenceslas** – which both spans the Alzette and served as a fortified footbridge leading back towards the Old Town.

Dead ahead, through the gate, is **Grund**, once a thriving working-class quarter but now an uneven mixture of fine old houses and dilapidation that strings along the river for a few hundred metres. Grund is dotted with cafés and art galleries and also hosts an arts and crafts **market** on the first Saturday of every month (April–Oct 10am–6pm), between rue Münster and rue Saint Ulric. The most striking building here is the church of **St-Jean Baptiste**, down near the river on rue Münster (daily 10am–noon & 2–6pm; free), an imposing structure with a massive spire and a flashy Baroque portal. The interior boasts a whopping – and inordinately gaudy – high altar, whilst the side chapel holds a much-venerated black Madonna. Next to the church, the entirely revamped **Abbaye de Neumünster** houses the **Centre Culturel de Rencontre** (Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; ☎26 20 52 1, 🌐www.ccrn.lu) a cultural meeting centre with temporary exhibitions and *brasserie* featuring live jazz on Friday and Sunday.

At the centre of Grund, a chunky little **bridge** spans the Alzette. On the far side, you can regain the Old Town either by taking the elevator up to place St-Esprit or by hoofing it up Montée du Grund. Alternatively, a left turn leads along **rue St-Ulric**, where the markers at no. 14 show how high the river has risen in flood years – the worst inundation was in 1756. Continuing, rue St-Ulric cuts beneath the massive walls of the Citadelle du St-Esprit before meeting rue St-Quirin at the east end of the Pétrusse valley.

The Pétrusse river valley

Rue St-Quirin is a pathway that threads its way west through the wooded parkland of the **Pétrusse river valley**. There's one specific sight here, the mostly fourteenth-century **Chapelle St-Quirin**, a tiny chapel chiselled out of – and projecting into – the rock-face and equipped with a dinky little spire. Further along the valley, paths clamber up to both ends of the **Pont Adolphe**, from where it's the briefest of walks back into the Old Town.

The outskirts: Kirchberg

For decades, the **Kirchberg** district, on a plateau a couple of kilometres to the northeast of the Old Town, was nothing more than an administrative centre for

a battery of European institutions – falling on either side of avenue John F. Kennedy. Today, however, the area is the site of the largest **urban development programme** in the country, with new office blocks, designed by eminent architects, appearing at breakneck speed, the overall aim being to consolidate and confirm the Duchy's leading role in the financial world. Capitalist eyecatchers include the **HypoVereinsbank Luxembourg**, designed by the American architect Richard Meier, who uses large white facades as his trademark, and the four-storey Cubist building housing the **Deutsche Bank**, designed by Gottfried Böhm. More than a dozen **sculptures** in public spaces enliven the area in between; look out for the cheerful *Grand Fleur Qui Marche* (Surreal Walking Flower), a model based on a ceramic by Fernand Léger, and *Sarreguémènes* by Frank Stella, inspired by floating smoke rings.

It's easy enough to get to Kirchberg from the Old Town by local **bus**, but – given that the district is about 3km long and 1.5 wide – it's perhaps best to drive, especially if you're set on a general exploration. The city tourist office issues a useful brochure detailing two Kirchberg **walks**.

Philharmonie Luxembourg and Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean

Both of Kirchberg's prime attractions are on the south side of avenue John F. Kennedy, back towards the Old Town. At the northern tip of the place de l'Europe is the impressive **Philharmonie Luxembourg** (☎26 32 26 32, 🌐www.philharmonie.lu), designed by Christian de Portzamparc and strongly resembling an ancient Greek temple, with 823 shining columns rising twenty metres from the ground. The Philharmonie offers regular classical concerts, of chamber music as well as more popular artists.

A short stroll southwest from here, in a huge glass structure designed by the architect Ieoh Ming Pei (he of Louvre pyramid fame), is the spanking new **Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean** (Mudam; Mon & Thurs–Sun 11am–6pm, Wed 11am–8pm; €5; 🌐www.mudam.lu). The museum has a far-reaching and wide-ranging collection of modern and contemporary art, which it exhibits by rotation in an ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions; there are visiting exhibitions too.

Eating and drinking

Luxembourg City's Old Town is crowded with **cafés** and **restaurants**, from inexpensive places where a filling *plat du jour* can cost as little as €9, through to lavish establishments with main courses costing twice as much and more. French cuisine is popular, and traditional Luxembourgish dishes are found on many menus too, mostly meaty affairs such as neck of pork with broad beans (*judd mat gaardebounen*), black sausage (*blutwurst*) and chicken in Riesling (*hahnchen im Riesling*), not to mention freshwater fish from the River Moselle. Keep an eye out also for *gromperenkichelchen* – potato cakes usually served with apple sauce – and in winter, stalls and cafés selling *glühwein*, hot wine mulled with cloves.

One of the great Luxembourg traditions is **coffee and cakes** in a salon or one of the city's numerous patisseries, and here, as in Belgium, pavement cafés are thronged in the summertime, place d'Armes being the centre of the outdoor scene. **Multilingual menus** are the norm and the only fly in the gastronomic ointment is that many places close on Sunday. Note also that most of the smarter restaurants close from around 2pm to 7pm.

Most visitors to the city are content to drink where they eat, but there is a lively **bar** and **club** scene spread around the various parts of town. Opening

hours are fairly elastic, but bars usually stay open till around 1am, clubs till 3am. While you're out on the tiles, try one of the local **Pilsner ales** – Mousel and the tasty Bofferdig are the most widely available.

Restaurants and cafés



Apoteca rue de la Boucherie 12 ☎26 73 77. The most fashionable restaurant in town, solidly booked on the weekend, with a designer restaurant divided over two floors and a nightclub-like bar downstairs. The menu is wide-ranging and imaginative with main courses averaging a very reasonable €15. If you ask for the wine list, you'll receive the key to the cellar where you can choose from wines ranging between €15 and €2000.

Basta Così rue Louvigny 10 ☎26 26 85 85. Stylish restaurant with plasma screens and a huge bar with lots of dark wood. The menu is traditional with Italian old-timers like lasagne, saltimbocca and bruschetta dominating the list. Mains from €14. Open daily, kitchen till 10.30pm.

Le Bouquet Garni rue de l'Eau 32 ☎26 20 06 20. Polished restaurant with beamed ceilings and starched tablecloths, worthy of its Michelin star. The French cuisine features local ingredients and is supplemented by an excellent wine cellar. Main courses from around €30. Closed Sat lunch & Sun.

Brasserie Guillaume place Guillaume II 14 ☎26 20 20 20. Bright, modern brasserie specializing in Luxembourgish dishes, and also boasting a fine line in mussels and carpaccio. A popular, fashionable spot and very affordable too – main courses from as little as €10. Open daily, kitchen till midnight.

Brasserie La Taverne Grand Hôtel Cravat, bd Roosevelt 29 ☎22 19 75. Waiters in bow ties and waistcoats set the scene at this smart bistro on the ground floor of the *Hôtel Cravat*, where an older clientele tucks into classy, French-inspired cuisine from a wide-ranging menu. Mains from €13.

El Compañero rue de l'Eau 26. Fashionable place for Spanish tapas and wicked cocktails at a reasonable price; popular with the locals too. The bar, with funky bright pink walls, turns into a disco late at night.

Français place d'Armes 14. The pavement café of the *Hôtel Français* offers tasty salads and an extensive menu including several Luxembourgish standbys from €12.

Kaempff-Kohler rue du Curé 18. Delicious cheese platters, accompanied by matching wines and a great terrace for people spotting. Also does take-away. Open Mon–Sat 9.30am–6.30pm.

Maison des Brasseurs Grand-rue 48 ☎47 13 71. Modern Grand-rue, the city's main shopping strip, is also home to this long-established and smartly decorated restaurant, which serves up delicious

Luxembourgish dishes. Sauerkraut is the house speciality. Mains from €15. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

Mosconi rue Münster 13 ☎54 69 94. The only Italian restaurant with two Michelin stars, located in Grund with a terrace on the river and a stylish restaurant upstairs. Obviously not a budget option, but the set lunch menu for €39 is a pretty good deal. Closed Sun, Mon & Sat lunchtimes.

Oberweis Grand-rue 19. There may be a restaurant menu here, but the real deal is the cakes, chocolates and tarts – mouthwatering stuff and famous across the whole of the Duchy. Closed Sun.

L'Ocean rue Louvigny 7 ☎22 88 66. Elegant if formal seafood restaurant in the Old Town dishing up fish platters and seafood for the well-heeled. Mains from €28. Closed Sun.

Wengé rue Louvigny 15 ☎26 20 10 58. Delicious cakes, chocolates and quiches are on sale in the front (pâtisserie) part of *Wengé*, while the smart and smooth restaurant behind and up the stairs offers a first-rate, French-style menu with mains at €30–36. Mon–Sat 8am–6.30pm, plus Wed & Fri eve.

Bars and clubs

Café des Artistes Montée du Grund 22. Charming café-bar close to the bridge in Grund. Piano accompaniment and *chanson* most nights – to a mixed and motley crew.



Chiggeri rue du Nord 15. Groovy, ground-floor bar in the Old Town, with a great atmosphere, funky decor and a mixed clientèle. Also a restaurant next door and outside terrace.

Melusina rue de la Tour Jacob 145, Clausen ☎26 00 89 75 @www.melusina.lu. Varied sounds Fri and Sat plus live jazz and folk music nights, as well as occasional theatrical performances. Expat favourite. Has a restaurant (open daily) and outside terrace too.

Pygmalion rue de la Tour Jacob 19, Clausen. Busy Irish bar down in the depths of Clausen. Open till 1am weekdays and 3am weekends.

Scott's Bisserwée. By the bridge in Grund, this pubby English bar is where expats congregate for draught Guinness and bitter.

The Tube rue Sigeffroi 8, Old Town. Lively, youthful and earthy nightclub named after London's Underground – hence the Tube memorabilia. One of the city's more fashionable places; varied sounds from techno through to soul.



Urban corner of rue de la Boucherie and rue du Marché aux Herbes. Popular with

expats and local business folk for its retro chic interior and impressive cocktail list.

V.I.P Room rue des Bains 19 ☎26 18 78 67

📞 www.viproom.lu. Favourite hangout of the rich and famous with glamorous parties and

international DJs on the weekend. Also an expensive restaurant. Tues–Sat.

Vis à Vis At the junction of rue des Capucins and rue Beaumont. Laid-back, comfortable brasserie-bar with old posters and antique woodwork. Closed Sun.

Listings

Airlines British Airways ☎080 83 23; Luxair

☎24 56 50 50.

Bookshops Papeterie Ernster, rue du Fossé 27, has a reasonable range of English-language books and newspapers; it's footsteps from place Guillaume II.

Banks and exchange You can change money at virtually any bank. ATMs are dotted round the centre – there's a Caisse d'Epargne cash machine at the east end of place Guillaume II on rue du Fossé.

Car parks There are four underground car parks in the Old Town, though spaces can still be hard to find. One is off bd Royale beside the bus station; another beneath place du Théâtre; a third under place Guillaume; and a fourth is at the east end of bd Roosevelt, near the Viaduc bridge. All charge around €1.50/hr during the day, with cheaper rates in the evening and on the weekend. There's some especially handy on-street parking on place de la Constitution, but spaces – and there aren't many – fill up fast.

Car rental Autolux ☎22 11 81; Avis ☎48 95 95; Europcar ☎40 42 28; Hertz ☎43 46 45. There's a complete list of car rental companies on

📞 www.luxauto.lu

Cinemas Cinemas show films in their original language, subtitled (rarely dubbed) as appropriate in French. A varied programme of art-house and classic films is screened in the Old Town at Cinémathèque Municipale, on place du Théâtre (☎47 96 26 44). Mainstream films are on offer at, among a dozen other cinemas, the five-screen Ciné Utopia, north of the Old Town at av de la Faiencerie 16 (☎22 46 11, 📞 www.utopolis.lu) and at the ten-screen Utopolis, av Kennedy 45, in Kirchberg (☎42 95 95, 📞 www.utopolis.lu).

Embassies Belgium, rue des Girondins 4 ☎44 27 46; Ireland, rte d'Arlon 28 ☎45 06 10; Netherlands, rue Ste-Zithe 6 ☎22 75 70; UK, bd Joseph II ☎22 98 64; USA, bd E. Servais 22 ☎46 01 23.

Emergencies Fire & ambulance ☎112; police ☎113.

Festivals The Schueberfouer, held over the last week in August and first two weeks of

September, is the city's main knees-up, featuring one of the biggest mobile fairs in Europe. It started out as a mediæval sheep market, as recalled by the Hammelsmarsch, on the middle Sunday, in which shepherds bring their sheep to town, accompanied by a band, and work their way round the bars. The city also puts on an annual "Summer in the City" programme of free music concerts, fashion shows and parades, beginning in late June and ending in the middle of September.

Laundry Quick-Wash, near the train station at rue de Strasbourg 31 (☎26 19 33). Dry cleaners are dotted around the city – look out for branches of 5 à sec. There's one south of the Old Town, not far from the train station at rue de Bonnevoie 106 (☎48 06 60).

Left luggage There are coin-operated lockers and a luggage office at the train station.

Mail The main post office adjoins the bus station on place E. Hamilius (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm, Sat 7am–5pm).

Newspapers English-language newspapers are available from most newsgagents from about 11am on the day of publication.

Pharmacies Central pharmacies include Goedert, place d'Armes 5. Duty rotas are displayed in pharmacy windows.

Police Main station is at rue Glesener 58–60.

Spa waters City folk often pop over to the spa town of **Mondorf-les-Bains** (📞 www.mondorf.lu), on the French border 20km southeast of Luxembourg City, to take the mineral waters, which emerge from the ground at a steady 25°C. There's a sauna pavilion, with indoor and outdoor swimming pools, massage, solariums, Turkish baths, whirlpools plus medicinal treatments.

Telephones International calls can be made from all public telephones and booths have multilingual instructions. Buy phone cards from post offices or newsgagents.

Train enquiries The CFL office in the station is open daily 6am–9pm (☎24 89 24 89, 📞 www.cfl.lu).

Around Luxembourg City

Luxembourg City is fringed by three very different parts of the country. Easily the most appealing is the **Gutland** – literally “Good Land” – which fills out much of the middle of the Duchy, rolling north to workaday **Mersch** and west to the Belgian border, its green and fertile farmland intercepted by long and gentle river valleys. The Gutland is dotted with prosperous, good-looking villages, but specific targets are hard to pin down, two exceptions being the pretty little hamlet of **Bourglinster** and the **Vallée de l'Eisch**, the most scenic part of which weaves its way west from **Hollenfels** to **Koerich**.

In the other direction, east of Luxembourg City, the landscape is flatter and duller, and there's nothing much to detain you until you reach the gentle, sweeping scenery of the **River Moselle**, which, for 50km or so, forms the border with Germany. The river's west bank is lined with small towns and vineyards, whose grapes sustain the Duchy's thriving **wine** industry. Almost all of the wine is white, perked up with a little rosé, and most is good quality, varying from fruity Rieslings to delicate Pinot Blancs and flowery Gewurztraminers, plus some excellent, often underrated *méthode champenoise* sparkling wines. A number of wine producers run tours and tastings of their **wine cellars** (*caves*) – a popular day-trip for Germans and Luxembourgers alike. In themselves, however, the Moselle towns are really rather mundane – the most agreeable targets being the pleasant town of **Remich** and the pretty village of **Ehnen**.

To the southwest of Luxembourg City lies the most crowded part of the country, an industrial district whose red rock produced the iron ore that transformed the Duchy from a rural backwater into a modern, urban state in the early twentieth century, though the deposits had been worked long before that. Industrial districts are rarely appealing to the passing tourist and this is no exception – though brisk and modern **Esch-sur-Alzette**, the Duchy's second largest town, does have its moments.

Getting from Luxembourg City to any of the towns and larger villages that surround it by **public transport** presents few difficulties, though you'll really need your own transport to make much of a tour of either the Gutland or the Moselle valley. Distances are predictably small: it's 30km from Luxembourg City to the Moselle, half that to Mersch.

North to Bourglinster and Mersch

Running parallel to the Liège train line, the main road **north** out of Luxembourg City – the N7 – seems to take ages to clear the trailing suburbs of the city, but eventually it reaches the five-kilometre-long turning that leads east to **BOURGLINSTER**, a pretty little place set in a wooded valley. Overlooking the village are the turrets and towers of the state-owned **château**, which is now used for art exhibitions and chamber music concerts. The château is also home to two **restaurants** – the formal *La Distillerie* (☎ 78 78 78, 🌐 www.bourglinster.lu), which serves French cuisine, and *La Taverne*, a much less expensive brasserie with both French and Luxembourgish dishes. It only takes half an hour or so to look round Bourglinster, but there is a **hostel** here – at rue de Gonderange 2 (☎ 26 78 07 07, 🌐 www.youthhostels.lu; dorm beds €17.50).

Back on the N7, it's just 6km more to **MERSCH**, an unexciting crossroads town at the confluence of several river valleys, one of which is the Vallée de l'Eisch.

The Vallée de l'Eisch

From Mersch, the **CR105** – a minor road – snakes its way south along the **Vallée de l'Eisch**, one of the Gutland's most attractive river valleys. The problem is actually finding the right road: the CR105 begins to the west of the centre of Mersch. To get here, take the N8 out of town, go underneath the motorway and then look for the turning on the left – but not the road to Saeul. The CR105 threads its way through pretty countryside before reaching, after about 10km, minuscule **HOLLENFELS**, above the river, where the old château, which mostly dates from the eighteenth century, has been turned into one of the country's most beautifully sited **hostels** (T 30 70 37, W www.youthhostels.lu; dorm beds €15.30, doubles 1). From here, it's a few kilometres more to **ANSEMBOURG**, a sliver of town that possesses two castles (no public access) – one up on the hillside dating from the twelfth century and a later one down below, which was built for a local iron-smelting baron. It's a pretty spot and so is the next village along, **SEPTFONTAINES**, 8km to the west also on the CR105. There's another privately-owned castle here, up on the hill, as well as a fine old **church**, whose graveyard holds several unusual and elaborate Stations of the Cross.

Four kilometres further and you reach the two-kilometre-long turning to the final valley village, **KOERICH**, not as picturesque a spot as its neighbours, but with the valley's most interesting **church**, whose interior boasts splendid Baroque furnishings and fittings. From Koerich, it's just 12km west over the Belgian border to Arlon (see p.376).

East to Remich and the Moselle valley

Heading east from Luxembourg City on the E29, it's about 25km to **REMICH**, an amenable modern place that slopes steeply up from the River Moselle. Remich is a major stop for the **cruise boats** that ply up and down the River Moselle from Easter to October, connecting Remich with Schengen to the south and Wormeldange, Grevenmacher and Wasserbillig to the north. These cruises are operated by **Entente Touristique de la Moselle Luxembourgeoise** about once a day (T 75 82 75, W www.moselle-tourist.lu); as a sample fare, a single from Remich to Grevenmacher costs €7, €11 return. As well as the water, Remich's other main attraction is **wine**, with several local wineries offering tours and tastings (see box, overleaf)

There's no strong reason to stay overnight in Remich, but the town does have several **hotels**, one of the most agreeable being the two-star *Auberge des Cygnes*, in a comfortable 1950s building on the riverfront at rue Esplanade 11 (T 23 69 88 52, W www.cygnes.lu; 2). Also on the riverfront is the smart, four-star **Hôtel St-Nicolas**, rue Esplanade 31 (T 26 663, W www.saint-nicolas.lu; 4), which occupies a distinguished old building dating back to the 1880s. Both the *Auberge des Cygnes* and the *Hôtel St-Nicolas* have first-class **restaurants** – the first concentrating on Luxembourg dishes, the second French. That said, on a hot evening the terrace at the *Hôtel d'Esplanade*, rue Esplanade 5, is the place to eat.

Ehnen

North of Remich along the Moselle, vineyards furrow the hillsides, intermittently interrupted by craggy bluffs – pretty scenery that heralds the hamlet of **EHNEN**, whose huddle of old and very quaint stone buildings is tucked away in a wooded dell just off the main road. There's a **Musée du Vin** here (April–Oct Tues–Sun 9.30–11.30am & 2–5pm; €3.50) – nothing very exciting, but with informative exhibits in the old fermenting cellar detailing

Luxembourg's wineries

Whether or not the Romans introduced **wine** to the Luxembourg region is still the subject of much debate, but one thing is certain, the fertile banks of the River Moselle have been nourishing the vine for a very long time indeed. Rivaner and Elbling (one of the oldest wines in the world) used to dominate the area, but nowadays Riesling, Auxerrois, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc make a strong presence. Standards are generally very high, so it is perhaps surprising that Luxembourg wine is largely overshadowed by that of its neighbours, France and Germany. There are numerous small wineries in the area and, although many are not open to the public, we've picked out several that are.

Bernard Massard rue du Pont 8, Grevenmacher (April–Oct tours & tastings daily 9.30am–6pm; €3.50; ☎ www.bernard-massard.lu). The most prominent among the wineries, on the southern side of Grevenmacher, right next to the main street and river. Like the St-Martin caves in Remich (see p.421), Bernard Massard is known for its sparkling, *méthode champenoise* wine, but visitors usually see the modern production process, making it a less interesting – and shorter – tour. Included is a short introductory film and, at the end of a visit, a tasting in the slick hospitality suite.

Cep D'Or rte du Vin 15, Hëttermillen (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 1–7pm, Sat & Sun 3–7pm; ☎ www.cepdor.lu). Designed by the Austrian architect François Valentiny, everything in this unusual, bunker-style cave is functional – even the artificial lake on top of the roof is there to keep the cellar cool. A family-owned winery, it's known for its Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer. Hëttermillen is between Remich and Ehnen.

Pollfabaire rte du Vin 115, Wormeldange (May–Oct tastings Mon–Sat 10.30am–8pm, Sun 10.30am–12.30pm & 3–8pm; Nov–April Sat & Sun only; €2.80; ☎ www.vinsmoselle.lu). Part of the large Domaines de Vinsmoselle cooperative, this winery produces over a million litres a year and is best known for its sparkling *méthode champenoise*. Visitors can observe the modern production process, but things liven up on Sundays when a *vin dansant* with music adds to the atmosphere. Wormeldange is 12km north along the river from Remich.

St Martin rte de Stadtbredimus 53, Remich (April–Oct daily 10am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm; €3). The house speciality here is sparkling wine and, unlike many of its rivals, this cellar tour shows the traditional *méthode champenoise* process in which the bottles are turned by hand every other day. The caves are located a fifteen-minute walk north along the river from the centre of Remich, on the left of the main road (the N10).

Wellenstein rue des Caves 13, Wellenstein (May–Oct daily 10am–6pm, outside season by appointment; tour €2.25, tasting €3.95; ☎ www.vinsmoselle.lu). Founded in 1930, this is Luxembourg's largest wine cellar producing 3.5 million litres a year. Although their tour shows the modern production process, the explanation is very pleasantly done. Wellenstein is 4km or so south of Remich.

various aspects of the wine-making process, past and present – as well as two **hotels**. Easily the pick of them is the neat and trim, three-star *Simmer* (☎ 76 00 30, ☎ www.hotel-simmer.lu; ②), in a rambling, turreted brick mansion that dates back to the late nineteenth century; it has an excellent restaurant here too, with a large terrace overlooking the Moselle.

Bus #450 runs north from Remich to Grevenmacher via Ehnen hourly; Ehnen is 10km from Remich.

Grevenmacher

With a population of just over four thousand, **GREVENMACHER**, about 20km upriver from Remich, is the pint-sized capital of the Luxembourg Moselle. It possesses a pleasant old town, complete with a comely set of stone houses, but

the main pull is the Bernard Massard **winery**, rue du Pont 8 (see box opposite). For free town maps and other local gubbins, consult the **tourist office** at rte du Vin 10 (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 1–5pm; ☎ 75 82 75, 🌐 www.grevenmacher.lu).

From Grevenmacher, there is an hourly **bus** service north along the river to Wasserbillig and Echternach (see below); at Wasserbillig, you can also pick up the **train** back to Luxembourg City.

Southwest to Esch-sur-Alzette

The district immediately to the southwest of Luxembourg City used to be pretty dire, an iron-ore mining and steel-making region whose heavy industry and urban sprawls were best glimpsed from a train window on the way to somewhere else. Nowadays, with much of the steel-making dead and gone as uneconomic, the towns are being greened and cleaned, nowhere more so than **ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE**, whose population of around 27,000 includes a large number of Italians, whose forebears migrated here to work the steel. Esch is at its most agreeable among the shops and cafés of its pedestrianized main street, **rue de l'Alzette**, and it also possesses one mildly enjoyable attraction, the **Musée Nationale de la Résistance**, at the west end of rue de l'Alzette in place de la Résistance (Thurs, Sat & Sun 3–6pm; free), which tracks through the history of the Resistance in thorough detail. Esch is also home to the recently opened **Rockhal**, on the edge of town on av du Rock'n'Roll 5 (☎ 24 55 51, 🌐 www.rockhal.lu), a live-music venue with two large halls and an impressive programme of international stars.

Esch is just 17km from Luxembourg City and its **train station** is on the south side of the town centre, about 300m from rue de l'Alzette along avenue de la Gare. The **tourist office** is at the east end of rue de l'Alzette on place de l'Hôtel de Ville (Mon–Fri 10am–12.30pm & 1.30–6pm, Sat 10am–5pm; ☎ 54 16 37, 🌐 www.esch-city.lu).

Echternach and around

Some 35km northeast of Luxembourg City, the delightful little town of **Echternach** cuddles up to a bend in the River Sûre on the German border. The town is one of the Duchy's most beguiling, not least because of its splendid abbey, and has the added advantage of being at the heart of some wonderful scenery, comprising a parcel of land commonly – if rather oddly – called **La Petite Suisse Luxembourgeoise**. Despite the name, there are no Alpine peaks here, but the area is beautiful all the same, with steep and rocky wooded gorges gashing a rolling mountain plateau of open farmland and forest. The most enjoyable way to explore La Petite Suisse Luxembourgeoise is on its excellent network of **hiking trails**, with Echternach as a base. In addition, there are a couple of castles you might wish to drop by – one each in the villages of **Larochette** and **Beaufort**.

Getting to Echternach from other parts of the Duchy by **bus** – including Luxembourg City, Diekirch and Vianden – is straightforward, but bus services to the surrounding villages are patchy.

Echternach

A town of around five thousand souls, **ECHTERNACH** grew up around an abbey that was founded here in 698 by **St Willibrord**, a Yorkshire

missionary-monk who, according to legend, cured epilepsy and cattle. Such finely balanced skills went down a treat with the locals, most of whom had been converted to Christianity long before his death here in 739 at the grand old age of 81. Nowadays, Willibrord is commemorated by a renowned day-long **dancing procession** in which the dancers cross the town centre in leaps and jumps – signifying epilepsy – to the accompaniment of the polka and holding white handkerchiefs. The procession, which first took place in 1533, is held annually on Whit Tuesday – two days after Whit Sunday – and begins at 9am.

Arrival and information

With regular services from Luxembourg City, Diekirch and Ettelbruck, Echternach's **bus station** is 500m from the main square, place du Marché, straight down rue de la Gare. The **tourist office** is opposite the entrance to the basilica just north of the main square (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm, also July & Aug Sat & Sun same hours; ☎72 02 30, 🌐www.echternach.lu). It supplies free town maps, has lots of local information, sells hiking maps of the surrounding region and will book accommodation on your behalf at no extra cost. A **tourist train** departs hourly (Easter–Sept 11am–5pm; €6.50) from the place du Marché, whisking you around the main attractions and taking in the artificial lake on the southwest side of town.

Accommodation


Central Echternach has a good supply of **inexpensive** hotels and is within easy reach of a **hostel**.

L'Auberge de Jeunesse chemin vers Rodenhof ☎72 01 58, 🌐www.youthhostels.lu. Echternach's sporty hostel – with professional climbing wall and artificial lake – is located about a 15-min walk outside of the town centre on the road to Rodenhof. To get there, take bus #110 or #111 from Luxembourg City, get off at the Nonnemillen/Lac stop, and it's a 5-min walk. Thirty two- to six-bedrooms. Dorm beds €17.50, doubles ①

Hostellerie de La Basilique place du Marché 7 ☎72 94 83, 🌐www.hotel-basilique.lu. The most expensive hotel in the centre, this family-owned, four-star establishment has fourteen well-appointed,

modern rooms, some of which overlook the main square. The decor in the public areas is perhaps over-blown, but nothing too painful. ④

Le Petit Poète place du Marché 13 ☎72 00 72 🌐www.lepetitpoete.lu. Inexpensive hotel above a café bang in the centre of town with just twelve plain but perfectly adequate modern rooms. Closed Dec & Jan. ①

 **Puccini** rue de la Gare 21 ☎72 03 06, 🌐www.puccini.lu. Recently refurbished to a modern spec, this medium-sized hotel occupies an older building in the city centre above a popular restaurant. ③

The Town

At the centre of Echternach is **place du Marché**, an airy, broadly rectangular piazza, which is flanked by an elegant mix of old buildings. The most notable among them is the fifteenth-century **Palais de Justice** – or Denzelt (Law Courts) – a striking, turreted structure of roughly dressed stone held together by pinkish mortar and given poise by its Gothic arcade. The statues on the facade – of local, ecclesiastical and Biblical figures – were, however, added in the 1890s. The Denzelt is now part of the **Hôtel de Ville**, the bulk of which was completed in a pleasing version of French Empire style, again in the nineteenth century.

The Basilique St-Willibrord

From place du Marché, it's a short stroll north to the **Basilique St-Willibrord** (daily 9.30am–6.30pm; free), a brooding, forceful edifice equipped with two

Walking, cycling and canoeing round Echternach

The tourist office sells a **hiking map** for the Echternach district entitled *La Petite Suisse Luxembourgeoise et Basse-Sûre*, detailing around fifty potential hikes, anywhere between 2km and 25km in length. The majority are clearly marked however, so even without a map you can (usually) find your way around without too much difficulty. One popular route, taking in some fine rugged scenery, is the six-kilometre walk west from Echternach to the plateau hamlet of **Berdorf**, up the dramatic **Gorge du Loup**. At the top of the gorge are an open-air theatre and grottoes, which may have been where the Romans cut mill stones. There's a fairly frequent bus service between Berdorf and Echternach, or you can extend the hike by returning down the next valley to the south, with the path weaving through the woods across the valley from the N11, the main road back into Echternach.

Cycling is another popular way of exploring the region. There are two official cycling routes departing from Echternach, the PC2 and PC3, both running along the old railway line. The PC2 leads you to Luxembourg City on a 37-kilometre track, but note that this route is not for the fainthearted as there are numerous stiff climbs. A bit longer but far less adventurous, the PC3 runs along the rivers in the region, leading you on a 22-kilometre track to Wasserbillig or a 31-kilometre track to Vianden, with the more athletic able to take in Berdorf en route. Bicycles can be rented at The Outdoor Freizeit (see below) for €20 per day or €15 for half a day.

It's also possible to **kayak** down the River Sûre to Echternach from Dillingen, Wallendorf or Diekirch, the starting point depending on the time of year. The Outdoor Freizeit, rue de la Sûre 10, Dillingen (☎ 86 91 39; 🌐 www.outdoorfreizeit.lu), offers lots of advice – though the route is not especially difficult – and rents out both single and double kayaks; advance booking is essential. Dillingen is 10km or so northwest along the river from Echternach.

sets of turreted towers. The church has had a long and chequered history. The first structure was a relatively modest affair, but as the Benedictine monastery grew richer, so the monks had it extended, stuffing it with all sorts of holy treasures. This made it a tempting target for the French Revolutionary army, who sacked the abbey and expelled the monks in 1797. Thereafter the monastery was turned into a pottery factory, but the Benedictines returned a few years later and promptly restored the abbey to an approximation of its medieval layout. There was yet more trouble during the Battle of the Bulge, when the abbey was heavily bombed, but the monks persevered, rebuilding the whole abbey – again to the medieval plan – and reconsecrating the church in 1952. The postwar reconstruction was skilfully executed and today's basilica has all the feel of a medieval church, most notably in its yawning, dimly lit nave. That said, the church's furnishings are in themselves pretty pedestrian, and the only significant piece to have survived the bombing is a part of the exquisite **crucifix** on the nave's left-hand wall. Downstairs, the **crypt** is also a survivor, dating back to the original eighth-century foundation. The crypt's whitewashed walls are decorated by several faded frescoes and accommodate the primitive **coffin** of Saint Willibrord, though this is enclosed within a hideously sentimental marble canopy of 1906.

The abbey

The huge **abbey complex** spreads out beyond the church, its crisply symmetrical, mainly eighteenth-century buildings now used as a school and for offices – including the tourist office. Next door to the church, the vaulted cellars of the former Abbot's Palace contain the **Musée de l'Abbaye**

(daily: March–May & Oct 10am–noon & 2–5pm; June & Sept 10am–noon & 2–6pm; July–Aug 10am–6pm; €3), which has an excellent display on the medieval illuminated manuscripts for which Echternach once had an international reputation. Organized chronologically, the display explores the artistic development of these manuscripts, beginning in the eighth century, when Celtic and Anglo-Saxon influences are clearly discernible, and continuing through to the scriptorium's eleventh-century, German-influenced heyday. Among the exhibits, two of the finest are the tenth-century *Codex Caesareus Upsaliensis* and the book of pericopes (a selection of Biblical texts) made for the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III (1017–56). Many of the manuscripts are illustrated and explained at some length (in French and German), though most are actually reproductions. The rest of the museum holds a few incidental bits and pieces, including a couple of seventh-century sarcophagi, a piece of mosaic flooring from a Roman villa discovered just outside town, and a modest display on St Willibrord's life and times. The formal beds of the old abbey gardens, by the river to the rear of the complex, have been turned into the very strollable **parc municipal**.

Eating and drinking

Most of Echternach's hotels have competent, occasionally very good **café-restaurants**, typically kitted out in a sort of semi-Alpine style with oodles of wood. Many offer competitively priced **plats du jour**, others focus on Luxembourgish specialities – and some do both. One of the better places is at the hotel *Puccini* (see p.424). Alternatively, *Giorgio's Pizzeria*, rue André Duchscher 4, serves excellent pizzas from €7 – and *Le Petit Palais*, rue de la Gare 52, has delicious crepes. As for **drinking**, there's a lively scene among the pavement cafés on and around the place du Marché, with the most inviting option here being the 🍷 *Café De Philo'soff'*, rue de la Gare 31, with French bygones on the wall and a leafy terrace. Alternatively, you could head off to *Bit Beim Dokter*, a cosy café-bar up by the tourist office.

Around Echternach: Larochette and Beaufort

Among the villages that dot the forested valleys and open uplands of La Petite Suisse, **LAROCLETTE**, a scenic 25km west of Echternach, is one of the most interesting, largely on account of its **château** (Easter–Oct daily 10am–6pm; €2), whose imposing ruins sprawl along a rocky ridge. There's been a fortress here since the tenth century, but the most significant remains date from the fourteenth century, when the local lords controlled a whole swath of Luxembourg. Allow a good thirty minutes to explore the fortress and then pop down to the village, which strings along the valley below, its attractive medley of old houses harbouring a fine old church and three **hotels**. The pick of the trio is the *Hôtel Résidence*, a comfortable three-star establishment in the centre at rue de Medernach 14 (📞83 73 91, 🌐www.hotelresidence.lu; 📍). In the same price category – but more routine – is the *Grand Hôtel de la Poste*, at place Bleech 11 (📞87 81 78, 🌐www.grand-hotel-de-la-poste.lu; 📍). The village also possesses a **hostel** at Osterbour 45 (📞83 70 81, 🌐www.youthhostels.lu; dorm beds €17.50, doubles 📍), in a well-kept older building on the edge of the village; and a **campsite** – *Camping Birkelt* – at rue de la Piscine 1 (📞87 90 40, 🌐www.camping-birkelt.lu; March–Oct). As for eating, the *Hôtel Résidence* has a first-rate **restaurant**, where the emphasis is on local dishes and ingredients. If that option fails, you can choose from half a dozen options on the main square, place Bleech.

Beaufort

From Larochette, it's about 15km northeast along pretty country roads to **BEAUFORT**, a humdrum agricultural village that straggles across a narrow, open plateau. In the wooded valley below is Beaufort's one and only claim to fame, its **château** (Easter–Oct 9am–6pm; €3), a rambling, mostly medieval stronghold whose stern walls and bleak towers roll down a steep escarpment. The most impressive part of a visit is the climb up the stone stairway into the fortress, past a series of well-preserved gateways. There's not too much to look at inside, though the old torture chamber is suitably grim and the stinky old well is a reminder that, by the fourteenth century, castles were as likely to surrender because of the stench of the sanitation as they were from enemy action.

Once you've seen the castle, there's no strong reason to hang around, but the village does have a pleasant, modern **hostel**, at rue de l'Auberge 6 (☎83 60 75, 🌐www.youthhostels.lu; dorm beds €15.30, doubles ①; closed mid-Dec to mid-Jan) and a couple of reasonable **hotels**. The better option is the well-appointed *Hôtel Meyer*, in a sprightly modern building with an indoor pool and sauna at Grand-rue 120 (☎83 62 62, 🌐www.hotelmeyer.lu; ④). The *Meyer* has the village's best **restaurant** too.

Vianden

Hidden away in a deep fold in the landscape, beneath bulging forested hills and a mighty hilltop castle, tiny **VIANDEN**, just 30km or so northwest of Echternach, is undoubtedly the most strikingly sited of all Luxembourg's provincial towns. The setting, the castle and the magnificent scenery have long made it a popular tourist destination – and the town has the range of hotels and restaurants to prove it. Wherever else you go in Luxembourg, be sure to come here.

Arrival, information and getting around

With regular services from Diekirch and Ettelbruck, Vianden's tiny **bus station** is about five minutes' walk east of the town bridge along rue de la Gare and its continuation rue de la Frontière. The **tourist office** is at the west end of the bridge on the castle side of the river, on rue du Vieux Marché (April–Aug Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–2pm; Sept–March Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 1–5pm, Sat 10am–2pm; ☎83 42 57, 🌐www.vianden.eu). It has copious local information, issues hiking maps and sells a useful booklet describing around thirty **walks** in the vicinity of Vianden, ranging from a short ramble along the river to more energetic hauls up into the surrounding hills. **Cycling trails** link Vianden with both Diekirch and Echternach and **mountain bikes** can be rented from the Pavillon de la Gare (mid-July to early Sept Mon–Sat 8am–noon & 1–5pm; ☎26 87 41 57; advance booking recommended), beside the bus station, for €15 per day, €40 for three days. There's also a **tourist train**, which makes a forty-minute gambol round the town beginning at the town bridge (daily: April & Oct from 1.30–5pm, May–Sept from 11am–5pm; €6; 🌐www.benni-vianden.lu).

Accommodation

Accommodation isn't usually a problem in Vianden – virtually every other building seems to be a hotel – but you'd still be well advised to reserve in

advance during the high season. There are also lots of **campsites** to choose from, the handiest of which is *Op dem Deich* (☎83 43 75, 🌐www.opdemdeich.lu; April to early Oct;), by the river behind – and just along from – the bus station. In addition, there are two other campsites further along the road to Echternach. First up, about 1km from the bridge, is *De l'Our* (☎83 45 05, 🌐www.camping-our-vianden.lu; April to late Oct) and then, after another 400m or so, comes *Du Moulin* (☎83 45 01, 🌐www.campingdumoulin.lu; May–Sept). All three sites are reasonably well equipped – as is Vianden **hostel**.

Auberge de Jeunesse montée du Château 3 ☎83 41 77 🌐www.youthhostels.lu. Brisk, modern hostel in a nicely placed – but difficult to find – building at the top of Grand-rue, near the castle. Ten rooms, all with shared facilities, in two- to twelve-bedded rooms. Closed late-Dec to Feb. Dorm beds €15.30, doubles ①



Auberge du Château Grand-rue 74-80 ☎83 45 74, 🌐www.auberge-du-chateau.lu. In a good-looking, three-storey town house on the castle side of the river, this well-kept hotel has forty recently revamped, modern rooms. Mid-Feb to mid-Nov. ②

Hôtel Heintz Grand-rue 55 ☎83 41 55, 🌐www.hotel-heintz.lu. Traditional, even old-fashioned, family-owned hotel, whose workaday facade belies its thoroughly Alpine interior, with lots of wood panelling and oodles of local bygones. The rooms are comfortable and well appointed and some have private balconies with views over the river. April to early Nov. ②

Hôtel Petry rue de la Gare 15 ☎83 41 22, 🌐www.hotel-petry.com. In the centre of town and occupying a recently enlarged older building, this bright, modern, eco-friendly hotel has rainwater-flush toilets, a sauna and a fitness area. Late Feb to Dec. ②

The Town

Some 500m from top to bottom, Vianden's main street – the **Grand-rue** – sweeps down a steep, wooded hill to the pint-sized **bridge** that both spans the River Our and serves as the centre of town. On the bridge there's a **statue** of St John Nepomuk, a fourteenth-century Bohemian priest, who was thrown into the River Vltava for refusing to divulge the confessional secrets of his queen – an untimely end that was to make him the patron saint of bridges. Also on the bridge is a fine bust of **Victor Hugo** (1802–85), who was expelled from France for supporting the French revolutionaries of 1848. Hugo spent almost twenty years in exile, becoming a regular visitor to Vianden and living here in the summer of 1871. His former house, at the east end of the bridge, has been turned into a modest **museum** (daily 11am–5pm; €4; 🌐www.victor-hugo.lu) commemorating his stay here, with many letters and copies of poems and manuscripts, including his *Discourse on Vianden*. Here also are photographs of the town during the nineteenth century, and sketches by the great man of local places of interest – the castles at Beaufort and Larochette, for example. Sadly, few of Hugo's other possessions have survived, save for the bedroom furniture, complete with original bed.

Strolling up Grand-rue from the bridge, look out for the Gothic **Église des Trinitaires** on the left (daily 9am–6pm; free). The church's twin naves date back to the thirteenth century, as does the subtle, sinuous tracery of the adjoining **cloître** (cloister). Further up the street, the town's other museum, the **Musée d'Art Rustique**, occupies an old and distinguished-looking house at Grand-rue 96 (Easter–Oct 11am–5pm; €3). This holds an enjoyable hotchpotch of rural furniture, fancy firebacks and old clothes, plus a sprawling display of dolls and, on the top floor, a small room devoted to some fascinating historical documents and old photographs of the town and castle.

The castle

Vianden's principal sight is its inordinately picturesque **château** (daily: March & Oct 10am–5pm; April–Sept 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm; €5.50; @ www.castle-vianden.lu), perched high above the town. Originally a fifth-century structure, the castle you see today mostly dates from the eleventh century, though bits and pieces were added much later – hence the mixture of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance features. The castle was the home of the counts of Vianden, who ruled the town and much of the area during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – until they fell under the sway of the House of Luxembourg in 1264. Later, in 1417, the Luxembourg family took over the building, and it remained the property of the grand dukes until 1977 when it was handed over to the state.

A very large complex, the castle is now open in its entirety following a very thorough and sensitive restoration (previously much of it was in ruins), though the crowds trooping through the pristine halls and galleries on the self-guided tour can't help but spoil the atmosphere. Some rooms have been furnished in an approximation of period style – the **Salle des Banquets** (Banqueting Hall) being a case in point – while others display suits of armour and suchlike. Of particular architectural merit are the long **Galerie Byzantine** (Byzantine Room), with its high trefoil windows, and the **Chapelle Supérieure** (Upper Chapel) next door, surrounded by a narrow defensive walkway. There are, furthermore, exhibits on the development of the building, detailing its restoration, and on the history of the town. For a bit of authentic mustiness, peek down the **well** just off the Grand Kitchen, its murky darkness lit to reveal profound depths in which, legend maintains, a former count can be heard frantically playing dice to keep the Devil at bay and avoid being dragged off to hell.

The obvious **approach** to the castle is along the short access road at the top of Vianden's main street. More interestingly, a fairly easy **footpath** leads round to the castle from one of the hills immediately to the north. Even better, it's possible to reach this hilltop, 450m above the river, without breaking sweat by means of a **télésiège** (chairlift; May to mid-Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–6pm; €4.50 return). This departs from rue du Sanatorium, a five- to ten-minute walk north from the east end of the town bridge – just follow the signs. The upper terminal of the *télésiège* also has a café and offers extravagant views over Vianden.

Eating and drinking

Almost all of the town's hotels have **restaurants** – in fact there's barely a restaurant which isn't part of a hotel. The restaurant of the *Hôtel Heintz* is especially good, serving an excellent line in Luxembourgish dishes at reasonable prices, a description which applies in equal measure to the restaurant of the *Auberge du Château*. At both, main courses start at €15. Another – more casual – alternative is the café-restaurant of the *Hôtel Auberge de l'Our*, by the bridge, where they serve both Luxembourgish and French

Moving on from Vianden

Moving on from Vianden, the most obvious route is southwest to Diekirch, Ettelbruck and the valley of the River Sûre (see p.431). Equally enticing, however, is the scenic drive or cycle ride north along the River Our and then the short onward journey west to Clervaux (see p.434), northern Luxembourg's most interesting town.

dishes. The riverside terrace **bar** here is one of the most convivial places in town, though it gets jam-packed on summer weekends.

Diekirch and around

Heading southwest from Vianden, it's just 12km to **Diekirch**, a busy little town, which – along with neighbouring **Ettelbruck** – has long been a major staging point on the highway north from Luxembourg City to Belgium's Liège. Both towns were badly mauled during the Battle of the Bulge (see p.378), but Diekirch – unlike its neighbour – has retained a modicum of charm and also possesses an interesting museum and a reasonable supply of hotels. Furthermore, Diekirch is a handy base for venturing out along the upper reaches of the **River Sûre**, attractive scenery that accommodates both the impressive castle of **Bourscheid** and the picture-postcard hamlet of **Esch-sur-Sûre**.

As for **public transport**, Ettelbruck is on the main rail line between Luxembourg City and Liège, with a branch line linking it to Diekirch. There are local buses from both Ettelbruck and Diekirch to the villages along and around the River Sûre, but services are generally infrequent.

Diekirch

The compact centre of **DIEKIRCH** hugs the north bank of the River Sûre, its encircling boulevard marking the path of the long-demolished medieval walls. The town took a pounding in 1944 – hence the modern buildings that characterize the centre – but bits and pieces of the old have survived. Most notable amongst them is the **Église St-Laurentius** (Easter–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 2–6pm; free), partly dating from the ninth century and located about 100m east of the top of the pedestrianized main shopping street, **Grand-rue**. The church is equipped with a dinky little spire and a pair of comely towers, while the interior is noteworthy for its spooky Roman and medieval sarcophagi, discovered when the floor was relaid.

Immediately to the west of the old centre, across the retaining boulevard, is **place Guillaume**, a breezy, open square that marks the centre of the nineteenth-century town. From here, it's about 250m north along the boulevard – and across place des Recollets – to the **Musée national d'Histoire Militaire**, at rue Bamertal 10 (daily: April–Oct 10am–6pm, Nov–March 2–6pm; €5; ☎ www.nat-military-museum.lu). This provides an excellent historical survey of the Battle of the Bulge, with special emphasis on US forces. The photographs are the real testimony, showing both sets of troops in action and at leisure, some recording the appalling freezing conditions of December 1944, others the horrific state of affairs inside the medics' tents. There's a variety of dioramas, many modelled on actual photographs (which are often displayed alongside), along with a hoard of military paraphernalia – explosives, shells, weapons, and personal effects of both American and German soldiers (prayer books, rations, novellas, etc). There's also a display entitled “**Veiner Miliz**”, detailing the activities of the Luxembourg resistance movement based in Vianden, and a room devoted to **Tambow**, the camp to which all the Luxembourgers captured by the Germans were sent. Ask here also for the free *Battleground Luxembourg* brochure, which outlines a car tour of the major Battle of the Bulge sites, monuments and remains.

Practicalities

Readily accessible by train from Ettelbruck and Luxembourg City, and by bus from Echternach and Vianden, Diekirch's combined **bus** and **train station** is a five- to ten-minute walk southwest of the centre on avenue de la Gare; many buses also stop on or near place Guillaume. The **tourist office** is in the old centre, on place de la Libération, at the north – or top – end of Grand-rue (July to mid-Aug Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; mid-Aug to June Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm, Sat 2–4pm; ☎ 80 30 23, 🌐 www.diekirch.lu). It issues free town maps and will book accommodation on your behalf without charge. It also rents out **bicycles** (city bike €7.50 a day, mountain bike €15 a day) and issues free foldouts with eight different **cycling** routes ranging between 35km and 88km.

Accommodation

Of the town's five **hotels**, the pick is the three-star *Hôtel Du Parc*, a spick-and-span, modern hotel facing the River Sûre at av de la Gare 28 (☎ 80 34 72, 🌐 www.hotel-du-parc.lu; 📍). A good alternative is the four-star *Beau Séjour*, on the encircling boulevard on the north side of the centre at rue de l'Esplanade 12 (☎ 26 80 47 15, 🌐 www.hotel-beausejour.lu; 📍). This hotel has bright and breezy modern rooms and a good restaurant, serving mainly French and seasonally-inspired dishes. The town's two **campsites** – *de la Sûre* (☎ 80 94 25; April–Sept) and *Op de Sauer* (☎ 80 85 90, 🌐 www.campsauer.lu; mid-April to mid-Oct) – are handily located a few minutes' walk from the old centre by the river on the route de Gilsdorf. To get there, cross the town's principal bridge and take the riverside path.

Eating and drinking

For **food**, the excellent *Brasserie du Commerce*, on place de la Libération, serves tasty, traditional Luxembourgish dishes at reasonable prices; otherwise, head for *Um Grill*, right in front of the church on rue de l'Esplanade, for grills, pastas and salads (closed Thurs).

Ettelbruck

ETTELBRUCK, just 5km west of Diekirch, is a workaday crossroads town at the confluence of the rivers Alzette and Sûre. Badly damaged in the fighting of 1944, the town is resolutely modern, the only significant sight being the **Musée Général Patton**, rue Dr Klein 5 (June to mid-Sept daily 10am–5pm; mid-Sept to May Sun 2–5pm; €2.50; 🌐 www.patton.lu), which focuses on the eponymous general's involvement in the Battle of the Bulge (see p.378 & p.432). The museum is located a short walk north of the **train station**, just off avenue J.F. Kennedy. The **Patton memorial** is just outside of town on the N7 back towards Diekirch; it features a large statue of the general presented to the town by his son.

Free maps of Ettelbruck are available at the **tourist office**, rue de Bastogne 1 (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 1.30–5pm, plus July & Aug Sat 10am–noon & 2–4pm; ☎ 81 20 68, 🌐 www.sit-e.lu).

West along the River Sûre

North of Ettelbruck, two equally appealing country roads – the CR348 and the CR349 – worm their way through forested hills to the village of **BOURSCHEID**, a ten-kilometre journey. Bourscheid rambles along a bony ridge, down below which, on the steep and heavily wooded valley slopes,

General Patton

Loved and hated with equal passion, the redoubtable **General Patton** (1885–1945) was the American commander who, at the head of the US 3rd Army, drove the Germans out of Luxembourg in the later stages of the **Battle of the Bulge** (see p.378). It was a skilled operation that demonstrated Patton's military prowess to fine advantage, but as ever he muddied the waters by rashly remarking that the Allies "should let the sons of bitches go all the way to Paris, then we'll cut them off and round them up" – which is precisely what no one in newly liberated France wanted to hear.

Born in California to an affluent family with a strong military tradition, Patton entered the Virginia Military Institute at the age of 18, transferring to the United States Military Academy a year later. In **World War I**, he saw service in France, rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and taking a lead role in the Tank Corps before being badly wounded when a bullet ripped through his upper thigh. Forever after, he would joke about being a "**half-assed general**", regularly dropping his pants to prove it.

In the interwar years, Patton campaigned long and hard for the development of a US **armoured corps**, but without much success until the Germans overran Poland in 1939. In a tizz, the US army hurriedly created an armoured force, making Patton one of its commanders. Three years later, Major-General Patton, as he now was, was dispatched to North Africa, the first of several campaigns in which he was involved. As a field commander, the charismatic, immaculately groomed Patton was among the best, but he was too impulsive to be a good strategist and he did not pay enough attention to organizational matters. **Eisenhower**, the Allied Commander in Chief, could probably have dealt with these military problems discreetly enough, but Patton had a habit of infuriating friend and foe alike. He repeatedly berated Montgomery for being too cautious and, worst of all, when he was visiting a hospital he slapped a battle-fatigued GI across the face, accusing him of cowardice. The ensuing furore almost wrecked his career for good.

By comparison with his tumultuous life, Patton's **death** can't help but seem anticlimactic – he died from injuries sustained in a car accident. It was perhaps a blessing in disguise: peace could hold little for a man who declared "Compared to war, all other forms of human endeavour shrink to insignificance . . . God how I love it".

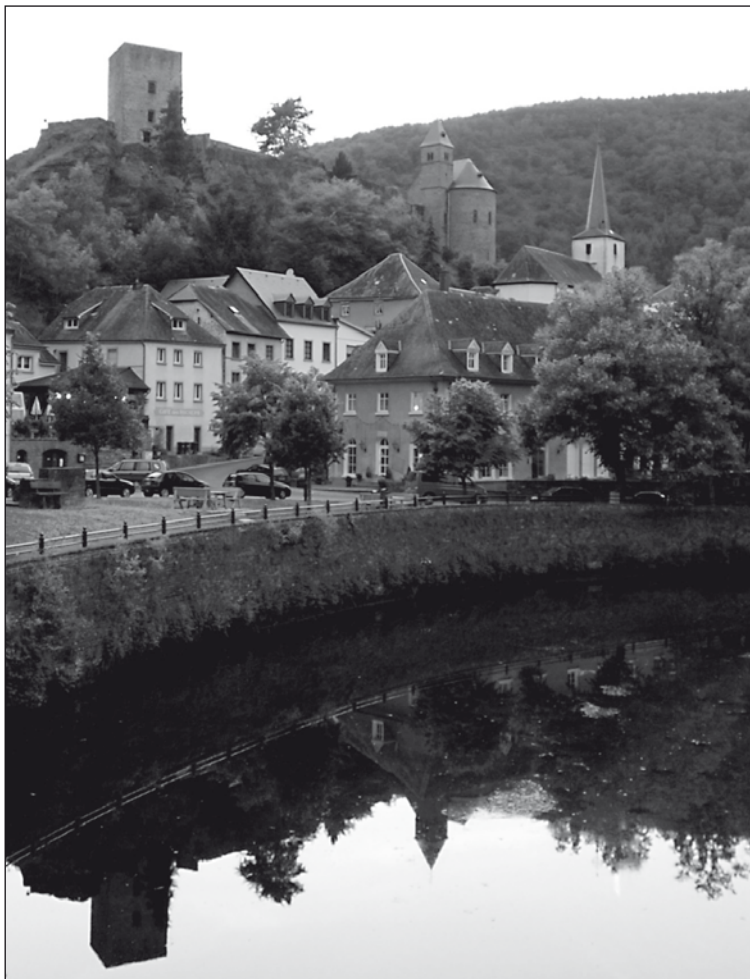
lurks a massive **château** (April–Sept daily 9am–6pm; Oct daily 10am–5pm, Nov–March Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €3.50). The first proper fortifications were erected here around 1000 AD, when stone walls were substituted for a previous wooden structure. Predictably, little of this original stronghold has survived and most of what you see today – most memorably the castle's mighty turrets and thick towers – dates from the fourteenth century. By comparison, the interior is something of a disappointment, with precious little to see, though the gabled **Stolzembourg house** gamely displays a ragbag of artefacts unearthed during several archeological digs, alongside occasional exhibitions featuring the work of local artists.

Pushing on down from the castle, the CR348 plunges into the woods before emerging – after about 1500m – beside the River Sûre. Here, by the bridge in pocket-sized **BOURSCHIED-MOULIN**, is the four-star *Hôtel du Moulin* (☎99 00 15, 🌐www.moulin.lu; closed mid-Nov to Feb; 4), which occupies a large and expansive lodge-like mansion with lovely views along the valley and an indoor heated pool. If your wallet can't stand the strain, Bourscheid-Moulin has two riverside **campsites**, both open from mid-April to mid-October. These are *Um Gritt* (☎99 04 49, 🌐www.camp.lu), with chalet-style huts, and neighbouring *Du Moulin* (☎99 03 31, 🌐www.camp.lu).

Esch-sur-Sûre

From Bourscheid-Moulin, you can follow the River Sûre west along the N27 to reach, after about 15km, **ESCH-SUR-SÛRE**, a small village with a reputation out of all proportion to its size, mainly on account of its gorgeous situation, draped over a hill within an ox-bow loop in the river. The village is short on specific sights, but wandering its old cobbled streets, lined with good-looking stone houses, is very enjoyable and you can scramble round the hilltop ruins of its medieval **château** (open access; free).

Accommodation includes the first-rate, four-star *Hôtel de la Sûre*, rue du Pont 1 (☎83 91 10, 🌐www.hotel-de-la-sure.lu; closed Jan; 🍷), an immaculate modern hotel with all mod cons and facilities, including a restaurant and bike rental (€22 a day). An equally inviting second choice is *Hôtel Beau-Site*, in a



large old building on the other side of the river next to the town's main bridge at rue de Kaundorf 2 (☎ 83 91 34, 🌐 www.beau-site.lu; 📍). There's also a large riverside **campsite**, *Im Ahl* (☎ 83 95 14; closed Jan & Feb).

Esch is close to the **N15**, which gives ready access to Ettelbruck (see p.431), just 16km away to the southeast, and Belgium's Bastogne (see p.377), 25km to the northwest. To reach Clervaux (see below), in northern Luxembourg, the scenic route is via Wiltz (see below), the fast route via Ettelbruck.

North to Clervaux

Beyond Ettelbruck lies the narrowing neck of northern Luxembourg, where rolling forest sweeps over an undulating plateau. This is the **Luxembourg Ardennes** (D'Eisléck in Luxembourgish), to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from much of its Belgian namesake (covered in Chapter 5). Scenically, it's at its most appealing around Vianden (see p.427), but the rest of the region is pleasant enough, especially the rearing, twenty-kilometre country road – the CR324/CR326 – connecting **Wiltz**, just off the N15 northwest of Esch-sur-Sûre, with Clervaux.

CLERVAUX, northern Luxembourg's most interesting town, is an ancient place, its jumble of slate roofs tumbling over a hill in a tight loop of the River Clerve. At the centre of things is the **château**, dating from the twelfth century, but rebuilt in the seventeenth and again after considerable damage in the last war. This later episode is recounted in the **Battle of the Bulge Museum**, beside the central courtyard (March–May & mid-Sept to Dec Sat & Sun 1–5pm; June Mon–Sat 1–5pm, Sun 11am–6pm; July to mid-Sept daily 11am–6pm; €2.50). Another part of the castle holds a **museum of models** (same times and price), incorporating miniature mock-ups of several of the country's castles, but this pales when compared with the castle's prime exhibit, the **Family of Man** (March & Oct–Dec Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; April–Sept daily 10am–6pm; €4.50), a remarkable collection of over five hundred photographs compiled by Edward Steichen (1879–1973), a former director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Steichen family migrated to the States from Luxembourg when Edward was two years old, but clearly he maintained an attachment to the country of his birth, bequeathing the collection to the Grand Duchy in his will. First exhibited in 1955, Steichen's photographs were selected from no less than two million pictures by nearly three hundred photographers and they depict life, love and death in 68 countries, a truly international collaboration that Steichen called the “culmination of his career” and classified by UNESCO as a memory of the world.

Practicalities

Clervaux is on the Luxembourg City/Liège **train line**, which bisects northern Luxembourg. From Clervaux **train station**, it's a good ten-minute walk south into the town centre, straight down rue de la Gare and its continuation, Grand-rue. The **tourist office** is in the castle (April–June Mon–Sat 2–5pm; July & Aug daily 9.45–11.45am & 2–6pm; Sept Mon–Sat 9.45–11.45am & 1.30–5.30pm; Oct Mon–Sat 9.45–11.45am & 1–5pm; ☎ 92 00 72, 🌐 www.tourisme-clervaux.lu); it has details of local accommodation and issues free town maps.

There are plenty of **hotels**, including the modern, cosy and well-kept *Hôtel du Commerce*, centrally located at rue de Marnach 2 (☎ 92 91 81,

📍 www.hotelducommerce.lu; ☎️). Another, more distinctive offering is the *Hôtel du Parc*, rue du Parc 2 (☎️ 92 06 50, 📍 www.hotelduparc.lu; 📍), occupying a large nineteenth-century mansion which clings to a wooded hill overlooking the town. There are also a couple of **campsites**, the better one being *Camping Reilenveier* (☎️ 92 01 60; April–Oct), about 2km out of town on the Vianden road, beside the river.

The best option for a good **meal** is *Vieux Château*, inside the castle precincts, near the entrance, at rue du Château 4. It's a popular, rustic place serving good-value and tasty fish, beef and chicken main courses from €14.

Travel details

Trains

Luxembourg City to: Arlon (every 30min; 20min); Brussels (hourly; 3hr); Clervaux (hourly; 1hr 5min); Diekirch (change at Ettelbruck; hourly; 40min); Ettelbruck (hourly; 35min); Liège (every 2hr; 2hr 30min); Namur (hourly; 2hr); Wasserbillig (every 30min; 30min).

Buses

Diekirch to: Echternach (hourly; 35min); Vianden (every 30 min; 20min).
Echternach to: Beaufort (9 daily; 20min); Diekirch (hourly; 35min); Ettelbruck (16 daily; 45min);

Grevenmacher (hourly; 40min); Larochette (Mon–Sat every 1 or 2 hr; 1hr); Luxembourg City (hourly; 1hr); Wasserbillig (hourly; 30min).
Ettelbruck to: Diekirch (hourly; 10min); Echternach (15 daily; 45min); Esch-sur-Sûre (hourly; 25min); Vianden (hourly; 25min).
Grevenmacher to: Echternach (hourly; 40min); Wasserbillig (hourly; 10min).
Luxembourg City to: Diekirch (hourly; 1hr 20min); Echternach (hourly; 1hr); Mondorf-les-Bains (hourly; 30min); Remich (hourly; 45min).
Remich to: Ehnen (hourly; 15min); Grevenmacher (hourly; 30min).
Wasserbillig to: Echternach (hourly; 30min); Grevenmacher (hourly; 10min).

Contexts

Contexts

The historical framework	439
An introduction to Belgian art.....	460
Books.....	466

The historical framework

Jumbled together throughout most of their history, the countries now known as Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands didn't reach their present delimitations until 1830. Before then, their borders were continually being redrawn following battles, treaties and alliances, a shifting pattern that makes it impossible to provide a history of one without frequent reference to the others. To make matters more involved, these same three countries were – and still are – commonly lumped together as the “Low Countries” on account of their topography, though, given the valleys and hills of southern Belgium and Luxembourg, this is more than a little unfair. Even more confusing is the fact that the Netherlands is frequently called “Holland”, when Holland is actually a province in the Netherlands. In the account that follows we've used “Low Countries” to cover all three countries and “Holland” to refer to the province. In addition, we've termed the language of the northern part of Belgium “Flemish” to save confusion, though “Dutch” or even “Netherlandish” are sometimes the preferred options among Belgians themselves.

Beginnings

Little is known of the **prehistoric** peoples of the Low Countries, their visible remains largely confined to the far north of the Netherlands, where mounds known as *terpen* were built to keep the sea at bay. By the fifth century BC, the **Celts** are believed to have established an Iron Age culture across much of the region, though these tribes only begin to emerge from the prehistoric soup after Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul (broadly France) in 57–50 BC. The **Romans** found three tribal groupings living in the region: the mainly Celtic **Belgae** (hence the nineteenth-century term “Belgium”) settled by the rivers Rhine, Meuse and Waal to the south; the Germanic **Frisians** living on the marshy coastal strip north of the Scheldt; and the **Batavi**, another Germanic people, inhabiting the swampy river banks of what is now the southern Netherlands. The Belgae were conquered and their lands incorporated into the imperial province of **Gallia Belgica**, but the territory of the Batavi and Frisians was not considered worthy of colonization. Instead, these tribes were granted the status of allies, a source of recruitment for the Roman legions and curiosity for imperial travellers. In 50 AD Pliny observed, “Here a wretched race is found, inhabiting either the more elevated spots or artificial mounds . . . When the waves cover the surrounding area they are like so many mariners on board a ship, and when again the tide recedes their condition is that of so many shipwrecked men.”

The **Roman occupation** continued for nigh on five hundred years until the legions were pulled back to protect the heartland of the crumbling empire. Yet, despite the length of their stay, there's a notable lack of material evidence to indicate their presence, an important exception being the odd stretch of city wall in Tongeren (see p.300), one of the principal Roman settlements. As the empire collapsed in chaos and confusion, the Germanic **Franks**, who had been settling within Gallia Belgica from the third century, filled the power vacuum to the south, and, along with their allies the Belgae, established a **Merovingian**

kingdom based around their capital in Tournai. A great swath of forest extending from the Scheldt to the Ardennes separated this predominantly Frankish kingdom from the more confused situation to the north and east, where other tribes of Franks settled along the Scheldt and Leie – a separation which came to delineate the ethnic and linguistic division that survives in Belgium to this day. North of the Franks of the Scheldt were the Saxons and finally the north coast of the Netherlands was settled by the Frisians.

Towards the end of the fifth century, the Merovingians extended their control over much of what is now north and central France. In 496 their king, **Clovis**, was converted to Christianity, a faith which slowly filtered north, spread by energetic missionaries like St Willibrord, first bishop of Utrecht from about 710, and St Boniface, who was killed by the Frisians in 754 in a final act of pagan resistance before they too were converted. Meanwhile, after the death of the last distinguished Merovingian king, Dagobert, in 638, power passed increasingly to the so-called “mayors of the palace”, a hereditary position whose most outstanding occupant was **Charles Martel** (c.690–741). Martel ruled a large but all too obviously shambolic kingdom whose military weakness he determined to remedy. Traditionally, the Merovingian (Frankish) army was comprised of a body of infantry led by a small group of cavalry. Martel replaced this with a largely mounted force of trained knights, who bore their own military expenses in return for land, the beginnings of the **feudal system**. Actually, these reforms came just in time to save Christendom: in 711 that extraordinary Arab advance which had begun at the beginning of the seventh century reached the Pyrenees and a massive Muslim army occupied southern France in preparation for further conquests. In the event, Martel defeated the invaders outside Tours in 732, one of Europe’s most crucial engagements and one that, in the event, saved France from Arab conquest once and for all.

Ten years after Martel’s death, his son, Pepin the Short, formally usurped the Merovingian throne with the blessing of the pope, becoming the first of the **Carolingian** dynasty, whose most famous member was **Charlemagne**, king of the west Franks from 768. In a dazzling series of campaigns, Charlemagne extended his empire south into Italy, west to the Pyrenees, north to Denmark and east to the Oder, his secular authority bolstered by his coronation as the first **Holy Roman Emperor** in 800. The pope bestowed this title on him to legitimize the king’s claim to be the successor of the emperors of imperial Rome – and it worked a treat. Based in Aachen, Charlemagne stabilized his kingdom and the Low Countries benefited from a trading boom that utilized the region’s principal rivers. However, unlike his Roman predecessors, Charlemagne was subject to the divisive inheritance laws of the Salian tribe of Franks, and after his death in 814, his kingdom was divided between his grandsons into three roughly parallel strips of territory, the precursors of France, the Low Countries and Germany.

The growth of the towns

The **tripartite division** of Charlemagne’s empire placed the Low Countries between the emergent French- and German-speaking nations, a dangerous location, which was subsequently to define much of its history. This was not, however, apparent in the cobweb of local alliances that made up early feudal Western Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries. During this period, French kings and German emperors exercised a general authority over the Low

The béguinages

One corollary of the urbanization of the Low Countries from the twelfth century onwards was the establishment of **béguinages** (*begijnhoven* in Flemish) in almost every city and town. These were semi-secluded communities, where widows and unmarried women – the **béguines** (*begijns*) – lived together, the better to do pious acts, especially caring for the sick. In **construction**, *béguinages* follow the same general plan with several streets of whitewashed, brick terraced cottages hidden away behind walls and gates and surrounding a central garden and chapel.

The origins of the *béguine* movement are somewhat obscure, but it would seem that the initial impetus came from a twelfth-century Liège priest, a certain Lambert le Bègue (the Stammerer). The main period of growth came a little later when several important female nobles established new *béguinages*, like the ones in Kortrijk and Ghent (by Joanna of Constantinople, the Countess of Flanders), and, shortly afterwards, the one in Bruges (at the behest of Margaret, also Countess of Flanders).

Béguine communities were different from convents in so far as the inhabitants did not have to take vows and had the right to return to the secular world if they wished. At a time when hundreds of women were forcibly shut away in convents for all sorts of reasons (primarily financial), this element of choice was crucial.

Countries, but power was effectively in the hands of local lords who, remote from central control, brought a degree of local stability. From the twelfth century, feudalism slipped into a gradual decline, the intricate pattern of localized allegiances undermined by the increasing strength of certain lords, whose power and wealth often exceeded that of their nominal sovereign. Preoccupied by territorial squabbles, this streamlined nobility was usually willing to assist the growth of towns by granting charters, which permitted a certain amount of autonomy in exchange for tax revenues, and military and labour services. The first major cities were the **cloth towns of Flanders**, particularly Ghent, Bruges and Leper, which grew rich from the manufacture of cloth, their garments exported far and wide and their economies dependent on a continuous supply of good-quality wool from England. Meanwhile, the smaller towns north of the Scheldt concentrated on trade, exploiting their strategic position at the junction of several of the major waterways and trade routes of the day.

Predictably, the **economic interests** of the urbanized merchants and guildsmen soon conflicted with those of the local lord. This was especially true in Flanders, where the towns were anxious to preserve a good relationship with the king of England, who controlled the wool supply, whereas their count was a vassal of the king of France, whose dynastic aspirations clashed with those of his English rival. As a result, the history of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Flanders is punctuated by sporadic conflict, as the two kings and the guildsmen slugged it out, the fortunes of war oscillating between the parties but the underlying class conflict never resolved.

Burgundian rule

By the late fourteenth century the political situation in the Low Countries was fairly clear: five lords controlled most of the region, paying only nominal homage to their French or German overlords. Yet things began to change when,

in 1419, **Philip the Good**, Duke of Burgundy, succeeded to the countship of Flanders and by a series of adroit political moves gained control over the southern Netherlands, Brabant and Limburg to the north, and Antwerp, Namur and Luxembourg to the south. He consolidated his power by establishing a strong central administration based in Bruges and by curtailing the privileges granted in the towns' charters. Less independent it may have been, but **Bruges** benefited greatly from the duke's presence, becoming an emporium for the **Hanseatic League**, a mainly German association of towns, which acted as a trading group and protected its interests by an exclusive system of trading tariffs. The wealth of Bruges was legendary, and the Burgundian court patronized the early and seminal *Nederlandish* painters like Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, whose works are displayed in Ghent and Bruges today.

Philip died in 1467 to be succeeded by his son, **Charles the Bold**, who was killed in battle ten years later, plunging his father's carefully crafted domain into turmoil. The French seized the opportunity to take back Arras and Burgundy and before the people of Flanders would agree to fight the French they kidnapped Charles's successor, his daughter Mary, and forced her to sign a charter that restored the civic privileges removed by her grandfather.

The Habsburgs

After her release, Mary married the **Habsburg Maximilian of Austria**, who assumed sole authority when Mary was killed in a riding accident in 1482 – her tomb stands beside that of her father in the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk in Bruges (see p.204). A sharp operator, Maximilian continued where the Burgundians had left off, whittling away at the power of the cities with considerable success. When Maximilian became Holy Roman Emperor in 1494, he transferred control of the Low Countries to his son, Philip the Handsome, and then – after Philip's early death – to his grandson **Charles V**, who then became king of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor in 1516 and 1519 respectively. Charles ruled his vast kingdom with skill and energy, but, born in Ghent, he was very suspicious of the turbulent Flemish burghers. Consequently, he favoured **Antwerp** at their expense and this city now became the greatest port in the Habsburg empire, part of a general movement of trade and prosperity away from Flanders to the cities further north. In addition, the Flemish cloth industry had, by the 1480s, begun its long decline, undermined by England's new-found cloth-manufacturing success.

By sheer might, Charles systematically bent the merchant cities of the Low Countries to his will, but regardless of this display of force, a spiritual trend was emerging that would soon question the rights of the emperor and rock the power of the Catholic Church itself.

The Reformation

An alliance of church and state had dominated the medieval world: pope and bishops, kings and counts were supposedly the representatives of God on earth, and they worked together to crush religious dissent wherever it appeared. Much of their authority depended on the ignorance of the population, who

were entirely dependent on their priests for the interpretation of the scriptures, their view of the world carefully controlled.

The **Reformation** was a religious revolt that stood sixteenth-century Europe on its head. There were many complex reasons for it, but certainly the development of **typography** was a crucial element. For the first time, printers were able to produce relatively cheap Bibles in quantity, and the religious texts were no longer the exclusive property of the priesthood. The first stirrings of the Reformation were in the welter of debate that spread across much of Western Europe under the auspices of theologians like **Erasmus of Rotterdam** (1465–1536; see p.123), who wished to cleanse the Catholic church of its corruptions, superstitions and extravagant ceremony; only later did many of these same thinkers – principally **Martin Luther** – decide to support a breakaway church. In 1517, Luther produced his 95 theses against indulgences, rejecting – among other things – Christ’s presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and denying the Church’s monopoly on the interpretation of the Bible. There was no way back and when Luther’s works were disseminated his ideas gained a European following among reforming groups branded as **Lutheran** by the Church, whilst other reformers were drawn to the doctrines of **John Calvin** (1509–64). Luther asserted that the Church’s political power was subservient to that of the state; Calvin emphasized the importance of individual conscience and the need for redemption through the grace of Christ rather than the confessional.

These **Protestant** seeds fell on fertile ground among the merchants of the cities of the Low Countries, whose wealth and independence had never been easy to accommodate within a rigid caste society. Similarly, their employees, the guildsmen and their apprentices, had a long history of opposing arbitrary authority, and were easily convinced of the need to reform an autocratic, venal church. In 1555, **Charles V abdicated**, possibly on account of poor health, transferring his German lands to his brother Ferdinand, and his Italian, Spanish and Low Countries territories to his son, the fanatically Catholic **Philip II**. In the short term, the scene was set for a bitter confrontation, while the dynastic ramifications of the division of the Habsburg empire were to complicate European affairs for centuries.

The revolt of the Netherlands

After his father’s abdication, Philip II decided to teach his heretical subjects a lesson they wouldn’t forget. He garrisoned the towns of the Low Countries with Spanish mercenaries, imported the **Inquisition** and passed a series of anti-Protestant edicts. However, other pressures on the Habsburg Empire forced him into a tactical withdrawal and he transferred control to his sister **Margaret of Parma** in 1559. Based in Brussels, the equally resolute Margaret implemented the policies of her brother with gusto. In 1561 she reorganized the church and created fourteen new bishoprics, a move that was construed as a wresting of power from civil authority, and an attempt to destroy the local aristocracy’s powers of religious patronage. Protestantism – and Protestant sympathies – spread amongst the nobility, who now formed the “League of the Nobility” to counter Habsburg policy. The League petitioned Philip for moderation but were dismissed out of hand by one of Margaret’s Walloon advisers, who called them “*aes geux*” (those beggars), an epithet that was to be enthusiastically adopted by the rebels. In 1565 a harvest failure caused a winter



△ William the Silent

famine among the urban workers across the region and, after years of repression, they finally struck back. The following year, a Protestant sermon in the tiny Flemish textile town of Steenvoorde incited the congregation to purge the local church of its papist idolatry. The crowd smashed up the church's reliquaries and shrines, broke the stained-glass windows and terrorized the priests, thereby launching the **Iconoclastic Fury**. The rioting spread like wildfire and within ten days churches had been ransacked from one end of the Low Countries to the other, nowhere more so than in Antwerp.

The ferocity of this outbreak shocked the upper classes into renewed support for Spain, and Margaret regained the allegiance of most nobles – with the

principal exception of the country's greatest landowner, Prince William of Orange-Nassau, known as **William the Silent**. Of Germanic descent, he was raised a Catholic but the excesses and rigidity of Philip had caused him to side with the Protestant movement. A firm believer in individual freedom and religious tolerance, William became for many a symbol of liberty; but after the Fury had revitalized the pro-Spanish party, he prudently slipped away to his estates in Germany. Meanwhile, Philip II was keen to capitalize on the increase in support for Margaret and, in 1567, he dispatched the **Duke of Alva**, with an army of ten thousand men, to the Low Countries to suppress his religious opponents absolutely. Margaret was not at all pleased by Philip's decision and, when Alva arrived in Brussels, she resigned in a huff, initiating what was, in effect, military rule. One of Alva's first acts was to set up the Commission of Civil Unrest, which was soon nicknamed the "**Council of Blood**", after its habit of executing those it examined. No fewer than twelve thousand citizens were polished off, mostly for taking part in the Fury.

Initially the repression worked: in 1568, when William attempted an invasion from Germany, the towns, garrisoned by the Spanish, offered no support. William waited and conceived other means of defeating Alva. In April 1572 a band of privateers entered Brielle on the Meuse and captured it from the Spanish. This was one of several commando-style attacks by the so-called **Waterguezzen** or sea-beggars, who were at first obliged to operate from England, although it was soon possible for them to secure bases in the Netherlands, whose citizens had grown to loathe Alva and his Spaniards.

After the success at Brielle, the revolt spread rapidly: by June the rebels controlled the province of Holland and William was able to take command of his troops in Delft. Alva and his son Frederick fought back, but William's superior naval power frustrated him and a mightily irritated Philip replaced Alva with **Luis de Resquesens**. Initially, Resquesens had some success in the south, where the Catholic majority were more willing to compromise with Spanish rule than their northern neighbours, but the tide of war was against him – most pointedly in William's triumphant relief of Leiden in 1574. Two years later, Resquesens died and the (unpaid) Habsburg garrison in Antwerp mutinied and attacked the town, slaughtering some eight thousand of its people in what was known as the **Spanish Fury**. Though the Habsburgs still held several towns, the massacre alienated the south and pushed its inhabitants into the arms of William, whose troops now swept into Brussels, the heart of imperial power. Momentarily, it seemed possible for the whole region to unite behind William and all signed the **Union of Brussels**, which demanded the departure of foreign troops as a condition for accepting a diluted Habsburg sovereignty. This was followed, in 1576, by the **Pacification of Ghent**, a regional agreement that guaranteed freedom of religious belief, a necessary precondition for any union between the largely Protestant north (the Netherlands) and Catholic south (Belgium and Luxembourg).

Philip was, however, not inclined to compromise, especially when he realized that William's Calvinist sympathies were giving his new-found Walloon and Flemish allies the jitters. The king bided his time until 1578, when, with his enemies arguing among themselves, he sent another army from Spain to the Low Countries under the command of Alessandro Farnese, the **Duke of Parma**. Events played into Parma's hands. In 1579, tiring of all the wrangling, seven northern provinces agreed to sign the **Union of Utrecht**, an alliance against Spain that was to be the first unification of the Netherlands as an identifiable country – as the **United Provinces**. The assembly of these United Provinces was known as the **States General**, and

met at The Hague; it had no domestic legislative authority, and could only carry out foreign policy by unanimous decision, a formula designed to make potential waverers feel more secure. The role of **Stadholder** was the most important in each province, roughly equivalent to that of governor, though the same person could occupy this position in any number of provinces. Meanwhile, in the south – and also in 1579 – representatives of the southern provinces signed the **Union of Arras**, a Catholic-led agreement that declared loyalty to Philip II and counter-balanced the Union of Utrecht in the north. Parma used this area as a base to recapture Flanders and Antwerp, which fell after a long and cruel siege in 1585. But Parma was unable to advance any further north and the Low Countries were, de facto, divided into two – the Spanish Netherlands and the United Provinces – beginning a separation that would lead, after many changes, to the creation of three modern countries.



The Spanish Netherlands (1579–1713)

With his army firmly entrenched in the south, Philip was now prepared to permit some degree of economic and political autonomy, exercising control over the **Spanish Netherlands** through a governor in Brussels, but he was not inclined to tolerate his newly recovered Protestant subjects. As a result, thousands of weavers, apprentices and skilled workers – the bedrock of Calvinism – fled north to escape the new Catholic regime, thereby fuelling an economic boom in Holland. It took a while for this migration to take effect, and for several years the Spanish Netherlands had all the trappings – if not the substance – of success, a mini-economy sustained by the conspicuous consumption of the Habsburg elite. Silk weaving, diamond processing and tapestry- and lace-making were particular beneficiaries and a new canal was cut linking Ghent and Bruges to the sea at Ostend. This commercial restructuring underpinned a brief flourishing of artistic life centred on **Rubens** and his circle of friends – including Anthony Van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens – in Antwerp during the first decades of the seventeenth century.

Months before his death in 1598, Philip II had granted control of the Spanish Netherlands to his daughter and her husband, appointing them the **Archdukes Isabella and Albert**. Failing to learn from experience, the ducal couple continued to prosecute the war against the Protestant north, but with so little success that they were obliged to make peace – the **Twelve-Year Truce** – in 1609. When the truce ended, the new Spanish king, Philip IV proved equally foolhardy, bypassing Isabella – Albert was dead – to launch his own campaign against the Protestant Dutch. This was part of the **Thirty Years' War** (1618–48), a devastating conflict that spread across most of western Europe in a mix of dynastic rivalry and religious (Catholic against Protestant) hatred. The Spanish were initially successful, but they were weakened by war with France and Dutch seapower. Thereafter, from 1625 onwards, the Spaniards suffered a series of defeats on land and sea that forced them out of what is today the southern part of the Netherlands, and in 1648 they were compelled to accept the humiliating terms of the **Peace of Westphalia**. This was a general treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War, and its terms both recognized the independence of the United Provinces and closed

the Scheldt estuary, an action designed to destroy the trade and prosperity of Antwerp. By these means, the commercial pre-eminence of Amsterdam was assured.

The only major fly in the United Provinces' ointment was the conflict between central authority and provincial autonomy. Although the **House of Orange** had established something like royal credentials, many of Holland's leading citizens were reluctant to accept its right to power. The republicans held the upper hand for most of the seventeenth century until an attack on the country by Louis XIV in 1672 forced the States General to seek the help of **William of Orange**, whose success in dealing with the crisis resulted in his appointment to the office of Stadholder. It was this same William who was to become the king of England (and his wife Mary the queen) in 1689.

In stark contrast, the Spanish Netherlands paid dearly for its adherence to the Habsburg cause. In the course of the Thirty Years' War, it had teetered on the edge of chaos – highwaymen infested the roads, trade had almost disappeared, the population had been halved in Brabant, and acres of fertile farmland lay uncultivated – but the peace was perhaps as bad. Denied access to the sea, Antwerp was ruined and simply withered away, while the southern provinces as a whole spiralled into an economic decline that pauperized its population. Yet the ruling families seemed proud to appear to the world as the defenders and martyrs of the Catholic faith; those who disagreed left.

The Counter-Reformation

Politically dependent on a decaying Spain, economically ruined and deprived of most of its more independent-minded citizens, the country turned in on itself, sustained by the fanatical Catholicism of the **Counter-Reformation**. Religious worship became strict and magnificent, medieval carnivals were transformed into exercises in piety, and penitential flagellation became popular, all under the approving eyes of the **Jesuits**. Indeed, the number of Jesuits was quite extraordinary: in the whole of France, there were only two thousand, but the Spanish Netherlands had no fewer than 1600. It was here that they wrote their most important works, exercised their greatest influence and owned vast tracts of land. Supported by draconian laws that barred known Protestants from public appointments, declared their marriages illegal and forbade them municipal assistance, the Jesuits and their fellow Catholic priests simply overwhelmed the religious opposition; in the space of fifty years, they transformed this part of the Low Countries into an introverted world shaped by a mystical faith, where Christians were redeemed by the ecstasy of suffering.

The visible signs of the change were all around, from extravagant Baroque churches to Crosses, Calvaries and shrines scattered across the countryside. Literature disappeared, the sciences vegetated and religious orders multiplied. In **painting**, artists – principally Rubens – were used to confirm the ecclesiastical orthodoxies, their canvases full of muscular saints and angels, reflecting a religious faith of mystery and hierarchy; others, such as David Teniers and the later Bruegels, retreated into minutely observed realism.

French interference

In 1648, the **Peace of Westphalia** freed the king of France from his fear of Germany, and the political and military history of the Spanish Netherlands thereafter was dominated by the efforts of **Louis XIV** to add the country to his territories. Fearful of an over-powerful France, the United Provinces,

England and Sweden, among others, determinedly resisted French designs and, to preserve the balance of power, fought a long series of campaigns beginning with the **War of Devolution** in 1667 and ending in the **War of the Spanish Succession**. The latter was sparked by the death in 1700 of **Charles II**, the last of the Spanish Habsburgs, who had willed his territories to the grandson of Louis XIV of France. An anti-French coalition refused to accept the settlement and there ensued a haphazard series of campaigns that dragged on for eleven years, marked by the spectacular victories of the Duke of Marlborough – Blenheim, Ramillies, Malplaquet and Oudenaarde. Many of the region's cities were besieged and badly damaged during these wars, and only with the **Treaty of Utrecht** of 1713 did the French abandon their attempt to conquer the Spanish Netherlands. The latter were now passed to the Austrian Habsburgs in the figure of the emperor Charles VI.



The Austrian Netherlands (1713–94)

The transfer of the country from Spanish to **Austrian control** made little appreciable difference: there were more wars and more invasions and a remote central authority continued to operate through Brussels. In particular, the **War of the Austrian Succession**, fought over the right of Maria Theresa to assume the Austrian Habsburg throne, prompted the French to invade and occupy much of the country in 1744, though imperial control was restored four years later by the **Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle**. Perhaps surprisingly, these dynastic shenanigans had little effect on the country's agriculture, which survived the various campaigns and actually became more productive, leading to a marked increase in the rural population, especially after the introduction of potato cultivation. But intellectually the country remained vitrified and stagnant – only three percent of the population were literate, workers were forbidden to change towns or jobs without obtaining permission from the municipal authorities, and skills and crafts were tied to particular families.

This sorry state of affairs began to change in the middle of the eighteenth century as the Austrian oligarchy came under the influence of the **Enlightenment**, that belief in reason and progress – as against authority and tradition – that had first been proselytized by French philosophers. In 1753, the arrival of a progressive governor, the **Count of Cobenzl**, signified a transformation of Habsburg policy. Eager to shake the country from its torpor, Cobenzl initiated an ambitious programme of public works. New canals were dug, old canals deepened, new industries were encouraged and public health was at least discussed, the main result being regulations forbidding burial inside churches and the creation of new cemeteries outside the city walls. Cobenzl also took a firm line with his clerical opponents, who took a dim view of all this modernizing and tried to encourage the population to thwart him in his aims.

In 1780, the **Emperor Joseph II** came to the throne, determined, as he put it, to “root out silly old prejudices” by imperial decree. His reforming zeal was not, however, matched by any political nous and the deluge of edicts that he promulgated managed to offend all of the country's major

groups – from peasants, clerics and merchants right through to the nobility. Opposition crystallized around two groups – the liberal-minded **Vonckists**, who demanded a radical, republican constitution, and the conservative **Statists**, whose prime aim was the maintenance of the Catholic status quo. Pandemonium ensued and, in 1789, the Habsburgs dispatched an army to restore order. Against all expectations, the two political groups swallowed their differences to combine and then defeat the Austrians near Antwerp in what became known as the **Brabant Revolution**. The rebels promptly announced the formation of the United States of Belgium, but the uneasy alliance between the Vonckists and Statists soon broke down, not least because the latter were terrified by the course of the revolution which had erupted across the border in France. Determined to keep the radicals at bay, the Statists raised the peasantry to arms and, with the assistance of the priests, encouraged them to attack the Vonckists, who were killed in their hundreds. The Statists now had the upper hand, but the country remained in turmoil and when Emperor Joseph died in 1790, his successor, **Léopold**, was quick to withdraw many of the reforming acts and send in his troops to restore imperial authority.

French rule and its aftermath (1794–1830)

The new and repressive Habsburg regime was short-lived. French Republican armies brushed the imperial forces aside in 1794, and the Austrian Netherlands was annexed the following year, an annexation that was to last until 1814. The **French** imposed radical reforms: the Catholic Church was stripped of much of its worldly wealth, feudal privileges and the guilds were abolished, and a consistent legal system was formulated. **Napoleon**, in control from 1799, carried on the work of modernization, rebuilding the docks of Antwerp and forcing the Netherlanders, whose country the French had also occupied, to accept the reopening of the Scheldt. Unrestricted access to French markets boosted the local economy, kick-starting the mechanization of the textile industry in Ghent and Verviers and encouraging the growth of the coal and metal industries in Hainaut, but, with the exception of a radical minority, the French occupation remained unpopular with most of the populace. Looting by French soldiers was commonplace, especially in the early years, and the French introduced conscription, most hated of all, provoking a series of (brutally repressed) peasant insurrections.

The Republican regime was generally disliked in the Netherlands too. The French had begun by dissolving the United Provinces, setting up the “**Batavian Republic**” in its stead. In this, they were aided and abetted by a group of local sympathizers, pro-French merchants who called themselves “**Patriots**” in opposition to their bitter rivals, the “**Orangists**” (after the House of Orange). The Netherlanders were, however, pretty much united in being unenthusiastic about helping the French in their war against England and paid the price in 1806 when Napoleon appointed his brother Louis as their king. In the event, this didn’t satisfy Bonaparte either and just four years later he incorporated the country into the French Empire.

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands

French rule in both countries began to evaporate after Napoleon's disastrous retreat from Moscow in 1812 and had all but disappeared long before Napoleon's final defeat just outside Brussels at the Battle of **Waterloo** in June 1815. At the **Congress of Vienna**, called to settle Europe at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the main concern of the Great Powers, including Great Britain and Russia, was to create a buffer state against any possible future plans the French might have to expand to the north. With scant regard to the feelings of those affected, they therefore decided to establish the **United Kingdom of the Netherlands**, which incorporated both the old United Provinces and the Spanish (Austrian) Netherlands. On the throne they placed Frederick William of Orange, crowned **King William I**. The Great Powers also decided to give Frederick William's German estates to Prussia and in return presented him with the newly independent **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg**. This was a somewhat confused arrangement. The duchy had previously been part of both the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands, but now it was detached from the rest of the Low Countries constitutionally and pushed into the German Confederation at the same time as it shared the same king with the old United Provinces and Austrian Netherlands.

Given the imperious way the new Kingdom of the Netherlands had been established, it required considerable royal tact to make things work. William lacked this in abundance and indeed some of his measures seemed designed to inflame his French-speaking (Belgian) subjects. He made Dutch the official language of the whole kingdom and, in a move against the Catholics, he tried to secularize all Church-controlled schools. Furthermore, each of the two former countries had the same number of representatives at the States General despite the fact that the population of the old United Provinces was half that of its neighbour. There were competing economic interests too. The north was reliant on commerce and sought free trade without international tariffs; the industrialized south wanted a degree of protectionism. William's refusal to address any of these concerns united his opponents in the south, where both industrialists and clerics now clamoured for change.

Independent Belgium: 1830–1900

The **revolution** against William began in the Brussels opera house on August 25, 1830, when the singing of a duet, *Amour Sacré de la Patrie*, hit a nationalist nerve and the audience poured out onto the streets to raise the flag of Brabant in defiance of the king. At first the revolutionaries only demanded a scaling down of royal power and a separate "Belgian" administration, but negotiations soon broke down and in late September the insurrectionists proclaimed the **Kingdom of Belgium**. William prepared for war, but the liberal governments of Great Britain and France intervened to stop hostilities and, in January of the following year, they recognized an independent Belgian state at the

Belgium's kings

Léopold I (1831–65). Foisted on Belgium by the Great Powers, Léopold, the first king of the Belgians, was imported from Germany, where he was the prince of Saxe-Coburg – and the uncle of Queen Victoria. Despite lacking a popular mandate, Léopold made a fairly good fist of things, keeping the country neutral as the Great Powers had ordained.

Léopold II (1865–1909). Energetic and forceful, Léopold II – son of Léopold I – encouraged the urbanization of his country and promoted its importance as a major industrial power. He was also the man responsible for landing Brussels with such pompous monuments as the Palais de Justice and for the imposition of a particularly barbaric colonial regime on the peoples of the Belgian Congo (now the Republic of Congo).

Albert I (1909–34). Easily the most popular of the dynasty, Albert's determined resistance to the German invasion of World War I, when the Germans occupied almost all of the country, made the king a national hero whose untimely death, in a climbing accident, traumatized the nation. Albert was the nephew of Léopold II and the father of Léopold III.

Léopold III (1934–51). In contrast to his father, Léopold III had the dubious honour of becoming one of Europe's least popular monarchs. His first wife died in a suspicious car crash; he nearly lost his kingdom by remarrying (then anathema in a Roman Catholic country); and he was badly compromised during the German occupation of World War II. During this time, Léopold remained in Belgium rather than face exile, fuelling rumours that he was a Nazi collaborator – though his supporters maintained that he prevented thousands of Belgians from being deported. After several years of heated postwar debate, during which the king remained in exile, the issue of Léopold's return was finally put to a referendum in 1950. Just over half the population voted in his favour, but there was a clear French/Flemish divide, with opposition to the king concentrated in French-speaking Wallonia. Fortunately for Belgium, Léopold abdicated in 1951 in favour of his son, Baudouin.

Baudouin I (1951–93). A softly spoken family man, Baudouin did much to restore the popularity of the monarchy, not least because he was generally thought to be even-handed in his treatment of the French- and Flemish-speaking communities. He also hit the headlines in April 1990 by standing down for a day so that an abortion bill (which he as a Catholic had refused to sign) could be passed. Childless, he was succeeded by his brother.

Albert II (1993–). Born in 1934, the present king, Baudouin's younger brother, is impeccably royal, from his Swiss finishing school to his aristocratic Italian wife, Queen Paola. Albert, a steady chap who looks like an avuncular bank manager, has proved a safe pair of hands, becoming a national figurehead in the manner of his predecessor and steering a diplomatic course through the shoals of Flemish–Wallonian antagonisms. Scandalously, though, Queen Paola was the first Belgian royal to be photographed in a swimming costume – and a bikini at that.

Conference of London. The caveat – and this was crucial to the Great Powers given the trouble the region had caused for centuries – was that Belgium be classified a “neutral” state, that is one outside any other's sphere of influence. To bolster this new nation, they ceded to it the western segments of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and dug out Prince Léopold of Saxe-Coburg to present with the crown. William retained the northern part of his kingdom and even received the remainder of Luxembourg as his personal possession, but he still hated the settlement and there was a further bout of sabre-rattling before he finally caved in and accepted the new arrangements in 1839.

Shrewd and capable, **Léopold I** (1830–65) was careful to maintain his country's neutrality and encouraged an industrial boom that saw coal mines developed, iron foundries established and the rapid expansion of the railway system. One casualty, however, was the traditional linen-making industry of rural Flanders. The cottagers who spun and wove the linen could not compete with the mechanized mills, and their pauperization was compounded by the poor grain harvests and potato blight of 1844–46. Their sufferings were, however, of only mild concern to the country's political representatives, who were elected on a strictly limited franchise, which ensured the domination of the middle classes. The latter divided into two loose groups, the one attempting to undermine Catholic influence and control over such areas as education, the other profoundly conservative in its desire to maintain the status quo. Progressive elements within the bourgeoisie coalesced in the **Liberal party**, which was free trade and urban in outlook, whereas their opponents, the **Catholic party**, promised to protect Belgian agriculture with tariffs. The political twist was that the Catholic party, in its retreat from the industrialized and radicalized cities, began to identify with the plight of rural Dutch-speaking Belgians – as against the French-speaking ruling and managerial classes.

Léopold II's long reign (1865–1909) was dominated by similar themes, and saw the emergence of Belgium as a major industrial power. The 1860s and 1870s also witnessed the first significant stirrings of a type of **Flemish nationalism** which felt little enthusiasm for the unitary status of Belgium, divided as it was between a French-speaking majority in the south – the Walloons – and the minority Dutch-speakers of the north. There was also industrial unrest towards the end of the century, the end results being a body of legislation improving working conditions and, in 1893, the extension of the **franchise** to all men over the age of 25. The Catholic party also ensured that, under the Equality Law of 1898, Dutch was ratified as an official language, equal in status to French – the forerunner of many long and difficult debates. Another matter of concern was the **Belgian Congo**. Determined to cut an international figure, Léopold II had decided to build up a colonial empire. The unfortunate recipients of his ambition were the Africans of the Congo River basin, who were effectively given to him by a conference of European powers in 1885. Ruling the Congo as a personal fiefdom, Léopold established an extraordinarily cruel colonial regime – so cruel in fact that even the other colonial powers were appalled and the Belgian state was obliged to end the embarrassment by taking over the region – as the Belgian Congo – in 1908.

The twentieth century to 1939

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Belgium was an industrial powerhouse with a booming economy and a rapidly increasing workforce – 934,000 in 1896, 1,176,000 in 1910. It was also determined to keep on good terms with all the Great Powers, but could not prevent getting caught up in **World War I**. Indifferent to Belgium's proclaimed neutrality, the Germans had decided as early as 1908 that the best way to attack France was via Belgium, and this is precisely what they did in 1914. They captured almost all of the country, the exception being a narrow strip of territory around De Panne. Undaunted, **King Albert I** (1909–34) and the Belgian army bravely manned the northern part of the Allied line, and it made the king a national hero. The trenches ran through western Flanders and all the towns and villages lying close



△ Belgian soldiers in the trenches

to them – principally Ieper (Ypres) – were simply obliterated by artillery fire. Belgium also witnessed some of the worst of the slaughter in and around a bulge in the line, which became known as the **Ypres Salient** (see pp.173–178). The destruction was, however, confined to a narrow strip of Flanders and most of Belgium was practically untouched, though the local population did suffer during the occupation from lack of food and hundreds of men were forced to work in German factories.

After the war, under the terms of the **Treaty of Versailles**, Belgium was granted extensive reparations from Germany as well as some German territory – the slice of land around Eupen and Malmédy and, in Africa, Rwanda and Burundi. Domestically, the Belgian government extended the franchise to all men over the age of 21, a measure which subsequently ended several decades of **political control** by the Catholic party. The latter was now only able to keep power in coalition with the Liberals – usually with the Socialists, the third major party, forming the backbone of the opposition.

The political lines were, however, increasingly fudged as the Catholic party moved left, becoming a Christian Democrat movement that was keen to co-operate with the Socialists on such matters as social legislation. The political parties may have been partly reconciled, but the **economy** staggered from crisis to crisis even before the effects of the Great Depression hit Belgium in 1929. The political class also failed to placate those Flemings who felt discriminated against. There had been a widespread feeling among the Flemish soldiers of World War I that they had borne the brunt of the fighting and now an increasing number of Flemings came to believe – not without justification – that the Belgian government was overly Walloon in its sympathies. Only reluctantly did the government make Flanders and Wallonia legally unilingual regions in 1930, and even then the linguistic boundary was left unspecified in the hope that French-speakers would come to dominate central Belgium. Furthermore, these communal tensions were fuelled by changing expectations. The Flemings had accepted the domination of the French-speakers without much protest for several centuries, but as their region became more prosperous and as their numbers increased in relation to the Walloons, so they grew in self-confidence, becoming increasingly unhappy with their social and political subordination. Inevitably, some of this discontent was sucked into **Fascist** movements, which drew some ten percent of the vote in both the Walloon and Flemish communities, though for very different reasons: the former for its appeal to a nationalist bourgeoisie, the latter for its assertion of “racial” pride among an oppressed group.

World War II and the immediate postwar period

The Germans invaded again in **May 1940**, launching a blitzkrieg that overwhelmed both Belgium and the Netherlands in short order. This time there was no heroic resistance by the Belgian king, now **Léopold III** (1934–51), who ignored the advice of his government and surrendered unconditionally and in such great haste that the British and French armies were, as their Commander-in-Chief put it, “suddenly faced with an open gap of twenty miles between Ypres and the sea through which enemy forces might reach the beaches”. It is true that the Belgian army had been badly mauled and that a German victory was inevitable, but the manner of the surrender infuriated many Belgians, as did the king’s refusal to form a government in exile. At first the occupation was relatively benign and most of the population waited apprehensively to see just what would happen. The main exception – setting aside the king, who at best played an ambivalent role – was the right-wing edge of the **Flemish Nationalist movement**, which cooperated with the Germans and (unsuccessfully) sought to negotiate the creation of a separate Flemish state. Popular opinion hardened against the Germans in 1942 as the occupation became more oppressive. The Germans stepped up the requisitioning of Belgian equipment, expanded its forced labour schemes, obliging thousands of Belgians to work in Germany, and cracked down hard on any sign of opposition. By the end of the year, a **Resistance** movement was mounting acts of sabotage against the occupying forces and this, in turn, prompted more summary executions of both Resistance fighters and hostages.

The summer of 1942 witnessed the first round-ups of the country's **Jews**. In 1940, there were approximately fifty thousand Jews in Belgium, mostly newly arrived refugees from Hitler's Germany. Much to their credit, many Belgians did their best to frustrate German efforts to transport the Jews out of the country – usually to Auschwitz; the Belgian police did not cooperate, Belgian railway workers left carriages unlocked and/or sidelined trains, and many other Belgians hid Jews in their homes for the duration. The result was that the Germans had, by 1944, killed about half the country's Jewish population, a much lower proportion than in other parts of occupied Europe.

With the occupation hardening, the vast majority of Belgians were delighted to hear of the D-Day landings in June 1944. The **liberation** of Belgium began in September with the American troops in the south and the British and Canadian divisions sweeping across Flanders in the north.

After the war, the Belgians set about the task of economic **reconstruction**, helped by aid from the United States, but hindered by a divisive controversy over the wartime activities of King Léopold. Inevitably, the complex shadings of collaboration and forced cooperation were hard to disentangle, and the debate continued until 1950 when a **referendum** narrowly recommended his return as king from exile. Léopold's return was, however, marked by rioting across Wallonia, where the king's opponents were concentrated, and Léopold **abdicated** in favour of his son, **Baudouin** (1951–93).

The second half of the twentieth century

The development of the **postwar** Belgian economy followed the pattern of most of Western Europe – reconstruction in the 1950s; boom in the 1960s; recession in the 1970s; and retrenchment in the 1980s and 1990s. Significant events included the belated extension of the franchise to women in 1948; an ugly, disorganized and hasty evacuation of the Belgian Congo in 1960 and of Rwanda and Burundi in 1962; and the transformation of Brussels from one of the lesser European capitals into a major player when it became the home of the EU and NATO (the latter organization was ejected from France on the orders of de Gaulle in 1967). There was also acute labour unrest in the Limburg coalfield in the early 1980s, following plans to close most of the remaining pits, and a right royal pantomime when Catholic King Baudouin abdicated for the day while the law legalizing abortion was ratified in 1990.

Yet, above all, the postwar period was dominated by increasing **tension between the Walloon and Flemish communities**, a state of affairs that was entangled with the relative economic decline of Wallonia, formerly the home of most of the country's heavy industry, as compared with burgeoning Flanders. One result of the tension was that every **national institution** became dogged by the prerequisites of bilingualism – speeches in parliament, for example, had, and still have, to be delivered in both languages – and all the main political parties created separate Flemish- and French-speaking sections. Bugged down by these linguistic preoccupations, the federal government often appeared extraordinarily cumbersome, but there again much of the political class came to be at least partly reliant on the linguistic divide for their jobs and, institutionally speaking, had little incentive to see the antagonisms resolved. **Regional government** was also transformed by this communal

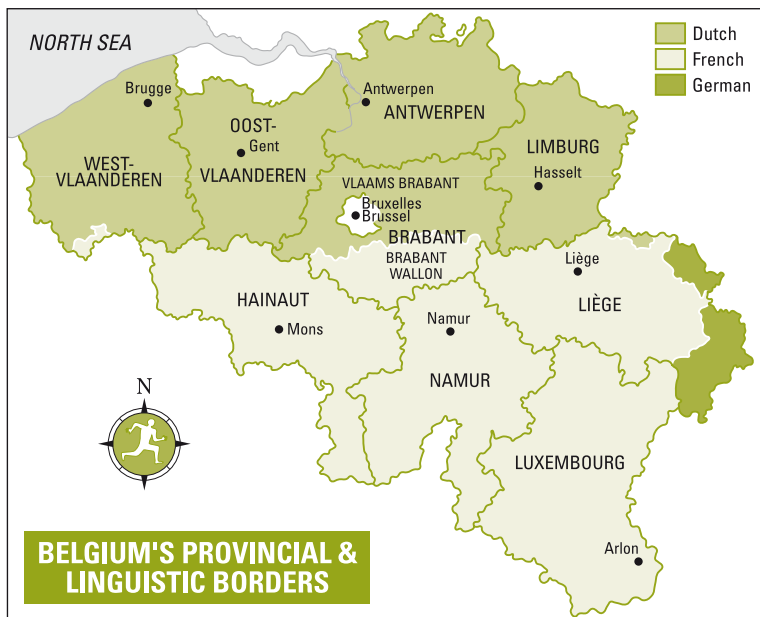
rivalry. The country had long been divided into provinces, but superimposed on this, in 1962, was the **Language Divide** (see box, p.458), which recognized three linguistic communities – French-, Flemish- and German-speaking. This was supplemented, in 1980, by the division of the country into three **regions**, one each for the French and Flemish, with Brussels, the third, designated a bilingual region. The transfer of major areas of administration from the centre to the regions followed.

A rare moment of national unity came in 1996 when Belgians from both sides of the linguistic divide rose up in protest at the police, which proved itself at best hopelessly inefficient, at worst complicit in, the gruesome activities of the child murderer and pornographer **Marc Dutroux**. Over 350,000 people took to the capital's streets, demanding the police and justice system be overhauled. This outburst of public protest peaked again two years later when, amazingly enough, Dutroux escaped his police guards, stole a car and headed out of the city. Although he was subsequently recaptured, most Belgians were simply appalled, though there was some relief when Dutroux was finally sentenced to life imprisonment in June 2004.

The Dutroux affair dented the national psyche, and – conviction or not – few Belgians now believe that the reforms subsequently imposed on the police have made much difference. Into this psychological breach rode the **royal family**, one of the few institutions to bind the country together. In 1999, the heir to the throne, Prince Philippe, broke with tradition and married Mathilde d'Udekem d'Acoz – a Belgian of non-royal descent, with family on both sides of the linguistic divide. The marriage may well have healed a few wounds, but its effects should not be over-estimated. Over 400,000 people snapped up the free travel tickets offered by Belgian railways for the occasion, but only around twenty percent were used to come to Brussels, and out of them one can only speculate as to how many loyal subjects chose to wave the flag on a cold December day rather than head for the nearest bar.

The present

In many ways, Belgium is a divided society, the two linguistic groups viewing each other with suspicion punctuated by hostility. In essence, the **Walloons** fear that the wealthier and more numerous Flemings will come to dominate the state, and indeed they may make this a self-fulfilling prophecy with their reluctance to learn Flemish – bilingualism being a prerequisite for any national job. The **Flemings**, on the other hand, want political and cultural recognition, and many bristle at what they perceive as Wallonian cultural and linguistic arrogance. Such nebulous but pervasive fears are hard to combat, and it's sometimes difficult to see what will hold the country together. That said, whenever the national government looks set to founder, coalitions of right- and left-wing politicians have always managed, with some energetic horse-trading, to keep the national government going. In this regard, the example of Antwerp is instructive: in local elections, the right-wing, nationalist Fleming **Vlaams Belang** regularly polls more votes than any of its rivals, but has been kept from power by all sorts of unlikely alliances – with Greens and Christian Democrats, for instance, working together to shut them out.



The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg from 1830

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Luxembourg had been designated a **Grand Duchy** by the Great Powers and given (as personal property) to King William I of Orange-Nassau, the ruler of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (including Belgium). After Belgium broke away from William's kingdom in 1830, Luxembourg remained the property of the Dutch monarchy until 1890 when the ducal crown passed to another (independent) branch of the Nassau family, who have ruled there ever since. In 1867, the Great Powers made further decisions about Luxembourg: the **Treaty of London** reaffirmed the duchy's territorial integrity and declared it neutral in perpetuity, thereby – it was hoped – protecting it from the clutches of both Germany and France. Following this declaration, Luxembourg City's fortifications were largely destroyed.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw Luxembourg's poor, agricultural economy transformed by the discovery and mining of **iron ore deposits**, which led to the foundation of what was soon one of Europe's largest steel industries. In 1914, the Grand Duchy confirmed its neutrality, but was still occupied by the Germans as it was again in **World War II** when the Luxembourgers put up a stubborn resistance, leading to many brave acts of defiance and considerable loss of life. In particular, the Battle of the Bulge was a major disaster and, as the war ended in 1945, one third of the country's farmland lay uncultivated, the public transportation system was in ruins, and some sixty thousand people were homeless.

The Belgian Language Divide

The Belgians are divided between two main groups, the **Flemings**, Dutch- or Flemish-speakers, concentrated in the north of the country, who form about sixty percent of a total population of some ten million, and to the south the **Walloons**, French-speakers, who account for around forty percent. There are also, in the far east of the country, a few pockets of **German**-speakers around the towns of Eupen and Malmédy.

The Flemish-French **language divide** has troubled the country for decades, its significance rooted in deep class and economic divisions. When the Belgian state was founded in 1830, its ruling and middle classes were predominantly French-speaking and they created the new state in their linguistic image: French was the official language and Flemish was banned in schools. This Francophone domination was subsequently reinforced by the way the economy developed, with Wallonia becoming a major coal mining and steel-producing area, whilst Flanders remained a predominantly agricultural, rural backwater. There were nationalist stirrings amongst the Flemings from the 1880s onwards, but it was only after World War II – when Flanders became the country's industrial powerhouse as Wallonia declined – that the demand for linguistic and cultural parity became irresistible. In the way of such things, the Walloons read Flemish “parity” as “domination”, setting the scene for all sorts of inter-communal hassle.

As a response to this burgeoning animosity, the **Language Frontier** was formally drawn across the country in 1962, cutting the country in half, from west to east. The aim was to distinguish between the French- and Flemish-speaking communities and thereby defuse tensions, but it didn't work. In 1980, this failure prompted another attempt to rectify matters with the redrafting of the constitution and the creation of a federal system, with three separate **communities** – the Flemish North, the Walloon South and the German-speaking east – responsible for their own cultural and social affairs and education. At the same time, Belgium was divided into three **regions** – the Flemish North, the Walloon South and bilingual Brussels, with each regional authority dealing with matters like economic development, the environment and employment.

Although the niceties of this partition have undoubtedly calmed troubled waters, in bilingual Brussels and at national-government level the division between

In the **postwar years**, reconstruction was rapid and the government wisely pursued a policy of industrial diversification that has made the country one of the most prosperous parts of Europe. Disappointed by the results of neutrality, Luxembourg also joined the EC and NATO and is now home to many major Community departments.

Flemish- and French-speakers still influences many aspects of working and social life. Schools, political parties, literature and culture are all segregated along linguistic lines, leading to a set of complex, face-saving regulations which can verge on the absurd. Government press conferences, for example, must have questions and answers repeated in both languages, one after the other. Across Belgium as a whole, bitterness about the economy, unemployment and the government smoulders within (or seeks an outlet through) the framework of this linguistic division, and individual neighbourhoods can be paralyzed by language disputes. The communities of Fourons/Voeren, for instance, a largely French-speaking collection of villages in Flemish Limburg, almost brought down the government in the mid-1980s when the Francophone mayor, one Jose Happart, refused to take the Flemish language exam required of all Limburg officials. Dismissed, he stood again and was re-elected, prompting the prime minister at the time, Wilfred Martens, to offer his own resignation. The Fourons affair was symptomatic of the obstinacy that besets the country to this day with a sort of linguistic guerrilla warfare continuing along the peripheries of the Language Frontier with, for example, Eddie de Block, the mayor of Merchtem, on the edge of Brussels, introducing a ban on the speaking of French in the town's schools in 2006. These various disputes give succour to the political right on both sides – namely the **Vlaams Blok** – now **Vlaams Belang** – on the Flemish side, and, for the French-speakers, the **Front des Francophones** (FDF).

All this said, it would be wrong to assume that Belgium's language differences have gone beyond the level of personal animosity and institutionalized mutual suspicion. Belgian **language extremists** have been imprisoned over the years, but very few, if any, have died in the fight for supremacy. Indeed, some might see a bilingual nation as a positive thing in a Europe where trading – and national – barriers are being increasingly broken down. Suggesting this to a Belgian, however, is normally useless, but there again the casual visitor will rarely get a sniff of these tensions. It's probably better to speak English rather than Flemish or French in the "wrong" part of Belgium, but if you make a mistake, the worst you'll get is a look of glazed indifference.

An introduction to Belgian art

The following outline is the very briefest of introductions to a subject that has rightly filled volumes, and is designed to serve only as a quick reference. Inevitably, it covers artists who lived and worked in both the Netherlands and Belgium, as these two countries have both been, for most of their history, bound together as the so-called Low Countries. For in-depth and academic studies, see the recommendations in the “Books” section on p.466.



The Early Flemish Masters

Throughout the medieval period, Flanders was one of the most artistically productive parts of Europe with each of the cloth towns, especially Bruges and Ghent, trying to out-do its rivals with the quality of its religious art. Today, the works of these early Flemish painters, known as the **Flemish Primitives**, are highly prized and an excellent sample is displayed in both Ghent and Bruges as well as in Brussels.

Jan van Eyck (1385–1441) is generally regarded as the first of the Flemish Primitives, and has even been credited with the invention of oil painting itself – though it seems more likely that he simply perfected a new technique by thinning his paint with (the newly discovered) turpentine, thus making it more flexible. His fame partially stems from the fact that he was one of the first artists to sign his work – an indication of how highly his talent was regarded by his contemporaries. Van Eyck's most celebrated work is the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, a stunningly beautiful altarpiece displayed in St-Baafskathedraal in Ghent (see p.244). The painting was revolutionary in its realism, for the first time using elements of native landscape in depicting Biblical themes, and was underpinned by a complex symbolism which has generated analysis and discussion ever since. Van Eyck's style and technique were to influence several generations of Low Countries artists.

Firmly in the Eyckian tradition was **Rogier van der Weyden** (1400–64), one-time official painter to the city of Brussels. Weyden's religious paintings do, however, show a greater degree of emotional intensity than those of van Eyck, while his serene portraits of the bigwigs of his day were much admired across a large swathe of western Europe. Among the many painters influenced by Van der Weyden, one of the most talented was **Dieric Bouts** (1415–75). Born in Haarlem in what is now the Netherlands but active in Leuven (see p.296), Bouts is recognizable by his stiff, rather elongated figures and horrific subject matter, all set against carefully drawn landscapes.

Hugo van der Goes (d.1482) was the next Ghent master after van Eyck, most famous for the Portinari Altarpiece in Florence's Uffizi. After a short painting career, he died insane, and his late works have strong hints of his impending madness in their subversive use of space and implicit acceptance of the viewer's presence.

Few doubt that **Hans Memling** (1440–94) was a pupil of van der Weyden. Active in Bruges throughout his life, he is best remembered for the pastoral

charm of his landscapes and the quality of his portraiture, much of which survives on the rescued side panels of triptychs. The Memling collection in Bruges (see p.206) has a wonderful sample of his work.

Both **Gerard David** (1460–1523) and **Jan Provoost** (1465–1529) moved to Bruges at the back end of the fifteenth century. Mostly they painted religious scenes, but their secular works are much more memorable, especially David's *Judgement of Cambyses*, exhibited in the Groeninge in Bruges (see p.199). David's best-known apprentice was **Adriaen Isenbrant** (d.1551), whose speciality was small, precisely executed panels. Isenbrant was the last of the great painters to work in that city before it was superseded by Antwerp – which itself became the focus of a more Italianate school of art in the sixteenth century.

Strikingly different, but broadly contemporaneous, was **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450–1516), who lived for most of his life in the Netherlands, though his style is linked to that of his Flemish contemporaries. His frequently reprinted religious allegories are filled with macabre visions of tortured souls and grotesque beasts, and appear at first faintly unhinged, though it's now thought that these are visual representations of contemporary sayings, idioms and parables. While their interpretation is far from resolved, Bosch's paintings draw strongly on subconscious fears and archetypes, giving them a lasting, haunting fascination.

The sixteenth century

At the end of the fifteenth century, Flanders was in economic and political decline and the leading artists of the day migrated to the booming port of Antwerp. The artists who worked here soon began to integrate the finely observed detail that characterized the Flemish tradition with the style of the Italian painters of the Renaissance. **Quentin Matsys** (1464–1530) introduced florid classical architectural details and intricate landscapes to his works, influenced perhaps by the work of Leonardo da Vinci. As well as religious works, he painted portraits and genre scenes, all of which have recognizably Italian facets, and paved the way for the Dutch genre painters of later years. **Jan Gossart** (1478–1532) made the pilgrimage to Italy too, and his dynamic works are packed with detail, especially finely drawn classical architectural backdrops. He was the first Low Countries artist to introduce the subjects of classical mythology into his works, part of a steady trend through the period towards secular subject matter, which can also be seen in the work of **Joachim Patenier** (d.1524), who painted small landscapes of fantastical scenery.

The middle of the sixteenth century was dominated by the work of **Pieter Bruegel the Elder** (c.1525–69), whose gruesome allegories and innovative interpretations of religious subjects are firmly placed in Low Countries settings. Pieter also painted finely observed peasant scenes, though he himself was well connected in court circles in Antwerp and, later, Brussels. **Pieter Aertsen** (1508–75) also worked in the peasant genre, adding aspects of still life; his paintings often show a detailed kitchen scene in the foreground, with a religious episode going on behind. Bruegel's two sons, **Pieter Bruegel the Younger** (1564–1638) and **Jan Bruegel** (1568–1625) were lesser painters: the former produced fairly insipid copies of his father's work, while Jan developed a style of his own – delicately rendered flower paintings and genre pieces that earned him the nickname “Velvet”.

Towards the latter half of the sixteenth century highly stylized Italianate portraits became the dominant fashion, Frans **Pourbus the Younger** (1569–1622) being the leading practitioner. Frans worked for the likes of the Habsburgs and the Médicis, his itinerant life in contrast to that of his grandfather, the Bruges-based **Pieter Pourbus** (1523–84), the founder of this artistic dynasty.

The seventeenth century

Belgian painting of the early seventeenth century was dominated by **Pieter Paul Rubens** (1577–1640), easily the most important exponent of the Baroque in northern Europe. Born in Siegen, Westphalia, Rubens was raised in Antwerp, where he entered the painters' guild in 1598. He became court painter to the Duke of Mantua in 1600, and until 1608 travelled extensively in Italy, absorbing the art of the High Renaissance and classical architecture. By the time of his return to Antwerp in 1608 he had acquired an enormous artistic vocabulary: the paintings of Caravaggio in particular were to influence his work strongly. His first major success was *The Raising of the Cross*, painted in 1610 and displayed today in Antwerp cathedral (see p.258). A large, dynamic work, it caused a sensation at the time, establishing Rubens' reputation and leading to a string of commissions. *The Descent from the Cross*, his next major work (also in the cathedral), consolidated this success; equally Baroque, it is nevertheless quieter and more restrained. Thereafter, he was able to set up his own studio, where he gathered a team of talented artists (among them Antony van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens – see p.463). The subsequent division of labour ensured a high rate of productivity and a degree of personal flexibility; the degree to which Rubens personally worked on a canvas would vary – and would determine its price.

From the early 1620s onwards Rubens turned his hand to a plethora of themes and subjects – religious works, portraits, tapestry designs, landscapes, mythological scenes, ceiling paintings – each of which was handled with supreme vitality and virtuosity. From his Flemish antecedents he inherited an acute sense of light, and used it not to dramatize his subjects (a technique favoured by Caravaggio and other Italian artists), but in association with colour and form. The drama in his works comes from the vigorous animation of his characters. His large-scale allegorical works, especially, are packed with heaving, writhing figures that appear to tumble out from the canvas.

The energy of Rubens' paintings was reflected in his **private life**. In addition to his career as an artist, he also undertook diplomatic missions to Spain and England, and used these opportunities to study the works of other artists and – as in the case of Velázquez – to meet them personally. In the 1630s, gout began to hamper his activities, and from this time his painting became more domestic and meditative. **Hélène Fourment**, his second wife, was the subject of many portraits and served as a model for characters in his allegorical paintings, her figure epitomizing the buxom, well-rounded women found throughout his work.

The followers of Rubens

Rubens' influence on the artists of the period was enormous. The huge output of his studio meant that his works were universally seen, and widely disseminated by the engravers he employed to copy his work. Chief among

his followers was the portraitist **Antony van Dyck** (1599–1641), who worked in Rubens' studio from 1618, often taking on the depiction of religious figures in his master's works that required particular sensitivity and pathos. Like Rubens, van Dyck was born in Antwerp and travelled widely in Italy, though his initial work was influenced less by the Italian artists than by Rubens himself. Eventually van Dyck developed his own distinct style and technique, establishing himself as court painter to Charles I in England, and creating portraits of a nervous elegance that would influence portraiture there for the next hundred and fifty years. Most of his great portrait paintings remain in England, but his best religious works – such as the *Crucifixion* in Mechelen's cathedral – can be found in Belgium.

Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678) was also an Antwerp native who studied under Rubens. Although he was commissioned to complete several works left unfinished by Rubens at the time of his death, his robustly naturalistic works have an earthy – and sensuous – realism that is quite distinct in style and technique.

Genre painting

As well as the Baroque creations of Rubens and his acolytes, another style emerged in the seventeenth century, that of **genre painting**. Often misunderstood, the term was initially applied to everything from animal paintings and still lifes through to historical works and landscapes, but later came to be applied only to scenes of everyday life. One of its early practitioners was **Frans Snijders** (1579–1657), who took up still-life painting where Aertsen left off, amplifying his subject – food and drink – to even larger, more sumptuous canvases, while doubling up as a member of the Rubens art machine, painting animals and still-life sections for the master's works. In the Spanish Netherlands (as Belgium was called from 1579–1713), the most skilful practitioner was **Adriaen Brouwer** (1605–38), whose peasant figures rivalled those of the painters Jan Steen and Adriaen van Ostade in the United Provinces (now the Netherlands) to the north. Brouwer's output was unsurprisingly small given his short life, but his riotous tavern scenes and tableaux of everyday life are deftly done, and were well received in their day, collected by, among others, Rubens and Rembrandt. Brouwer studied in Haarlem for a while under Frans Hals (and may have picked up much of his painterly technique from him), before returning to his native Flanders to influence **David Teniers the Younger** (1610–90), who worked in Antwerp, and later in Brussels. Teniers' early paintings are Brouwer-like peasant scenes, although his later work is more delicate and diverse, including *kortegaardje* – guardroom scenes that show soldiers carousing.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

By the end of the seventeenth century, French influences had overwhelmed Belgium's native artistic tradition, with painters like **Jan Joseph Horemans I** and **Balthasar van den Bossche** modifying the Flemish genre painting of the previous century to suit Parisian tastes. Neoclassicism was also coming into vogue at this time, a French-led movement whose leading light was **Jacques Louis David** (1748–1825), the creator of the *Death of Marat*, an iconic work

Founded in 1883, **Les XX** (*Les Vingt*) was an influential group of twenty Belgian painters, designers and sculptors, who were keen to bring together all the different strands of their respective crafts. For ten years, they staged an annual exhibition showcasing both domestic and international talent, and it was here that Cézanne, Manet and Gauguin were all exhibited at the very beginning of their careers. With members as diverse as James Ensor and the architect-designer Henri van de Velde, Les XX never professed to be united by the same artistic principles, but several of its members, including Rysselberghe, were inordinately impressed by the Post-Impressionism of Seurat, whose pointillist *The Big Bowl* created a sensation when it was exhibited by Les XX in 1887.

Les XX – and the other literary-artistic groupings that succeeded it – were part of a general **avant-garde** movement which flourished in Brussels at the end of the nineteenth century. This avant-garde was deeply disenchanted with Brussels' traditional salon culture, not only for artistic reasons but also because of its indifference to the plight of the Belgian working class. Such political views nourished close links with the fledgling **socialist movement**, and Les XX even ran the slogan "art and the people have the same enemy – the reactionary bourgeoisie". Indeed, the Belgian avant-garde came to see art (in all its forms) as a vehicle for liberating the Belgian worker, a project regularly proclaimed in *L'Art Moderne*, its most authoritative mouthpiece.

displayed in Brussels' Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts (see p.98). **Laurent Delvaux** (1696–1778) was another important figure, a Flemish sculptor who produced a large number of works for Belgian churches, including the pulpit of Ghent's cathedral.

French artistic fashions ruled the Belgian roost well into the **nineteenth century**, and amongst them Neoclassicism remained the most popular. Of the followers of Jacques Louis David, **François Joseph Navez** (1787–1869) was the most important to work in Belgium, furthering the influence of the movement via his position as director of the Brussels academy. With Belgian independence from the Netherlands in 1830 came, as might be expected, a new interest in nationalism, and artists such as **Louis Galliat** (1810–87) and **Henri Dobbelaere** (1829–85) spearheaded a romantic interpretation of historical events, idealizing Belgium's recent and medieval history.

Antoine Wiertz (1806–65) was celebrated for his grandiose amalgamation of romantic and Neoclassical themes in his sculptures and paintings, while **Henri de Braekeleer** (1840–88) was highly regarded for his Dutch-inspired interiors and landscapes. Indeed, landscape painting underwent a resurgence of popularity in France in the mid-nineteenth century, and once again Belgian artists flocked to reflect that country's tastes. More positively, **Émile Claus** (1849–1924) adapted French Impressionist ideas to create an individual style known as Luminism, and **Théo Rysselberghe** (1862–1926) followed suit. The talented **Fernand Khnopff** (1858–1921) developed his own style too, in his case inspired by the English Pre-Raphaelites.

One artist who stands out during this period is **Constantin Meunier** (1831–1905), a painter and sculptor whose naturalistic work depicting brawny workers and mining scenes was the perfect mirror of a fast-industrializing Belgium. But the most original Belgian artist of the late nineteenth century was **James Ensor** (1860–1949). Ensor, who lived in Ostend for most of his life, painted macabre, disturbing works, whose haunted style can be traced back to Bosch and Bruegel and which was itself a precursor of Expressionism. He

was active in a group known as **Les XX** (*Les Vingt*; see box opposite), which organized exhibitions of new styles of art from abroad, and greatly influenced contemporary Belgian painters.

The twentieth century and beyond

Each of the major modern art movements had its followers in Belgium, and each was diluted or altered according to local taste. **Expressionism** was manifest in a local group of artists established in a village near Ghent, with the most eye-catching paintings produced by **Constant Permeke** (1886–1952), whose bold, deeply coloured canvases can be found in many Belgian galleries. There was also **Jean Delville** (1867–1953), not as talented as Permeke perhaps, but an artist who certainly set about his religious preoccupations with gigantic gusto. **Surrealism** also caught on in a big way, perhaps because of the Belgian penchant for the bizarre and grotesque. **René Magritte** (1898–1967), one of the leading lights of the movement, was born and trained in Belgium and returned there after being involved in the movement's birth in 1927. His Surrealism is gentle compared to the work of Dali or de Chirico: ordinary images are used in a dreamlike way, often playing on the distinction between a word and its meaning. His most famous motif was the man in the bowler hat, whose face was always hidden from view. **Paul Delvaux** (1897–1994) adopted his own rather salacious interpretation of the movement – a sort of “what-the-butler-saw” Surrealism.

Most of the interwar artists were influenced by van Doesburg and de Stijl in Holland, though none figured highly in the movement. The abstract geometrical works of **Victor Severanckx** (1897–1965) owed much to de Stijl, and he in turn inspired the postwar group known as **La Jeune Peinture**, which gathered together some of the most notable artists working in Belgium, the antecedents of the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s. A similar collective function was served by **CoBrA**, founded in 1948 and taking its name from the first letters of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. While none of the Belgian participants in CoBrA achieved the fame of one of its Dutch members, Karel Appel, the name of **Pierre Alechinsky** (1927–) is certainly well known in his hometown, Brussels.

Probably the most famous recent Belgian artist is **Marcel Broodthaers** (1924–76). He initially worked in the Surrealist manner, but soon branched out, quickly graduating from cut-paper geometric shapes into both the plastic arts and most famously, sharp and brightly coloured paintings of everyday artefacts, especially casseroles brimming with mussels.

Books

Most of the following **books** should be readily available in bookshops or online (@www.amazon.com), though you may have a little more difficulty tracking down those few titles we mention which are currently out of print, signified o/p. Titles marked with the 🦋 symbol are especially recommended.

Travel and general

Charlotte and Emily Brontë

(ed. Sue Lonoff) *The Belgian Essays*. The Brontë sisters left their native Yorkshire for the first time in 1842 to make a trip to Brussels. Charlotte returned to Brussels the following year. This handsome volume – from Yale – reproduces the twenty-eight essays they penned (in French) during their journey and provides the English translation opposite. A delightful read; particular highlights are “The Butterfly”, “The Caterpillar” and “The Death of Napoleon”.

Chris Craggs *Selected Rock Climbs in Belgium and Luxembourg*. All you could ever wish to know about climbing in these two countries. Scores of route descriptions and loads of helpful advice, though the book was published by Cicerone long ago – in 1994. In Belgium, most of the climbs are in the Namur-Dinant area while in Luxembourg the focus is around Berdorf.

 **Michael Farr** *Tintin: The Complete Companion*. A Tintinologist's treat, this immaculately illustrated book – written by one of the world's leading Tintinologists – explores every aspect of Hergé's remarkably popular creation. Particularly strong on the real-life stories that inspired Hergé, but you do have to be seriously interested in Tintin to really enjoy it.

Hergé *The Calculus Affair and The Making of Tintin: Cigars of the Pharaoh & the Blue Lotus*. Tintin comic strips

come in and out of print at a rapid rate, usually in anthologies; there's a wide selection of audio cassettes too. The two anthologies listed here are as good a place as any to start.




Michael Jackson *Michael Jackson's Great Beers of Belgium*. Belgium produces the best beers in the world. Michael Jackson is one of the best beer writers in the world. The result is cheeky, palatable and sinewy with just a hint of fruitiness. A new and updated edition was published in 2007.

Bruce McCall *Sit!: The Dog Portraits of Thierry Poncelet*. This weird and wonderful book features the work of Belgian Thierry Poncelet, who raids flea markets and antique shops for ancestral portraits, then restores them and paints dogs' heads over the original faces.

Harry Pearson *A Tall Man in a Low Land*. The product of an extended visit to the lesser-known parts of Belgium, this racy book is in the style of (but not as perceptive as) Bill Bryson. Pearson has oodles of comments to make on Belgium and the Belgians – on everything from DIY to architecture – and although he sometimes tries too hard, this is an enjoyable read.

Benoit Peeters *Tintin and the World of Hergé: an Illustrated History*. Examines the life and career of Hergé, particularly the development of Tintin, and the influences on his work. No fewer than three hundred illustrations.


 **Luc Sante** *The Factory of Facts.* Born in Belgium but raised in the US, Sante returned to his native land for an extended visit in 1989 – at the age of 35. His book is primarily a personal reflection, but he also uses this as a base for a thoughtful exploration of Belgium and the Belgians – from their art to their food and beyond.

Marianne Thys *Filmography of Belgian Movies, 1896–1996.* This authoritative hardback volume has reviews of every Belgian film ever made. Published in 2000, it's 992 pages long, as is reflected in the cost.

Andrew Tucker *Dries Van Noten: Shape, Print and Fabric.* Serious-minded but thought-provoking examination of the work of the

eponymous Belgian fashion designer. Lots of good background stuff on the development of the Antwerp fashion scene.


San van de Veire *Belgian Fashion Design.* The staggering success of Flemish fashion designers is chronicled in this well-illustrated book. Particularly interesting on the factors underpinning the burgeoning of Belgian fashion in the early 1980s.

 **Tim Webb** *Good Beer Guide to Belgium.* Detailed and enthusiastic guide to the best bars, beers and breweries. A good read, and extremely well informed to boot, this is undoubtedly the best book on its subject on the market. Published in 2005 by CAMRA (Campaign For Real Ale books).

History and politics

Neal Ascherson *The King Incorporated: Leopold the Second and the Congo.* Belgium's King Léopold II was responsible for one of the cruelest of colonial regimes, a savage system of repression and exploitation that devastated the Belgian Congo. Ascherson details it all.

Malcolm Balen *A Model Victory: Waterloo and the Battle for History.* Some twenty years after Waterloo, the British government asked Lieutenant William Siborne, a great fan of the Duke of Wellington, to prepare a scale model of the battle. They assumed that he would depict the start of the battle, but he chose the crisis instead – and this is where he came unstuck. Based on interviews with scores of Waterloo veterans, Siborne's model had the Prussian army arriving on the battlefield earlier than the Duke claimed, thereby taking some of the glory from the British army. Siborne felt the full fury of Wellington's ire – and this much-praised book details it all.

 **J.C.H. Blom (ed.)** *History of the Low Countries.* Belgian history books are thin on the ground, so this incisive, well-balanced volume is very welcome. A series of historians weigh in with their specialities to build a comprehensive picture of the region from the Celts and Romans through to the 1980s. Highly recommended, though hardly a light holiday read.

Paul van Buitenen *Blowing the Whistle* (o/p). All your worst fears about the EU confirmed. Buitenen was an assistant auditor in the EU's Financial Control Directorate in Brussels and this book, published in 1998, exposed the fraud and corruption. Needless to say, the EU was far from grateful for his revelations and forced him to resign, but even so the scandal stories became so widespread that the entire Commission was obliged to resign en bloc. Since then, there have been earnest declarations that things have improved.

Martin Conway *Collaboration in Belgium*. Detailed analysis of wartime collaboration and the development of Fascism in Belgium in the 1930s and 1940s. Authoritative and well written, but something of a special-interest text.

Nicholas Crane *Mercator* Arguably the most important map-maker of all time, Gerard Mercator was born in Rupelmonde near Antwerp in 1512. This book details every twist and turn of his life and provides oodles – perhaps too many oodles – of background material on the Flanders of his time.

Paul Fussell *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Intriguing take on World War I giving prominence to the rants, epistles, poems and letters of those British soldiers who were caught up in it – and, by implication, the effect it had on British society as a whole. Also the *Boys' Crusade*, which zeroes in on the experience of the (very youthful) American troops who fought in Europe in World War II; includes an especially revealing section on the Battle of the Bulge (see p.378).

Galbert of Bruges *The Murder of Charles the Good*. A contemporaneous chronicle of the tempestuous events that rattled early twelfth-century Bruges, this detailed yarn gives all sorts of insights into medieval Flanders.

Pieter Geyl *The Revolt of The Netherlands 1555–1609*. Geyl presents a detailed account of the Netherlands during its formative years, chronicling the uprising against the Spanish and both the formation of the United Provinces and the creation of the Spanish Netherlands (the Belgium of today). First published in 1932, it has long been regarded as the classic text on the subject, though it is a hard and ponderous read.

Craig Harline and Eddy Put *A Bishop's Tale*. An unusual book based on the journals of Mathias Hovius, who was Archbishop of Mechelen in the early seventeenth century. It is, perhaps, a little too detailed to enthrall the average reader, but it does provide a real insight into the period – its preoccupations and problems.



Christopher Hibbert *Waterloo*. Hibbert is one of Britain's leading historians, an astute commentator who writes in a fluent, easily accessible style. This book is divided into three parts. The first examines Napoleon's rise to power, the second looks at Wellington and his allies, the third deals with the battle. Hibbert is also responsible for editing *The Wheatley Diary*, the journal and sketchbook of a young English officer who fought his way across Europe during the Napoleonic Wars.



Adam Hochschild *King Leopold's Ghost*. Harrowing account of King Leopold's savage colonial regime in the Congo. A detailed assessment – perhaps a little too long – explains and explores its gruesome workings. Particularly good on Roger Casement, the one-time British consul to the Congo, who publicized the cruelty and helped bring it to an end. It was this same Casement who ended up being hung by the British in 1916 for his active support of the Irish Republican movement. Hochschild's last chapter – “The Great Forgetting” – is a stern criticism of the Belgians for their failure to acknowledge their savage colonial history.

Lisa Jardine *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent*. Great title for an intriguing book on the premature demise of one of the Protestants' most acclaimed heroes, assassinated in Delft in the Netherlands in 1584. At just 160 pages, the tale is told


succinctly, but – unless you have a particular interest in early firearms – there is a bit too much information on guns.

B.H. Liddell Hart (ed.) *The Letters of Private Wheeler* (o/p). A veteran of World War I, Liddell Hart writes with panache and clarity, marshalling the letters penned by the eponymous private as he fought Napoleon and the French across a fair slice of Europe. Wheeler fought at Waterloo, but the section on the battle is surprisingly brief. As a whole, the letters are a delight, a witty insight into the living conditions and attitudes of Wellington's infantry. In similar vein, Liddell Hart's *History of the Second World War* (o/p) is an excellent introduction to military strategy and tactics. The author always claimed (with some justification) that he foresaw the potential importance of tanks – a voice crying in the British military wilderness before Hitler unveiled his blitzkrieg.

Philip Mansel *Prince of Europe: the Life of Charles Joseph de Ligne 1735–1814*. The Habsburg aristocracy that dominated the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) in the eighteenth century have rarely come under the historical spotlight, but this weighty tome partly remedies the situation. One of the clan who owned the château of Beloeil (see p.326), the priapic and multi-faceted Charles

Joseph was a gardener and a general, a curious traveller and a diplomat. Mansel explores his life and milieu thoroughly and in entertaining style.

Janet Morgan *The Secrets of Rue St Roch*. Intriguing account of British spy operations in occupied Luxembourg during World War I. Gripping stuff.

 **Geoffrey Parker** *The Dutch Revolt*. Compelling account of the struggle between the Netherlands and Spain. Quite the best thing you can read on the period. Also *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road 1567–1659*. The title may sound academic, but this book gives a fascinating insight into the Habsburg army that occupied the Low Countries for well over a hundred years – how it functioned, was fed and moved from Spain to the Low Countries along the so-called Spanish Road.

Andrew Wheatcroft *The Habsburgs*. Excellent and well-researched trawl through the dynasty's history, from its eleventh-century beginnings to its eclipse at the end of World War I. Enjoyable background reading.

Geoffrey Wootten *Waterloo 1815*. About one-third of the length of Hibbert's *Waterloo* (see p.468), this 96-page book focuses on the battle, providing a clear, thorough and interesting account.


World War I

William Allison & John Fairley *The Monocled Mutineer* (o/p). An antidote to all those tales of soldiers dying for their country in World War I, this little book recounts the story of one Percy Toplis, a Nottinghamshire lad turned soldier, mutineer, racketeer and conman who was finally shot by the police in 1920. Includes an intriguing account of the large-scale mutiny that broke out along the British line in 1917.

Robert Graves *Goodbye To All That*. Written in 1929, this is the classic story of life in the trenches. Bleak and painful memories of First World War army service written by Graves, a wounded survivor.

Martin Gilbert *First World War*. Highly regarded account of the war focused on the battles and experiences of the British army. Very thorough – at 600-odd pages.

Siegfried Sassoon *The Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*. Sassoon's moving and painfully honest account of his experiences in the trenches of the First World War. A classic, and infinitely readable. Also Siegfried Sassoon's *Diaries 1915–1918*.

 **A.J.P. Taylor** *The First World War: An Illustrated History*. First published in 1963, this superbly

written and pertinently illustrated history offers a penetrating analysis of how the war started and why it went on for so long. Also includes a fine section on events in the Ypres Salient. Many of Taylor's deductions were controversial at the time, but such was the power of his arguments that much of what he said is now mainstream history.

Art and architecture


Ulrike Becks-Malorny *Ensor* (o/p). Eminently readable and extensively illustrated account of James Ensor's life and art. Often neglected, James Ensor was one of the country's finest painters; he hailed from Ostend.

Kristin Lohse Belkin *Rubens*. Too long for its own good, this book details Rubens' spectacularly successful career both as artist and diplomat. Belkin is particularly thorough in her discussions of technique and the workings of his workshop. Extensive reference is made to Rubens' letters. Excellent illustrations.

Robin Blake *Anthony van Dyck*. Whether or not van Dyck justifies 448 pages is a moot point, but he did have an interesting life and certainly thumped out a fair few paintings. This volume explores every artistic nook and cranny.


Aurora Cuito (ed) *Victor Horta*. Concise and readily digestible guide to the work of Belgium's leading exponent of Art Nouveau (see p.118).

David Dernie *Victor Horta*. Perhaps surprisingly, this is the only readily recommendable book dedicated to that pioneer of Art Nouveau, Victor Horta (see p.118). It competently describes his milieu and lingers on his architectural legacy, but it does cost an arm and a leg.

 **R. H. Fuchs** *Dutch Painting*. As complete an introduction to the subject – from Flemish origins to the present day – as you could wish for, in just a couple of hundred pages. First published in the 1970s.

R. H. Fuchs et al *Flemish and Dutch Painting (from Van Gogh, Ensor, Magritte and Mondrian to Contemporary)*. Excellent, lucid account giving an overview of the development of Flemish and Dutch painting from Van Gogh onwards.

Suzi Gablik *Magritte*. Suzi Gablik lived in Magritte's house for six months in the 1960s and this personal contact informs the text, which is lucid, perceptive and thoughtful. Most of the illustrations are, however, black and white. At 208 pages, much longer than the Hammacher version (see below).

 **Walter S. Gibson** *Hieronymus Bosch and Bruegel*. Two wonderfully illustrated titles on these two exquisite allegorical painters. The former contains everything you wanted to know about Hieronymus Bosch, his paintings and his late fifteenth-century environment, while the latter takes a detailed look at Pieter Bruegel the Elder's art, with nine well-argued chapters investigating its various components.

A.M. Hammacher *René Magritte*. An excellent art book, beautifully

illustrated and featuring a detailed examination of Magritte's life, times and artistic output. Very competitively priced too.

Craig Harbison *Jan van Eyck: the Play of Realism*. Not much is known about van Eyck, but Harbison has done his best to root out every detail. The text is accompanied by illustrations of all of Eyck's major paintings.

Literature

Mark Bles *A Child at War*. This powerful book describes the tribulations of Hortense Daman, a Belgian girl who joined the Resistance at the tender age of fifteen. Betrayed to the Gestapo, Daman was sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where she was used in medical experiments, but remarkably survived. This is her story, though the book would have benefited from some editorial pruning.



Hugo Claus *The Sorrow of Belgium*. Born in Bruges in 1929, Claus is generally regarded as Belgium's foremost Flemish-language novelist, and this is generally regarded as his premier novel. It charts the growing maturity of a young boy living in Flanders under the Nazi occupation. Claus's style is somewhat dense to say the least, but the book gets to grips with the guilt, bigotry and mistrust of the period, and caused a minor uproar when it was first published in the early 1980s. His *Swordfish* is a story of an isolated village rife with ethnic and religious tensions. The effects of this prove too much for a boy, precipitating his descent into madness. Also *Desire*, the strange and disconcerting tale of two drinking buddies, who, on an impulse, abandon small-town Belgium for Las Vegas, where both of them start to unravel.

Peter Weiermair *Eros & Death: Belgian Symbolism* (o/p). Great title for an original book exploring the nature of Belgian symbolism, with reference to drawings, prints, paintings and sculptures. Artists featured include James Ensor and Felician Rops.

Christopher White *Peter Paul Rubens: Man and Artist* (o/p). A beautifully illustrated introduction to Rubens' work, life and times.

Alan Hollinghurst *The Folding Star*. Not a Belgian novel, but the British writer Hollinghurst's evocation of a thinly disguised Bruges, in a compelling novel of sex, mystery and obsession. The enthusiastic descriptions of gay male sexual encounters make this a climactic book in more ways than one.

Barbara Kingsolver *The Poisonwood Bible: A Novel*. In 1959, an American Baptist missionary and his family set out to convert souls in the jungle depths of the Belgian Congo. They are unprepared for the multiple disasters that befall them – from great, stinging ants to irregular Congolese soldiers.

Amelie Nothomb *Loving Sabotage*. English-language translations of modern Belgian writers (in both French and Dutch) are a rarity, but Nothomb, one of Belgium's most popular writers, has made the linguistic leap. This particular novel deals with the daughter of a diplomat stationed in Peking in the 1970s, a rites-of-passage story with a Maoist backdrop. *The Stranger Next Door*, perhaps Nothomb's most successful translated work, deals with weird and disconcerting happenings in the Belgian countryside.

Jean Ray *Malpertuis*. This spine-chilling Gothic novel was written by a Belgian in 1943. It's set in Belgium, where the suffocating Catholicism of

the Inquisition provides a suitably atmospheric backdrop.



Georges Rodenbach *Bruges la Morte*. First published in 1892, this slim and subtly evocative novel is all about love and obsession – or rather a highly stylized, decadent view of it. It's credited with starting the craze for visiting Bruges, the “dead city” where the action unfolds.

Georges Simenon *Maigret Loses His Temper* and *Maigret And The Killer*. There can be no dispute that Simenon was Belgium's most famous crime writer, his main creation being the Parisian detective Maigret. There are dozens of books to choose from

– these two can get you started. Ripping yarns.

Emile Zola *Germinal*. First published in 1885, *Germinal* exposed the harsh conditions of the coalmines of northeast France. It was also a rallying call to action with the protagonist, Etienne Lantier, organizing a strike. A vivid, powerful work, Zola had a detailed knowledge of the mines – how they were run and worked – and makes passing reference to the coalfields of southern Belgium, where conditions and working practices were identical. This novel inspired a whole generation of Belgian radicals.

Language

Language

Flemish and French	475
Glossary	485

Flemish and French

Throughout the northern part of Belgium, in the provinces of East and West Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg and Flemish Brabant, the principal language is **Dutch**, which is spoken in a variety of distinctive dialects commonly (if inaccurately) lumped together as **Flemish**. Flemish-speakers have equal language rights in the capital, Brussels, where the majority of Belgians speak a dialect of **French** known as **Walloon**, as they do in the country's southern provinces, known logically enough as Wallonia. Walloon is almost identical to French, and if you've any knowledge of the language, you'll be readily understood. French is also the most widely spoken language in **Luxembourg**, along with German – although most Luxembourgers also speak a local and distinctive German dialect, **Lëtzebuergesch** (see p.406).

Flemish

Flemish, or Dutch, is a Germanic language – the word “Dutch” itself is a corruption of “Deutsche”, a label inaccurately given by English sailors in the seventeenth century – and although Dutch-speakers are at pains to stress the differences between the two languages, if you know any German you'll spot many similarities. Most Flemish-speakers, particularly in the main towns and in the tourist industry, speak English to varying degrees of excellence. Indeed, Flemish-speakers have a seemingly natural talent for languages, and your attempts at speaking theirs may be met with bewilderment – though this can have as much to do with your pronunciation (Dutch is very difficult to get right) as their surprise that you're making an effort. Consequently, the following words and phrases should be the most you'll need to get by. We've included a basic food and drink glossary, though menus are nearly always multilingual and where they aren't, ask and one will almost invariably appear.

As for **phrasebooks**, the *Rough Guide to Dutch* is pocket-sized, and has a good dictionary section (English–Dutch and Dutch–English) as well as a menu reader; it also provides a useful introduction to grammar and pronunciation.

Pronunciation

Flemish is **pronounced** much the same as English. However, there are a few Dutch sounds that don't exist in English, which can be difficult to get right without practice.

Consonants

Double-consonant combinations generally keep their separate sounds in Flemish: **kn**, for example, is never like the English “knight”. Note also the

following consonants and consonant combinations:

j is an English y, as in yellow

ch and **g** indicate a throaty sound, as at the end of the Scottish word loch.

The Dutch word for canal – gracht – is especially tricky, since it has two of these sounds – it comes out along the lines of khrakht. A common word for hello is Dag!
– pronounced like daakh

ng as in **bring**

nj as in **onion**

y is not a consonant, but another way of writing **ij**

Vowels and diphthongs

A good rule of thumb is that doubling the letter lengthens the vowel sound.

a is like the English **apple**

aa like **cart**

e like **let**

ee like **late**

Words and phrases

The basics

ja	yes
nee	no
alstublieft	please
dank u or bedankt	thank you
hallo or dag	hello
goedemorgen	good morning
goedemiddag	good afternoon
goedenavond	good evening
tot ziens	goodbye
tot straks	see you later
Spreekt u Engels?	Do you speak English?
Ik begrijp het niet	I don't understand
vrouwen/mannen	women/men
kinderen	children
heren/dames	men's/women's toilets
Ik wil...	I want...
Ik wil niet ... (+verb)	I don't want to...
Ik wil geen ... (+noun)	I don't want any...
Wat kost...?	How much is...?
sorry	sorry
alle richtingen	all directions (road sign)

Travel and shopping

postkantoor	post office
postzegel(s)	stamp(s)
geldwisselkantoor	money exchange

o as in **pop**

oo in **pope**

u is like the French **tu** if preceded by a consonant; it's like **wood** if followed by a consonant

uu is the French **tu**

au and **ou** like **how**

ei and **ij** as in **fine**, though this varies strongly from region to region; sometimes it can sound more like **lane**

oe as in **soon**

eu is like the diphthong in the French **leur**

ui is the hardest Dutch diphthong of all, pronounced like **how** but much further forward in the mouth, with lips pursed (as if to say "oo").

kassa	cash desk
Hoe kom ik in...?	How do I get to...?
Waar is...?	Where is...?
Hoe ver is het naar...?	How far is it to...?
Wanneer?	When?
ver/dichtbij	far/near
links/rechts	left/right
rechtdoor	straight ahead
spoor or perron	railway platform or track
loket	ticket office
hier/daar	here/there
goed/slecht	good/bad
groot/klein	big/small
open/gesloten	open/closed
duwen/trekken	push/pull
nieuw/oud	new/old
goedkoop/duur	cheap/expensive
heet or warm/koud	hot/cold
met/zonder	with/without

Numbers

nul	0
een	1
twee	2
drie	3
vier	4
vijf	5

zes	6
zeven	7
acht	8
negen	9
tien	10
elf	11
twaal	12
dertien	13
veertien	14
vijftien	15
zestien	16
zeventien	17
achttien	18
negentien	19
twintig	20
een en twintig	21
twee en twintig	22
dertig	30
veertig	40
vijftig	50
zestig	60
zeventig	70
tachtig	80
negentig	90
honderd	100
honderd een	101
twee honderd	200
twee honderd een	201
vijf honderd	500
vijf honderd vijf en twintig	525
duizend	1000

Days

maandag	Monday
dinsdag	Tuesday

woensdag	Wednesday
donderdag	Thursday
vrijdag	Friday
zaterdag	Saturday
zondag	Sunday
gisteren	yesterday
vandaag	today
morgen	tomorrow
morgenochtend	tomorrow morning
jaar	year
maand	month
week	week
dag	day

Months

januari	January
februari	February
maart	March
april	April
mei	May
juni	June
juli	July
augustus	August
september	September
oktober	October
november	November
december	December

Time

uur	hour
minuut	minute
Hoe laat is het?	What time is it?

A Flemish menu reader

Basic terms and ingredients

belegd	filled or topped, as in belegde broodjes (bread rolls topped with cheese, etc)
boter	butter
boterham/broodje	sandwich/roll
brood	bread

dranken	drinks
eieren	eggs
gerst	barley
groenten	vegetables
Hollandse saus	hollandaise sauce
honing	honey
hoofdgerechten	main courses
kaas	cheese

koud	cold
nagerechten	desserts
peper	pepper
pindakaas	peanut butter
sla/salade	salad
smeerkaas	cheese spread
stokbrood	french bread
suiker	sugar
vis	fish
vlees	meat
voorgerechten	starters/hors d'oeuvres
vruchten	fruit
warm	hot
zout	salt

Cooking terms and methods

doorbakken	well-done
gebakken	fried or baked
gebraden	roast
gegrild	grilled
gekookt	boiled
geraspt	grated
gerookt	smoked
gestoofd	stewed
half doorbakken	medium-done
rood	rare

Starters and snacks

erwtensoeep/snert	thick pea soup with bacon or sausage
huzarensalade	potato salad with pickles
koffietafel	light midday meal of cold meats, cheese, bread, and perhaps soup
patat/friet	chips/french fries
soep	soup
uitsmijter	ham or cheese with eggs on bread

Meat and poultry

biefstuk (hollandse)	steak
biefstuk (duitse)	hamburger
eend	duck
fricandeau	roast pork
fricandel	frankfurter-like sausage

gehakt	minced meat
ham	ham
kalfsvlees	veal
kalkoen	turkey
karbonade	a chop
kip	chicken
kroket	spiced veal or beef in hash, coated in breadcrumbs
lamsvlees	lamb
lever	liver
ossenhaas	tenderloin beef
rookvlees	smoked beef
spek	bacon
worst	sausages

Fish and seafood

forel	trout
garnalen	prawns
haring	herring
haringsalade	herring salad
kabeljauw	cod
makreel	mackerel
mosselen	mussels
oesters	oysters
paling	eel
schelvis	haddock
schol	plaice
tong	sole
zalm	salmon
zeeduivel	monkfish

Vegetables

aardappelen	potatoes
bloemkool	cauliflower
bonen	beans
champignons	mushrooms
erwten	peas
hutspot	mashed potatoes and carrots
knoflook	garlic
komkommer	cucumber
prei	leek
rijst	rice
sla	salad, lettuce
stampot andijvie	mashed potato and endive

Flemish specialities

hutsepot – a winter-warmer consisting of various bits of beef and pork (including pigs' trotters and ears) casserole with turnips, celery, leeks and parsnips

konijn met pruimen – rabbit with prunes

paling in 't groen – eel braised in a green (usually spinach) sauce with herbs

stoemp – mashed potato mixed with vegetable and/or meat purée

stoofvlees – cubes of beef marinated in beer and cooked with herbs and onions

stoverij – stewed beef and offal (especially liver and kidneys), slowly tenderized in dark beer and served with a slice of bread covered in mustard

waterzooi – a delicious, filling soup-cum-stew, made with either chicken (*van kip*) or fish (*van riviervis*)

stampot boerenkool	mashed potato and cabbage
uien	onions
wortelen	carrots
zuurkool	sauerkraut

Sweets and desserts

appelgebak	apple tart or cake
gebak	pastry
ijs	ice cream
koekjes	biscuits
pannenkoeken	pancakes
pepernoten	ginger nuts
poffertjes	small pancakes, fritters
(slag)room	(whipped) cream
speculaas	spice and cinnamon-flavoured biscuit
stroopwafels	waffles
vla	custard

Fruits and nuts

aardbei	strawberry
amandel	almond
appel	apple
appelmoes	apple purée
citroen	lemon
druiven	grape
framboos	raspberry
hazelnoot	hazelnut
kers	cherry
kokosnoot	coconut
peer	pear
perzik	peach

pinda	peanut
pruim	plum/prune

Drinks

anijsmelk	aniseed-flavoured warm milk
appelsap	apple juice
bessenjenever	blackcurrant gin
chocomel	chocolate milk
citroenjenever	lemon gin
droog	dry
frisdranken	soft drinks
jenever	a Dutch/Belgian gin
karnemelk	buttermilk
koffie	coffee
koffie verkeerd	coffee with warm milk
kopstoot	beer with a jenever chaser
melk	milk
met ijs	with ice
met slagroom	with whipped cream
pils	beer
proost!	cheers!
sinaasappelsap	orange juice
thee	tea
tomatensap	tomato juice
vruchtensap	fruit juice
wijn	wine
(wit/rood/rosé)	(white/red/rosé)
vieux	Dutch brandy
zoet	sweet

French

French isn't a particularly easy language, despite the number of words shared with English, but learning the bare essentials is not difficult and makes all the difference. Even just saying "Bonjour, Madame/Monsieur" when you go into a shop and then pointing will usually get you a smile and helpful service. Most **Walloons** (French-speaking Belgians) working in the business and tourist industries have at least some knowledge of English, but beyond that, and especially in Wallonia's small towns and villages, you'll need at least a modicum of French to have any sort of conversation at all.

Differentiating words is the initial problem in understanding **spoken French** – it's very hard to get people to slow down. If, as a last resort, you get them to write it down, you'll probably find you know half the words anyway. Of the available **phrasebooks**, Rough Guides' own *French Phrasebook* should sort you out better than most.

L

LANGUAGE | French

Pronunciation

Consonants

Consonants are pronounced much as in English, except:

c is softened to the **s** sound when followed by an "e" or "i", or when it has a cedilla (ç) below it

ch is always **sh**

g is softened to a French **j** sound when followed by e or i (eg gendarme)

h is silent

j is like the s sound in "measure" or "treasure"

ll is like the **y** in **yes**

qu is normally pronounced like a **k** as in **key** (eg quatre)

r is growled (or rolled).

th is the same as **t**

w is **v**

Vowels

These are the hardest sounds to get right. Roughly:

a as in hat

e as in get

é between **get** and **gate**

è between **get** and **gut**

eu like the **u** in **hurt**

i as in **machine**

o as in **hot**

o, **au** as in **over**

ou as in **food**

u as in a pursed-lip version of **use**

More awkward are the combinations below when they occur at the ends of words, or are followed by consonants other than **n** or **m**:

in/im like the an in **anxious**

an/am, **en/em** as in **don** when said with a nasal accent

on/om like the **don** in **Doncaster** said by someone with a heavy cold

un/um like the u in **understand**.

Words and phrases

The basics

oui	yes
non	no
s'il vous plaît	please

(non) **merci**
bonjour
comment allez-vous??ça va?
bonjour

(no) thank you
hello
how are you?
good morning

bonjour	good afternoon
bonsoir	good evening
bonne nuit	good night
au revoir	goodbye
à bientôt	see you later
maintenant/ plus tard	now/later
pardon, Madame, Monsieur/ je m'excuse	sorry
parlez-vous anglais?	do you speak English?
je (ne) comprends (pas)	I (don't) understand
femmes	women
hommes	men
hommes/femmes	men's/women's toilets
enfants	children
je veux . . .	I want . . .
je ne veux pas	I don't want
d'accord	OK/agreed

Travel and shopping

la poste	post office
timbre(s)	stamp(s)
bureau de change	money exchange
la caisse	cashier
le guichet	ticket office
comment est-ce que je peux arriver à . . . ?	how do I get to . . . ?
où est . . . ?	where is . . . ?
combien y a-t-il jusqu'à . . . ?	how far is it to . . . ?
quand?	when?
c'est combien . . . ?	how much is . . . ?
loin/près	far/near
à gauche/à droite	left/ right
tout droit	straight ahead
quai	platform
ici/là	here/there
bon/mauvais	good/bad
grand/petit	big/small
ouvert/fermé	open/closed
pousser/tirer	push/pull
nouveau/vieux	new/old

bon marché/cher	cheap/expensive
chaud/froid	hot/cold
avec/sans	with/without
beaucoup/peu	a lot/a little
derrière	behind
voie de traversée	through traffic only

Numbers

zéro	0
un	1
deux	2
trois	3
quatre	4
cinq	5
six	6
sept	7
huit	8
neuf	9
dix	10
onze	11
douze	12
treize	13
quatorze	14
quinze	15
seize	16
dix-sept	17
dix-huit	18
dix-neuf	19
vingt	20
vingt-et-un	21
trente	30
quarante	40
cinquante	50
soixante	60
soixante-dix (local usage is septante)	70
quatre-vingts	80
quatre-vingt-dix (local usage is nonante)	90
cent	100
cent-et-un	101
deux cents	200
cing cents	500
mille	1000

Days

lundi	Monday
mardi	Tuesday
mercredi	Wednesday
jeudi	Thursday
vendredi	Friday
samedi	Saturday
dimanche	Sunday
matin	morning
après-midi	afternoon
soir	evening
nuit	night
hier	yesterday
aujourd'hui	today
demain	tomorrow
demain matin	tomorrow morning
jour	day
semaine	week
mois	month
année	year

Months

janvier	January
février	February
mars	March
avril	April
mai	May
juin	June
juillet	July
août	August
septembre	September
octobre	October
novembre	November
décembre	December

Time

minute	minute
heure	hour
Quelle heure est-il . . ?	What time is it...?

A French menu reader

Basic terms and ingredients

beurre	butter
chaud	hot
crème fraîche	sour cream
dessert	dessert
escargots	snails
frappé	iced
fromage	cheese
froid	cold
gibier	game
hors d'oeuvres	starters
légumes	vegetables
oeufs	eggs
pain	bread
poisson	fish
poivre	pepper
riz	rice
salade	salad
sel	salt
sucré/sucré	sugar/sweet (taste)
tourte	tart or pie
tranche	slice
viande	meat

Cooking terms and methods

à point	medium done
au four	baked
bien cuit	well done
bouilli	boiled
frit/friture	fried/deep fried
fumé	smoked
grillé	grilled
mijoté	stewed
pané	breaded
rôti	roast
saignant	rare (meat)
sauté	lightly cooked in butter

Starters and snacks

assiette anglaise	plate of cold meats
bisque	shellfish soup
bouillabaisse	fish soup from Marseilles
bouillon	broth or stock
consommé	clear soup
croque-monsieur	grilled cheese and ham sandwich

crudités	raw vegetables with dressing
potage	thick soup, usually vegetable
un sandwich/une baguette . . .	a sandwich . . .
de jambon	with ham
de fromage	with cheese
de saucisson	with sausage
à l'ail	with garlic
au poivre	with pepper
oeufs . . .	eggs . . .
au plat	fried eggs
à la coque	boiled eggs
durs	hard-boiled eggs
brouillés	scrambled eggs
omelette . . .	omelette . . .
nature	plain
au fromage	with cheese
salade de . . .	salad of . . .
tomates	tomatoes
concombres	cucumbers
crêpes . . .	pancakes . . .
au sucre	with sugar
au citron	with lemon
au miel	with honey
à la confiture	with jam

Meat and poultry

agneau	lamb
bifteck	steak
boeuf	beef
canard	duck
cheval	horsemeat
cuisson	leg of lamb
côtelettes	cutlets
dindon	turkey
foie	liver
gigot	leg of venison
jambon	ham
lard	bacon
porc	pork
poulet	chicken
saucisse	sausage
veau	veal

Fish and seafood

anchois	anchovies
anguilles	eels
carrelet	plaice
crevettes roses	prawns
hareng	herring
lotte de mer	monkfish
maquereau	mackerel
morue	cod
moules	mussels
saumon	salmon
sole	sole
truite	trout

Vegetables

ail	garlic
asperges	asparagus
carottes	carrots
champignons	mushrooms
choufleur	cauliflower
concombre	cucumber
genièvre	jumper
laitue	lettuce
oignons	onions
petits pois	peas
poireau	leek
pommes (de terre)	potatoes
tomate	tomato

Sweets and desserts

crêpes	pancakes
crêpes suzettes	thin pancakes with orange juice and liqueur
glace	ice cream
madeleine	small, shell-shaped sponge cake
parfait	frozen mousse, sometimes ice cream
petits fours	bite-sized cakes or pastries

Fruits and nuts

amandes	almonds
ananas	pineapple

Walloon and Brussels specialties

carbonnades de porc Bruxelloise – pork with a tarragon and tomato sauce
chicorées gratinées au four chicory baked with ham and cheese
fricadelles à la bière – meatballs in beer
fricassée Liègeois – fried eggs, bacon and sausage or blood pudding
le marcassin – young wild boar, served either cold and sliced or hot with vegetables
pâté de faisan – pheasant pâté
truite à l'Ardennaise – trout cooked in a wine sauce

L LANGUAGE French

cacahouète

peanut

cérises

cherries

citron

lemon

fraises

strawberries

framboises

raspberries

marrons

chestnuts

noisette

hazelnut

pamplemousse

grapefruit

poire

pear

pomme

apple

prune

plum

pruneau

prune

raisins

grapes

Drinks

bière

beer

café

coffee

eaux de vie

spirits distilled from
various fruits

jenever

Dutch/Flemish gin

lait

milk

orange/citron

fresh orange/lemon

pressé

juice

thé

tea

vin . . .

wine . . .

rouge

red

blanc

white

brut

very dry

sec

dry

demi-sec

sweet

doux

very sweet

Glossary

Flemish terms

Abdij Abbey.

Begijnhof Convent occupied by beguines (*begijns*), ie members of a sisterhood living as nuns but without vows, retaining the right of return to the secular world. See box, p.441.

Beiaard Carillon (ie a set of tuned church bells, either operated by an automatic mechanism or played by a keyboard).

BG *Begane grond* – “ground floor” (“basement” is **K** for *kelder*).

Belfort Belfry.

Beurs Stock exchange.

Botermarkt Butter market.

Brug Bridge.

Burgher Member of the upper or mercantile classes of a town, usually with certain civic powers.

Fiets Bicycle.

Fietspad Bicycle path.

Geen toegang No entry.

Gemeente Municipal, as in *Gemeentehuis* (town hall).

Gerechtshof Law Courts.

Gesloten Closed.

Gevel Gable: decoration on narrow-fronted canal houses.

Gilde Guild.

Gracht Canal.

Groentenmarkt Vegetable market.

(Grote) markt Central town square and the heart of most north Belgian communities, normally still the site of weekly markets.

Hal Hall.

Hof Courtyard.

Huis House.

Ingang Entrance.

Jeugdherberg Youth hostel.

Kaai Quay or wharf.

Kapel Chapel.

Kasteel Castle.

Kerk Church; eg Grote Kerk – the principal church of the town.

Koning King.

Koningin Queen.

Koninklijk Royal.

Korenmarkt Corn market.

Kunst Art.

Lakenhal Cloth hall: the building in medieval weaving towns where cloth would be weighed, graded and sold.

Let Op! Attention!

Luchthaven Airport.

Molen Windmill.

Noord North.

Ommegang Procession.

Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk or **OLV** Church of Our Lady.

Oost East.

Paleis Palace.

Plaats A square or open space.

Plein A square or open space.

Polder An area of land reclaimed from the sea.

Poort Gate.

Postbus Postbox.

Raadhuis Town hall.

Rijk State.

Schatkamer Treasury.

Schepenzaal Alderman's Hall.

Schone kunsten Fine arts.

Schouwburg Theatre.

Sierkunst Decorative arts.

Spionnetje Small mirror on a canal house enabling the occupant to see who is at the door without descending the stairs.

Spoor Track (as in railway) – trains arrive and depart on track (as distinct from platform) numbers.

Stadhuis The most common word for a town hall.

Stedelijk Civic, municipal.

Steeg Alley.

Steen Stone.

Stichting Institute or foundation.

Straat Street.

T/M *Tot en met* – “up to and including”.

Toegang Entrance.

Toren Tower.

Tuin Garden.

Uitgang Exit.

VA *Vanaf* – “from”.

Vleeshuis Meat market.

Volkskunde Folklore.

Weg Way.

West West.

ZOZ Please turn over (page, leaflet etc).

Zuid South.

French terms

Abbaye Abbey.

Aéroport Airport.

Auberge de jeunesse Youth hostel.

Beaux arts Fine arts.

Belfroi Belfry.

Béguinage Convent occupied by beguines, ie members of a sisterhood living as nuns but without vows and with the right of return to the secular world (see box, p.441).

Bicyclette Bicycle.

Bourse Stock exchange.

Chapelle Chapel.

Château Mansion, country house, or castle.

Cour Court(yard).

Couvent Convent, monastery.

Dégustation Tasting (wine or food).

Donjon Castle keep.

Église Church.

Entrée Entrance.

Est East.

Étage Floor (of a museum, etc).

Fermé Closed.

Fermeture Closing period.

Fouilles Archeological excavations.

Gare Railway station.

Gîte d'étape Dormitory-style lodgings situated in relatively remote parts of the country, which can house anywhere between ten and one hundred people per establishment.

Grand-place Central town square and the heart of most French communities, normally still the site of weekly markets.

Halle aux draps Cloth hall. The building in medieval weaving towns where cloth would be weighed, graded, stored and sold.

Halle aux viandes Meat market.

Halles Covered, central food market.

Hôpital Hospital.

Hôtel Hotel or mansion.

Hôtel de ville Town hall.

Jardin Garden.

Jours fériés Public holidays.

Maison House.

Marché Market.

Moulin Windmill.

Municipal Civic, municipal.

Musée Museum.

Nord North.

Notre Dame Our Lady.

Occidental West.

Ouvert Open.
Palais Palace.
Place Square, marketplace.
Pont Bridge.
Porte Gateway.
Quai Quay, or station platform.
Quartier District of a town.
Roi King.

Reine Queen.
Rue Street.
Sortie Exit.
Sud South.
Syndicat d'initiative Tourist office.
Tour Tower.
Trésor Treasury.

Art and architectural terms

Ambulatory Covered passage around the outer edge of the choir of a church.

Apse Semi-circular protrusion (usually) at the east end of a church.

Art Deco Geometrical style of art and architecture popular in the 1930s.

Art Nouveau Style of art, architecture and design based on highly stylized vegetal forms. Especially popular in the early part of the twentieth century.

Balustrade An ornamental rail, running, almost invariably, along the top of a building.

Baroque The art and architecture of the Counter-Reformation, dating from around 1600 onwards. Distinguished by extreme ornateness, exuberance and by the complex but harmonious spatial arrangement of interiors.

Basilica Catholic church with honorific privileges.

Carillon A set of tuned church bells, either operated by an automatic mechanism or played on a keyboard.

Carolingian Dynasty founded by Charlemagne; mid-eighth to early tenth century. Also refers to art, etc, of the period.

Caryatid A sculptured female figure used as a column.

Chancel The eastern part of a church, often separated from the nave by a screen (see “rood screen” p.488). Contains the choir and ambulatory.

Classical Architectural style incorporating Greek and Roman elements – pillars,

domes, colonnades etc – at its height in the seventeenth century and revived, as Neoclassical (see p.488), in the nineteenth.

Clerestory Upper storey of a church with windows.

Diptych Carved or painted work on two panels. Often used as an altarpiece – both static and, more occasionally, portable.

Expressionism Artistic style popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, characterized by the exaggeration of shape or colour; often accompanied by the extensive use of symbolism.

Flamboyant Florid form of Gothic (see “Gothic” p.488).

Fresco Wall painting – durable through application to wet plaster.

Gable The triangular upper portion of a wall – decorative or supporting a roof – which is a feature of many canal houses.

Gallo-Roman Period of Roman occupation of Gaul (including much of present-day Belgium), from the first to the fourth century AD.

Genre painting In the seventeenth century the term “genre painting” applied to everything from animal paintings and still lifes through to historical works and landscapes. In the eighteenth century, the term came only to be applied to scenes of everyday life.

Gobelin A rich French tapestry, named after the most famous of all tapestry manufacturers, based in Paris, whose most renowned period was during the reign of Louis XIV; also loosely applied to tapestries of similar style.

Gothic Architectural style of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, characterized by pointed arches, rib vaulting, flying buttresses and a general emphasis on verticality.

Merovingian Dynasty ruling France and parts of the Low Countries from the sixth to the middle of the eighth century. Refers also to art, etc., of the period.

Misericord Ledge on choir stall on which the occupant can be supported while standing; often carved with secular subjects (bottoms were not thought worthy of religious subject matter – quite right too).

Mosan Adjective applied to the lands bordering the River Meuse – hence Mosan metalwork.

Nave Main body of a church.

Neoclassical A style of classical architecture (see 487) revived in the nineteenth century, popular in the Low Countries during and after French rule in the early nineteenth century.

Neo-Gothic Revived Gothic style of architecture popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Renaissance The period of European history marking the end of the medieval period and the rise of the modern world. Defined, amongst many criteria, by an increase in classical scholarship, geographical

discovery, the rise of secular values and the growth of individualism. Began in Italy in the fourteenth century. Also refers to the art and architecture of the period.

Retable Altarpiece.

Rococo Highly florid, light and intricate eighteenth-century style of architecture, painting and interior design, forming the last phase of Baroque.

Romanesque Early medieval architecture distinguished by squat, heavy forms, rounded arches and naive sculpture.

Rood loft Gallery (or space) on top of a rood screen.

Rood screen Decorative screen separating the nave from the chancel. A rood loft is the gallery (or space) on top of it.

Stucco Marble-based plaster used to embellish ceilings, etc.

Transept Arms of a cross-shaped church, placed at ninety degrees to nave and chancel.

Triptych Carved or painted work on three panels. Often used as an altarpiece.

Tympanum Sculpted, usually triangular and recessed, panel above a door.

Vauban Seventeenth-century French military architect whose fortresses still stand all over Europe and the Low Countries; hence the adjective Vaubanesque.

Vault An arched ceiling or roof.

Avoid Guilt Trips

Buy fair trade coffee + bananas ✓

Save energy - use low energy bulbs ✓

- don't leave tv on standby ✓

Offset carbon emissions from flight to Madrid ✓

Send goat to Africa ✓

Join Tourism Concern today ✓

Slowly, the world is changing.
Together we can, and will, make a difference.

Tourism Concern is the only UK registered charity fighting exploitation in one of the largest industries on earth: people forced from their homes in order that holiday resorts can be built, sweatshop labour conditions in hotels and destruction of the environment are just some of the issues that we tackle.

Sending people on a guilt trip is not something we do. We know as well as anyone that holidays are precious. But you can help us to ensure that tourism always benefits the local communities involved.

Call 020 7133 3330
or visit tourismconcern.org.uk to find out how.

A year's membership of Tourism Concern costs just £20 (£12 unwaged)
- that's 38 pence a week, less than the cost of a pint of milk, organic of course.



TourismConcern



THE ROCCO FORTE COLLECTION



Brussels, Hotel Amigo

THE ART OF SIMPLE LUXURY

11 Luxury hotels in key European destinations

Berlin Brussels Edinburgh Florence Frankfurt Geneva London Manchester
Marrakech (2009) Munich Prague (2008) Rome Sicily (2009) St Petersburg

www.roccofortecollection.com

Small print and Index

A Rough Guide to Rough Guides

Published in 1982, the first Rough Guide – to Greece – was a student scheme that became a publishing phenomenon. Mark Ellingham, a recent graduate in English from Bristol University, had been travelling in Greece the previous summer and couldn't find the right guidebook. With a small group of friends he wrote his own guide, combining a highly contemporary, journalistic style with a thoroughly practical approach to travellers' needs.

The immediate success of the book spawned a series that rapidly covered dozens of destinations. And, in addition to impecunious backpackers, Rough Guides soon acquired a much broader and older readership that relished the guides' wit and inquisitiveness as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach and value-for-money ethos.

These days, Rough Guides include recommendations from shoestring to luxury and cover more than 200 destinations around the globe, including almost every country in the Americas and Europe, more than half of Africa and most of Asia and Australasia. Our ever-growing team of authors and photographers is spread all over the world, particularly in Europe, the USA and Australia.

In the early 1990s, Rough Guides branched out of travel, with the publication of Rough Guides to World Music, Classical Music and the Internet. All three have become benchmark titles in their fields, spearheading the publication of a wide range of books under the Rough Guide name.

Including the travel series, Rough Guides now number more than 350 titles, covering: phrasebooks, waterproof maps, music guides from Opera to Heavy Metal, reference works as diverse as Conspiracy Theories and Shakespeare, and popular culture books from iPods to Poker. Rough Guides also produce a series of more than 120 World Music CDs in partnership with World Music Network.

Visit www.roughguides.com to see our latest publications.

Rough Guide travel images are available for commercial licensing at www.roughguidespictures.com



SMALL PRINT

Rough Guide credits

Text editor: Annie Shaw and James Rice

Layout: Anita Singh

Cartography: Katie Lloyd-Jones

Picture editor: Nicole Newman

Production: Rebecca Short

Proofreader: Stewart Wild

Cover design: Chloë Roberts

Photographer: Roger Mapp, Jean-Christophe Godet & Anthony Cassidy

Editorial: London Kate Berens, Claire Saunders, Ruth Blackmore, Alison Murchie, Karoline Densley, Andy Turner, Keith Drew, Edward Aves, Alice Park, Lucy White, Jo Kirby, James Smart, Natasha Foges, Róisín Cameron, Emma Traynor, Emma Gibbs, Kathryn Lane, Joe Staines, Duncan Clark, Peter Buckley, Matthew Milton, Tracy Hopkins, Ruth Tidball; **New York** Andrew Rosenberg, Steven Horak, AnneLise Sorensen, Amy Hegarty, April Isaacs, Ella Steim, Anna Owens, Joseph Petta, Sean Mahoney; **Delhi** Madhavi Singh, Karen D'Souza
Design & Pictures: London Scott Stickland, Dan May, Diana Jarvis, Mark Thomas, Chloë Roberts, Sarah Cummins; **Delhi** Umesh Aggarwal, Ajay Verma, Jessica Subramanian,

Ankur Guha, Pradeep Thapliyal, Sachin Tanwar, Nikhil Agarwal

Production: Vicky Baldwin

Cartography: London Maxine Repath, Ed Wright; **Delhi** Jai Prakash Mishra, Rajesh Chhibber, Ashutosh Bharti, Rajesh Mishra, Animesh Pathak, Jasbir Sandhu, Karabi Gogoi, Amod Singh, Alakananda Bhattacharya, Swati Handoo

Online: Narender Kumar, Rakesh Kumar, Amit Verma, Rahul Kumar, Ganesh Sharma, Debojit Borah

Marketing & Publicity: London Liz Statham, Niki Hanmer, Louise Maher, Jess Carter, Vanessa Godden, Vivienne Watton, Anna Paynton, Rachel Sprackett; **New York** Geoff Colquitt, Megan Kennedy, Katy Ball;

Delhi Ragini Govind

Manager India: Punita Singh

Series Editor: Mark Ellingham

Reference Director: Andrew Lockett

Publishing Coordinator: Helen Phillips

Publishing Director: Martin Dunford

Commercial Manager: Gino Magnotta

Managing Director: John Duhigg

Publishing information

This fourth edition published February 2008 by

Rough Guides Ltd,

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL

345 Hudson St, 4th Floor,

New York, NY 10014, USA

14 Local Shopping Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi 110017, India

Distributed by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd,

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL

Penguin Group (USA)

375 Hudson Street, NY 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Australia)

250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell,

Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd,

10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario,

Canada M4V 1E4

Penguin Group (NZ)

67 Apollo Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 1310,
New Zealand

Cover concept by Peter Dyer.

Typeset in Bembo and Helvetica to an original
design by Henry Iles.

Printed in Far East

© Martin Dunford and Phil Lee 2008

No part of this book may be reproduced in any
form without permission from the publisher except
for the quotation of brief passages in reviews.

504pp includes index

A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-84353-856-1

The publishers and authors have done their
best to ensure the accuracy and currency of
all the information in **The Rough Guide to
Belgium and Luxembourg**, however, they can
accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or
inconvenience sustained by any traveller as
a result of information or advice contained in
the guide.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that
the fourth edition of **The Rough Guide to
Belgium and Luxembourg** is accurate and
up to date. However, things change – places
get “discovered”, opening hours are notoriously
fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower
standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left
something out, we'd like to know, and if you can
remember the address, the price, the hours, the
phone number, so much the better.

Please send your comments with the
subject line “**Rough Guide Belgium and
Luxembourg Update**” to email@roughguides.com,
or by post to the address above. We'll
credit all contributions and send a copy of the
next edition (or any other Rough Guide if you
prefer) for the very best emails.

Have your questions answered and tell others
about your trip at
[@community.roughguides.com](http://community.roughguides.com)



SMALL PRINT

Acknowledgements

Phil Lee would like to thank his editors, Annie Shaw and James Rice, for their patient good humour and attention to detail during the preparation of this new edition. Special thanks also to Katie Lloyd-Jones; Karin Sinnaeve of OPT Wallonie Bruxelles in Brussels; Anita Rampall of Tourism Flanders & Brussels; Pieter Vander Gheynst from the Conseil Bruxellois des Musées; Igor Daems from Toerisme Antwerpen; Jean

Claude Conter of the Luxembourg Tourist Office; Sophie Bouallegue of the Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Wallonia; and Malijn Maat for her help with all sorts of queries. I am especially grateful also for the assistance offered me by Sue Heady, Director of Communications at Rocco Forte Hotels. Thanks also to my co-writers Martin Dunford, Suzanne Morton-Taylor, Suzy Sumner and Loik Dal Molin.

Readers' letters

Thanks to all the readers who have taken the time to write in with comments and suggestions (and apologies if we've inadvertently omitted or misspelt anyone's name):

John Akhurst; Anthony Neil Ashworth; Richard Barker; Tom Baxter; Johan Bergstromallen-Allen; Otto Beuchner; Aleksandra Bilos; Lianne Bissell; Julia Bomken; Chris Burin; Dick Butler; Richard Butler; Martin Connors; David Cox; Emmanuel David; John & Frances Davies; Nele Depoorter; Mike Dobson; Simon Evans; Franck Faraday; Anthea Finlayson; Sheina Foulkes; Catherine Froidebise; Patrick Gardinal; Eric Van Geertruyden; Johan De Geyndt; Pieter Van der Gheynst; Mike Gingell; J. Goodfellow; David Gruccio; Katrien Gysen; Tony Hallas; John Hammond; Helen Harjanto; Lucy Hartiss; Pat Hindley; Herman Hindricks; Jay Jones; Adam Kramer;

John & Angela Lansley; Peter & Vivien Lee; Simon Loveitt; Heather McCann; Richard Madge; Loes Maveau; Claudia Merges; Slávi Metz; Deirdre & David Mills; William Milne; Paul Mitchell; Bernadette & Michael Mossley; Ros Murphy; Mary Murray; B. E. Neale; Stuart Newman; Adolphe Nzeza; Isabel Payno; Susan Plowden; Johnny Pring; David Reeves; Kiron Reid; John A. Rosenhof; Chris Serle; Silke; Roel Smeyers; Tim Smith; William Smith; Phyllis Snyder; K. Tan; Warren Thomas; Christina Thyssen; Robin Tilston; Elisabeth Timenchik; David Trussler; Frederik Vlieghe; Mary Whitham; Brian & Suzanne Williams; Steve Willis; Stephen Wills; Melanie Winterbotham; Glenda Young.



Photo credits

All photos © Rough Guides except the following:

Introduction

Luxembourg City © Panoramic Images/Robert Harding
Sand Sculptures Festival, Zeebrugg © Mark Renders
Jacques Brel in Concert © Henri Bureau/Sygma/Corbis

Things not to miss

02 Luxembourg City © Jean-Christophe Godet
04 Tresor du prieure de Namur
© Jean-Christophe Godet
09 Die Swaene Hotel, Bruges © Die Swaene Hotel
17 Vineyards near Remich, Luxembourg
© Jean-Christophe Godet
18 Kayak, Ardennes © Jeanmart/Belgian Tourist Office
19 Vianden Castle, Luxembourg © Franz-Marc Frei/Corbis
20 Holy Blood Procession © Alamy
22 Walkers in the Belgian Ardennes © Nick Haslam/Alamy
23 Het Zwin Nature Reserve © Jean-Christophe Godet
24 Binche, Mardi Gras Parade © Francois Lenoir/Reuters/Corbis

Beer... and more beer colour section

Belgian beers (full page) © Andrew Cowin/Alamy
Chimay Abbey © Cephas Picture Library/Alamy
Glass of Bellevue Kriek © Nigel Lloyd/Alamy
Selection of beer glasses © Arco Images/Alamy

Belgian food colour section

Brussels waffles © Marianna Raszowska
Omelette festival, Malmédy © Joern Sackermann/Alamy
Waterzooi © Simon Reddy/Alamy
Diners at pavement café © Peter Titmuss/Alamy
Cheese stall © Brian Harris/Alamy
Chocolate, Brabant, Brussels © Eye Ubiquitous/Alamy

Black and whites

p.350 Namur © Jeanmart/Belgian Tourist Office
p.377 Bastogne, Battle of the Bulge
© Jean-Christophe Godet
p.392 Spa, Thermal Pools © Jeanmart/Belgian Tourist Office
p.402 Cafés, Luxembourg
City © Jean-Christophe Godet
p.415 Grund District and River Alzette,
Luxembourg City © Jean-Christophe Godet
p.433 Esch sur Sure © Jean-Christophe Godet

Contexts

p.444 William The Silent © Hulton Archive/Getty
p.453 WW1, The Battle of Hofstade
© Underwood & Underwood/CORBIS



SMALL PRINT



Selected images from our guidebooks are available for licensing from:

ROUGHGUIDESPICTURES.COM

Index

Map entries are in **colour**.

A

Abri d'Hitler (Hitler's Belgian bunker)..... 339
 accommodation 37–40
accommodation price codes 38
 addresses 51
 Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, The 224–226
 airlines 30–31
 Albertstrand 159
 Angels of Mons, The 323
 Annevoie, Les Jardins d' 355
 Ansembourg (Lux) 421
 Anseremme 358, 361
ANTWERP 248–278
Antwerp 250–251
Antwerp, central 256
Antwerp & northeast Belgium 246–247
 accommodation 253
 arrival 252
 B&Bs 254
 bars 276
 boat trips 253
 cafés 275
 cinemas 277
 clubs 277
 concert halls 277
 diamond trade 268
 docks, old city 262
 fashion (shopping) 269
 Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen 274
 Groenplaats 259
 Grote Markt 255
 Het Eilandje 262
 hostels 255
 hotels 254
 information 252
 internet access 278
 listings 278
 Maagdenhuis 271
 markets 278
 Mayer van den Bergh, Museum 270
 Middleheim Open-Air Sculpture Museum 274
 ModeNatie 269
 MOMU 269
 MUHKA 273
 Museum Plantin-Moretus 259

Museum voor Schone Kunsten 271
 music, live 277
 Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum (National Maritime Museum) 260
 National Maritime Museum (Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum) 260
 Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal 258
 Plantin-Moretus, Museum 259
 Provinciaal Diamantmuseum 268
 restaurants 275
 Rockoxhuis Museum 263
 Rubenhuis 265
 Rubens 258, 262, 264, 265, 267, 273
 Schone Kunsten, Museum voor 271
 Sint Pauluskerk 261
 St Carolus Borromeus 264
 St Jacobskerk 266
 Stadhuis 255
 theatres 277
 transport, city 253
 zoo 268
 architectural terms, art and 487
 Ardennes, Flemish 182
Ardennes, The 345–400
Ardennes, The 346–347
 Arlon 376
art 460–465
 art and architectural terms 487
 Artevelde, Jacob van 232
 Ath 327
 Atlantikwall 160
 ATMs 55
 Attre 327
 Auden, W. H. 100

B

B&Bs 38
 Baarle-Hertog 248
 Baarle-Nassau 248
 banks 55

Bastogne 377
 Beaufort (Lux) 427
 Beaumont 342
 Beauvoorde 167
 beer 43, see *Belgian Beer* colour section
 beguinages, the 441
Belgium 4–5
 Belgium's royals 451
 Beloeil 326
 Berdorf (Lux) 425
 Bertrix 369
bibliography 466–472
 Binche 328
 Blankenberge 158
 Boetprocessie (Penitents' Procession), Veurne 166
 Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum (Open-air Museum) 299
books 466–472
 Borinage, The 325
 Bosch, Hieronymus 99, 201, 236, 461
 Botrange, Signal de 399
Botte de Hainaut, The 336–342
Bouillon 369–373
Bouillon 369
 Bourglinster (Lux) 420
 Bourscheid (Lux) 431
 Bourscheid-Moulin (Lux) 432
 Bouts, Dieric 99, 460, 207, 296
Brabant Wallon 139, 309–342
Brabant Wallon 310–311
 Brangwyn, Frank 203
 Bruegel, Pieter the Elder 91, 100, 270, 272, 461
 Bruegel, Pieter the Younger 100, 237, 264, 281, 461
 Brueglette 327
BRUGES 186–215
Bruges 188–189
Bruges, central 194
 accommodation 190
 arrival 187
 ATMs 215
 B&Bs 193
 bars 213
 Begijnhof 208

Belfort.....	195
boat trips.....	191
Burg, The.....	197
cafés.....	211
cinema.....	214
clubs.....	213
football.....	215
Groeninge Museum.....	199
Gruuthuse Museum.....	204
guided tours.....	191
Heilig Bloed Basiliek.....	197
hostels.....	193
hotels.....	192
information.....	190
internet access.....	215
Jeruzalemkerk.....	210
Kantcentrum.....	209
lace.....	215
listings.....	215
markets.....	215
Markt, The.....	195
Memling collection.....	206
Minnewater.....	208
music.....	214
Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk ...	204
performing arts.....	214
restaurants.....	212
St Janshospitaal.....	205
St Salvatorskathedraal.....	207
Stadhuis.....	198
tours, guided.....	191
transport, city.....	190
Brûly-de-Pesche.....	339
BRUSSELS	65–138
Brussels, EU Quarter & Le Cinquanteaire	110–1101
Brussels, Grand-Place & around	79
Brussels, Lower & Upper Town	84–85
Brussels, métro & prémétro	72
Brussels, St Gilles, avenue Louise & Ixelles	116–117
Brussels and around	66
Abbaye de la Cambre.....	120
accommodation.....	74–77
airports.....	68, 69
Anderlecht.....	121
arrival.....	68
Art Nouveau (in Brussels)	119
Atomium.....	124
Autoworld.....	113
B&Bs.....	76
bars.....	128–132
bars, live music.....	133
Beaux Arts, Musées Royaux des.....	98–104
bicycles, public.....	73
bilingualism.....	65
Bois de la Cambre.....	120
Botanique, Le.....	90

Bourse.....	87
BOZAR.....	96
Brel, Fondation internationale Jacques.....	91
Bruparck.....	124
Brussels Card.....	70
Bulletin, The.....	71
buses to.....	70
cafés.....	128–132
Cambre, Abbaye de la.....	120
Card, Brussels.....	70
Cathedral.....	93
Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée.....	89
Charles II, The health of.....	82
chocolates (shopping).....	136
cinemas.....	134
Cinquanteaire, Le.....	113
clubs.....	133
Comic Strip Centre, Belgian	89
comic strips (shopping) ...	136
concert halls.....	134
Coudenberg palace, remains of.....	105
Église Protestante.....	97
EU, in Brussels.....	112
European Union Parliament building.....	108
fashion, shops.....	87
Fernand Cocq, place.....	121
film.....	134
football.....	138
Forêt de Soignes.....	120
Galerie Ravenstein.....	95
Galleries St Hubert.....	89
gay scene.....	135
Grand-Place	78–86
guided tours.....	73
Heysel.....	124
history.....	67
hostels.....	77
Hôtel de Ville.....	78
hotels.....	74–76
information.....	70
internet.....	138
Ixelles.....	115–121
Jette.....	123
lace (shopping).....	137
Laeken.....	124
lesbian scene.....	135
listings.....	138
Louise, avenue.....	115–121
Louise, place.....	107
Lower Town	77–92
Maison d'Erasmus.....	122
Manneken Pis.....	86
markets.....	137
Marolles, Quartier.....	92
Martyrs, place des.....	89
Maypole planting.....	90
métro, the.....	71
MIM.....	97
Mini-Europe.....	125
Mont des Arts.....	96
Musée Antoine Wiertz.....	109
Musée Belvue, Le.....	105

Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze.....	122
Musée Constantin Meunier	119
Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles	83
Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles.....	121
Musée des Instruments de Musique.....	97
Musée des Sciences Naturelles.....	111
Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle.....	86
Musée René Magritte.....	123
Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale.....	114
Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire.....	114
Musée Victor Horta.....	118
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.....	113
Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts.....	98–104
music, bars, live.....	133
nightlife.....	132
Notre Dame de la Chapelle	91
Notre Dame du Sablon.....	106
Ommegang, The.....	106
Palais de Charles de Lorraine	96
Palais de Justice.....	107
Palais des Beaux Arts.....	96
Palais Royal.....	104
Parc de Bruxelles.....	105
restaurants.....	125–128
Royale, place.....	97
Sablon.....	106
Serres Royales.....	124
shopping.....	135–137
St Gilles.....	115–121
St Jean Baptiste au Béguinage.....	88
Ste Catherine.....	87
taxis.....	73
Tervuren.....	114
Théâtre de la Monnaie.....	89
theatres.....	134
tours, guided.....	73
train stations in.....	69
trains to.....	69
trams.....	71
transport, city.....	71
Upper Town	92–107
Bulge, Battle of the – museum.....	434
Bulge, The Battle of the	378
bus contacts.....	31
bus from the UK.....	30
buses within Belgium and Luxembourg.....	33

C

Caesar, Julius 167
 camping..... 39
 Camus, Albert..... 226
 canoeing around Bouillon
 374
 canoeing around Rochefort
 366
 canoeing in the Ourthe
 valley..... 381
 canoeing near Echternach
 (Lux)..... 425
 Cantillon brewery, Brussels
 122
 car rental 34
 car rental agencies 36
 carillon, the..... 286
 Carnival in Binche 328
 Celles..... 36
 cellphones 57
Charleroi..... 333–336
Charleroi..... 334
 children, travelling with
 51
Chimay..... 340–342
Chimay..... 340
 chocolate..... 9
 Clervaux (Lux)..... 434
 climate change 28
 coastal tram (Kusttram)
 150
 Comic Strip Centre, Belgian
 89
 Comines 178
 consulates, Belgian 52
 consulates, Luxembourg
 53
 costs, average..... 51
 Couvin 338
 credit cards 55
 crime..... 51
 Cuesmes 325
 currency..... 55
 currency exchange rates
 55
 cycling 36
 cycling around Bouillon
 374
 cycling around Damme
 217
 cycling around Rochefort
 366
 cycling in the Ourthe
 valley..... 381
 cycling near Dinant..... 361
 cycling near Echternach
 (Lux)..... 425

cycling the Lesse river
 valley..... 361

D

Damme 215–218
 David, Gerard 100, 201,
 272, 461
 David, Jacques Louis
 103, 463
De Haan..... 156–158
De Haan..... 157
 De Panne..... 162
 De Westhoekreservaat
 162
 debit cards 55
 Delvaux, Paul..... 102, 203,
 237, 273, 465
 Delvaux, Paul, museum
 161
 Deurle 241
 diamond trade, in Antwerp
 268
 Diekirch (Lux)..... 430
 Diksmuide..... 167
Dinant 356–359
 disabilities, travellers with
 52
 Dodengang (Trench of
 Death) 168
 Dohan 374
 Doudou, The..... 324
 drinking, eating and
 41–43, see
 *Belgian Food and Belgian
 Beer* colour sections
 driving from the UK 29
 driving within Belgium and
 Luxembourg 33
 Durbuy 381
 Dyck, Anthony van 101,
 463, 180, 237, 258, 264,
 287

E

eating and drinking
 41–43, see
 *Belgian Food and Belgian
 Beer* colour sections
 Ecaussinnes 329
Echternach (Lux)
 423–426
 EHIC 54
 Ehnen (Lux)..... 421

Eisch, Vallée de l' (Lux)
 421
 electricity 52
 email access..... 54
 embassies, Belgian 52
 embassies, Luxembourg
 53
 emergencies 57
 Ensor, James..... 104, 154,
 237, 273, 464
 entry requirements 52
 Eprave 366
 Erasmus, Desiderius..... 122,
 123
 Esch-sur-Alzette (Lux)
 423
 Esch-sur-Sûre (Lux)..... 433
 Ettelbruck (Lux) 431
 EU, in Brussels..... 112
 Eupen 395
 Euro Space Center..... 368
 euro, the 55
 Eurostar 29
 Eurotunnel 29
 Eurotunnel contact..... 31
 exchange rates, currency
 55
 Eyck, Jan van 224–226,
 272, 199, 460

F

farm holidays..... 40
 ferries from the UK..... 29
 ferry contacts 31
festivals 45–49
Flanders..... 145–242
Flanders..... 148–149
 Flanders Fields Museum,
 In..... 172
 Flemish cuisine..... 42
 flights
 from Australia..... 28
 from Canada 28
 from Ireland 27
 from New Zealand 28
 from South Africa 29
 from the UK..... 27
 from the USA 28
 online booking 30
 Floreffe, Abbaye de 355
 Florenville 376
 food 41–43, see *Belgian
 Food* colour section
 Fort Breendonk Gestapo
 centre..... 291
 Frahan 373
 Frère, Château de..... 360

G

Gaume, The 375
 gay travellers 53
 Gaye, Marvin 152
 Gendron-Celles 361, 362
GHENT 218–241
Ghent 220–221
Ghent, central 225
 accommodation 222
 Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,
 The 224–226
 arrival 219
 ATMs 240
 B&Bs 223
 bars 239
 Belfort 227
 boat trips 222
 cafés 238
 camping 223
 cinema 240
 clubs 239
 Design Museum 230
 Duivelsteen 233
 Eyck, Jan van 224–226
 Graslei 229
 Groentenmarkt 229
 Het Gravensteen 230
 hostel 223
 hotels 222
 Huis van Aljin Museum 231
 information 219
 internet access 240
 Korenmarkt 228
 Lakenhalle 227
 listings 240
 markets 241
 Museum voor Schone
 Kunsten 236
 Patershol, The 232
 performing arts 241
 restaurants 238
 S.M.A.K. 236
 Schone Kunsten, Museum
 voor 236
 St Baafskathedraal 224
 St Michielskerk 230
 St Nikolaaskerk 228
 Stadhuis 227
 STAM 235
 transport, city 219
 Vooruit 240
 Vrijdagmarkt 232
 walking tours 222
glossary, English 487
glossary, Flemish 485
glossary, French 486
 Goes, Hugo van der 460,
 200, 207
 Grand-Hornu 326
 Greene, Graham 186
 Grevenmacher (Lux) 422
 Gutland (Lux) 420

H

Hainaut 309–342
Hainaut 310–311
 Hamerenne 366
 Hankar, Paul 119
 Han-sur-Lesse 365
 Haspengouw, The 300
 Hasselt 298
 Hastière-par-Delà 360
 Hautes Fagnes, The 399
 health 53
 Hemingway, Ernest 368
 Herbeumont 375
 Het Zoute 159
 Het Zwin Natuurreservaat
 160
 Hëttermillen (Lux) 422
 hiking – see walking
history 439–459
 Hitler's (Belgian) bunker
 339
 Hoeke 217
 Hohes Venn, The 399
 holidays, public 56
 Hollenfels (Lux) 421
 Hornu 326
 Horta, Victor 89, 113,
 118, 119, 317
 hostels 39
 hotels 37
 Houyet 362
 Hugo, Victor 83, 428
 Huy 382

I

Ieper 169–173
Ieper 170
 Ijzertoren, Diksmuide 168
 information 58
 insurance 54
 internet access 54
 internet sites, useful 59

J

Jemelle 362
 jenever 43
 Jewish Deportation
 Museum 289
 Jordaens, Jacob 101,
 237, 267, 273, 463

K

kayaking around Bouillon
 374
 kayaking around Rochefort
 366
 kayaking in the Ourthe
 valley 381
 kayaking near Echternach
 (Lux) 425
 Kempen, The 248
 Khnopff, Fernand 104,
 202, 464
 kings of Belgium 451
 Kipling, Rudyard 173
 Kirchberg, Luxembourg
 City 416
 Kluisberg 182
 Knokke 159
 Knokke-Heist 159
 Koerich (Lux) 421
 Koksijde-Bad 161
Kortrijk 178–181
Kortrijk 179
 Kusttram (coastal tram)
 150

L

La Petite Suisse
 Luxembourgeoise 423
La Roche-en-Ardenne
 379
 Langemark 175
language, Flemish
 475–479
language, French
 480–484
 language, place names
 36
**Language Divide,
 Belgium's**
 457
**Language Divide,
 Belgium's** 458–459
 Larochette (Lux) 427
 Lautrec, Toulouse 121
 lesbian travellers 53
 Lesse river valley 361
Leuven 292–297
Leuven 293
 Libramont 369, 379
Liège 384–391
Liège 386–387
Lier 278–283
Lier 279

Lo 167
 Lombard, Lambert 389
 Lombardsijde-Bad 160
 Luxembourg Ardennes 434
 Luxembourg Card 405
LUXEMBOURG CITY
 407–419
Luxembourg City 408
Luxembourg City, Old Town 412
 Luxembourg cuisine 42
 Luxembourg history 405
 Luxembourg language 406
 Luxembourg travel passes 405
 Luxembourg wineries 422
Luxembourg, Grand Duchy of 403–435
Luxembourg, Grand Duchy of 404
 Luxembourgeoise, La Petite Suisse 423
 Luxembourgish 406

M

Maboge 381
 Magritte, René 102, 237, 273, 333, 335, 465
 mail 54
 Malmédy 397
 Manneken Pis 86
 maps 55
 Maredret, Abbaye de 356
 Maredsous, Abbaye de 356
 Mariembourg 337
 Marx, Karl 82
 Matsys, Quentin 100, 263, 270, 272, 316, 461
 McCrae, John 175
Mechelen 283–291
Mechelen 284
 media 44
 Melreux-Hotton 380
 Memling, Hans 99, 201, 206, 272, 460
 Menen 178
 Menin see Menen
 Menin Gate 172
menu reader, Flemish 477–479
menu reader, French 482–484
 Mersch (Lux) 420

Meunier, Constantin 103, 464
 Meuse river valley 360–361
 Mévergnies 327
 Middelkerke 160
 mobile phones 57
 Molinee valley 356
 Mondorf-les-Bains, spa waters (Lux) 419
Mons 320–325
Mons 321
 Moselle river valley (Lux) 421
 mosquitoes 56

N

Nadrin 381
Namur 348–354
Namur 349
 Nervia Group (of artists) 323
 newspapers 44
 Nieuwpoort 160
 Nieuwpoort-aan-Zee 161
 Nismes 338
 Nivelles 330

O

Oignies, Brother Hugo d' 351
 Olloy-sur-Viroin 339
 online booking, flights 30
 Oostduinkerke-Bad 161
 opening hours 56
 Orval, Abbaye d' 376
Ostend 151–156
Ostend 151
Oudenaarde 181–186
Oudenaarde 182
 Ourthe valley 381

P

Passchendaele 176
 passports 52
 Patton, General 431, 432
 Penitents' Procession (Boetprocessie), Veurne 166

Permeke, Constant 104, 203, 273, 465
 pharmacies 54
 Philippeville 337
 phones 57
 police 57
 post 54
 Poupehan 373
 press, the 44
Provincial borders, Belgium 457
 Provoost, Jan 202, 461
 public holidays 56
 public toilets 58

R

radio stations 44
 Rance 342
 Redu 368
 Reinhardstein, Château de 398
 Remich (Lux) 421
 René Magritte 123
 Rimbaud, Arthur 86
 Robertville 398
 Rochefort 362
 Rochehaut 373
 Ronquières 329
 Rops, Felicien 352
 Rubens 101, 227, 237, 258, 262, 264, 265, 267, 273, 289, 291, 462
 rural holidays 40

S

safety, personal 51
 Sanctuary Wood cemetery 177
 Sax, Adolphe 358
 Scourmont, Abbaye Notre-Dame 341
 Semois river valley 373, 374
 Septfontaines (Lux) 421
 shopping (sizes) 50
 Simenon, Georges 384, 390
 Sint Martens-Latem 241
 Sint Truiden 303
 Soignies 329
Spa 392–395
Spa 393
 spirits 43
 St Hubert 367

St Idesbald 161
 St Rémy, Abbaye de 364
 Stavelot 396
 steam train, Trois Vallées
 337
 Steichen, Edward 434
 Sûre river valley (Lux) ... 431

T

tapestries (in Brussels) ... 86
 tapestries (of Oudenaarde)
 183, 185
 tapestries (of Tournai) ... 316
 telephones 57
 television 44
 Tjil Ulenspiegel 216
 time 58
 Timmermans, Felix 280
 Tintin 90
 tipping 58
 toilets, public 58
Tongeren 300–303
Tongeren 301
 tour operators 31
 tourist offices, Belgian 58
 tourist offices, Luxembourg
 58
Tournai 312–319
Tournai 313
 train contacts 31
 trains from the UK 29
 trains within Belgium and
 Luxembourg 32–33
**trains within Belgium and
 Luxembourg** 34–35
 travel agents 31
 travellers' cheques 55
 Trench of Death
 (Dodengang) 168
 Tyne Cot cemetery 175

U

Ulenspiegel, Tjil 216

V

Vallée de l'Eisch (Lux) ... 421
 Van Gogh, Vincent, house
 of 325
 Verviers 392
Veurne 163–166
Veurne 164
 Veurne-Ambacht 166
 Vêves 361
Vianden (Lux) 427–430
 Vierves-sur-Viroin 339
 Villers, L'Abbaye de 331
 Villers-la-Ville 331
 Vingts, Les 464
 Virton 375
 visas 52
 Vlaams Belang 459
 Vlaams Blok 459
 Vlaamse Ardennen 182

W

Walcourt 336
 walking around Bouillon
 374
 walking around Rochefort
 366
 walking in the Ourthe
 valley 381
 walking near Dinant 361
 walking near Echternach
 (Lux) 425
 walking the Hautes Fagnes
 399
 walking the Hohes Venn
 399
 walking the Lesse river
 valley 361
Wallonian Brabant 139,
 309–342
Wallonian Brabant
 310–311
 Wallonian cuisine 41
Waterloo 139–143
Waterloo 140
 Waterloo, Battle of 141
 websites, useful 59

Wellenstein (Lux) 422
 Westende-Bad 160
 Weyden, Rogier van der
 99, 200, 236, 272,
 318, 460
 Wiertz, Antoine 104, 464
 Willebroek 292
 William the Silent 445,
 468
 Wiltz 434
 wineries of Luxembourg
 422
 wines 43
 Wordsworth, William 193
 World War I, The Angels of
 Mons 323
 World War I, the Ypres
 Salient 173–178
 World War II, Fort
 Breendonk Gestapo
 centre 291
 World War II, Jewish
 Deportation Museum
 289
 Wormeldange (Lux) 422
 Wulveringem 167

X

XX, Les 464

Y

youth hostels 39
Ypres Salient 173–178
Ypres Salient 174
 Ypres see leper

Z



































Zeebrugge 158
 Zillebeke 178
 Zonnebeke 177
 Zoutleeuw 304



NOTES

Map symbols

maps are listed in the full index using coloured text

	Chapter division boundary		Statue
	International boundary		Memorial/monument
	Regional boundary		Abbey
	Motorway		Museum
	Road		Parking
	Pedestrianized street		Metro station
	Steps		Prémétro station
	Footpath		Airport
	Railway		Bus/tram stop
	Ferry route		Information office
	River		Post office
	Point of interest		Internet access
	Mountain peak		Building
	Castle		Church
	Wall		Park
	Gate		Cemetery
	Restaurant		Beach

We're covered. Are you?



ROUGH GUIDES Travel Insurance

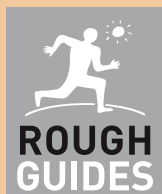
Visit our website at www.roughguides.com/website/shop or call:

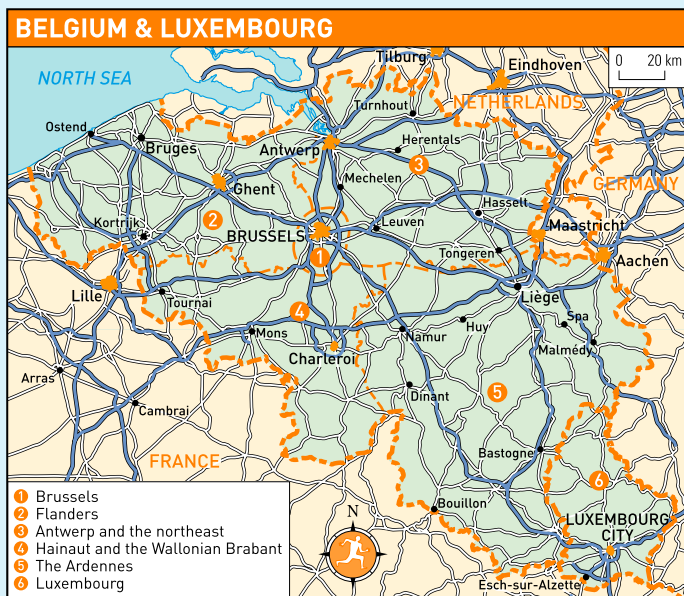


- 📞 UK: 0800 083 9507
- 📞 Spain: 900 997 149
- 📞 Australia: 1300 669 999
- 📞 New Zealand: 0800 55 99 11
- 📞 Worldwide: +44 870 890 2843
- 📞 USA, call toll free on: 1 800 749 4922

Please quote our ref: ***Rough Guides books***

Cover for over 46 different nationalities and available in 4 different languages.





About this book

Rough Guides are designed to be good to read and easy to use. The book is divided into the following sections and you should be able to find whatever you need in one of them.

The **colour section** is designed to give you a feel for Belgium and Luxembourg, suggesting when to go and what not to miss, and includes a full list of **contents**. Then comes **basics**, for pre-departure information and other practicalities.

The **guide** chapters cover Belgium and Luxembourg's regions in depth, each starting with a highlights panel, introduction and a map to help you plan your route.

The **contexts** section fills you in on history, art and books, while individual **colour inserts** introduce Belgium and Luxembourg's beers and cuisine, and **language** gives you an extensive menu reader and enough French and Flemish to get by.

The book concludes with all the **small print**, including details of how to send in updates and corrections, and a comprehensive **index**.

This fourth edition published February 2008.

The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in The Rough Guide to Belgium and Luxembourg, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.



Rough Guides • Broaden your horizons

Explore every corner of Belgium & Luxembourg using the clearest maps of any guide.

Choose where to go and what to see, inspired by dozens of photos.

Read expert background on everything from Belgium's best beers to exquisite medieval Flemish art.

Rely on our selection of the best places to stay, eat and party, for every budget.

It's like having a local friend help plan your trip.

"A comforting, easy companion."

The Independent on Sunday



OTHER ROUGH GUIDES INCLUDE:

www.roughguides.com



Published by
Rough Guides

Distributed by
The Penguin
Group

