

Brussels

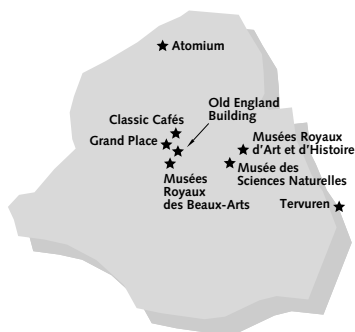


The fascinating capital of Belgium and Europe sums up all the contradictions of both. It's simultaneously historic yet hip, bureaucratic yet bizarre, self-confident yet un-showy and multicultural to its roots. The city's contrasts and tensions are multilayered yet somehow consistent in their very incoherence – Francophone versus Flemish, Bruxellois versus Belgian versus Eurocrat versus immigrant. And all this plays out on a cityscape that swings block by block from majestic to quirky to grimly rundown and back again. It's a complex patchwork of overlapping yet distinctive neighbourhoods that takes time to understand. Organic art nouveau facades face off against 1960s concrete disgraces. Regal 19th-century mansions contrast with the brutal glass of the EU's real-life Gotham City. World-class museums lie hidden in suburban parks and a glorious beech forest extends extraordinarily deep into the city's southern flank. This whole maelstrom swirls forth from Brussels' medieval core, where the truly grand Grand Place is surely one of the world's most beautiful squares.

Constant among all these disparate images is the enviable quality of everyday life – great shopping, consistently excellent dining at all price ranges, sublime chocolate shops and a *café* scene that could keep you drunk for years. But Brussels doesn't go out of its way to impress. Its citizens have a low-key approach to everything. And their quietly humorous, deadpan outlook on life is often just as surreal as the classic Brussels-painted canvases of Magritte.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Europe's most beautiful square?** Ponder the question over a few beers on the gorgeous Grand Place (p76)
- **Big balls** Nine of them arranged like a school chemistry set form the amazing Atomium (p90)
- **Drinkers' delight** *Cafés* ancient and modern, including an inspiring selection of classics scattered around the Bourse (p103)
- **Art history** Old masters and surrealists at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (p82), with its shiny new Magritte Museum annex
- **Art nouveau** The wonderful Old England Building (p82) – one of many art nouveau masterpieces (p82)
- **Dino discovery** Palaeontology comes to life at the magnificent Musée des Sciences Naturelles (p85)
- **Forgotten treasure** Extraordinary riches lurk in the vast Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (p87)



■ POPULATION: 1,081,000

■ LANGUAGES: FRENCH & DUTCH

BRUSSELS IN...

One Day

Gape in wonder at the **Grand Place** (p76), Brussels' gorgeous central square. Discover that the **Manneken Pis** (p77) is much smaller than you'd imagined then stroll through the **Galleries St-Hubert** en route to finding his 'squatting sister', the **Jeanneke Pis**. Admire the colourful scene that is the **Rue des Bouchers** (p78), then move on for a seafood lunch in the convivial **St-Catherine** area (p104). Window shop up Rue Antoine Dansaert, exploring the compact, quirky **Fashion District** (p79) then grab a drink in the **Cirio** (p103) or one of the other fabulous classic *cafés* around the **Bourse** (p78). Admire the cityscape as well as the musical instruments at the majestic **Old England Building** (p82), nip across the road to the new **Magritte Museum**, then have a drink in the eccentric **La Fleur en Papier Doré**, where Magritte himself used to booze. Admire the bulky **Palais de Justice** and preen a little as you stroll past the antique shops and pretty people on the Sablon. Have an exotic pita snack in the art nouveau *café* **Perroquet** (p100) or head straight to lively **Délirium Café** (p104) to sample a range of fine Belgian beers. Quickly realise that you should have stayed a week.

One Week

Buy a 72-hour **Brusselscard** (p76) for three intense pre-paid days of brilliant museums, but remember to start it on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday – otherwise you'll 'waste' a day. With the card in hand don't miss the **Musée des Sciences Naturelles** (p85), **Cinquantenaire museums** (p87), **Africa Museum** (p92), **Chinese Pagoda** (p90) or your free beer at **L'Arbre d'Or** (p77) on the Grand Place. Once the card has expired discover lambic beers at the **Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze** (p91), visit the unique **Atomium** (p90), peruse the comic-strip murals (p81), discover the restaurants, cultural complexities and **art nouveau houses** of Ixelles (p88), bus out to the **Waterloo Battlefield** (p217), and meet up with a **Tof person** (see the boxed text, p87). And all the while, never stop drinking your way through our list of inspirational *cafés* (p102). Santé!

HISTORY

According to legend, St-Géry built a chapel on a swampy Senne (Zenne) River island back in AD 695. A settlement that grew around it had become known as Bruocsella (from *bruoc*, marsh, and *sella*, dwelling) by 979 when Charles, Duke of Lorraine moved here from Cambrai. He built a fort on St-Géry island amid flowering irises, which have since become the city's symbol. By 1100 Bruocsella was a walled settlement and capital of the Duchy of Brabant. In 1229 Brabant's Duke Henri I published the first Brussels charter guaranteeing protection for (and expectations of) the town's citizens. In 1355 the Count of Flanders, then Brabant's neighbourhood enemy, invaded and seized Brussels. However, a year later, Brussels citizens, led by Everard 't Serclaes, ejected the Flemish to considerable jubilation. 't Serclaes went on to become a prominent local leader fighting for ever more civic privileges, a stance which finally saw him assassinated in 1388. This caused a furore in Brussels, whose towns-

folk blamed the lord of Gaasbeek and took revenge by burning down his castle (p113). Today, an anachronistic statue of 't Serclaes' corpse (Grand Place 8, p77) is still considered a potent source of luck.

Meanwhile, the cloth trade was booming. By the 15th century, prosperous markets filled the streets around the Grand Place selling products for which some are still named: Rue au Beurre (Butter St), Rue des Bouchers (Butchers' St) etc. The city's increasingly wealthy merchant guilds established their headquarters on the Grand Place, where medieval tournaments and public executions took place in the shadow of a towering Hôtel de Ville.

From 1519 Brussels came to international prominence as capital of Charles Quint's vast Hapsburg Empire (see p27). In 1549 Charles' future-successor, Philip II of Spain, was welcomed to the city in an incredibly lavish pageant that today forms the basis of the Ommegang (p17). But fanatically Catholic Philip was unimpressed with the lowlanders' brewing Protestantism. His

Spanish Inquisition resulted in thousands of executions including those of anti-Spanish Counts Egmont and Hoorn in front of the Maison du Roi.

In 1695, Louis XIV's French army under Marshal De Villeroy bombarded Brussels for 36 hours, hoping to divert Dutch attention from its attempts to regain Namur (Namur being temporarily occupied by France at this stage). The damage was truly catastrophic. Around 4000 houses were destroyed, around a third of the city was reduced to rubble and contemporary estimates calculated damages at 50 million florins (equivalent to some €5 billion in today's terms). The Grand Place was virtually obliterated though miraculously the Hôtel de Ville survived relatively intact. And within five years most of the square's guild-halls were rebuilt, making them even more impressive than they'd been before.

Austrian rule in the 18th century fostered urban development, with the construction of grand squares such as Place Royale and completion of the royal palace at Laeken (1784). Many of the Upper Town's architectural gems were built during this time and in the brief eras of French and Dutch rule that followed. In 1830 Brussels proved the unlikely starting point of the curious 1830 'operatic' revolt (see boxed text, p107) that led Belgium to entirely unexpected independence.

At this stage Brussels was home to around 100,000 people. However, the city grew enormously in both population and stature during the next century, greatly funded by Wallonia's industrial revolution along with King Léopold II's plunder of the Congo. While millions of Congolese died, Brussels lavished itself with some of Europe's finest belle époque and art nouveau buildings.

Unlike much of the country, Brussels survived both world wars comparatively unscathed. The city underlined a new era of post-war optimism by hosting the 1958 World's Fair in the shadow of one of the era's most extraordinary constructions, the Atomium (p90). Brussels' growth was further boosted when it became the headquarters of NATO and EEC (later EU). However, in the city's drive for progress and modernism, much of the capital's once-fine architecture was torn down to make way for mediocre concrete office buildings, a form of architectural vandalism that's now widely known as *Brusselization*. A stint as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2000 finally gave

the city the push it needed to start properly protecting heritage buildings and sprucing up neglected neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, brutal steel-and-glass redevelopment has continued apace in the EU and Bruxelles-Midi areas while plenty of grimy urban areas still await attention.

ORIENTATION

Most of Brussels is surrounded by 'the Ring' ('R0'), a far-from-ring-shaped motorway that gets blocked almost solid with rush-hour traffic from September to June. Lengthy connectors involving long tunnel sections (and thus invisible on many maps) link to a much smaller 'inner ring' that traces a rough pentagon along lines that were once the city walls. The central Senne River is effectively invisible, having been covered over in the late 19th-century for health reasons (cholera outbreaks and the like).

Best explored on foot, Central Brussels' historic core includes the **Lower Town** (Map p70) around the imposing Grand Place, the partly gentrified working-class **Marolles** (Map pp72-3) and the much grander **Upper Town** (Map pp68-9) with its royal buildings, museums and snooty Sablon.

Southeast of the inner ring, the vibrantly multicultural area of **Matonge** (p89) is home to the capital's African community while further east, between **Etterbeek** and the monumental arch of the **Cinquantenaire**, lies the **EU quarter** (p85).

Built by Léopold II to access his new forest park at La Cambre, the patchily grand, upmarket Ave Louise runs south through vibrant **Ixelles** (Elsene in Dutch; Map pp72-3), which is liberally dotted with art nouveau architecture, as is somewhat down-at-heel **St-Gilles** (Map pp72-3) to its direct west.

Just north of the inner ring lie the run-down, if once grand, immigrant neighbourhoods of **Schaerbeek** (Map pp66-7) and **St-Josse** (Map pp68-9) and the Gare du Nord. Directly southeast of the station is a pink-windowed red-light district, yet to its north lies a shiny new tower-block business district resembling a miniature Manhattan. Post-industrial **Molenbeek** (Map pp66-7) is the city's modern-day port on the Charleroi-Antwerp canal. Further north, **Laeken** is where the Belgium's royal family lives and in **Heysel** you'll find that intriguing space-age leftover from the 1958 World's Fair, the Atomium.

BILINGUAL BRUSSELS

The 19 *communes* of the Brussels Capital Region (Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest in Dutch, Région de Bruxelles-Capitale in French) comprise the only area in Belgium that's officially bilingual. For simplicity in this book we have only used one version of each name (the French) but in fact on buildings, train stations, road signs, you name it, there are two versions. That explains why certain Brussels street names look so flabbergastingly long. In fact they're saying the same thing twice. For example, in 'Rue de l'Ecuyer Schildknaapstraat', both Rue de l'Ecuyer (French) and Schildknaapstraat (Dutch) mean Squire Street. Handily, the grammatical form of the two languages means that the French terms *rue/avenue* (street/avenue) always come first while in Dutch *straat/laan* are tacked on to the end. This allows for a space-saving trick when the core name doesn't need translating, ie a sign might end up reading something like 'Ave Maxlaan' (ie literally Ave Max Avenue). In the Marolles, street names even add a third version in Bruxellois (the city's traditional dialect).

Brussels is surrounded by Flanders, where all signs are in Dutch. So for places like Tervuren, Zaventem (the airport) and Grimbergen covered in this chapter but beyond Brussels' official regional boundary, the street names are given in Dutch. If you want to see normally placid Belgians get inexplicably heated, ask them what they think about the six Faciliteitengemeente/Communes à Facilité on the edge of Brussels (where people 'should' speak Dutch but in reality the majority speak French).

Brussels has numerous train stations. Major international services invariably arrive at Bruxelles-Midi, whose down-at-heel surroundings are gradually being punctuated by stark contemporary tower buildings. Generally you're advised to hop straight on any connecting train (four minutes) to subterranean Bruxelles-Central, which is handiest for the historic centre. Use Bruxelles-Luxembourg or Bruxelles-Schuman for the EU Area.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Antyclone des Açores (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 5246; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 34) Travel specialist.

FNAC (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-209 2211; www.fnac.be; City 2 shopping centre, Rue Neuve; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Fri) Book department-store with events ticketing agency.

Sterling Books (Map p70; ☎ 02-223 6223; www.sterlingbooks.be; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 38; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-6.30pm Sun) English-language bookshop with comfy sofas and a kids' play area.

Waterstones (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 2708; Blvd Adolphe Max 71-75; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-6pm Sun) Large English-language bookshop with numerous international magazines.

Internet Access

There's free wi-fi at Flanders Info (p76), the Cercle des Voyageurs (p104), Zabar (p105) and many other *cafés*. Matonge has numerous phone-internet shops.

Other central options:

Belgium Internet (Map p70; Rue du Marché au Charbon; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr) Three terminals oddly plonked in a central all-night grocery store.

Touistrading (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 5493; Rue de Flandre 118; per hr €1; ☎ 11am-11.30pm) Typical phone shop.

Laundry

Aquatic Wash Laundry (Map pp72-3; Rue Montserrat 9; per load €3.20; ☎ 5.30am-11pm) Self-service laundrette.

Salon Lavoir de la Chapelle (Map p70; Rue Haute 7; per 5kg load €6.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Old-fashioned, full-service laundrette.

Left Luggage

Bruxelles-Midi Station Luggage office (per article per day €2.50; ☎ 6am-9pm); Luggage lockers (per 24hr small/large €3/4) Maximum 72 hours for lockers.

Medical Services

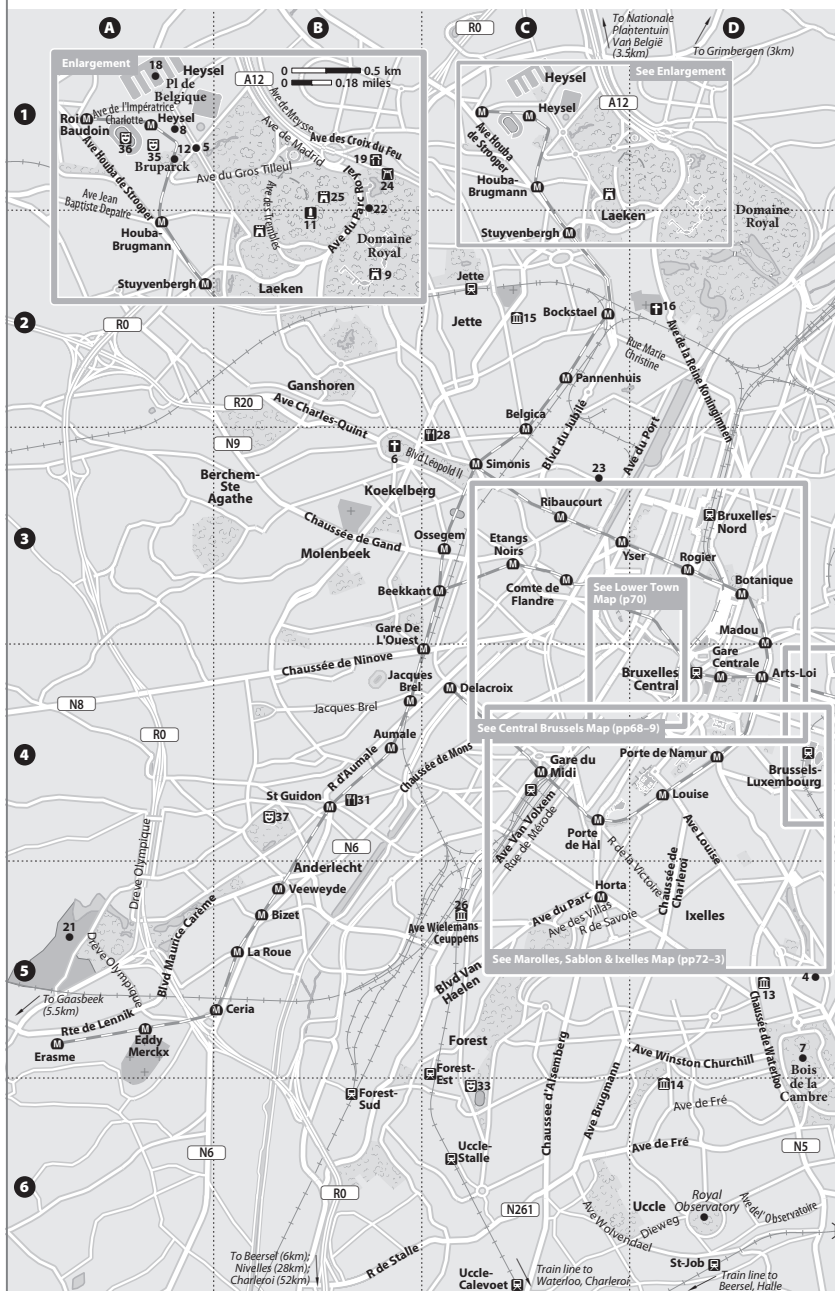
Community Help Service (☎ 02-648 4014; www.chsbelgium.org; ☎ 24hr) English-speaking crisis helpline. Can also help find English-speaking doctors, dentists and other health professionals.

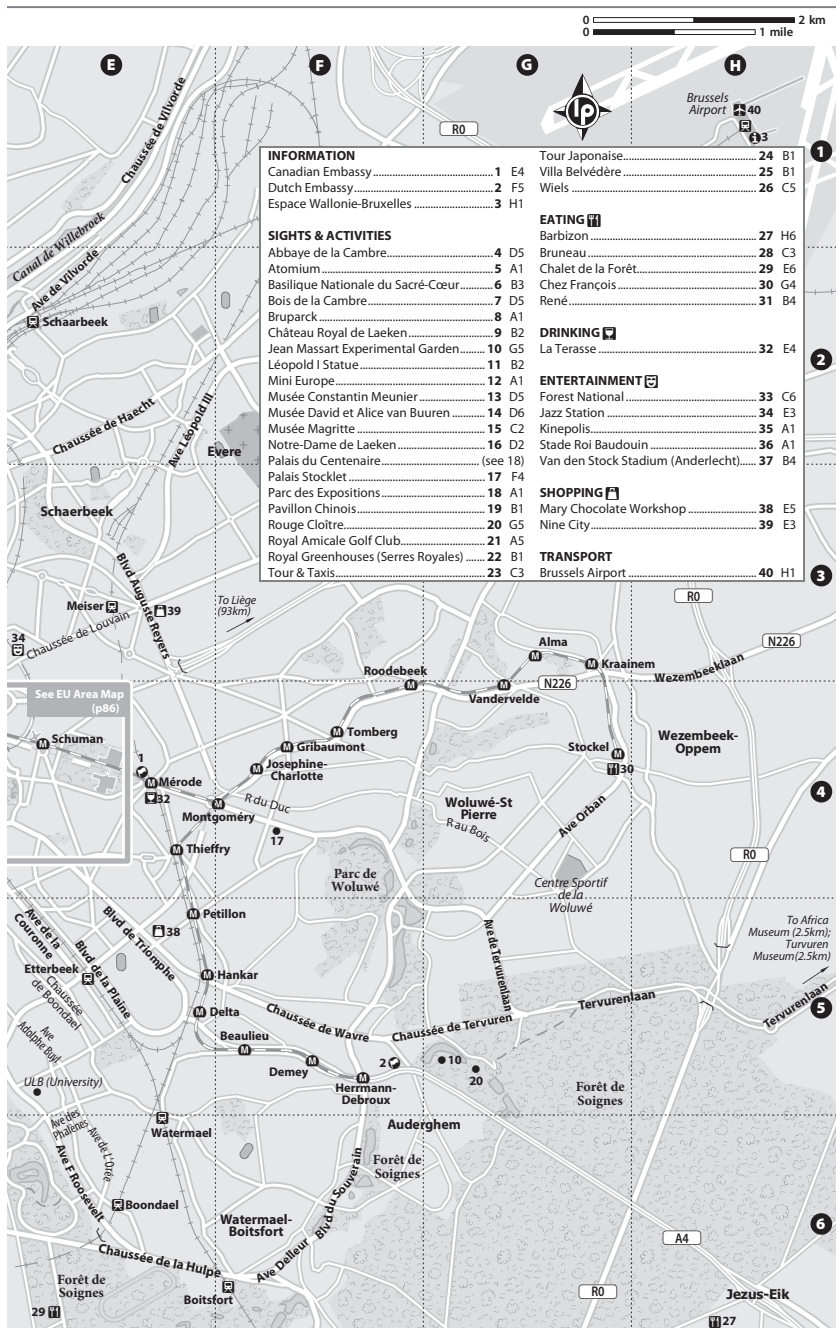
Dr Van Breusegem Clinic (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 1407; Rue L Lepage 12; ☎ 9am-10am & 5pm-6pm Mon-Fri) Central location. Consultations without appointment €23.

Hôpital St-Pierre (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-535 3111; www.stpierre-bru.be; Rue Haute 290-322; ☎ emergency 24hr, consultation 8am-5pm) Central hospital offering emergency assistance.

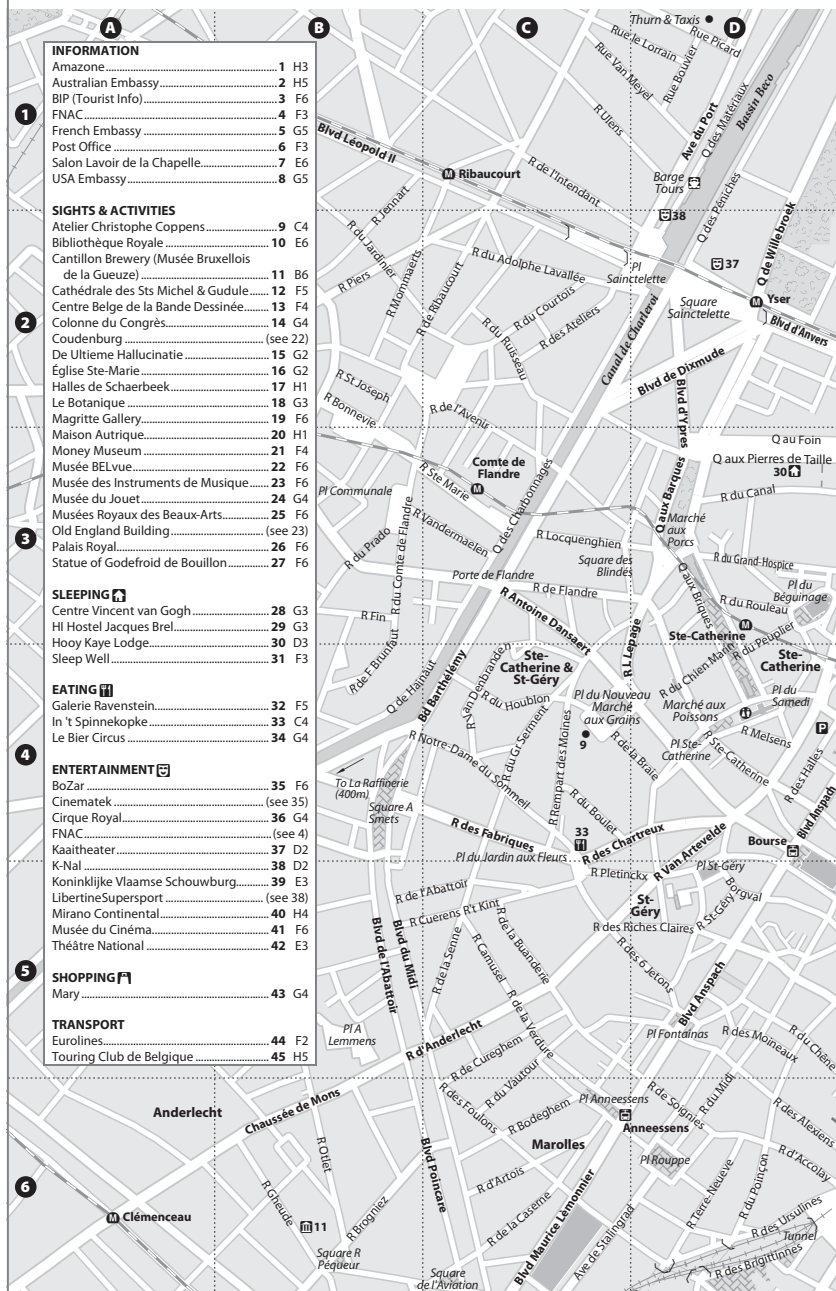
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GREATER BRUSSELS





CENTRAL BRUSSELS





MAROLLES, SABLON & IXELLES

INFORMATION

Aquatic Wash Laundry	1	D2
Hôpital St Pierre	2	D3
New Zealand Embassy	3	G1
Tourist Information Booth.....	4	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Africamali	5	G2
Audrey Hepburn's Childhood Home	6	F3
Ave Brugmann 30 (Art Deco Tower).....	7	E6
Ave Ducpatiaux 18-24 (Art Nouveau Houses).....	8	E6
Ave Général de Gaulle 38-39.....	9	H5
Ave Paul Dejaer 16.....	10	C5
Ave Paul Dejaer 9 (Art Nouveau House).....	11	C5
Breugel House.....	12	D2
Église Notre-Dame de la Chapelle.....	13	D1
Église Notre-Dame du Sablon.....	14	E1
Flagey Building	15	H5
Galerie d'Ixelles.....	16	F2
Hôtel Hannon	17	D6
Hôtel Solvay (Art Nouveau Building).....	18	G5
Hôtel Tassel (Horta's 'first' Art Nouveau House).....	19	F4
Ixelles Ponds	20	H5
Jardin d'Enfants (Horta-Designed Schoolhouse)	21	D2
Le Chat Mural.....	22	C2
Musée d'Art Fantastique.....	23	E5
Musée Horta.....	24	E5
Palais de Justice	25	D2
Peeping Policeman Mural.....	26	D2
Piscine Victor Boin	27	C5
Place du Petit Sablon	28	E2
Porte de Hal.....	29	C3
Recyclart.....	30	D1
Rue Africaine 92 (Art Nouveau House).....	31	E5

Rue de Savoie 66 (Art Nouveau House).....	32	C5
Rue Defacqz 71 (Hanker's Art Nouveau House).....	33	E5
Rue du Lac 6	34	G5
Rue Faider 83 (Art Nouveau House).....	35	F5
St-Gilles Prison	36	D6
St-Gilles Town Hall.....	37	C5
WWI Memorial	38	H5

SLEEPING

Chambres en Ville.....	39	G2
Hôtel Galia	40	C2
Hôtel Rembrandt	41	F3
Hôtel Stanhope	42	G1
thewhitehotel	43	F5

EATING

Au Bon Coeur	44	B3
Au Stekerlapatte.....	45	D3
Chez Oki.....	46	G5
Cinabre de Garance.....	47	D2
Dolma	48	G4
Easy Tempo.....	49	D2
Imagin' Air	50	G3
La Quincaillerie	51	E6
La Tsampa	52	F5
Le Framboisier	53	F5
Le Hasard des Choses.....	54	E5
Le Perroquet.....	55	E2
Les Brassins.....	56	F3
Les Petits Oignons.....	57	D1
L'Ultime Atome.....	58	F2
Midi Station.....	59	A2
Quim's.....	60	D2
Restobières	61	D2
Rouge Tomate	62	F4
Saint Boniface	63	F2
Tartine Zaline	64	F2
Tour D'y Voir	65	E1
Wittamer.....	66	E1
Yamayu Sanatsu.....	67	F3

DRINKING

Blomqvists Espresso Bar	68	F2
Brasserie de la Renaissance.....	69	C5
Brasserie Ploegmans	70	D2
Café Belga	(see 15)	
Comptoir Florian.....	71	F2
Kuumba	72	G2
L'Inattendu	73	D3
Moeder Lambic.....	74	C5
Natural Caffè	75	F5
Nexx	76	H4
Zabar.....	77	D1

ENTERTAINMENT

Arsene50.....	(see 15)	
Conservatoire Royal de Musique.....	78	E2
Fuse.....	79	C3
La Démence.....	(see 79)	
Sounds Jazz Club	80	G3
Théâtre Les Tanneurs.....	81	C2

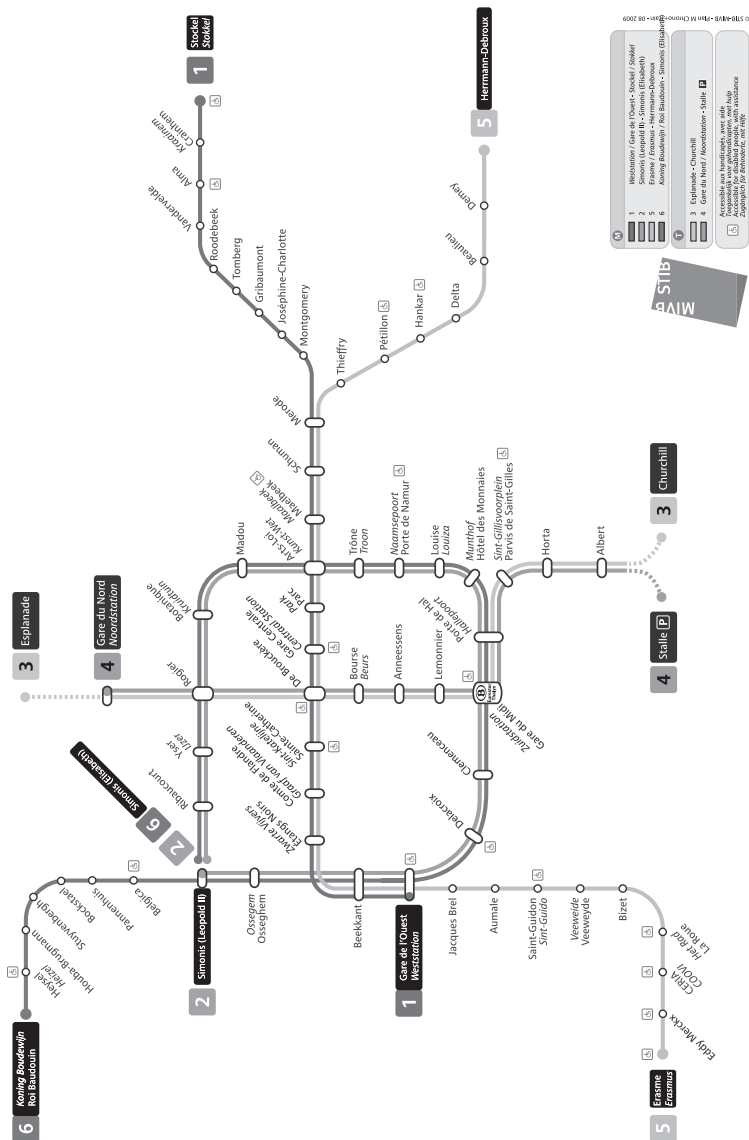
SHOPPING

Antique Market	82	E1
Au Cherche-Midi	83	E1
Beermania	84	G2
Daily Flea Market	85	C2
L'Ecuyer.....	86	F5
Les Enfants d'Édouard	87	F4
Olivier Strelli	88	E3
Pierre Marcolini	89	E1
Wittamer.....	90	E1

TRANSPORT

Avis.....	91	F6
Budget.....	92	E4
Bus to Charleroi Airport.....	93	A3
Elevator	94	D2
Maison des Cyclistes.....	95	G2
STIB Branch Kiosk	(see 4)	
TEC Bus W.....	96	B2

BRUSSELS TRANSPORT MAP



(Continued from page 65)

Money

ATMs and exchange facilities are found near the Bourse, at Bruxelles-Midi station and Brussels Airport. **Eurogold** (Map p70; Rue de la Bourse 32; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri) offers comparatively good exchange rates without commission.

Post

Post office Main (Map p70; Blvd Anspach 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat); Gare du Midi (Map pp72-3; Ave Fonsny 1e; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat); City 2 shopping centre (Map pp68-9; Rue Neuve; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

BIP (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-548 0458; www.biponline.be; Rue Royale 2-4; ☎ 10am-6pm) Official Brussels region tourist office. More spacious and much less crowded than Brussels International (see above). Hotel bookings and information are available but no financial transactions.

Brussels International (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 8940; www.brusselsinternational.be; Grand Place; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, Mon-Sun in summer) The main city tourist office, located inside the town hall. Often crammed full, it sells discount booklets and the Brussels card (see boxed text, right). Booth at Bruxelles-Midi train station.

Espace Wallonie-Bruxelles (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-504 0200, 02-725 5275; www.belgique-tourisme.net; arrivals hall, Brussels Airport; ☎ 8am-9pm) Information on Brussels and Wallonia, not Flanders.

Flanders Info (Map p70; ☎ 02-504 0390; www.visitflanders.com; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 63; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-June & Sep, 9am-7pm Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar, to 4pm Sun Oct-Mar, closed 1-2pm weekends) For Flanders information, obviously. Free wi-fi.

Use-it (Map p70; ☎ 02-725 5275; www.use-it.be; Rue de l'Écuyer; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Tue-Fri & 1pm-5pm Sat). Their superb free guide-maps are full of spot-on local tips and irreverent humour. Copies are available from a door dispenser even when the office is closed, and also from hostels or by download.

Travel Agencies

Airstop (Map p70; ☎ high toll 070-233 188; www.airstop.be; Blvd Emile Jacqmain 76; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat)

Connections (Map p70; ☎ high toll 070-233 313, 02-550 0130; www.connections.be; Rue du Midi 19; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat)

SIGHTS

The medieval grandeur of the Grand Place has an immediate wow factor that rarely fails to impress. And further afield are numer-

DISCOUNTS & FREEBIES

On the first Wednesday afternoon of each month, most of Brussels' major museums are free to enter. At other times the cheapest way to see a bunch of top sites is with the **Brussels card** (www.brusselscard.be; 24/48/72 hours €20/28/33). The card gets you into 30 major museums and provides free city transport plus discounts for other attractions, some shops and restaurants. It's available through Brussels International (left), six STIB agencies and four of the bigger museums. Pre-paying online saves €1. When picking your dates don't forget that most museums close Mondays. And when collecting the pass, ensure that its magnetic stripe has been properly validated.

ous excellent museums. But much of the fun in Brussels is found simply wandering the streets, enjoying the bizarre mismatch of architectural styles, spotting the quirky little details and dropping regularly into the fabulous *cafés* en route.

Grand Place

Brussels' magnificent Grand Place (Map p70) is one of the world's most unforgettable urban ensembles. Oddly hidden, the enclosed cobblestone square is only revealed as you enter on foot from one of six narrow side alleys: Rue des Harengs is the best first approach.

The focal point is the magnificently spired 15th-century city hall but each of the fabulous antique guildhalls (mostly 1697-1705) has a charm of its own. Most are unashamed exhibitionists adorned with fine baroque gables, gilded statues and elaborate guild symbols.

Alive with classic *cafés*, the square takes on different auras at different times. Try to visit more than once and don't miss looking again at night when the scene is magically (and tastefully) illuminated. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings there's a flower market and at various other times the square might host anything from Christmas fairs to rock concerts to the extraordinary biennial 'flower carpet' (see p18).

HÔTEL DE VILLE (CITY HALL)

Laboriously built between 1444 and 1480, the splendid, slightly asymmetric **Hôtel de Ville** (City Hall; Map p70; ☎ visitors office 02-279 4347) was almost

the only building on the Grand Place to escape the 1695 French bombardment – ironic considering it was their primary target. The creamy stone facade is lavished with Gothic gargoyles and reliefs of nobility. Its intricate tower soars 96m, topped by a gilded statue of St-Michel, Brussels' patron saint. For 45-minute **guided tours** (€3; ☎ 3.15pm Tue & Wed year-round, 12.15pm Sun from Apr-Sep), turn up at Brussels International (opposite) 40 minutes before scheduled departure times to buy tickets.

MAISON DU ROI

This fanciful feast of neogothic arches, verdigris statues and mini-spires is bigger, darker and nearly 200 years younger than the surrounding guildhouses. Once a medieval bread-market, the current masterpiece dates from an 1873 rebuild and nowadays houses the **Brussels City Museum** (☎ 02-279 4350; www.bru-city.be; adult/concession/Brusselscard €3/2.50/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) whose old maps, architectural relics and paintings give a historical overview of the city. Don't miss Pieter Breugel the Elder's 1567 *Cortège de Noces* (Wedding Procession).

HOUSES & GUILDHALLS

The Grand Place's gorgeous buildings and guildhouses are listed here according to their street number and traditional name, along with their original guild where appropriate:

1: Maison des Boulangers – Bakers Now the cafe Le Roy d'Espagne. The gilded bronze bust above the door is Bakers' patron, St-Aubert.

2: La Brouette (The Wheelbarrow) – Grease-makers Notice the faint gold wheelbarrows above the door. The statue of St-Gilles was added in 1912.

4: Le Sac (The Bag) – Cabinet-makers Incredibly ornate.

5: La Louve (The She-Wolf) – Archers The golden phoenix rising from the ashes signifies the rebirth of the Grand Place after the 1695 bombardment.

6: Le Cornet (The Horn) – Boatmen Stern-shaped gable.

7: Le Renard (The Fox) – Haberdashers

8: L'Étoile (The Star) The square's smallest building, where city hero Everard 't Serclaes (p63) died in 1388. A fairly contemporary 'tradition' claims you'll garner good luck by rubbing a 1902 brass statue of Everard's reclining corpse. Holes have been worn into Everard's forearm from all the rubbing. The statue adorns the house's arched north wall in Rue Charles Buls, the road separating the house from the Hôtel de Ville. Also notice the lovely 1899 gilded art nouveau plaque dedicated to the city by its appreciative artists.

9: Le Cygne (The Swan) – Butchers In 1847 this lovely house hosted Karl Marx. Ironically it's now home to the square's finest upmarket restaurant.

10: L'Arbre d'Or (The Golden Tree) – Brewers Notice the hop plants climbing columns here. Still the Belgian brewers' headquarters, two atmospheric but small basement rooms now house a cursory **Brewery Museum** (☎ 02-511 4987; www.beerparadise.be; adult/Brusselscard €6/free; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Easter-Nov, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Dec-Easter). Entry includes a beer sipped amid barrels and delightfully antiquated wooden brewers' tools. Tickets seem overpriced if you're paying but with the Brusselscard it's a great opportunity for a free drink.

13-19: Dukes' of Brabant Mansion Six 1698 houses behind a single palatial facade reworked in 1882. Had the imperial governor had his way after 1695, the whole square would have looked rather like this.

24-25: La Chaloupe d'Or (The Golden Boat) – Dressmakers Now a particularly splendid *grand café* whose upper storey rooms (when open) offer fine views across the square.

26-27: Le Pigeon – Artists Victor Hugo lived here during his exile from France in 1852.

South of Grand Place

MANNEKEN PIS

Don't be surprised to 'meet' Van Gogh posing on Rue Charles Buls, Brussels' most unashamedly tourist-oriented shopping street, whose chocolate and trinket shops lead the camera-toting hoards three blocks to the **Manneken Pis** (Map p70; cr Rue de l'Étue & Rue du Chêne). This fountain-statue of a little boy cheerfully taking a leak is comically tiny and a perversely perfect national symbol for surreal Belgium. More often than not the tiny statue's nakedness is largely hidden beneath a costume relevant to an anniversary, national day or local event. The costume diary is posted on <http://ordre-manneken-pis.blogspot.com> (in French). His ever-growing wardrobe is partly displayed at the Maison du Roi (opposite).

The present-day bronze Manneken Pis design was sculpted by Jérôme Duquesnoy in 1619, but it's not the original. A stone version named Little Julian stood here from the mid-14th century.

CHANSON & LACE

The excellent **Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle** (Map p70; Costume & Lace Museum; ☎ 02-213 4450; Rue de la Violette 12; adult/Brusselscard €3/free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun) has a fine collection. At the time of research, however,

OTHER PISSERS

The Manneken Pis (p77) has a much younger little squatting 'sister', the 20th-century **Jeanneke Pis** (see below; Map p70) and there's also **Zinneke** (see opposite; Map p70), a mongrel dog standing with cocked (if dry) leg as though to show his contempt for the surrounding Fashion District.

Meanwhile, if you go to **Geraardsbergen** (p167) you'll find many locals who insist that *their* Manneken Pis is actually the original.

the museum building was almost entirely commandeered for a major exhibition on 1950s fashions. The **Jacques Brel Foundation** (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 1020; www.jacquesbrel.be; Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 11; adult/concession €8/5; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, last entry 5pm) is an archive centre and museum dedicated to Belgium's raspy-voiced chanson superstar (see the boxed text, p77).

Îlot Sacré**GALERIES ST-HUBERT**

When opened in 1847 by King Léopold I, the glorious **Galleries St-Hubert** (Map p70; Galerie du Roi, Galerie de la Reine, Galerie des Princes) formed Europe's very first shopping arcade. Many enticing shops lie behind its neoclassical glassed-in arches flanked by marble pilasters. Several eclectic *cafés* spill tables onto the gallery terrace, safe from rain beneath the glass roof. For a surreal introduction to Brussels' charms walk through Belgique Gourmande confectionery shop (Galerie de la Reine 17) and descend into some brick-vaulted subterranean tunnels. Here a soundtrack of jazz and dripping water announces **Brussels on Stage** (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 0973; www.bruxelles-enscene.be; adult/child/Brusselscard €6/5/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm). Imaginative ideas, from iris pools to sliced-open trams, illustrate the city's history and culture but when we last visited some scenes were broken and 'Manneken Pis alley' had run dry.

RUE DES BOUCHERS

Northwest of the *galleries* are uniquely colourful Rue and Petite Rue des Bouchers, a pair of narrow alleys jam-packed with pavement tables, pyramids of lemons and iced displays of fish and crustacea. It's gloriously photogenic and space heaters keep things working year-round but before being enticed in by the waiter-touts, read the boxed text, p98.

Up a dead-end alley here you'll find the Manneken Pis's recently re-plumbed 'sister' **Jeanneke Pis** (Map p70; Impasse de la Fidélité) squatting behind locked railings (see the boxed text, left).

Returning towards the Grand Place, don't miss peeping inside Toone (p108) and into the wonderful, age-old biscuit shop **Dandoy** (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 0326; Rue au Beurre 31), full of splendid old moulds for *speculaas/speculoos* (traditional spiced biscuit) figures.

Bourse

The **Bourse** (Map p70; Place de la Bourse) is Belgium's 1873 stock exchange building. You can't enter but its grandiose neoclassical facade is brilliantly festooned with friezes and sculptures, reclining nudes, lunging horses and a multitude of allegorical figures. Some of the work is by Rodin, then a young apprentice sculptor. Directly outside, an archaeological site called **Bruxella1238** (☎ from 10.15am 1st Wed of each month) has uncovered the scanty remains of a former Franciscan convent that was bombarded into ruins in 1695. Most of the site is visible by peeping through the glass windows set into the pavement roughly outside the *Cirio café* (p103).

Five of Brussels' most archetypal and historic *cafés* are within stumbling distance of the Bourse, three of them hidden away down minuscule medieval passageways (p103).

The nearby **Église St-Nicolas** (Church of St-Nicolas; Map p70; Rue au Beurre 1; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-7.30pm Sun) is a pint-sized edifice as old as Brussels itself. What really makes it notable is its virtual invisibility – the exterior is almost totally encrusted with shops. Appropriately enough, it's dedicated to the patron saint of merchants.

St-Géry

Surrounding Place St-Géry you'll find a lively, compact area of popular *cafés* and good-value Asian restaurants. Until 1799 the square had been dominated by a medieval Gothic church. But it was demolished under the anti-religious French regime and replaced by a market square featuring a curious pyramidal monolith-fountain. In 1881 a superb neo-Renaissance brick-and-wrought-iron meat market, the **Halles St-Géry** (Map p70; www.hallesaintgeroy.be), was built right around this monument. The market lay derelict for much of the 1980s but has since been beautifully renovated and is now a combined bar-*café*, night club and exhibition space.

JACQUES BREL

Born in Schaerbeek in 1929, Belgium's greatest 20th-century singer started his career in 1952 in the Brussels cabaret La Rose Noire. The following year he headed to Paris, where he mixed with songwriters and fellow artists including Édith Piaf. His first record was released in 1954 and he rapidly became an idol. His passionate, transcendent songs were performed with astounding intensity. As one fan described it 'he sang like a boxer and usually lost a kilo during each performance'. The wide-ranging themes of his songs include love, spirituality, nostalgia, the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and beautiful evocations of Belgium's contradictions. Despite the latter, he was often thought of as French, and became a 'French' film star in the late 1960s. In 1973 he quit performing to sail around the world. He spent the last two years of his life in the remote Marquesas Islands of French Polynesia, where he's now buried near French painter Paul Gauguin, having died of lung cancer in 1978.

Top five Brel songs:

- *Bruxelles* – upbeat nostalgic favourite in which he somehow gets away with turning the capital into a verb (approximately translated as 'That was the time when Brussels Brusseled')
- *Ne me Quitte Pas* – the classic tear-jerker
- *Madeleine* – don't be fooled by the jolly banjo sound...waiting for a Brussels tram has never sounded so poignant
- *Le Plat Pays* – rain, fog and dismal Belgian landscapes are somehow rendered as poetic idylls
- *Les Flamands* – light-heartedly mocks the po-faced lifestyle of the Flemish even though his family was originally of Flemish descent

Black steel gates beside the bistro Le Lion St-Géry lead into a private (but often open) courtyard in which one branch of the mostly covered Senne River has been uncovered along with a reconstructed historical mooring point. The stream is bridged by the vaulted 1811 brick, neogothic **Au Lion d'Or** building. The courtyard also offers interesting views of the bulb-spined church, **Église Notre-Dame des Riches Claires**.

Fashion District

You don't have to be a fashion hound to enjoy the quirky facades, shops and idiosyncrasies of this compact area that neatly divides St-Géry and Ste-Catherine. Heading northwest from the Bourse, you'll pass the magnificent wrought-iron frontage of the Beursschouwburg (see p106), a cultural centre originally built in 1885 as a grand brasserie. A block north, ponder who would actually want to sit on the translucent plastic chairs displayed on the white-lit disco flooring at **Kartell** (Map p70; Rue Antoine Dansaert 2) furniture shop. Veer west here on Rue des Chartreux to admire the flamboyant art nouveau ironwork over the entrance to Brussels' classic chess-*café*, Le Greenwich (see p104). Nearby is the surreal lighting specialist **Espace Bizzare** (Map p70; www.espacebizarre.com; Rue des

Chartreux 19), the first place to look should you need a lamp in the form of a life-sized horse. On the next corner is a typically Brussels-style piece of street humour, the statue of a cock-legged dog Zinneke (ie 'Mongrel', see the boxed text opposite).

The main area of fashion boutiques lies two short blocks north on Rue Antoine Dansaert. Stijl (p110) and secondhand specialist Idiz Bogam (p110) are much less daunting to enter than the hallowed boutiques of **Annemie Verbeke** (Map p70; Rue Antoine Dansaert 64) or ring-the-bell **Martin Margiela** (Map p70; Rue de Flandre 114). Window shoppers might find **Linders** (Map p70; Rue Antoine Dansaert 84) more intriguing: it specialises in the archaic-looking white-ruffed black 'togas' still worn by top Belgian lawyers. Across the road, designer eyewear specialist **Hoet** (Map p70; Antoine Dansaert 97) has an extraordinary line in silver filigree eyeshades. Do look up to admire the Parisian-style gables above. And look back to the upper facade of the outwardly uninspired KBC bank building to notice an unexpected frieze of bananas. A block west, **Atelier Christophe Coppens** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-538 0813; www.christophecoppens.com; Nouveau Marché aux Grains 23) is perhaps the most visually remarkable of all the boutiques, a stage-like affair on which the 'performer' is a circular

white-curtained changing space, the 'audience' neat rows of hats and scarves.

Ste-Catherine

It's hard to imagine today, but fishing boats once sailed up the now-invisible River Senne, mooring in the heart of Ste-Catherine, which was for centuries a major fish market. Although the river has been covered over since 1870, the area's reputation for fish persists and the main reason you're likely to visit is to choose from the numerous well-regarded seafood restaurants around Pl Ste-Catherine. There's also a curious mixture of cheaper bars and eateries sprinkled along Rue de Flandre.

The area sports two notable if smog-blackened churches. **Église Ste-Catherine** (Place Ste-Catherine; ☒ rarely open) must be one of the only religious buildings that positively encourages folks to urinate on its walls (there's a 'pissoir' on its northwest flank). Inside is a black statue of the Virgin and Child that Protestants once hurled into the Senne (1744) but was found again 'miraculously' floating on a chunk of turf. The 1657 **Église St-Jean-Baptiste au Béguinage** (Map p70; Place du Béguinage) is a Flemish baroque masterpiece designed by Luc Fayd'Herbe, a student of Rubens. It's often cited as Belgium's most beautiful church but is rarely open.

Boxed in on three sides and incongruously dwarfed by the back of a Novotel Hotel is the ivy draped **Tour Noire** (Place du Samedi), a remnant of Brussels' original city wall.

Other minor curiosities include the **Pigeon Soldat memorial** commemorating the brave carrier pigeons of WWI. Beside the monolithic **Anspach Fountain**, notice the bronze crocodiles and lizards set to leap out of the water...at least when the pool has any water.

Rue Neuve Area

Pedestrianised **Rue Neuve** (Map p70) is central Brussels' busiest shopping street but certainly not its loveliest. To escape the lacklustre '70s architecture, meditate awhile in the 18th-century **Église Notre-Dame du Finistère** (Map p70; ☒ 9am-6.30pm), whose great baroque interior features a remarkable 1758 altarpiece, its giant wooden canopy held aloft by flying cherubs. The neo-classical **Place des Martyrs** should eventually look pretty grand once the glacially slow renovations are finally complete. Already one terraced *café* has started 'reclaiming' parts of this square that had, till recently, been eerily forgotten. At its centre is a monument to 467 people who died

in the 1830 revolution. The haphazard spark to the revolution (see the boxed text, p107) had been lit by excitable opera-goers leaving the La Monnaie/De Munt, still Brussels' most prestigious cultural venue (see p107).

Cathedral Area

CATHÉDRALE DES STS-MICHEL & GUDULE
Host to coronations and royal weddings, Brussels' grand, twin-towered **cathedral** (Map pp68-9; www.cathedralestmichel.be; Place Sainte-Gudule; admission/treasury free/€2.50; ☒ cathedral 8am-6pm, treasury 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, till 3.45pm Sat, closed Sun morning) bears at least a passing resemblance to Paris' much better known Notre Dame. Begun in 1226, the construction took some 300 years. Stained-glass windows flood the soaring nave with light while column-saints brandish gilded tools. An enormous wooden pulpit, sculpted by Antwerp artist Hendrik Verbruggen, sees Adam and Eve driven out of Eden by fearsome skeletons. To climb the cathedral towers (10am on the second Saturday of each month, €5), sign up a day or two ahead.

MONEY MUSEUM

Unexpectedly absorbing, the 15-room **National Bank Museum** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-221 2206; www.nbbmuseum.be; Rue du Bois Sauvage 10; adult/student/child/Brusselscard €5/4/free/free; ☒ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is far more than just a coin collection. Well-presented exhibits trace the very concept of money all the way from cowrie shells to credit cards. Entrance is free at weekends, on Wednesday afternoon and throughout summer.

COLONNE DU CONGRÈS

Brussels' 25m-tall version of Nelson's Column is an 1850s monolith (Map pp68-9) topped by a gilded statue of King Léopold I. It commemorates the Belgian constitution of 1831. The four female figures around its base represent the four constitutionally upheld freedoms of religion, association, education and the press. The last of these encouraged Victor Hugo, Karl Marx and others to visit Belgium back when such freedoms were much more restricted in other parts of Europe. Between two bronze lions, an eternal flame honours Belgian victims of the two world wars.

CENTRE BELGE DE LA BANDE DESSINÉE

Though the Hergé Museum (p220) is much more memorable, the **Belgian Comic Strip Centre**

(Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-219 1980; www.comicscenter.net; Rue des Sables 20; adult/concession/Brusselscard €7.50/5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) offers a definitive overview of the country's vibrant comic-strip culture (see p43). Even if you're not excited by the 'Ninth Art', do peep inside the impressive 1906 art nouveau building, a Victor Horta (see the boxed text, p89) classic with wrought-iron superstructure and a glass roof. You don't have to pay an entrance fee to enjoy the central hallway or to drink a coffee (€2.20) at the attached *café*.

Place Royale Area

A short stroll up the Mont des Arts steps from the Grand Place area, Place Royale forms the heart of Brussels' regal Upper Town area. The neoclassical square features a bold equestrian **statue of Godefroid de Bouillon**, the crusader knight who very briefly became the first European 'king' of Jerusalem in 1099 (see the boxed text, p239). It's flanked with fascinating museums and has a curious secret lurking beneath (see Coudenberg, p82). North of the Royal Palace is a spacious formal **park** dotted with classical statues.

ROYAL PALACE

When the king takes his summer holidays you can visit his official workplace, the 19th-

century **Palais Royal** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-551 2020; www.monarchy.be; Place des Palais; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Tue-Sun late Jul-early Sep). It's an expansive pile that looks something like a less-inspired cousin to Buckingham Palace. Although officially residence to the Belgian monarchs, a king hasn't actually lived here since Léopold III decamped to Laeken (p90) after 1935. The first few rooms might feel a little soulless but the throne room is impressively overloaded with chandeliers and gilt. And for a breathtaking climax you end up in the former 'Congo Room'. Here artist Jan Fabre has created an extraordinary iridescent wonder by covering the ceiling with the wing-cases of 1.4 million Thai jewel beetles.

BELVUE

Attached to the Royal Palace's western end, **Musée BELvue** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-545 0800; www.belvue.be; Place des Palais 7; adult/senior/youth/child/Brusselscard €5/4/3/free/free; ☎ 10am-5pm) introduces Belgian history through a series of documents, images and videos. There are masses to take in and the computerised map of Europe's changing borderlines (morphing year by year 1000AD to 1830) is especially engrossing. However, unless you're already fairly familiar with the events covered you might be left with as many questions as answers.

COMIC-STRIP MURALS

Over 40 comic-strip murals currently enliven alleys and thoroughfares throughout the old city centre, with more added year after year. Most are mapped on www.brusselscomics.com/en/route_bd.cfm and a more detailed free brochure is available from Brussels International (p76). Moseying past a few of these cheery murals makes a great excuse to explore less-visited neighbourhoods. Some favourites:

- **Tibet & Duchateau** (Map p70; Rue du Bon Secours 9) – very effectively sees a life-sized figure teetering towards a trompe l'œil window
- **Tintin** (Map p70; Rue de l'Étude)
- **Broussaille** (Map p70; Rue du Marché au Charbon) – depicts a young couple arm-in-arm. The original 1991 version showed a couple of very ambiguous sex that the neighbouring gay establishments used to promote the quarter. However, a 1999 repaint seemed to give the black-haired figure a more feminine hairstyle, earrings and (slightly) bigger breasts. Creeping homophobia or honest mistake? Nobody knows.
- **Peeping Policeman** (Map pp72-3; Rue Haute) – Hergé character uses the terrace end brilliantly for a little spying
- **Manneken Pis Displaced** (Map p70; Rue de Flandre)
- **Néron** (Map p70; Pl St-Géry) – a human stack reaching for the birds
- **Le Chat** (Map pp72-3; Blvd du Midi) – bricklaying himself into place

BRUSSELS' ART NOUVEAU MASTERPIECES

Brussels excels in art nouveau architecture. In the city centre don't miss the Old England Building (below) or the magnificent *café* Falstaff (p103). Many other top examples are scattered fairly widely but there are decent concentrations of fine facades in St-Gilles (p88) and Ixelles (p88), where a classic art nouveau house hosts a museum dedicated to maestro architect Victor Horta (p89). Near the Cinquanteenaire monument, the loveliest of all art nouveau townhouses is the Maison Cauchie (p87). In Schaerbeek Maison Autrique (p88) appeals to some Horta aficionados, while drinking at De Ultieme Hallucinatie (p88) offers tantalising glimpses of some marvellous art nouveau interiors. The famous Palais Stoclet (p92), now Unesco-listed, is undergoing extensive restoration.

ARAU tours (p92) can get you into some normally closed gems including the **Hôtel Solvay** (Map pp72-3; Ave Louise 224) and Hôtel Van Eetvelde (p87), whose facades barely hint at the wonders within. Brussels International tourist office and Horta Museum sell the map-guide *Brussels: Living Art Nouveau* (€3). An extensive if slightly dated art nouveau brochure and map can be downloaded from www.brusselsartnouveau.be.

COUDENBERG

Coudenberg Hill (now Place Royale) was the site of Brussels' original 12th-century castle. Over several centuries this was transformed into one of Europe's most elegant and powerful palaces, most notably as the 16th-century residence of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (Charles Quint; p27). Around the palace, courtiers and nobles in turn built fine mansions. However, the vast complex was destroyed in a catastrophic 1731 fire. Its ruins were eventually levelled to create newly laid out Place Royale but beneath street level the basic structure of the palace's long-hidden lower storeys remains. Whole stretches of medieval street layout are now discernable thanks to considerable archaeological work. The **Coudenberg** (adult/senior/youth/child/Brusselscard €5/4/3/free/free, combined with BELvue €8/5/4/free/free) subterranean site is entered from BELvue. You'll emerge near the Old England Building.

OLD ENGLAND BUILDING

This 1899 former department store is an art nouveau showpiece with a superlative black facade all aswirl in wrought iron and arched windows. It contains Brussels' **Musical Instrument Museum** (Musée des Instruments de Musique; Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-545 0130; www.mim.fgov.be; Rue Montagne de la Cour 2; adult/concession/Brusselscard €5/3.50/free; 🕒 9.30am-4.45pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4.45pm Sat & Sun, last entry 4pm), one of the world's biggest collections of historic, modern and world instruments. Stand near each exhibit to automatically hear the instrument's sound played on your audio-guide. And don't miss the rooftop *café* for a superb city panorama.

MUSÉES ROYAUX DES BEAUX-ARTS

Brussels' foremost **art gallery** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-508 3211; www.fine-arts-museum.be; Rue de la Régence 3; permanent collection adult/senior/student/Brusselscard €8/5/2/free, Magritte Museum €8/5/2/free, audio-guide €4, combination ticket €13/9/3/free, temporary exhibitions €9/6.50/2.50/9; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) has a truly stupendous collection. Sadly, by no means is all of it currently on display.

Permanent Collection

With some 30 rooms closed indefinitely for asbestos removal, you can currently see only the highlights of the superb pre-18th-century collection. It's particularly strong on surreal and macabre 16th-century masterpieces (Bosch, Dirck Bouts etc) and includes a room full of Breugel. You're then swept into the potbellied pomposity of Counter-Reformation art with numerous gigantic Rubens and Jordaens canvases and plenty more 17th- and 18th-century fare.

Way down in the bowels of the gallery, the 'modern' art section starts with 19th-century work but is notable for its wealth of fine early 20th-century pieces by Belgian artists plus the odd Seurat, Dali and Miro.

Magritte Museum

A separate ticket is required for the gallery's beautifully presented **Magritte Museum** (www.musee-magritte-museum.be). Opened in June 2009, it has the world's largest collection of the surrealist pioneer's paintings and drawings. Watch his style develop from colourful Braque-style cubism in 1920 through a Dali-esque phase and a late-1940s period of Kandinsky-like

brushwork to his trademark bowler hats of the 1960s. Regular screenings of a very professional 52-minute documentary give interesting insights into the artist's unconventionally conventional life (see the boxed text, below).

Sablon

The Sablon is a cobbled square whose *cafés*, antique shops and *chocolatiers* are typically frequented by the see-and-be-seen Brussels upper crust. Surrounding lanes sport plenty more intriguing antique shops and the square itself hosts a Sunday antique market. The Sablon's large, flamboyantly Gothic church, the **Église Notre-Dame du Sablon** (Map pp72-3; Rue de la Régence; ☎ 9am-7pm), started life as the 1304 archers' guild chapel. However, a century later it had to be massively enlarged to cope with droves of pilgrims attracted by the supposed healing powers of its Madonna statue. The statue was procured in 1348 by way of an audacious theft from a church in Antwerp – apparently by a vision-motivated husband-and-wife team in a rowing boat! It has long since gone but a boat behind the pulpit commemorates the curious affair that went on to inspire Brussels' original Ommegang (p17).

ÉGLISE NOTRE-DAME DE LA CHAPELLE

Brussels' oldest surviving **church** (Map pp72-3; Place de la Chapelle; admission/guide-pamphlet free/€3; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-May) now curi-

ously incorporates the decapitated tower of the 1134 original as the central section of a bigger Gothic edifice. Behind the palm-tree pulpit, look on the wall above a carved confessional to find a small memorial to 'Petro Brevgello', ie Pieter Breugel the Elder (see the boxed text, p84), who once lived in the nearby Marolles.

Nearby, the barely used Bruxelles-Chapelle commuter train station is topped by a skate area and hosts **Recydart** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 5734; www.recydart.be; Rue des Ursulines 25), an urban regeneration project hosting anything from debates to art to cutting-edge DJ parties.

PLACE DU PETIT SABLON

About 200m uphill from Place du Grand Sablon, this charming little garden (Map pp72-3) is ringed by 48 bronze statuettes representing the medieval guilds. Standing huddled on a fountain plinth like two actors from a Shakespearean drama are Counts Egmont and Hoorn, popular city leaders who were beheaded on the Grand Place in 1568 for defying Spanish rule. The site of Egmont's grand former residence lies behind.

Palais de Justice

Larger than St Peter's in Rome, this colossal 2.6 hectare complex of **law courts** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-508 6410; Place Poelaert; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm

MR MAGRITTE

Celebrated by a fine new museum (opposite), René Magritte (1898–1967) was Belgium's most prominent surrealist artist. He's best known for a simple painting consisting of a pipe and the words 'this is not a pipe' (in French). The joke is recycled endlessly by Belgian newspapers, advertisers and even on the door of one of Magritte's favourite drinking holes, La Fleur en Papier Doré (p105), whose *café* walls still preserve some of his scribbles.

But many of his works go much deeper, blending images of the ordinary with those of the subconscious. One fascinating element in Magritte's personality was his apparent conventionality. Unlike many fellow artists he was sociable, happily married and unimpressed by the bohemian lifestyles of the Paris surrealist set. From 1930 the Magrittes moved into the very ordinary suburban house that's now Brussels' 'other' **Musée Magritte** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-428 2626; www.magrittemuseum.be; Rue Essegheem 135; adult/concession €6/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), exhibiting his passport, photos, furniture and, predictably enough, a pipe. Here Magritte painted most of his famous works – setting up his easel in the kitchen and painting while wearing a three-piece business suit. The kitchen window offered a view of a postage-stamp garden and a brick wall that was Magritte's 'looking glass into another world'.

Die-hard Magritte fans can also visit Magritte's bourgeois 1911 **childhood home** (☎ 071-244 926; chatelet-tourisme@skynet.be; Rue des Gravelles 95, Châtelet; ☎ sporadic) in the sorry ex-mining town of Châtlet (Map p209) outside Charleroi, now a venue for very occasional art exhibits. Or admire (from outside) the house in Lessines (p213), where Magritte was born.

THE BREUGEL FAMILY

Spell it Breugel or Breughel, this family dominated Flemish art in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Pieter Breugel the Elder (c 1525–69) was undeniably the family's master. His work ranged from powerful landscapes to satirical allegories likened to those of Hieronymus Bosch. But he's best remembered for his quirky scenes of contemporary peasant life woven around portentous religious events and myths. Many of his works were painted in the step-gabled brick house now nicknamed **Breugel House** (Map pp72-3; Rue Haute 132), which can be visited, but only by arranging a private guided tour through Brussels International (p76). Book way ahead.

Breugel's first son, Pieter Breughel the Younger (1564–1638) might have added an h but he largely copied his father's style, earning the nickname 'Hell Breughel' for his preoccupation with scenes of damnation. Contrastingly, second son Jan Breughel (1568–1625) spent most of his artistic life in Antwerp painting sensitive landscapes and flower arrangements, leading to his sobriquet, 'Velvet'.

Mon-Fri) was the world's biggest building when constructed (1866–83). Designed to evoke the temples of the Egyptian pharaohs, it was sited on the hill dominating the working-class Marolles as an intimidating symbol of law and order. When its architect Joseph Poelaert went insane and died during its construction, legends promptly suggested he'd been struck down by the witchcraft of the numerous Marolles residents evicted to make way for the building. The term *skieven* (twisted) *architekt* remains a characteristic insult in the old Bruxellois dialect (right). However, some claim that the term dates back much earlier to when the City Hall's tower was built off-centre in the 15th century (p76).

While the labyrinthine Palais de Justice is undoubtedly grand, it is not easy to secure. Indeed in several high-profile cases criminals have managed to abscond from its precincts.

Behind the building a pavement **terrace** offers wide panoramas over the Brussels rooftops, with the Atomium and Koekelberg Basilica as stars of the skyline show. A glass **elevator** (Pl Breugel, Rue de l'Épée; free; ☎ 7.30am-11.45pm) leads down into the Marolles.

Marolles

Brussels' once resolutely working-class quarter, the Marolles has partly shed its proletarian image with a rash of intimate restaurants and funky interior-design shops setting up along the main streets, Rue Haute and Rue Blaes. Nonetheless, pockets of original Bruxellois character can still be found, notably around the **Place du Jeu-de-Balle**, home to a classic early morning flea market (see p109). At a few of the down-market *cafés* here you might overhear people speaking in the earthy Bruxellois dialect

(see boxed text, below). Note that despite the name, Jeu-de-Balle (aka *balle-pelotte*; p46) is no longer played here. Further west, Sunday's **Marché du Midi** (☎ 6am-1pm Sun) is Brussels' biggest market with a colourful, predominantly North African and Mediterranean feel.

PORTE DE HAL

For centuries Brussels was surrounded by a grand 8km fortress wall. It was partially demolished in the 1790s then removed altogether on Napoleon's orders in 1810. Well, almost. In fact a few isolated remnants survived, including one of the seven very imposing 14th-century gatehouse towers that the

BRUXELLOIS

The old Marolles-Brussels dialect, Bruxellois, is a curious mixture of French, Dutch and Walloon with elements of Spanish and Yiddish thrown in. These days very few people beyond Place du Jeu-de-Balle actually speak the full dialect. Nonetheless, certain Bruxellois words are used, consciously or otherwise, to punctuate local French whether for comic effect or because no better word exists. Classic examples that hint at the playful Bruxellois character:

- *blêter* – to snivel, complain
- *in stoemelings* – sneakily, on the quiet
- *papzak* – fatso
- *zatlap* – habitual drunkard
- *zieverair* – time-waster, idiot
- *zieverer* – to mess around

French preserved for use as a military prison. This **Porte de Hal** (Blvd du Midi; adult/concession/child/Brusselscard €5/4/free/free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, last entry 4.15pm) was converted into a museum in 1847 and romantically embellished with statuary, windows and neogothic turrets thereafter. Today an audio-guide leads you round its decent little city-history museum and exhibition of armour. Then there's the opportunity to climb for views to the 6th-storey battlements. Despite recent landscaping of surrounding gardens, the tower's fairy-tale appearance jars with its location on a traffic island within the inner-city ring road.

Forest (Vorst)

Forest is a completely misleading name for this run-down, inner-city *commune* dominated by a vast car factory. It's well off the usual tourist track, but in a converted former brewery building towards Bruxelles-Midi (tram 82), you'll find **Wiels** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-340 0050; www.wiels.org; Ave Van Volxemaan 354; adult/concession/Brusselscard €6/4/free; ☎ noon-7pm Wed-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun), the capital's new centre for contemporary art exhibitions. Entry is free on Wednesday evenings.

EU Area

Along the thundering thoroughfares Rue de la Loi and Rue Belliard, tragically bland office blocks are packed so close together they form dark concrete canyons. To the east, EU office buildings cut a brutally modern gash through a once attractive neighbourhood behind Bruxelles-Luxembourg station. But it's not all horror. The EU Area (Map p86) also has lovely gardens, fountains and some fine early 20th-century houses notably around Sq Marie-Louise.

EU PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament looks like a gigantic greenhouse for triflids. It's nicknamed 'Caprice des Dieux' (Whim of the Gods), not because it's divinely inspired, but because its facade resembles a so-named French cheese – or at least the cheese's blue-oval box. Visitors can sit in on parliamentary sessions in the huge debating chamber (the 'hemicycle'), or take free multilingual audio-guided **tours** (☎ 10am & 3pm Mon-Thu, 10am Fri) when parliament's not meeting. Start at the **visitor's centre** (Map p86; ☎ 02-284 3457; Rue Wiertz 43).

EU PROS & CONS

The European Union (www.europa.eu.int) bureaucracy is run from the European Commission in Brussels while a few weeks each year, Euro MPs from the 27 nations gather to debate in Brussels' US\$1.6 billion European Parliament building. Providing for the resultant legions of Eurocrats, lobbyists, translators and journalists has created a great economic knock-on effect for the city's service industries. But many lament the wholesale destruction of the formerly characterful Quartier Léopold to make space for brash new EU buildings. And whenever the EU announces measures aimed at reducing agricultural subsidies, it's Brussels' streets that get jammed up with the tractors of protesting farmers.

From central Brussels, access is easiest by suburban train to **Bruxelles-Luxembourg** (15 minutes, four times an hour on weekdays). It's Belgium's oldest train station, though only a token section of stone facade remains of the 19th-century original – a startling contrast to the new modernist station (with Hergé mural) and to the ghetto of businesslike EU offices that back it. These line a central concourse that's as impersonal and charmless as a Le Corbusier sketch.

PARC LÉOPOLD

Steep-sloping Parc Léopold was Brussels Zoo till 1880 and now forms an unexpectedly pleasant oasis hidden away just behind the EU Parliament. Fine century-old buildings like the attractive **Solvay Library** and **Jacqmain School** are closed to the public and the **Musée Antoine Wiertz**, displaying Wiertz's frenzied 19th-century hell scenes is under long-term reconstruction. But the Musée des Sciences Naturelles (below) alone justifies the trip. Afterwards you can retire to *cafés* on Place Luxembourg or take the chip-challenge at Maison Antoine (Pl Jourdan) – do you think they're really Brussels' best?

Musée des Sciences Naturelles

This inspirational **Museum of Natural Sciences** (Map p86; ☎ 02-627 4238; www.naturalsciences.be; Rue Vautier 29; adult/concession/child/Brusselscard €7/6/4.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) may well be the best of its type anywhere.



INFORMATION		Maison St-Cyr 14 C1	Maison Antoine..... 25 B3
EU Parliament Visitor's Centre 1 A3	Musée Antoine Wiertz 15 A3	Rosticeria Fiorentina..... 26 C1	
German Embassy 2 A2	Musée des Sciences Naturelles..... 16 A4	Tout Bon 27 A3	
Irish Embassy 3 A3	Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire 17 D2	DRINKING ☑	
Luxembourg Embassy 4 C1	Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire 18 D3	Café de l'Autobus 28 B3	
Luxembourg Tourist Office..... (see 4)	Sliver of Berlin Wall..... 19 A3	Euro-bars 29 A3	
UK Embassy..... 5 A2	Solvay Library..... 20 A3	James Joyce..... 30 B1	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Kitty O'Shea's 31 B2	
Arcade du Cinquantenaire..... 6 D2	SLEEPING 🏠 🏠		Old Oak 32 C1
Autoworld..... 7 D3	B-Apart Hotel Ambiorix 21 C1	Piola Libri..... 33 C1	
Berlaymont (European Commission)..... 8 B2	Camping Bruxelles-Europe à Ciel Ouvert 22 A4	Ville de Dinant 34 A3	
European Parliament 9 A3	SHOPPING 🛍️		Wild Geese 35 A1
Facade of Original Brussels-Luxembourg Station 10 A3	Place Jourdan Market..... 36 B3		
Hôtel Van Eetvelde..... 11 B1	TRANSPORT		
Jacqmain School 12 B3	Eating 🍴	#63 Bus Stop from Centre 37 C1	
Maison Cauchie..... 13 D3	Esprit de Sel 23 B3	#63 Bus Stop to Centre (see 14)	
	Exki..... 24 B2		

Thought-provoking and highly interactive, the museum has far more than the usual selection of stuffed animals. The undoubted highlight is a unique 'family' of iguanodons – 10m-high dinosaurs found in a Hainaut coal mine back in 1878. A computer simulation shows the mudslide that might have covered them, sand-boxes allow you to play dino hunter and multi-lingual videos give a wonderfully nuanced debate on recent palaeontology. Was T-Rex a giant chicken? You decide! Other delights include a cutaway living beehive, a whale hall and a walk-through Antarctic 'tunnel'.

THE EU COMMISSION

The European Commission, the EU's sprawling bureaucracy, is centred on the vast, four-winged **Berlaymont building** (Map p86; Rue de la Loi 200). Built in 1967, it's striking but by no means beautiful, despite a billion-euro rebuild between 1991 and 2004 that removed asbestos-tainted building materials. Information panels dotted around the building give insight into the history of this neighbourhood and Brussels' international role. From Bruxelles-Central take Metro 1A to Schuman or a handy suburban train to Brussels-Schuman (12 minutes).

Cinquantenaire & Around

The **Cinquantenaire** (Map p86) is a triumphal arch reminiscent of Paris' *Arc de Triomphe*. It was designed to celebrate Belgium's 50th anniversary ('cinquantenaire') in 1880 but took so long to build that by that date only a temporary plaster version was standing. The full beast wasn't completed till 1905. In summer, the arcade forms the curious backdrop to a drive-in cinema screen, while around it are several grand-scale museums. Access is easiest by Metro 1A to Schuman or Mérode.

MUSÉE ROYAL DE L'ARMÉE ET D'HISTOIRE MILITAIRE

Getting onto the top of the Cinquantenaire Arcade is possible if you visit this free **museum** (Map p86; ☎ 02-737 7811; www.klm-mra.be; Parc du Cinquantenaire 3; admission/audio-guide free/€3; 🕒 9-11.45am & 1-4.30pm Tue-Sun). It boasts a truly staggering collection of all things military dating back to Belgian independence.

AUTOWORLD

Across the big, cobbled square (free parking), **Autoworld** (Map p86; ☎ 02-736 4165; www.autoworld

INSIDE INFORMATION

Brussels' EU world is often viewed by outsiders as a faceless bureaucracy. Well, perhaps it is. But it is also a community of real people from 27 real countries, a remarkable opportunity to share culture and understanding that is all too often missed. The interesting scheme, **Tof People** (www.brusselstofpeople.be), aims to overcome the inertia by putting you in touch with a whole range of Brussels-based folks from all over the union.

.be; adult/concession/Brusselscard €6/4.70/free, camera €2.50; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) displays one of Europe's biggest ensembles of vintage and 20th-century cars. Among all the four-wheelers, notice the Harley Davidson the present king gave to Belgium's police force when he decided his biker days were over.

MUSÉES ROYAUX D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE

Few Belgians realise there's a treasure trove lurking within this cavernous **Antiquities Museum** (Map p86; ☎ 02-741 7211; www.kmkg-mrah.be; Parc du Cinquantenaire 10; adult/concession/child/Brusselscard €5/4/free/free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun). The astonishingly rich, global collection ranges from Ancient Egyptian sarcophagi to Meso-American masks, to icons to wooden bicycles. It's worth having a clear idea what you want to see before coming or the sheer scope can prove overwhelming. Visually attractive spaces include the medieval stone carvings set around a neogothic cloister and the soaring Corinthian columns (convincing fibreglass props) that bring atmosphere to an original 420 AD mosaic from Roman Syria. Labelling is in French and Dutch so the English-language audio-guide (€3 extra) is worth considering.

ART NOUVEAU HOUSES

Brussels' greatest art nouveau gem is the **Maison Cauchie** (Map p86; ☎ 02-733 8684; www.cauchie.be; Rue des Francs 5; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm 1st Sat & Sun of each month, plus 6pm-8.30pm most evenings May-Aug), whose stunning 1905 facade is lavishly adorned with stylised female figures. It looks like a Klimt painting transformed into architecture. When it's open, wait in a gallery of Cauchie's expressionist paintings and read about the building's miraculous 1980s salvation until the next tour (around 30 minutes)

is ready to take you into the fabulous sgraffito-adorned rooms upstairs.

Currently hidden by renovation scaffolding, the narrow **Maison St-Cyr** (Map p86; Sq Ambiorix 11; ☎ closed) has a classic 1903 facade that's remarkable for its naturalistic copper-framed window, filigree balconies and a circular upper portal. It's crowned by a devil-may-care top-knot of extravagantly twisted ironwork.

A great highlight of an ARAU tour (p92) is getting into the otherwise closed **Hôtel Van Eetvelde** (Map p86; Ave Palmerston 2-4). While the outside of this building is not Brussels' most gripping, its interior is a Horta masterpiece studded with exotic timbers and sporting a central glass dome infused with African-inspired plant motifs. Its owner, Baron Van Eetvelde, was at that time Minister for the Congo and, not coincidentally, the country's highest-paid civil servant.

Schaerbeek

The rather seedy area around the **Gare du Nord** (Bruxelles-Nord) is a weird human jumble. Motorists cruise lasciviously past prostitutes in their 'pink windows' while local Muslim ladies pass by obliviously, dressed in fully scarfed modesty.

Looking east along Rue Royale your gaze is unavoidably drawn to the very distinctive **Église Ste-Marie** (Map pp68-9; Pl de la Reine), an octagonal 19th-century church in neo-Byzantine style, replete with buttresses and a star-studded central cupola. Nearby **café De Ultieme Hallucinatie** (Map pp68-9; www.ultiemehallucinatie.be; Rue Royale 316; beer from €2.20; ☎ 10.30am-2am Mon-Sat) is a classic townhouse refitted with art nouveau interiors in 1904. The front salon is truly marvellous, with original lamps, brass radiator-covers and stained glass. The brasserie area (behind) that's publicly accessible is much less interesting but buying a drink earns you a walk-through glimpse of the highlights.

The 1901 former food market **Halles de Schaerbeek** (☎ 02-218 2107; www.halles.be; Rue Royale Ste-Marie 22) is a great example of glass and wrought-iron industrial architecture that's been restored as an arts venue.

Horta fans may enjoy his 1893 **Maison Atrique** (☎ 02-215 6600; www.aunique.be; Chaussée de Haecht 266; adult/senior/concession €6/4.30/3; ☎ noon-5.30pm Wed-Sun). It shows little luxury or extravagance but many design elements hint at the art nouveau wave that was just about to sweep Brussels to architectural glory. It hosts

regularly changing exhibitions and the website offers an interesting downloadable walking guide to the neighbourhood (www.aunique.be/docs/promenade/plan.en.pdf).

Trams 92 or 93 pass near all of the above.

St-Gilles (Sint-Gillis)

One of Brussels' overlooked architectural wonders is **Saint-Gilles town hall** (Maison Communale de Saint-Gilles; Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-536 0211; www.stgilles.iris.net.be; Pl Maurice van Meenen), a splendid Napoleon III style palace sporting a soaring brick belfry dotted with gilt statuary. Occasional exhibitions and a major **Comics Festival** (www.comicsfestivalbelgium.com; ☎ early Oct) are held here but otherwise visits are only by arrangement, so you can't be sure of seeing the wedding hall ceiling, painted by Belgian symbolist artist, Fernand Khnopff.

The surrounding area has a couple of great *cafés* and plenty of century-old houses. Although many are grimy and neglected and virtually none are open for visits, walking past a selection of fine facades whets one's appetite for the Horta Museum (opposite) and makes a pleasant way to discover this very eclectic area. Examples:

- **Ave Paul Dejaer 9** Colourfully refurbished art nouveau house
- **Ave Paul Dejaer 16** Sadly abandoned former charcuterie store, inside which 'lives' a giant rooster fashioned out of spoons
- **Rue de Savoie 66** Art nouveau house
- **St-Gilles Prison** (Ave Ducpétiaux) Crenellated white-stone facade that imitates a veritable Crusader-era fortress
- **Ave Ducpétiaux 18-24** Fine archetypal townhouses
- **Hôtel Hannon** (Ave de la Jonction 1; ☎ 11am-6pm) Superb art nouveau stained-glass windows
- **Ave Brugmann 55** Archetypal art nouveau circular window-tops and little owls over the door
- **Ave Brugmann 30** Round-ended art deco tower apartment

Ixelles (Elsene)

Trams 91 or 92 get you close to the following sights.

In what seems an outwardly typical Ixelles townhouse, the **Musée d'Art Fantastique** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 0475-412 918; www.maisonbizarre.be; Rue Américaine 7; admission €7; ☎ 2-5pm Sat & Sun) hits you with jumbled rooms full of cyborg body parts,

Terminator heads and vampire cocoons, then lets you electrocute a troll.

A few doors away a much more sedate attraction is the art nouveau **Musée Horta** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-543 0490; www.hortamuseum.be; Rue Américaine 25; admission €5; 🕒 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun). It occupies two adjoining houses designed and built between 1898 and 1901 by Brussels' most renowned architect, Victor Horta (see below), who lived here himself until 1919. The exterior has distinctive dome ironwork but it's the interior that impresses. Radiating from an iron-laced staircase, airy rooms sport mirrored walls, glorious timber paneling, intimate stained-glass inlays and curly door handles.

Other nearby art nouveau houses (closed to the public):

- **Rue Africaine 92** Creamy tones, harmonious lines and a big circular window
- **Rue Defacqz 71** 1893 house designed by prominent art nouveau architect Paul Hankar (1859–1901) as his own studio
- **Rue Faider 83** Beautiful, gilded sgraffito design at the top

FLAGEY AREA

Centre of an up-and-coming nightlife area is the 1938 'liner' building, **Flagey** (Map pp72-3; www.flagey.be; Place Flagey), originally conceived as the national radio building. With its distinctive round 'periscope' tower, it's an art deco classic that now hosts a hip cafe and various entertainment venues.

Leading north are the pretty **Ixelles Ponds** (Étangs d'Ixelles) flanked by an artistic though modest **WWI Memorial** and many grand mansions. Private art nouveau house-facades to admire include the crazy wrought-iron railings on the otherwise stern **Ave Général de Gaulle**

38-39 and the slightly grubby 1904 **Rue du Lac 6**, with circular windows, super stained glass and a lovely 2nd-floor balcony.

Access is by trams 81 or 82 from Bruxelles-Midi.

MATONGE

Taking its name from a square in Kinshasa, Congo, **Matonge** is home to Brussels' African community though the compact area also encompasses a much wider ethnic mix. Like parts of Kinshasa, the architecture has its fair share of tired old 1960s concrete but even the dreary **Galerie d'Ixelles** comes to life with a dozen African hair-stylist shops, down-market bars and an outlet for Congolese CD/DVDs. On Chaussée de Wavre travel agencies offer cheap flights to Bujumbura and Kigali. Snack bars serve cheap, tasty portions of African delicacies such as Yassa, Mafe or Moambe (see the boxed text, p101). Grocery shops at numbers 17, 27, 36 and 130 are the place to look for plantains, yams, leaf-wrapped cassava or even dried caterpillars. But don't come expecting endless quaint boutiques selling folkloric African village-art. The only such place here is **Africamäli** (☎ 02-503 0074; Chaussée de Wavre 83).

MUSÉE CONSTANTIN MEUNIER

This intimate **museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-648 4449; Rue de l'Abbaye 59; admission free; 🕒 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Fri) occupies an Ixelles townhouse that was the last home and studio of Brussels-born artist Constantin Meunier (1831–1905). He's best known for his emotive sculptures and social realist paintings, including larger-than-life bronzes depicting muscular miners from Hainaut, dockworkers from Antwerp and men reaping fields. Take tram 93 or 94.

HORTA'S CREATIONS

Victor Horta (1861–1947) was an architectural chameleon mostly remembered for his daring, light-suffused art nouveau buildings using trademark elements of wrought iron and glass. His once-celebrated Maison du Peuple (see p184) was torn down in 1965 but surviving masterpieces include Rue Américaine 25 (now the Musée Horta, opposite) and Grand Magasin Waucquez (now the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée, p80), along with Horta's first truly art nouveau house, the 1893 **Hôtel Tassel** (Map pp72-3; Rue Paul-Émile Janson 6) and his first civic commission, the **Jardin d'Enfants** (Map pp72-3; Rue St-Ghislain 40) schoolhouse.

Horta's WWI 'exile' in England and the USA marked a transition in styles – gone was the sensuous art nouveau and in its place stood the clean-cut functionalism of art deco. From 1922 to 1928 Horta designed the bold but severe Palais des Beaux-Arts (see BoZar, p107), while his disappointing last major work was the drably functional, post-art deco train station, Bruxelles-Central.

Uccle (Ukkel)

Uccle is an affluent, middle-class *commune*, though you'd hardly think so from a first glance at the graffiti-tagged station Uccle-Stalle.

In a 1928 art deco showpiece house you'll find the exquisite **Musée David et Alice van Buuren** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-343 4851; www.museumvanbuuren.com; Ave Léo Errera 41; adult/senior/student/child €10/8/5/free, garden only €5/4/2.50/free; 🕒 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon), where five rooms are crammed with sublime furnishings, stained glass and top-quality paintings covering five centuries of art. Also notable are more than 30 works by van Buuren's talented symbolist protégé, sketch for the latter's classic *Peeling Potatoes*. Take tram 23 or 90.

BOIS DE LA CAMBRE

This remarkably extensive forest park (Map pp66-7) forms Brussels' great green lungs. It stretches from regal Ave Louise to the Forêt de Soignes, whose soaring beech trees then extend all the way to Waterloo (p217). Established in 1862 the park has lawns, playgrounds, a 'pocket' theatre, roller-skating rink and an island on an artificial lake, where the historic Chalet Robinson *café*-restaurant was recently rebuilt after a tragic fire.

Laeken

The **Domaine Royal** (Royal Estate) contains a trio of palace-villas that are home to Belgium's ruling family. All are out of bounds to tourists but two or three weeks a year (exact dates announced each January) you can join the enthusiastic queues to visit the magnificent **Royal Greenhouses** (Serres Royales; Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-551 2020; www.monarchy.be; Ave du Parc Royal 61; admission €2; 🕒 late Apr-early May), designed in 1873 by Alphonse Balat (Horta's teacher). The construction was an engineering marvel of its day and the contents include many fabulous and rare tropical species. Take bus 53 from Metro Bockstael.

Deceased Belgian royals are laid to rest in the **crypt** (🕒 2pm-5pm Sun & special holidays) of the splendid, triple-spired stone church of **Notre-Dame de Laeken** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-479 2362; www.ndlaeken-olvlaken.be; Parvis Notre-Dame; 🕒 2-5pm Tue-Sun, Jan-Nov).

A pair of realistic East Asian pagodas form the key attractions in the **Musées d'Extrême-Orient** (☎ 02-268 1608; http://orient.kmkg-mrah.be/japan/index_fr.html; Ave Jules Van Praet 44; adult/concession/child/

Brusselscard €4/3/1.50/free, 1-4.45pm 1st Wed of month free; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun). Both are Léopold II leftovers, built in 1905 after the king had seen similar towers at the 1890 Paris World's Fair. An underpass leads from the ticket desk to the vermilion **Tour Japonaise** (Japanese Tower; Map pp66-7) fronted by a fabulous Japanese pavilion with occasional art nouveau flourishes, such as in the stained-glass windows. Inside the gloriously glittering **Pavillon Chinois** (Chinese Pavilion; Map pp66-7), the decor swings from gilded belle époque to Khajuraho-Indian. Both pagodas display priceless Asian decorative arts while an easily overlooked Japanese Arts museum shows off swords, samurai armour and ukiyo-e painting. Get off tram 4 or 23 at 'Araucaria'.

Stretching west to the Atomium, the expansive **Parc de Laeken** is dotted with magnolia and mature chestnut trees. Its focal point is an 1880 **Léopold I statue**.

Heysel

The astounding Atomium (see below) dominates a sprawling complex of trade-fair exhibition halls including the distinctive 1930 art deco **Palais du Centenaire** (Map pp66-7) featuring terraced tiers capped by statues. Nearby you'll also find the national football stadium, Belgium's original multiplex/IMAX cinema and a subtropical water fun-park. Metro station Heysel is handy, tram 81 is more scenic and car access is easy from the Brussels ring. If you're driving or cycling note that less than 6km north, historic Grimbergen village (p113) is an entirely different world.

ATOMIUM

The space-age **Atomium** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-475 4777; www.atomium.be; adult/concession/Brusselscard/child €9/6/6/free; 🕒 10am-5.30pm) looms 102m over north Brussels' suburbia like a gleaming steel alien from a '60s Hollywood movie. It consists of nine house-sized metallic balls linked by steel tube-columns containing escalators and lifts. The balls are arranged like a school chemistry set to represent iron atoms in their crystal lattice...except these are 165 billion times bigger. It was built as a symbol of postwar progress for the 1958 World's Fair and was originally destined for demolition thereafter. However, it rapidly became an architectural icon and received a shiny makeover in 2006.

Visits take you by lift to the top panorama sphere where, disappointingly, the views aren't

labelled and queues are possible. Back at the bottom, escalators and stairs show you four other spheres. Displays focus on the building's construction and the 1958 fair but you'll need to have paid the extra €2 for an audio-guide to learn much from them.

At night the spheres sparkle magically and, except during midsummer, the panorama-level **restaurant** (☎ 02-479 5850; www.belgiumtaste.com; mains €12-20) reopens at 7.30pm, putting starched cloths on its functional tables and serving decent dinners with a view. Dinner guests don't pay the tower entrance fee but reservations are 100% essential.

MINI EUROPE

Want to fool your friends that you saw all of Europe? Easy. Just photograph the dozens of 1/25th scale models of the continent's top monuments at **Mini Europe** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-478 1313; www.minieurope.com; adult/child €11.80/8.80; ☞ 10am-5pm Apr-Dec, 9.30am-8pm Jul-Aug). On certain midsummer Saturday nights it stays open till midnight, with firework displays at 10.30pm.

Koekelberg

NATIONAL BASILICA

Ghastly but gigantic, **Basilique Nationale du Sacré-Cœur** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-421 1669; www.basilique.be; Parvis de la Basilique 1; ☞ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Apr) is the world's fifth-largest church and, by some measures, the world's largest art deco building. When construction started in 1905 (to celebrate Belgium's 75th anniversary), a truly magnificent feast of neogothic spires was planned. However, WWI left state finances impoverished so a 1925 re-design shaved off most of the intricate details. The lumpy result, finally completed in 1969, has some attractive stained glass but is predominantly a white elephant of dull, brown brick and green copperwork. The central dome is visible for miles, commanding the northwest end of ruler-straight Blvd Léopold II. Take the lift (adult/Brusselscard €4/2.40) to a 53m-high panorama balcony for wide views including an interesting perspective on the Atomium. Enter from door 6 (southwest side).

Molenbeek

TOUR & TAXIS

A postal sorting shed doesn't sound like an immediate tourist draw but the **Tour & Taxis complex** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-420 6069; www.tourtaxis

.be; Rue Picard 3) is in fact an architectural masterpiece – its 21st-century revamp creating a fine exhibition and commercial space in these Victorian warehouses and customs depots. It's all part of an ongoing gentrification of Brussels' run-down **canal district**, from where you can now take a variety of summer **barge cruises** (www.brusselsbywater.be).

Anderlecht

Internationally best known for its **football team** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-522 1539; www.rscab.be; Van den Stock Stadium, Ave Théo Verbeek 2), this sprawling western suburb now has a rather grimy, run-down reputation. However, back in 1521 it was still a country village when the world-famous humanist Erasmus came to 'play at farming'. The lovely brick home where he stayed for five months is now the **Erasmus House Museum** (☎ 02-521 1383; www.erasmushouse.museum; Rue du Chapitre 31; admission €1.25; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). It's an unexpected little gem furnished with fine artworks including several Flemish Primitive paintings and some priceless manuscripts. There's an attractive 'philosophy garden' behind and the already modest entry fee also allows access to Belgium's smallest **begijnhof** (☞ closed noon-2pm). It's now an appealing two-house something-of-everything museum tucked behind the nearby 16th-century Gothic **Church of St-Pierre & St-Guidon** (☞ 9am-noon daily & 2pm-5.30pm Thu-Tue). The church has some original murals and was once a major pilgrimage site: right up until WWI, cart-drivers and those suffering fits would arrive here to pray before the reliquary of 10th-century St-Guy (Guidon), the multitasked patron saint of cattle, work-horses, sheds and epileptics. The church's fine, carved white-stone spire looks especially photogenic viewed up narrow Rue Poselein, and it dominates the patchily attractive, *café*-ringed square **Place de la Vaillance**, where several 1920s buildings have pseudo-medieval facades. Metro Saint-Guidon lies directly behind.

CANTILLON BREWERY

Beer lovers shouldn't miss this unique living brewery-museum, the **Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-521 4928; www.cantillon.be; Rue Gheude 56; admission €5; ☞ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat). Atmospheric and family run, it's Brussels' last operating lambic (p49) brewery and still uses much of the original 19th-century equipment. After a brief explanation, visitors take a self-guided tour including the barrel

rooms where the beers mature for up to three years in chestnut wine-casks. Expect plenty of cobwebs as spiders are considered friends of lambic's spontaneous fermentation process, which occurs (winter only) in a vast, shallow copper tub in the attic room. The entry fee includes two taster-glasses of Cantillon's startlingly acidic brews. Virtually unrecognisable as a brewery, it's located on a faceless backstreet near Metro Clemenceau.

Woluwé & Tervuren

AVENUE DE TERVUREN (TERVURENLAAN)

A 20-minute ride on tram 44 from Metro Montgomery follows beautiful tree-lined Ave de Tervuren east past opulent embassy villas, the lovely parkland ponds of Woluwé and through the northern reaches of the leafy Forêt des Soignes. Sit on the right (south) side to spot the 1911 **Palais Stodet** (Map pp66-7; Ave de Tervuren 281; ☎ closed), whose stark, radically geometric exterior is an early premonition of art deco. A Unesco site since June 2009, at the time of research the building was under renovation but hopefully it will one day be possible to visit and admire the interiors, which feature original work by Klimt and Khnopff.

TERVUREN

Tram 44 terminates in verdant Tervuren, just beyond Brussels' eastern city limit. Here the unique **Africa Museum** (off Map pp66-7; Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika; ☎ 02-769 5211; www.africamuseum.be; Leuvensesteenweg 13, Tervuren; adult/concession/child/Brusselscard €5/4/free/free, audio-guide €2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) is a veritable palace of a building, purpose-built by King Léopold II to show off Europe's most impressive array of African artefacts. Of course, much of the collection was plundered from Léopold's then-private 'garden' (Congo), where his rule saw a staggering percentage of the Congolese population die (see p30).

The superb collection includes masks, tools, woven baskets and an enormous 22m-long, 3.5-tonne Lengola canoe. And what's displayed is only a fraction of what's still locked in the museum's vaults. Numerous stuffed animals and pinned insects are displayed in a section of the museum that has changed little since it opened in 1910 and whose walls are still adorned with landscapes by symbolist artist Emile Fabry. Most controversial is the section dealing with the

history of Congo, where a few statistics do little more than hint at the level of suffering endured by Africans under Léopold's infamously exploitative rule.

The museum's magnificent setting is a vast formal park of lakes and manicured lawns dotted with statuary. Here, in 1897, Leopold's ethnographic exhibition went as far as building whole Congolese villages... and populating them with living Congolese villagers. A shocking idea – even for that era. Yet it was repeated during 1958's World Fair to considerable global consternation.

The museum's gently colonial-themed **cafeteria** (sandwiches €3-7.50, mains €7.80-16.20; ☎ 11.30-3pm) serves a selection of African meals and various beers flavoured with exotic fruits.

ACTIVITIES

Golf

See <http://brussels.angloinfo.com/countries/belgium/golf.asp> for general golfing information and www.golfbelgium.be/clubs.html for club listings. Those with EGA recognised handicaps usually qualify for Belgian Golf Federation reciprocal membership and can then play at Anderlecht's 18-hole **Royal Amicale Golf Club** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-521 1687; www.golf-anderlecht.com; Rue de la Scholle; green fees week/weekend €38/55) near Metro Eddy Merckx.

Swimming

Piscine Victor Boin (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-539 0615; Rue de la Perche 38; adult/child €2/1.50; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat, from 2pm Wed) Covered art deco swimming pool in St-Gilles.

TOURS

Brussels City Tours (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 7744; www.brussels-city-tours.com; Rue de la Colline 8; adult/concession/child €16/14.50/8; ☎ every half hr 10am-4pm Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Nov-Mar) Hop-on, hop-off double-decker buses with eight-language commentary stopping at 13 places including Bruxelles-Central, Atomium, Place Royale and the EU's Rond Point Schuman. Buy tickets (valid 24 hours) when boarding. Also offered are 2½-hour city tours (10am and 2pm) starting on foot then continuing by bus, one-day bus tours to Ghent and Bruges and other weekly tours visiting places such as Antwerp or Luxembourg.

Heritage conservation group **ARAU** (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 3345; www.arau.org; Blvd Adolphe Max 55) can get you into many of Brussels' architectural

gems that are otherwise closed to the public. Their popular three-hour art nouveau bus tours (adult/concession €17/13) usually start 10am Saturdays (English or French/English) April to mid-December. For their other much more sporadic themed tours, see the website.

For cycle tours, see p111.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p16 for Brussels events.

SLEEPING

Brussels has a vast range of accommodation. Unless you're on specific business, try to find accommodation within the central 'pentagon', ideally around the Grand Place or perhaps in nearby Ste-Catherine. Brussels has a reasonable network of B&Bs, many listed and bookable through **Bed & Brussels** (☎ 02-646 0737; www.bnb-brussels.be).

Camping

Camping Bruxelles-Europe à Ciel Ouvert (Map p86; ☎ 02-640 7967; Chaussée de Wavre 203; tent/person €6/6; ☎ reception 8am-11pm Jul-Aug) The only campsite in central Brussels is a simple summer-only place hidden away in the garden of a spindle-spired church, Église du St-Sacrement. Rather rosy showers are available and campervans may park outside (€10 without hook-up). The nearest full camping grounds are much further afield in Wezembeek-Oppem, Grimbergen and Beersel (p113).

Budget

Most hostel fees include breakfast and are slightly discounted if you're under 26.

HI Hostel Jacques Brel (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 0187; brussels.brel@laj.be; Rue de la Sablonnière 30; dm/s/d €17.40/34/48; ☎ 8am-midnight; ☎ ☎ ☎) Neat, presentable and reasonably spacious hostel in a pleasant, nearly central area. The bar has occasional live music (sometimes guests play for their bed!), there's a 2nd-floor terrace, free wi-fi, laundry for €4, no lockout and a partly 'bio' (organic) breakfast is included.

Centre Vincent van Gogh (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-217 0158; www.chab.be; Rue Traversière 8; dm/s/d €18/33/52; ☎ ☎ ☎) The lobby bar and pool-table veranda are unusually hip for a hostel, but rooms are less glamorous and, from some, reaching the toilets means crossing the garden courtyard. No membership required. Wi-fi €2 per hour.

Sleep Well (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 5050; www.sleepwell.be; Rue du Damier 23; hostel dm/s/d/tr €19.70/30.50/55.40/74.10, hotel s/d/tr €43/62/88; ☎ ☎) Bright cartoon colours and a tinkling Manneken over the door are an inviting contrast to the soulless (if central) surroundings dominated by a multistorey car park. There's plenty of meet-each-other space, a bar, free breakfast, games room, terrace and internet (€1.50 per half hour). Functional, somewhat worn rooms look like student residences. The hostel section has shared facilities (though some rooms have taps and toilets) and can't be accessed between 11am and 3pm.

HI Hostel JOHN Breugel (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 0436; www.jeuigherbergen.be/brussel.htm; Rue du Saint Esprit 2; HI members dm/s/d €19.80/34/48.40; ☎ lockout 10am-2pm, curfew 1am-7am; ☎ ☎) Superbly central but somewhat institutional with limited communal space. Internet €2 per hour, wi-fi free, lockers €1.50.

2Go4 (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 3019; www.2G04.be; Blvd Émile Jacqmain 99; dm €22-29, s/d/tr/q €55/69/96/116; ☎ reception 7am-1pm & 4-11pm) The well-equipped hostel features zany ground-floor furnishings including a chunk of old Atomium sheeting hanging above reception. It's toward the slightly sleazier end of town but on a bright, major street. No lockout, no curfew. Come here to check in even if you've booked their unpretentious 'Grand Place Rooms' (Map p70; Rue des Harengs 6; doubles €59 to €70), which have low ceilings, hefty beams and a fabulously central location. Rates include coffee but not breakfast.

Midrange & Top End

Breakfast is generally included in rack rate prices, but not necessarily when you've scored an internet bargain. Check carefully.

WEEKEND & SUMMER DEALS

With most of Brussels' accommodation scene aimed squarely at Eurocrats and business travellers, many mid- and upper-range hotels drop their rates dramatically at weekends and in summer. Double rooms with September midweek rates of €240 might cost as little as €69 in August – so why use a hostel? Shop around and check carefully for internet deals, especially on chain hotels.

GRAND PLACE AREA

Downtown-BXL (Map p70; ☎ 0475-290 721; www.downtownbxl.com, www.lacasabxl.com; Rue du Marché au Charbon 118-120; d €76) Near the capital's gay district, this B&B is superbly located for those wanting to dance the night away. From the communal breakfast table and help-yourself coffee bar, a classic staircase winds up to good-value rooms featuring zebra striped cushions and Warhol Marilyn prints. One room features a round bed. Adjacent Casa-BXL offers three rooms in a more Moroccan-Asian style.

La Vieille Lanterne (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 7494; www.lavieillelanterne.be; Rue des Grands Carmes 29; s/d from €76/86, summer €65/75; ☎) Watch the Manneken Pis from the window of room 5 in this neat, unsophisticated six-room B&B-style 'hotel', accessed by steep spiral stairs from an archetypal giftshop. Check in before 10pm. Free wi-fi.

Hotel Alma (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 3119; www.almahotel.be; Rue des Éperonniers 42; d €80-200) Neat, high-ceilinged rooms with colourfully stripy carpets. The decor is minimalist but somewhat lacking in style. Rear rooms are peacefully quiet and great value if you're offered last-minute walk-in rates of €65 as we were.

Hotel Mozart (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 6661; www.hotel-mozart.be; Rue Marché aux Fromages 23; s/d/tr/q €80/100/130/150; ☎) Mozart? Think Sultanahmet rather than Salzburg when imagining the sensory overload of this place – lashings of Turkish mosaic-work plus wall fountains, gilt rococo-styled chairs and an incredible crush of imitation 'antiques', paintings and 'art nouveau' lamps. Garish, fun and very central but mattresses are saggy, bathrooms have their defects and you'll need good earplugs in the front rooms, which overlook never-sleeping 'Pita' street.

Hôtel Saint-Michel (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 0956; www.atgp.be; Grand Place 15; without view s/d/tr €65/105/128, with view €120/140/163) Its unique location right on the fabulous Grand Place means you just might forgive the dowdy decor, soft mattresses and a lift like a goods elevator. The views from the front rooms are truly breathtaking but bear in mind you'll also share the sounds of a square that remains alive with activity (and occasional full-scale rock concerts) till the wee hours. Service is very friendly.

Hôtel Arlequin (Map p70; ☎ 02-514 1615; www.florishotels.com; Rue de la Fourche 17; r €85-299; ☎) This well-hidden hotel's outstanding feature is its 7th-floor breakfast room with superb views

across to the City Hall. Recently upgraded room decor has a retro-'60s appeal that's more tasteful than the lobby might suggest. Nonetheless we found loose wires and scuffed corridor walls and at the weekend music from nearby venues can be disturbing. Rates vary radically according to demand. Wi-fi €5/10 per hour/day.

Chambres d'hôtes du Vaudeville (Map p70; ☎ 0471-473 837; www.chambresdhotesdaudeville.be; Galerie de la Reine 11; d rear/front €115/155; ☎ ☒) This classy new B&B has an incredible location right within the gorgeous (if reverberant) Galeries St-Hubert. Delectable decor styles include African, modernist and 'Loulou' (with 1920s nude sketches). Larger front rooms have claw-foot bathtubs and *galerie* views, but can be noisy with clatter that continues all night. Get keys via the art deco influenced, recently revamped Café du Vaudeville, where breakfast is included. Vaudeville's unique house beer is provided free in the minibar.

Royal Windsor Hôtel (Map p70; ☎ 02-505 5555; www.royalwindsorbrussels.com; Rue Duquesnoy 5; r weekend/internet/rack rates from €139/180/350, 'fashion rooms' €199-900; ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) This super-central 266-room business hotel has liveried doormen, a brass 'n' glass entranceway and somewhat oppressively low ceilings. Standard rooms offer '30s-style corner cabinets and stylish over-bed draperies. But the unique feature is the hotel's handful of 'fashion rooms' created by cutting-edge Belgian fashion designers including Nicolas Woit, Marina Yee and Kaat Tilley.

Hôtel Amigo (Map p70; ☎ 02-547 4747; www.hotelamigo.com; Rue de l'Amigo 1-3; d from €179/199/319 weekend/summer/weekday, ste from €1299; ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) Let faultlessly polite besuited staff usher you into Central Brussels' top address. Behind a classical Flemish facade lies a stone-flagged reception area worn smooth by centuries of footsteps. Stylishly redesigned rooms have an airy and imaginative vibe with neo-art deco touches, surreal carved 'fruit' elements and art ranging from signed Goossens caricatures to Magritte prints and framed Tintin figurines.

Hôtel Le Dixseptième (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 5744; www.ledxseptieme.be; Rue de la Madeleine 25; s/d/ste from €180/200/270, weekend €100/100/200; ☒ ☒) A hushed magnificence greets you in this alluring boutique hotel, partly occupying the former 17th-century residence of the Spanish ambassador. The coffee-cream breakfast room retains original cherub reliefs while

the bar-lounge has been done out to re-create a similar ambience. The 24 guestrooms are all individually decorated in a wide variety of styles. Spacious executive suites come with four-poster beds. Across a tiny enclosed courtyard-garden in the cheaper rear section, some rooms are less than memorable, though the Creuz Suite has its bathroom tucked curiously into a 14th-century vaulted basement. Lifts stop between floors so you'll need to deal with some stairs.

Hotel Aris (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 6006; www.arishotel.be; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 78; s/d/tr/ff €220/240/310/360; ☎ ☎) Very central. The blandly neutral rooms are overpriced at rack rates but well worth considering when discounted to €69 in summer.

Dominican (Map p70; ☎ 02-203 0808; www.the.dominican.be; Rue Léopold 9; r €315-1150; ☎ ☎) Combining classic elegance with understated modern chic this excellent top-range palace occupies the site of a former abbey right behind La Monnaie. It's hard to beat for style and the location is wonderfully central albeit in an area suffering from rather patchy architecture and atmosphere.

Le Plaza (Map p70; ☎ 02-278 0100; www.leplaza-brussels.be; Blvd Adolphe Max 118-126; r €100-400) From outside the architecture looks unsophisticatedly art deco but inside the foyer oozes classical charm. Rooms are refined and unusually spacious and the hotel has a conscious eco-sensitive policy. However, staff seem somewhat overworked and the location, while reasonably central, is marred by the block of sex shops that leads north from here towards the seedier Gare du Nord area. Breakfast €29.

Hôtel Métropole (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 2300, reservations, 02-214 2424; www.metropolehotel.com; Place de Brouckère 31; s/d/ste €330/360/500, weekend rates from €115; ☎ ☎) This 1895 showpiece has a jaw-droppingly sumptuous French Renaissance-style foyer with marble walls, coffered ceiling and beautifully etched stained-glass back windows. The *café* is indulgent and the bar (frequent live music) features recently 'rediscovered' murals by a student of Horta. One of the lifts is an 1895 original. Rooms have been recently redecorated in styles varying from art deco to what they describe as 'Venetian Baroque', slightly overcolourful for some tastes. Much of the furniture is restored, from 1930s originals, and some of the chandeliers no doubt are hellishly difficult to dust.

ST-CATHERINE & AROUND

Hôtel Noga (Map p70; ☎ 02-218 6763; www.nogahotel.com; Rue du Béguinage 38; s/d/tr/q from €95/110/135/160, weekends from €70/85/110/135; ☎ ☎) This very welcoming family hotel uses model yachts to give the lobby and piano room a certain nautical feel. Sepia photos of Belgian royalty, along with historic bellows, top hats and assorted random kitsch, lead up to variously decorated rooms that are neat and clean without particular luxury. Wi-fi is free for the first hour.

Hooy Kaye Lodge (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 4440; www.hooykayelodge.com; Quai aux Pierres de Taille 22; d €95-125) Calm, elegantly sparse B&B, with Burmese chests and framed antique garments in a 17th-century house, which retains its unpolished 1795 stairway. The Burmese connection continues with the three-tiered 'office' in the garden, shaped like an out-building of Shwedagon.

Hôtel Welcome (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 9546; www.brussels.hotel.travel; Rue du Peuplier 1; r €96-210; ☎ ☎) The wooden-panelled reception area does nothing to prepare guests for the full-colour decor in each uniquely designed room transporting you to, say, Tahiti, Congo, Cuba or Zanzibar.

our pick Maison Noble (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 2339; www.maison-noble.eu; Rue du Marq 10; s/€119-139, d/€129-149; ☎ ☎) A stay at this splendidly refined four-room guesthouse starts with a welcome drink in the Flemish neogothic lounge. It's backed by a gorgeous 1920s stained-glass panel and joined to a neo-Renaissance piano room. Guests are free to tickle the ivories and once in a while recitals are held here featuring up-and-coming concert pianists. Fully hotel-standard rooms have rainforest showers, fine linens, and framed Breughel prints over the beds. While the target market is 'married' gay couples, the charming owners are hetero-friendly.

Hotel Café Pacific (Map p70; ☎ 02-213-0080; www.hotelcafepacific.com; Rue Antoine Dansaert 57; s/€119-159, d/€129-169; ☎) The hip design look is all you'd expect from this fashion-district address, though the reception is just a desk attached to a revamped *café*. Most rooms come with high-powered showers and large but subtle black-and-white nudes above the bed. Fabrics by Mia Zia, toiletries by Bvlgari.

TRÔNE

A sedate, oft-overlooked little area that's within easy walking distance of the EU Parliament, yet also handy for the Royal area and lively Matonge.

Chambres en Ville (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 9290; www.chambresenville.be; Rue de Londres 19; s/d €80/100, 2 nights s/d €140/180; ☎) Impressive B&B in an unmarked 19th-century townhouse featuring part-stripped wooden floors, high ceilings and large, tastefully appointed guestrooms. Furniture new and old combined with striking artwork and curiosities from all over the world (notably antique African statuettes) gives the place a unique character. Duplex top-floor studio available (€1000 per month)

Hôtel Stanhope (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-506 9111; www.stanhope.be; Rue du Commerce 9; d weekday/weekend from €220/84; ☎ ☑ ☐ ☎ ☎) This serene oasis of genteel 'English-style' class has a mock-classical lounge-lobby styled like a club library and guestrooms where timeless fabrics vary from Sanderson-floral to Delftware-effect without feeling chintzy. Breakfast costs €25. Online weekend bargains can be found.

MAROLLES

Hôtel Galia (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 4243; www.hotelgalia.com; Place du Jeu-de-Balle 15; s/d/tr/q from €65/75/90/120; ☎) Simple rooms with tiny plastic shower-toilet cubicles overlook Brussels' well-known bric-a-brac market square. Prices are constant year-round so it's worth considering booking here during high seasons.

BRUXELLES-MIDI AREA

There are numerous hotels around Brussels' main international station, and prices are often very competitive. But you should be aware that this is not one of Brussels' more salubrious neighbourhoods. Locals probably exaggerate the area's reputation for petty criminality as part of a certain prejudice against largely immigrant districts. Still, there's little real charm here and it's a bit too far from the centre to be truly convenient for visiting Brussels' major sights. Hotels around Place Roupe (three blocks north) don't cost much more but the area's somewhat less daunting and slightly nearer the centre, though still far from a prime location.

Hôtel à la Grande Cloche (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 6140; www.hotelgrandecloche.com; Pl Roupe 10; s/d/tr €68/79/90) Unremarkable, somewhat disjointed and with slightly soft mattresses, this place is nonetheless professionally run and its fixed prices make it a reasonable fall back when everything in the centre is full or overpriced.

IXELLES & AVE LOUISE

Like everywhere in Brussels this area's character can vary substantially block by block, but overall it's one of the capital's most chic and lively inner suburbs.

Hôtel Rembrandt (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 7139; www.hotel-rembrandt.be; Rue de la Concorde 42; s/d without bathroom €50/75, with bathroom €70/95; ☎) A homely and good-value guest house just a block off Ave Louise. It's a jumble of old ornaments, paintings and polished wooden furnishings. Rooms are well cared for if a tad small, all with showers or baths but the cheaper ones sharing toilets. Reception closes at 9pm.

Thewhitehotel (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-644 2929; www.thewhitehotel.be; Ave Louise 212; r weekend/weekday from €90/115; ☎ ☎) The fiendishly hip ultra-minimalist rooms are bright white with designer touches. They're above a similarly stylish bar-lounge offering free internet (wi-fi in contrast costs €5 for two days). It's well placed for the trendy Flagey-Ixelles scene, a tram ride from the city centre and has bikes/scooters available to rent.

EATING

The essential Brussels experience involves old-world restaurants where aproned waiters bustle across tiled floors and diners tuck into hearty Belgian cuisine in wood-panelled surroundings. But trendy minimalism has also swept the scene, and there's no shortage of international cuisine. As ever, *cafés* (p102) are generally cheaper and open longer than restaurants if atmosphere and price is more important than refinement and cuisine.

The cobbled streets around the Grand Place are the natural starting point, though be careful on the quaint Rue and Petite Rue des Bouchers (see p98). For fish and seafood the Ste-Catherine's fish-market area is highly regarded. The streets around Place St-Géry offer a small line-up of great-value Asian eateries. The Marolles shelters several intimate and trendy options while Matonge counterpoints cheap African and world cuisine with hip local fare on Rue St-Boniface. There's a lot more choice around Ixelles. Affluent locals tend to dine considerably further afield in middle-class areas beyond the scope of this book, such as Woluwé, Kraainem and Uccle or semi-rural escapes like Lasne and Linkebeek. Useful sources of restaurant suggestions (some with customer reviews) are www.resto.be and www.deltaweb.be.

Lower Town

FRENCH & BELGIAN

Domaine de Lintillac (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 5123; Rue de Flandre 25; mains €9.50-28; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm Tue-Sat) This warm, colourful French-rustic-style restaurant features a toaster on each checkerboard table. Virtually every dish is duck-related including various duck sausages, pâtés and *cassoulet*, a thick bean-based stew. Prices are very reasonable, especially if you avoid their speciality foie-gras starters.

Fin de Siècle (Map p70; Rue des Chartreux 9; mains €10.23-15.81, beer from €1.91; 🍷 bar 4.30pm-1am, kitchen 6pm-12.30am) From *carbonade* (beer-based hot-pot) and *kriek* (cherry beer)-chicken to mezzes and tandoori chicken, the food selection is as eclectic as the decor in this low-lit cult place. Tables are rough, music constant, ceilings purple and prices still converted to the centime from Belgian Francs. To quote the barman 'there's no phone, no bookings, no sign on the door...we do everything to put people off but they still keep coming'.

Viva M'Boma (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 1593; Rue de Flandre 17; mains €11-18; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm Thu-Sat, plus noon-2pm Mon-Tue) Hefty Belgian classics served in a long, narrow bistro entirely walled in gleaming white tiles like the butchers' shop it once was. A stuffed sheep and pig's head meet and greet.

Brasserie Royal (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 8500; www.royalbrasseriebrussels.be; Rue de Flandre 103; mains €12.50-19, beer €2.20; 🍷 noon-10.30pm) Black and dark chocolate walls with white UFOs of light and rows of Bombay Sapphire for decor create a jazzy setting for steaks, fish or traditional Belgian fare. Don't let the abysmal website put you off.

La Villette (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 7550; www.la-villette.be; Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains 3; mains €16-20.50, mussels €21-23, lunch €14; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 6.30pm-11.30pm Sat) Beams, dark wood and

gingham tablecloths create a wonderfully typical atmosphere for traditional Brussels food, along with steaks and various changing beer recipes such as salmon in Hoegaarden or guinea fowl in *kriek*.

In't Spinnekopke (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-511 8695; www.spinnekopke.be; Place du Jardin aux Fleurs 1; mains €15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This age-old classic occupies a 17th-century whitewashed cottage with a summer terrace spilling onto on a newly revamped square. Bruxellois specialities and meats cooked in beer-based sauces are authentic but hardly a bargain and some of the tables feel a tad cramped.

Chez Léon (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 0426; www.chezleon.be; Rue des Bouchers 18; mains €15-27; 🍷 noon-11pm) This long-time tourist favourite serves the original 'Mussels from Brussels', and makes a good place to try them if you don't mind that portions (mostly 850g) are somewhat small by Belgian standards. Rooms are spread over several gabled house and decor varies from attractively classic to somewhat tacky depending on where you sit.

Brasserie de la Roue d'Or (Map p70; ☎ 02-514 2554; Rue des Chapeliers 26; mains €15-28; 🍷 noon-12.30am, closed Jul) Cosy in a cramped Parisian bistro sort of way, this place serves excellent if somewhat pricey Belgian food. Wall murals and ceiling clouds pay homage to the city's surrealist artists.

Belga Queen Brussels (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 2187; www.belgaqueen.be; Rue Fossé aux Loups 32; mains/weekday lunch/beers from €20/16/2.50; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 7pm-midnight) Belgian cuisine is given a chic, modern twist within a magnificent if reverberant 19th-century bank building. Classical stained-glass ceilings and marble columns are hidden behind an indecently hip oyster counter and wide-ranging beer and cocktail bar (open noon till late). In the former bank vaults beneath, there's a cigar lounge

TOP RESTAURANTS

Our restaurant reviews focus on ambience and value for money. However, if money is no object check out one of Brussels' dozen Michelin-starred restaurants, many run by internationally known chefs. Beware that even with a plutonium credit card you may need reservations weeks in advance for mythic **Comme Chez Soi** (Map p70; www.commechezsoi.be). Other classics require a lengthy taxi ride from the city centre, including Jean-Pierre Bruneau's **Bruneau** (Map pp66-7; www.bruneau.be) near Koekelberg, Alain Deluc's **Barbizon** (Map pp66-7; www.barbizon.be) in Jezus-Eik, and Pascal Devalkeneer's **Chalet de la Forêt** (www.lechaletdelaforet.be), also set amid towering beeches in the Forêt de Soignes. Central **Sea Grill** (Map p70; www.seagrill.be) is truly superb for fish though oddly located in a typical international business-hotel.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

Locals tend to steer clear of many undeniably attractive fish restaurants that create such a photogenic scene on the Rue and Petite Rue des Bouchers. Of course there are exceptions. Chez Leon (p97) is a veritable institution for mussels and Aux Armes de Bruxelles is a reliable place for high-class Belgian favourites. But at certain other places we've observed some subtle trickery. In one example we agreed to take a bargain value menu listed on the board outside. But when taking our order, the waiter nonchalantly suggested some vastly more expensive alternatives, implying (if never actually saying) that they were included. A second clever 'scam' was that the 'house wine' turned out to be one of the most expensive options on the wine list. So the moral, on this street at least, is always double check.

that morphs into a nightclub after 10pm Wednesday to Saturday. The unique toilets have a memorable surprise in store! Service and food standards here are heatedly debated among city residents but we've always had positive experiences.

our pick L'Ogenblik (Map p70; ☎ 02-5116151; www.ogenblik.be; Galerie des Princes 1; lunch €11, mains €23-28; ☒ noon-2.30pm & 7pm-midnight) This historic bistro-restaurant has sawdust floors, close-packed tables and plenty of bustle. The atmosphere is much livelier than many upmarket fish restaurants but seafood quality challenges the best (the salmon *mille-feuille* is divine). Steaks and duck dishes are also available.

La Maison du Cygne (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 8244; www.lamaisonducygne.be; Grand Place; mains €37-65, menu €65; ☒ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Sun-Fri) Gastronomic Belgo-French seasonal cuisine is served in this sophisticated restaurant on the 2nd floor of a classic 17th-century guildhall. Book way ahead to score one of the few tables with a Grand Place view. For something slightly less formal try their 1st-floor Ommegang Brasserie (www.brasserie-delommegang.be; mains €15 to €27; open noon to 2.30pm and 6.30pm to 10.30pm Monday to Saturday).

SEAFOOD

Many Belgian restaurants serve mussels (in season), monkfish and seafood plates but there are also seafood specialists. The best selection is in the Ste-Catherine area. Quality

WATER INTO WINE?

Or maybe beer? In midrange restaurants a bottle of water will typically cost €5 to €7. No, tap water isn't an option. But for less than half that price you can usually order a standard beer.

is generally high here and menu items fairly similar so it's a matter of finding the atmosphere and price range that suits. Note that drink prices can be disproportionately elevated in the pricier restaurants.

Mer du Nord (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 1192; www.vishandel.noordzee.be; Rue Ste-Catherine 45; ☒ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun) Well-reputed fishmonger's window catering to a queue of stand-and-snack lunch-grabbers around bare metal outdoor tables.

Vistro (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 4181; Quai aux Briques 16; mains €17-38, menus €22-47; ☒ noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri & 6.30-midnight Mon-Sat) Much less formal and noticeably cheaper than many Ste-Catherine options. Vistro has bare brick walls and A-frame beams upstairs and a pleasant buzz.

Vismet (Map p70; ☎ 02-218 8545; Pl Ste-Catherine 23; mains €24-26; ☒ noon-3pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sat) Vismet is popular and stylish in a simple, vaguely minimalist fashion, with rows of ceiling point-lamps and high-up mirrors like rectangular steersman's windows. Tables can feel slightly cramped but quality is high and there's a daily changing shortlist of recommendations.

Bij den Boer (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 6122; www.bijdenboer.com; Quai aux Briques 60; mains €15-28; ☒ noon-2.30pm & 6-10.30pm Mon-Sat) Convivial favourite, with mirror panelled walls, model yachts, sensible prices and a jolly ambience. Wine of the month is €20 a bottle.

La Marie-Joseph (Map p70; ☎ 02-218 0596; Quai au bois à Brûler 47-49; mains €22.50-32, beer/coffee €4.25/4; ☒ noon-3pm & 6.30-11pm Tue-Sun) Bright, modern art on whitewashed timber walls, simple tables and a hushed air of mild formality. The fish meals get consistently good local reviews from those who can afford them.

OTHER EUROPEAN

Comocomo (Map p70; ☎ 02-503 0330; Rue Antoine Dansaert 19; 3/6/9 pintxos €8.50/14/19; ☒ lunch & dinner;

premetro Bourse) *Pintxos* (the Basque version of tapas) snake past on an 80m-long conveyor belt. Colour codes include blue for fish, green for veggies, red for pork, and so on. It's all as predictably hip as you'd expect for this part of town.

A l'Ombra (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 6710; Rue des Harengs 2; pastas €8.50-13, mains €14-18; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Fri & 6.30pm-11.30pm Mon-Sat) Take a tiny, tile-walled 1920s shop-house. Keep the classic decor, wooden shelf-holders and cashier booth. Insert stools and a narrow communal table. Serve great fresh pasta and see if the customers finally communicate. Perhaps...at least with the farewell grappa.

Ricotta & Parmesan (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 8082; www.ricottaparmesan.com; Rue de l'Écuyer 31; mains €9-15; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6.30pm-11pm Mon-Sat) Excellent-value Italian food enjoyed in atmospheric decor – a pair of antique buildings filled with olive-oil bottles and antique cooking implements, some fancifully framed.

ASIAN

Lotus Bleu (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 6299; Rue du Midi 70; mains €8-13; ☎ noon-11pm) Simple, generally reliable central place for inexpensive Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai food.

Rêve d'Asie (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 4828; www.reve.dasie.be; Rue Jules Van Praet 19; mains €8-15; ☎ noon-11.30pm) A trishaw plunges from the ceiling, chairs and frames burst out of the half-plastered walls but all the Buddhas stay predictably calm. Despite the whacky decor, the Thai and Vietnamese food is very well priced and tasty (though hardly gourmet) and served with a smile. Plenty of other Asian options, mostly Vietnamese but also an Indian (with the unlikely name 'Shamrock'), are huddled along the same street.

Ajiyoshi (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 0298; Quai aux Briques 32; noodles €9.50-12, katsudon €15.50, sushi sets from €20.50; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-10.15pm) This tiny, typical Japanese eatery strikes a fair balance between price and quality. For detailed customer reviews of numerous other Japanese options in Brussels, see www.ponpokopon.net/resto.html.

VEGETARIAN

Den Teepot (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 9402; Rue des Chartreux 66; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Sat) Macrobiotic, veggie lunch place attached to a mustard-yellow 'bio' shop.

Picnik (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 3484; Rue de Flandre 109; soup €2-3, daily special €8, 3-course menu €9.50;

☎ 11.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Vegetarian snack bar that's mostly organic.

AFRICAN

Kokob (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 1950; www.kokob.be; Rue des Grands Carmes 10; veg/meat dishes from €7.90/11.50, rice €1; ☎ 6.30pm-11pm daily & noon-4pm Thu-Sun) Warmly lit Ethiopian bar/restaurant/cultural centre where well-explained dishes are best shared then eaten from and with pancake-like *injera* (€0.75 each). There is live acoustic music one Thursday per month.

LATE NIGHT

Mystical (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 1111; www.mysticalresto.be; Rue des Eperonniers 57; mains €11-24, pasta €8-14; ☎ 6pm-5am Tue-Sun) Bare-brick walls and alternating black and cream seats are attractively lit and surveyed by Buddha and Léopold II. The menu includes grills, mussels, and kangaroo in almond-honey sauce.

Si Bemol (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 6378; www.lesibemol.be; Rue aux Fleurs 20; mains €10.50-21.50; ☎ 7pm-5am; ☎) Traditional cuisine from *stoemp* (potato-veg mash) to steaks to *chicons au gratin* (ham-wrapped endives in cheese sauce) available almost till dawn. By the time Si Bemol closes, the *cafés* around Place de Jeu-de-Balle (Map pp72-3) will be opening so you needn't go hungry.

QUICK EATS

A range of inexpensive lunchtime sandwich shops lies in and around the Galerie Ravenstein arcade (Map pp68-9) behind Bruxelles-Central station. Elsewhere, the following snack options include:

Panos (Map p70; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 85) Handy chain-bakery and sandwich shop.

Pita Places (Map p70; Rue du Marché aux Fromages) Pick from a swarm of places along Rue du Marché aux Fromages. Most open at lunchtime then work all night till around 6am. Basic pitas cost from €3. Eat in or take away.

Fritland (Map p70; Rue Henri Maus 49; ☎ 11am-1am) Chips.

Comus & Gasterea (Quai aux Briques 86; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sun) Modern ice-cream parlour where everything's homemade, including the cones.

Leonidas (Map p70; Rue de la Colline 11; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) Snack on skewers of fresh strawberries dipped in a chocolate fountain (€3).

SELF-CATERING

GB Express (Map p70; Rue au Beurre 25; ☎ 8am-10pm) Small central supermarket.

Congrès

Le Bier Circus (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 0034; www.bier-circus.be; Rue de l'Enseignement 57; mains €13-18, pastas €9-12; ☎ noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri & 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat) The decor is underwhelming but the Belgian 'beer cuisine' is as good as you'll find and the *café* has a very wide range of brews to wash it all down.

Marolles, Sablon & Ixelles

SABLON

On the Sablon itself you'll often be paying a hefty premium for being seen in the 'right' place, though there are exceptions.

ourpick Le Perroquet (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 9922; Rue Watteuu 31; light meals €8-10; ☎ noon-1am) Lovely art nouveau *café* with stained glass, marble-topped tables and dark-wood panelling. It's a really affordable place for salads and gourmet pitas: try the toasted '*croc pruneaux*' stuffed with cheese, bacon, prunes and green-garnish (€5.90). Bar opens 10am.

Tour D'y Voir (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 0078; www.tourdyvoir.be; Place du Grand Sablon 8-9; mains €15-25, lunch/dinner menus €16/40; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) High-backed fashion chairs and modern, semi-abstract art contrasts with rough brick floors and ancient beams in the upper part of a converted medieval chapel. Front windows overlook the Sablon and the light-touch French food is presented with aplomb. The entrance is easily missed beside Wittamer (p109), the square's classic tearoom patisserie.

MAROLLES

Walking distance from the centre, Rue Haute, Rue Blaes and some interconnecting lanes host an up-and-coming dining scene. It's worth strolling around as new places open frequently. For really cheap food and drink from 5am till 5pm try any *café* on Place du Jeu-de-Balle. See map pp72-3.

Quim's (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 3008; www.lequims.be; Rue Haute 204; mains €9.50-19; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-10.30pm Tue-Sun; ☎) This Belgo-Portuguese offering has adroitly reworked a classic mirror-panelled *café* into a low-lit fashion-conscious restaurant without losing any of the building's character. Mock clock faces and twinkling candles predominate. Classic Belgian lunch-specials cost under €10.

Restobières (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 7251; www.restobieres.eu; Rue des Renards 32; mains €12-22, menus €18-38; ☎ noon-3pm Tue-Sat, 6.30-11pm Thu-Sat, 4-11pm Sun) Beer-based twists on typical Belgian meals

served in a delightful two-storey restaurant. The walls are plastered with bottles, grinders and countless antique souvenir biscuit tins featuring Belgian royalty.

Au Stekerlapatte (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 8681; Rue des Prêtres 4; mains around €16; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun, closed Jul-Aug; ☎) Behind a grungy facade lies a cavernous casual bistro offering an extensive menu of generous Belgo-French food.

Cinabre de Garance (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 1604; www.cinabredegarance.com; Rue Haute 198; mains €17-19, menu €30; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-10.30pm Tue-Sun; ☎) Red and grey walls are patterned with light projections and splashed with abstract art. Sit at conspicuously battered wooden tables for imaginative meals like kangaroo in fig sauce. Or follow flickering candles up steep rear stairs to the 'secret' handkerchief of tree-shaded terrace.

Les Petits Oignons (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 4738; www.petits-oignons.be; Rue Notre Seigneur 13; mains €18-25, 3-course lunch menu €18, 4-course dinner menu €28; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri & dinner Mon-Sat) This wisteria-draped 17th-century house has globe lanterns and colour-splash art inside, a garden area behind and puts reliable if limited-choice Belgo-French food on your plate, notably ray wings and lamb knuckle.

GARE DU MIDI AREA

Within the Bruxelles-Midi complex are the usual bars, bakeries and snack-shacks but if you have a long wait for your train there are a couple of dining options nearby that might be worth leaving the station for.

Au Bon Coeur (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-538 9669; Rue Joesph Claes 27; mains €4-10; ☎ 6.30-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Despite its cheesy decor and unpromising location, this family-style Greek eatery is an age-old classic for inexpensive *petits os* (short, barbequed spare ribs) served with fresh lemon rather than barbeque sauce. Queues are possible mid-evening. The walk from the station's southeast exit is short but gloomy.

Midi Station (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-526 8800; www.midistation.eu; Pl Victor Horta 26; mains €20-33; ☎ 7am-midnight) Attempting to reverse the Bruxelles-Midi station area's negative image, this boldly stylish restaurant also offers an oyster bar, hip cocktail lounge, a cigar bar and live music Thursdays and Fridays (10pm). Several cheap, smoky bars lie on either side if all you want's a €1.60 beer.

MATONGE & ST-BONIFACE

Very inexpensive African, Pakistani, South American, Italian and Belgo-Belgian eateries

EATING AFRICAN

Many restaurants in the compact Congolese district of Matonge offer a selection of African dishes. Common choices are *moambe*, Congo's classic palm-nut stew (fish or chicken), *yassa*, a tangy lemon-flavoured chicken dish originally from Senegal and *mafe* (aka *poulet arachide*), an Africa-wide favourite with chicken in a sauce made from palm oil, peanut paste and tomato purée. Add hot-pepper sauce to taste. Other typical options are grilled whole *tilapia* (St-Peters' fish), curried *gésier* (chicken gizzards) and barbecued goat. All tend to come accompanied with rice (sometimes cassava) with optional cassava-leaf 'spinach' and deep-fried plantain chips.

are located side-by-side along Rue Longue Vie and are liberally scattered on Chaussée de Wavre. Meanwhile one block southwest, St-Boniface is an island of decidedly trendier bistros and coffee shops.

Tartine Zaline (Map pp72-3; Galerie de la Porte de Namur; mains €5-7; ☎ noon-8pm) Generous portions of pre-prepared African meals packed to take away or microwaved to eat at a single row of simple stools.

Imagin'Air (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 3331; Pl Fernand Cocq 6; mains €9-17; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun, closed Wed in winter) Adorable, organic-food 'Art Café' with exposed brick walls and one of Brussels' prettiest patio terraces decked with plants and bonsai-sized trees. Short, hand-written menus change frequently and dishes can be made to order for those on gluten-free, lactose-free and vegetarian/vegan diets.

Les Brassins (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 6999; www.lesbrassins.be; Rue Keyenveld 36; mains €10-17; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-1am Sat, noon-midnight Sun) On a quiet, unpromising back-street, this unpretentious brasserie is decorated with old enamel brewery adverts and serves reliable, well-priced Belgian home-cooked classics such as *carbonade*, *filet américain* and *boulettes* (meatballs), accompanied by perfect *frites* (or *stoemp*, you choose) and washed down by an excellent range of Belgian beers.

Le Dakar (Map pp72-3; ☎ 0498-989 500; http://restoledakar.com; Chaussée de Wavre 134; beer €2, mains €10.50-13; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat, 6pm-1am Sun) Numerous places nearby serve the same Congolese and Senegalese favourites (see above) for less

money. However, unlike most, the Dakar has a gentle semblance of style and even a pair of artistic lounge seats at which to sip your aperitif.

L'Ultime Atome (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-513 1367; www.ultime-atome.com; Rue St-Boniface 14; mains €11-17; ☎ 8.30am-1am Mon-Fri, 10am-1am Sat & Sun). This cavernous brasserie has curious train-wheel decor enlivening the pale wooden paneling of an otherwise classic *café*. A youthful crowd keeps things buzzing day and night and the non-stop kitchen turns out great-value meals including cheesy endives, tajines and mussels (€17).

Saint-Boniface (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 5366; Rue St-Boniface 9; mains €15-22; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm Mon-Fri). Enchanting old-world restaurant, featuring gingham tablecloths, walls jammed with framed pictures and authentic dishes from France's southwestern and Basque regions, notably *cassoulet*, Périgord duck, foie gras and *andouillette* (strongly flavoured tripe sausage – very much an acquired taste).

IXELLES & AVE LOUISE

Le Framboisier (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-647 5144; Rue du Bailli 35; ☎ noon-11pm Tue-Sun) Imaginatively flavoured ice cream to take away or, in summer, eat in the garden. Sorbets, including some made from Cantillon beers, are the house specialities.

Le Hasard des Choses (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-538 1863; Rue du Page 31; mains €10-15; ☎ noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri & 7-10.30pm Sun-Fri) Monty Python-esque lamps and tube vents, rough, bare-brick walls and a tree-shaded backyard area make an unusual venue for salads, delicious pastas or shrimps in green coconut curry (€14).

Fin de Siècle (off Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-648 8041; www.lafinidesiecle.be; Ave Louise 423; mains €10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Despite the imposing exterior and plush olde-worlde decor this delightful discovery offers well-prepared (predominantly Italian) meals at remarkably sensible prices. A one-plate lunch costs only €7.95. Garden seating in summer.

Dolma (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-649 8981; www.dolma.be; Chaussée d'Ixelles 329; ☎ Tue-Sat) Competent if not especially exotic vegetarian buffet served in a Tibetan ambience. The daily changing selection is posted on their website.

La Tsampa (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-647 0367; www.tsampa.be; Rue de Livourne 109; daily special €12; ☎ noon-7.30pm Mon-Fri, closed Aug) Vegetarian restaurant and organic delicatessen with choice of meals till

2.30pm, then salads, pies or set-dish plates till close.

RougeTomate (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-6477044; www.rougetomate.com; Ave Louise 190; mains €18-29; ☎ noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri & 7-10.30pm Mon-Sat) Modern Mediterranean cuisine served in an expansive, fashionably updated 1883 townhouse whose rear terrace, shaded by old trees, adds further to the attraction in summer. Try the *lomo* (tenderloin) with mint and almond curry or, for vegetarians, pesto-flavoured *légumes en cocotte*.

La Quincaillerie (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-5339833; www.quincaillerie.be; Rue du Page 45; mains €19-35; ☎ noon-2.30pm Mon-Sat, 7pm-midnight daily) A central Victorian stairway and station-style clock dominate this unique brasserie-restaurant. Wooden box-draws, gleaming copperware and green wrought-iron interior date from its days as an upmarket ironmonger's shop. Upper-level seating is cramped but offers unusual views down upon other diners. Menus are multilingual and food standards reliable.

Chez Oki (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-6444576; www.chez-ok.com; Rue Lesbroussart 62; lunch €9, mains €20-25, 3-/4-/5-course menu €30/39.50/49.50; ☎ noon-2pm Tue-Fri & 6.30-10pm Mon-Sat) Modern minimalism wraps around a patch of 'zen garden' while French-Japanese fusion food works wonders on your plate. Hope that your *yeux fermés* (surprise) menu starts as ours did – with utterly divine foie gras sushi drizzled with caramelised soya. Wow. Wines from €26.

Yamayu Santatsu (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-513 5312; Chaussée d'Ixelles 141; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) Widely reckoned to be Brussels' most authentic Japanese restaurant by those who can cope with the idiosyncrasies of the notoriously temperamental sushi-master.

Anderlecht

Several *cafés* around the main square have cheap snack meals. For something more satisfying, **René** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-523 2876; Place de la Résistance 14; mains €14-26; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) is

a quintessential old-world family restaurant serving excellent steaks, *filet américain* finished at your table and seasonal mussels in steaming cauldrons. It overlooks a tree-lined square that hosts a vibrant Saturday market.

DRINKING

In most cities, tourists stop in *cafés* in between visiting the sights. Here the *cafés* are the sights. And visiting a museum or two just gives you your liver the necessary respite before another drink. Nearly every street in the city centre has at least one marvellously atmospheric *café*. Styles vary from showy art nouveau places and medieval survivors around the Bourse to hip and heaving options in St-Géry and Ixelles. And there's many an Anglo-Irish pub in the EU quarter. Where oh where will it end?

Lower Town

GRAND PLACE & AROUND

Whether you're sitting on one of the incomparable open-air terraces or within a 17th-century guildhouse, drinking on the grandest of Grand Places is a delight. Our favourites are the bustling **Le Roy d'Espagne** (Map p70; Grand Place 1; beer/coffee from €3/3.10; ☎ 10am-1am) – yes, those are inflated dried pigs' bladders above your head – and the even more indulgent **Chaloupe d'Or** (Map p70; Grand Place 24; beer/coffee from €3.40/3.60; ☎ 10am-midnight), whose 'secret' upstairs room is a particularly superb vantage point though not always open. Not surprisingly prices are steep, so if you're not here to soak up the special Grand Place ambience you can save up to 50% on drinks by walking just a block or two further.

Le Cercueil (The Coffin; Map p70; Rue des Harengs 10-12; beer from €2.80; ☎ 4pm-late Mon-Tue, 1pm-late Fri-Sun) Grungy, all-black madness with coffins for tables and lit mainly by UV.

Goupil le Fol (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 1396; Rue de la Violette 22; ☎ 9pm-5am) Overwhelming weirdness hits you as you acid-trip your way through

CHIP CHAMPS

Frying since 1948, **Maison Antoine** (Map p86; Place Jourdan; small chips/large chips/sauce €2/2.0/0.50; ☎ 11.30am-1am Sun-Thu, 11.30am-2am Fri & Sat) is a classic little *fritkot* (take-away chip kiosk) whose reputation as 'Brussels best' is self-perpetuating. 'Best' or not, their chips are certainly top notch and such is their popularity that *cafés* on the surrounding square (including beautifully wrought-iron-fronted L'Autobus) allow *frite* eaters to sit and snack so long as they buy a drink. Another fine contender for the chip crown is **Chez François** (Map pp66-7; Pl Dumon) at outlying Metro Stockel. Handily central Fritland (p99) keeps frying till the wee hours.

BRUSSELS' TOP DRINKING SPOTS FOR...

- Breakfast: Mokafé (p104)
- Bottled-beer choice: Délirium Café (p104)
- Chess: Le Greenwich (p104)
- Classic brown-café ambience: À la Mort Subite (below)
- Coffee: Blomqvists Espresso Bar (p105)
- Draught-beer choice: Moeder Lambic Fontainas (p104)
- Eccentricity: Goupil le Fol (opposite), Le Cercueil (opposite)
- *Fin-de-siècle* brilliance: Falstaff (below), Le Cirio (below), Métropole Café (p105)
- Hubble-bubble waterpipes: Imanza (p105)
- Hype: Café Belga (p105)
- Medieval atmosphere: A L'Image de Nostre-Dame (below)
- Ornate interior at bargain prices: Brasserie de la Renaissance (p105)
- Reading: Cercle des Voyageurs (p104), Floreo (p104)
- Tea: Comptoir Florian (p105)

this sensory overload of rambling passages, ragged old sofas and inexplicable beverages mostly based on madly fruit-flavoured wines (no beer available). Unmissable.

Poehenellekelder (Map p70; Rue du Chêne 5) Despite facing Brussels' kitsch-central, this is a surprisingly appealing *café* full of genuine old puppets. It offers a decent selection of fairly priced beers including Oerbier and gueuze on tap.

La Fleur en Papier Doré (Map p70; www.goudblom.mekeinpapier.be; Rue des Alexiens 53; ☎ 11am-midnight Tue-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) The nicotine-stained walls of this tiny *café* are covered with writings, art and scribbles by Magritte and his surrealist pals, some of which were reputedly traded for free drinks. 'Ceci n'est pas un musée', quips a sign on the door reminding visitors to buy a drink and not just look around.

BOURSE

Ah, the classics. If you do nothing else in Brussels, visit at least a couple of these close-packed yet easily overlooked gems. Each has its own unique character.

A L'Image de Nostre-Dame (Map p70; beers from €1.60; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-1am Sat, 4pm-10.30pm Sun, closes 8pm Wed) Down a tiny hidden alley, Nostre-Dame has an almost medieval feel, but retains a genuine local vibe. Magical... except for the toilets.

ourpick Le Cirio (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 1395; Rue de la Bourse 18; beer/lasagne €2.20/7.80; ☎ 10am-midnight) This

sumptuous 1886 *grand café* dazzles with polished brass-work and aproned waiters yet prices aren't exorbitant and coiffured Mesdames with small dogs still dilute the gaggles of tourists. The house speciality is a half-and-half mix of still and sparkling wines (€3.20).

Au Bon Vieux Temps (Map p70; Impasse Saint Michel; beers from €2.50; ☎ 11am-midnight) Duck beneath the bishop then tunnel through the centuries to this lushly panelled 1695 gem. You'll find lavish fireplaces, fascinating characters and even mythical Westvleteren 12 (€10!) on the beer menu.

Falstaff (Map p70; Rue Henri Maus 17; beers/mains from €2.80/13.50; ☎ 10am-1am) The interior of this *grand café* is an astonishing festival of century-old art nouveau stained glass and fluidity designed by Horta disciple, Houbion. A wide range of meals are available.

À la Bécasse (Map p70; Rue de Tabora 11; beer/spaghetti from €2.80/5; ☎ 11am-midnight) Hidden almost invisibly down a body-wide alley-tunnel. Long rows of tables give the Bécasse a certain Breugelesque quality though it's 'only' been operating since 1877. The unusual speciality is *panaché*, a jug of Timmermans lambic mixed with fruit beer or faro to make it more palatable. Not to everyone's taste.

ILOT SACRÉ

À la Mort Subite (Map p70; Rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères 7; draught Maes/Chimay €2/4.10; ☎ 11am-midnight) An absolute classic unchanged since 1928,

with lined-up wooden tables, arched mirror-panels and entertainingly brusque service.

Toone (Map p70; beer from €2.50; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun) Home to Brussels' classic puppet theatre (p108), this is also a unique and atmospheric drinking den...if you ever get served.

Délirium Café (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 3601; www.deliriumcafe.be; Impasse de la Fidélité; ☎ 10am-4am Mon-Sat, 10am-2am Sun) The barrel tables, beer-tray ceilings and over 2000 world beers were already impressive. Now they've added a rum garden, a tap house and the Floris Bar (from 8pm) serving hundreds of *jenever*s, vodkas and absinthes. No wonder it's lively. Live music at 10.15pm

Mokafé (Map p70; Galerie du Roi; coffee/beer/waffles/breakfast from €2/2.60/6.50; ☎ 7.30-11.30pm) Ideal for breakfast or gently indulgent cakes at a terrace in the awesome Galeries St-Hubert.

ST-GÉRY & STE-CATHERINE

Our listing barely scratches the surface of all that's available within a few easy blocks.

our pick **Cercle des Voyageurs** (Map p70; ☎ 02-514 3949; www.lecercledesvoyageurs.com; ☎ 11am-10pm Wed-Mon; ☎) Invite Phileas Fogg for coffee to this delightfully calm *café* featuring globes, antique-map ceiling and a travel library. If he's late, flick through old *National Geographic*s in your colonial leather chair or use the free wi-fi to see what happened.

Moeder Lambic Fontainas (Map p70; www.chezmoederlambic.be; Impasse de la Fidélité; ☎ 10am-4am Mon-Sat, 10am-2am Sun) A beer pub with design-style decor, dangling trumpet lamps, back lit wall panels and an incredible 40 different brews on draught including Witkap Pater (€3.30).

Le Greenwich (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 4167; Rue des Chartreux 7; beer/coffee/wine from €2.10/2.10/3.50, croque/spaghetti €4/9; ☎ 11am-10pm) High-ceilinged pub with belle époque gilt woodwork and pinafored waitresses supplying beers to a clientele of chess-playing regulars. The hushed concentration means you can hear a pawn drop.

Floreo (Map p70; ☎ 02-514 3905; www.floreo.be; Rue des Riches Claires 19; beer/coffee/shots/cocktails €1.80/1.90/4.50/6.50, wraps/mains €5.50/11.50; ☎ 11am-late) Big windows and a 1920s/30s charm make this intimate *café* a particularly relaxing place to read the newspapers by day (provided in several languages). On weekend evenings things heat up around 10pm with a DJ perched on the wooden spiral stairs. There's also a soul-funk jam session on Thursday nights around 9.30pm.

Booze'n'Blues (Map p70; Rue des Riches Claires 20; beer from €2; ☎ 4pm-late) Cramped and rough featuring a mannequin torso, an old juke box and an extended bar panelled like a choir stall. Unpredictable, entertainingly grouchily staff.

Los Romanticos (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 6707; Quai au Bois à Brûler 5; beer/mescal/cocktails from €2.50/6/7.50; ☎ noon-late, kitchen till 10pm) Upbeat South American restaurant, cocktail bar and dance floor offering regular tango courses.

Other great choices:

Monk (Map p70; Rue Ste-Catherine 42) Contemporary meets old brown-*café* in this 17th-century gabled house with tiled floors, mirrored walls and a hip clientele.

Fontainas Bar (Map p70; Rue du Marché au Charbon 91) Groovy triangle of 70s retro cool and a great patch of street-terrace.

Zebra (Map p70; Place St-Géry 33) Why do the hippest people like the least comfortable chairs?

Gecko (Map p70; Place St-Géry 16) Rough school-desk seating on the street-terrace and just the right level of planned scruffiness inside. Music favours modern reggae and African vibes.

Gay Bars

Le Belgica (Map p70; www.lebelgica.be; Rue du Marché au Charbon 32; ☎ 10pm-3am Thu-Sat, 8pm-3am Sun) DJs transform what looks like a 1920s traditional brown-*café* into one of Brussels' most popular gay music-pubs. Several other gay venues lie along the same street.

L'Homo Erectus (Map p70; ☎ 0475-831 107; www.lhomoerectus.com; Rue des Pierres 57; ☎ 3pm-dawn Mon-Fri, from 4pm Sat & Sun) One of the capital's most popular gay bars, now with two venues, each easily recognisable by the evolution of man from ape graphically depicted on the front windows. Relatively quiet during the day, crammed at night, and swamped during Pride weekends.

Locals' Cafés

Au Laboureur (Map p70; Rue de Flandre 108; beer €1.60; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) Amid surrounding trendiness, this refreshingly unpretentious place still attracts crusty beer-nursing locals with unfeasibly long moustaches. Hurry before it gentrifies.

Some other solidly local, unpretentious brown *cafés* that are central yet off the typical tourist circuit include **Kafka** (Map p70; Rue de la Vierge Noire 6), **Au Daringman** (Map p70; Rue de Flandre 37) and **Les Postiers** (Rue du Fossé aux Loups 14).

Tea & Coffee

Coffee Company (Map p70; Rue du Midi 45; cappuccinos €2.50; ☎ 7.30-11.30pm) Starbucks-style caffeine fixes for those wanting 'real' cappuccinos.

Imanza (Map p70; Rue van Artevelde 52; soft-drinks/tea €2.50/4, waterpipe €9; ☎ 6pm-1.30am Tue-Sun) Of the capital's many 'shisha bars' (places to smoke fragrant waterpipes), few are as exotically inviting as this triangular Ali Baba's cavern of low brass tables and twinkling Moroccan lamps. No alcohol served.

Métropole Café (Map p70; www.metropolehotel.com; Hotel Métropole, Place de Brouckère 31 beer/coffee/waffles from €3.80/3.80/7) The magnificently ornate belle époque interior easily justifies the hefty drink prices, though curiously a large number of punters still decide to sit on its comparatively unappealing street terrace.

Marolles

Brasserie Ploegmans (Map pp72-3; www.ploegmans.be; Rue Haute 148; mains €12-24; ☎ noon-2.30pm Tue-Fri & 6pm-10pm Tue-Sat, closed Aug) Old-fashioned mirror-panelled seats and 1927 chequerboard flooring make this a classic local hospitality that's also well regarded for its typical Bruxellois meals.

L'Inattendu (Map pp72-3; Rue de Wynants 13; beers €1.70-3, mains €8-15.50; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5am Fri) As unexpected as the name suggests, this is one classic little wood-panelled *café*-bistro tourists have largely overlooked. Basic, traditional pub-meals are served including *stoemp* (€9.50) and *waterzooi* (cream-based stew; €12).

Zabar (Map pp72-3; Pl de la Chapelle 7; beer/coffee from €2.50/2.50, pastas €8; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Fri, 10am-3am Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; ☎) This retro-stylish *café* is more orange than an orange and offers free wi-fi.

EU Area

Each national group has its own Eurocrat hangouts. On Thursday nights the bars of Place du Luxembourg are especially packed with parliamentary aides on the razz before their three-day weekend. Irish pubs around the Commission are typical Eurocrat favourites including **Kitty O'Shea's** (Map p86; Blvd Charlemagne 42), the **James Joyce** (Map p86; Rue Archimède 34) and oversized **Wild Geese** (Map p86; Ave Livingstone 2), though the **Old Oak** (Map p86; 26 rue Franklin 26; beers from €1.50) is more down-to-earth.

Ville de Dinant (Map p86; Rue de Trèves 30; beers €1.80-3; ☎ 11.30am-7pm Mon-Fri) You don't need a guidebook to find the numerous Eurocrat drinking holes around Place du Luxembourg but if you

want a really local experience nearby come to this uncompromisingly Belgian dive for a draught Grimbergen Blond.

Piola Libri (Map p86; ☎ 02-736 9391; www.piolalibri.be; Rue Franklin 66; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat, closed Aug; ☎) Italian Eurocrats relax after work on sofas, pavement tables or in the tiny triangle of back garden and enjoy free tapas-style snacks with chilled white wines at this convivial bookshop-*café*-bar.

La Terrasse (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-732 2851; www.brasserie.laterasse.be; Ave des Celtes 1; beers €2.40-4.50, mains €9.90-18; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) Handy for the Cinquantenaire, this wood-panelled classic *café* has a tree-shaded terrace and makes an ideal refreshment stop after a hard day's museuming. Snacks, pancakes, ice creams, breakfasts (from €3.90) and decent pub-meals are all available at various times.

Ixelles & St-Gilles

FLAGEY

The area is accessible by tram 81.

Café Belga (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-640 3508; Place Flagey 18; ☎ 8am-2am Sun-Thu, 8am-3am Fri & Sat) This hip brasserie in a corner of the art deco Flagey 'liner' building (p89) is mellow by day but beats grow ever louder towards closing time.

Nexx (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-644 5434; www.nexxresto.club.be; Chaussée de Boondael 8; beer/wine/cocktails from €2.50/3.50/8, mains €12.50-21.50; ☎ noon-3am Sun-Thu, noon-5am Fri & Sat) By midnight all conversation is drowned by DJ enthusiasm as Brussels *branché* set pack themselves into a heaving mass of hip blue-neon and silver wall-pads. In the quieter hours of early evening there's remarkably decent food on offer albeit rather haphazardly served.

MATONGE & LOUISE

Kuumba (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 8505; Rue de la Paix 35; ☎ 1pm-10pm Wed-Sat) The appealing *café* of a Flemish-African friendship association with small exhibitions of African art.

Coffee & Tea

If you're seeking 'real' cappuccinos (made with frothed milk rather than Belgian style with sweet whipped cream) try these cafes.

Blomqvists Espresso Bar (Map pp72-3; ☎ 0484-350 644; Rue Francart 14) A Swedish barista works his La Marzocco FB70, an espresso machine that's worth as much as a family car.

Comptoir Florian (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-513 9103; www.comptoirflorian.be; Rue St-Boniface 17; coffee/tea

€2.50/4.50; ☎ 11am-8pm Tue-Sat) Two tiny, supercozy tasting rooms behind a tea-trading store offering six different bean types for its coffees and 200 teas served in an eclectic range of pots.

Natural Caffè (Map pp72-3; Ave Louise 196; espresso/cappuccino €2/2.60; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Popular and fashionably brash if you like that upmarket chain sandwich-shop feel.

ST-GILLES

Brasserie de la Renaissance (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-534 8260; Ave Paul Dejaer 39; ☎ 9am-midnight) This *grand café* has a single, high-ceilinged room whose walls sport a ludicrously ornate load of gilt stucco tracery. Yet despite the grandeur, drinks are cheap and the food (Portuguese, Italian and Belgo-French) an amazing bargain. The street terrace surveys St-Gilles' lovely town hall.

Moeder Lambic (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-544 1699; Rue de Savoie 68; ☎ 4pm-2am) Sample an A to Z of Belgian beers in this compact *café* with bare-brick walls, chunky hand-hewn tables and crates full of well-thumbed comic books to read. Quite a contrast to its hip new sister-act (p104)

ENTERTAINMENT

For extensive listings check www.netevents.be, www.agenda.be, www.kiosque.be or, in print, get the English-language magazine *Bulletin*, Wednesday's MAD supplement in *Le Soir* or (more generally for Belgium) the Mosquito pull-out from *Telemoustique* magazine.

Ticket agencies:

Arsene50 (☎ 02-512 5745; www.arsene50.be; ☎ 12.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat; Galeries St-Hubert Map p70; Cinéma Arenberg, Galerie de la Reine; Flagey Map pp72-3; Pl Ste-Croix) Last-minute discounted and half-price tickets for cinema, theatre and assorted shows.

Caroline Music (Map p70; ☎ 02-217 0731; www.carolinemusic.be; Passage St-Honoré 20) Music shop and ticket agent for contemporary live gigs, festivals and club nights.

FNAC (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-275 1115; City 2 shopping centre, Rue Neuve; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Fri) Tickets for mainstream events.

Cinema

CineneWS (www.cineneWS.be) tells you what's on at 37 Brussels cinemas and dozens more beyond. On listings, 'VO' means 'original version' (ie with subtitles, not dubbed) while 'V fr' (French version) implies dubbing into French.

Kinopolis (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-474 2600; www.kinopolis.com; Blvd du Centenaire 1; 🇧🇪) Belgium's original

multiplex complex with 24 screens and an IMAX theatre.

Cinematek (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-551 1919; www.cinematek.be; BoZar Complex, Rue Baron Horta 9; adult/member €3/1, 2-month membership €15) Cinema buffs swoon at the incredible range of classic and cult choices and it's worth arriving early to browse the museum's old projectors and cinema memorabilia. Almost every day at least one silent movie is screened with live piano accompaniment. Other classic talkies are shown in their original language. To be on the safe side, consider booking a day ahead.

Cinema Nova (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 2477; www.nova-cinema.org; Rue Arenberg 3) The ultimate in alternative cinema, Nova shows off-beat international movies that are more thought-provoking than entertaining (subtitles will be French/Dutch) and there's a brilliantly rough student-style bar.

Live Music

ROCK

Ancienne Belgique (AB; Map p70; ☎ 02-548 2400; www.abconcerts.be; Blvd Anspach 110) The AB's two auditoriums are favourite venues for mid-level international rock bands and plenty of home-grown talent. Ticket office on Rue des Pierres.

Beursschouwburg (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 8290; www.beursschouwburg.be; Rue Auguste Orts 22; ☎ exhibition area 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, café 7.30pm-late Thu-Sun) Diverse mix of contemporary music including rock, jazz, rap and disco. The *café* approximates to a free nightclub late on weekend nights.

Forest National (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-340 2211; www.forestnational.be; Ave du Globe 36) The city's temple for larger international gigs and local favourites. Take tram 81.

Also see **Halles de Schaarbeek** (p88).

JAZZ & BLUES

L'Archiduc (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 0652; www.archiduc.net; Rue Antoine Dansaert 6; beer/wine/cocktails €2.70/3.60/8; ☎ 4pm-late) This intimate, split-level art deco bar has been playing jazz since 1937. It's an unusual two-tiered circular space that can get incredibly packed but remains convivial. You might need to ring the doorbell. Saturday concerts are free, Sundays bring in international talent and admission charges vary.

Music Village (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 1345; www.themusicvillage.com; Rue des Pierres 50; cover €7-20; ☎ from 7.30pm Wed-Sat) Polished 100-seat jazz venue housed in

two 17th-century buildings with dinner (not compulsory) available from 7pm and concerts starting 8.30pm, or 9pm weekends. The performers squeeze onto a small podium that's visible from any seat. Bookings advised.

Sounds Jazz Club (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 9250; www.soundsjazzclub.be; Rue de la Tulipe 28; 🎫 8pm-4am Mon-Sat) Unassuming but immensely popular little Ixelles venue. It has concerts most nights, styles varying from modern to big band to salsa. The website has click-through links to artists' MySpace pages. Cover charges vary and acts typically start around 10pm.

Jazz Station (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-733 1378; http://jazzstation.be; Chaussée de Louvain 193a; 🎫 exhibitions 11am-7pm Wed-Sat, concerts 6pm Sat & 8.30pm some weeknights) An appealing new venue in what was once an 1885 station building. There are also exhibitions, a multimedia jazz-archive and practice rooms, where you can listen in on musicians honing their art.

Bizon (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 4699; www.cafebizon.com; Rue du Pont de la Carpe 7; admission free; 🎫 6pm-late) Happening little grunge bar in St-Géry featuring home-grown live blues, a range of beers and a selection of *jenever*s.

OPERA & CLASSICAL

La Monnaie/De Munt (Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie/Koninklijke Muntscouwburg; Map p70; ☎ 02-229 1372; www.demunt.be; Place de la Monnaie) It was high-spirited revellers leaving this premier opera and dance venue who kick-started the 1830 revolution that led to Belgium's very formation (see the boxed text, below). The season runs September to June.

BoZar (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-507 8215, bookings 02-507 8200; www.bozar.be; Rue Ravenstein 23) Celebrated

classical-music venue, home to the National Orchestra and Philharmonic Society. From outside the Horta-designed 1928 art deco building lacks much charm but its Henri Le Bœuf Hall is considered to be one of the five best in the world for acoustic quality.

Conservatoire Royal de Musique (Royal Music Conservatory; Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 0427; Rue de la Régence 30) Classical-music venue.

Cirque Royal (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 2015; www.cirque-royal.org; Rue de l'Enseignement 81) This converted indoor circus is now a venue for dance, operetta, classical and contemporary music.

Flagey (www.flagey.be) Ixelles' flagship venue has several concert halls. See p89.

Maison de la Bellone (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 3333; www.bellone.be; Rue de Flandre 46) The glass-vaulted courtyard of this 18th-century stunner is used for occasional concerts.

Nightclubs

Consult **TheClubbing** (www.theclubbing.com) or **Noctis** (www.noctis.com) for what's-on listings or ask at music shops like Caroline Music (opposite) or **Dr Vinyl** (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 7344; Rue de la Grande Île 1; 🎫 noon-7pm Tue-Sat, open late for DJs Thu). Note that clubbing does not mean holing up in the capital – there's plenty more in and around Antwerp.

K-Nal (Map pp68-9; Ave du Port 1) On Saturday nights from 11pm, the capital's latest 'place to be' is K-Nal's Libertine Supersport (http://libertine-supersport.be), which kicked off in October 2009 following an intense Facebook buzz. Libertine level plays house/disco/lounge music while Supersport invites the biggest names in electro. Certain Fridays K-Nal also hosts 'Fight Club' and 'Anarchic', each once a month.

REVOLUTIONARY PERFORMANCE

An enchanting if highly simplified story of Belgium's foundation starts on 25 August 1830 with the Brussels premiere of French composer Daniel Auber's then-new opera, *La Muette de Portici* at La Monnaie (above) in Brussels. The story, sung in French, centres on a 1647 Naples uprising against the Spanish, featuring large crowd scenes and dramatic effects. Fired up by the duet *Amour sacré de la patrie* (Sacred love of homeland), the mainly bourgeois Francophone audience poured into the streets to join workers already demonstrating outside the theatre against their Dutch rulers. Together they stormed the Palais de Justice, chased out the Dutch troops and, in a glorious crowning moment, raised the flag of Brabant over Brussels' City Hall. Belgium was born.

For the 175th anniversary of Belgium, the opera was re-performed in Ghent. But this was Flanders 2005. When *Amour sacré de la patrie* started there were no Francophone 'patriots' to be stirred but plenty of Flemish nationalist hecklers ready to interrupt by singing instead the Flemish anthem. But by a pre-prepared and wonderfully Belgian compromise, the protesters left after a few minutes. This time no revolution. At least, not yet.

GAY & LESBIAN BRUSSELS

Brussels' compact but thriving Rainbow Quarter is clustered around Rue du Marché au Charbon. Here you'll find a dozen gay-oriented *cafés* (see www.lepetitmarais.eu and p104), and two LGBT information centres/bars, multilingual **Rainbow House** (Map p70; ☎ 02-503 5990; www.rainbowhouse.be; Rue du Marché au Charbon 42; 🕒 6.30pm-10.30pm Wed-Sat) and Francophone **Tels Quels** (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 3234; www.telsquels.be; Rue du Marché au Charbon 81; 🕒 from 5pm Sun-Tue, Thu & Fri, from 2pm Wed & Sat) who run the telephone helpline, **Telégai** (☎ 02-502 0700; 8pm-midnight).

Belgian Gay & Lesbian Pride (www.blgp.be; 🕒 1st Sat in May) culminates in this area with a vast-scale all-night party. The **Festival du Film Gay & Lesbien de Bruxelles** (www.fglb.org) runs for 10 days in late January and Cinéma Nova (p106) runs occasional **Pink Screen weeks** (www.gdac.org). **Darakan** (Map p70; ☎ 02-512 2076; Rue du Midi 9) is a tiny gay bookshop.

La Démence (www.lademence.com) held at Fuse (below) is a hugely popular gay rave that attracts men from all over Europe and beyond. It's only on once a month; check the website for dates. **Absolutely M** (www.absolutely-m.net; admission €9; 🕒 9pm-5am Sun) is a new Sunday gay night at the Mirano Continental (p107) and **Chez Maman** (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 8696; www.chezmaman.be; Rue des Grands Carmes 12; 🕒 from 10pm Thu-Sun) is the capital's most beloved transvestite show.

Handily central gay-friendly accommodation includes Downtown-BXL (p94), well placed for the nightlife area, and refined Maison Noble (p95), which is aimed more at couples and business folk.

Fuse (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 9789; www.fuse.be; Rue Blaes 208; admission €3-12; 🕒 11pm-7am Sat) The Marolles club that 'invented' European techno still crams up to 2000 movers onto its two dance floors. Once a month it also hosts La Démence (above).

Mirano Continental (Map pp68-9; www.mirano.be; Chaussée de Louvain) If you're still in your business suit after postwork Eurocrat pints on Place Luxembourg, this revamped former cinema could be your next destination. Thursdays' AtSeven (www.atseven.eu; from 7pm to 2am) is an early affair with grazing food, wine bar and '80s/'90s dance music while Friday parties and Saturday nights' Just Mirano (www.justmirano.be; €8 to €10; from 11pm to 6am) are mainstream 'friendly' discos.

Club des Halles (Map p70; ☎ 02-289 2660; www.cafedeshalles.be; Pl St-Géry 1) Popular city-centre club in the vaulted cellars beneath the buzzing Café des Halles.

Sport

In Heysel the national stadium, **Stade Roi Baudouin** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-479 3654; Ave du Marathon 135), hosts major cycling races, athletics meetings and international football matches. For club matches Brussels' most famous football team is RSC Anderlecht (see p91).

Theatre

Touring international productions occasionally supplement the local-language scene with

English-language performances. The theatre season runs September to June.

Le Botanique (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-218 7935; Rue Royale 236) Cultural centre, exhibition hall and concert venue incorporating an 1826 glass veranda.

KVS (Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg; Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-210 1112; www.kvs.be; Rue de Laeken 146) The Royal Flemish Theatre performs in a bold new auditorium behind a beautifully restored neo-Renaissance facade with plenty of wrought ironwork. Challenging Dutch-language dramas are typical but there are dance and occasional English-language productions.

Théâtre National (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-203 4155; www.theatrenational.be; Blvd Émile Jacqmain 111-115) The Francophone community's rectilinear glass theatre.

Kaaitheater (Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-201 5959; www.kaaitheater.be; Square Saintelette 20) Bastion of Flemish avant-garde theatre.

Théâtre Les Tanneurs (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 1784; www.lestanneurs.be; Rue des Tanneurs 75) Known for dynamic drama and dance.

Bronks Youth Theatre (Map p70; ☎ 02-219 7554; www.bronks.be; Marché aux Porcs 15) Theatre, mime and workshops for toddlers and children, most weekends.

PUPPET THEATRE

Théâtre Royal de Toone (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 7137; www.toone.be; Petite Rue des Bouchers 21; adult/student €10/7; 🕒 typically 8.30pm Thu & 4pm Sat, see website) Worth visiting anytime for its pub-*café*,

this is also the last bastion of traditional marionette theatre, performed for adults in French and occasionally in Walloon or Bruxellois.

DANCE

Brussels has no resident classical ballet – that's in Antwerp (p187) – but innovative contemporary dance companies do make occasional performances.

Rosas (☎ 02-344 5598; www.rosas.be) This Brussels-based company built around choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker strikes a winning balance between traditional and avant-garde dance. When not globetrotting they typically perform at La Monnaie (p107) or Kaaithheater (opposite).

Ultima Vez (☎ 02-219 5528; www.ultimavez.com) Brainchild of controversial director/choreographer Wim Vandekeybus, who's big on stark, confrontational images. In Brussels you might catch them at Théâtre Les Tanneurs (opposite). Check the website.

La Raffinerie (off Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-410 3341; www.charleroi-dances.be; Rue de Manchester 21, Molenbeek) This converted 19th-century sugar refinery is second home to Charleroi/Danses (p222).

SHOPPING

Rue Neuve (p80) lacks charm but is a major mainstream shopping street. Tourist-oriented shops selling chocolate, beer, lace and Atomium baubles stretch between the Grand Place and Manneken Pis. The splendid Galeries St-Hubert feature many more chocolate shops sold in a calmer, grander setting. Rue Antoine Dansaert is the nerve centre of Brussels' design and fashion quarter, the Sablon features antiques, while the Marolles are full of quirky interior design shops. Ave Louise is the setting for many up-market chain boutiques.

Art, Antiques & Interior Design

The Sablon area's many antique shops and private galleries resemble miniature museums. Some sell ancient artefacts from around the world. Others specialise in art deco work, glassware or contemporary art.

There's a weekly **antique market** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) on Place du Grand Sablon, which also sports particularly chic shops. Others are dotted along Rue des Minimes, Rue Charles Hanssens and Rue Watteu. If you're trying to replace a broken

glass from a set of Belgian crystal try **Au Cherche-Midi** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-511 2608; Rue Ernest Allard 16; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun). For a more funky selection of less exclusive ornaments and retro ware, trawl the appealing shops of Rue Haute and Rue Blaes in the Marolles district or rummage through the bric-a-brac of the Place du Jeu-de-Balle flea market (see p84). Haggling is expected at the latter.

Beer

Standard beers like Leffe, Hoegaarden, Chimay etc are usually cheaply available in supermarkets. But if you want rarer types without going to the brewery, there are beer-specialist shops to help you. They'll also sell matching glasses for some, along with various other beer paraphernalia. Shops with wide selections:

Beermania (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 1788; www.beermania.be; Chaussée de Wavre 174; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Sat Jan-Nov, daily Dec) Complete with a tasting *café*, international delivery service and online sales.

De Biertempel (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 1906; www.biertempel.be; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 56b; ☎ 9.30am-7pm)

Chocolate

LOCAL PRODUCERS

Mary (www.marychoc.com; Map pp68-9; ☎ 02-217 4500; Rue Royale 73; per kg €56; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Supplies pralines to Belgium's royals plus the odd US president. Their chocolate-making workshop (Map pp66-7; ☎ 02-737 7244; Chaussée de Wavre 950; open 9am to 3.30pm) offers tours with tastings (€8) behind the crenellated facade of the Arsenal building.

Planète Chocolat (Map p70; ☎ 02-511 0755; www.planetechocolat.be; Rue du Lombard 24; per kg €50; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm) Both moulds and chocolates are made on site. At 4pm Saturday and Sunday there are praline-making demonstrations explaining chocolate's development, culminating in a chance for visitors to create their own chocolates.

Wittamer (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-512 3742; Place du Grand Sablon 6) One of Brussels' best-known local establishments also runs a nearby posh patisserie and coffee shop, which is one of the places to see and be seen.

Jean-Philippe Darcis (Map p70; ☎ 02-502 1414; www.darcis.com; Petite Rue au Beurre 14) A Marcolini (p110) fashion sense but with the addition of prize-winning patisserie creations, notably 12 flavours of macaroon.

Train

Bruxelles-Midi (South Station; Map pp72-3) is the main station for international connections: the Eurostar, TGV and Thalys high-speed trains (with prebooking compulsory) only stop here. Most other mainline trains stop in quick succession at Bruxelles-Midi, **Bruxelles-Central** (Gare Centrale, Central Station; Map p70), and, except for Amsterdam trains, also at **Bruxelles-Nord** (Gare du Nord, North Station; Map pp68-9). Information offices at all three stations open early morning to late evening. For all enquiries consult www.b-rail.be or call ☎ 02-555 2555.

The following fares (one-way second-class) are for standard trains from Bruxelles-Central:

Destination	Fare (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency (per hr)
Amsterdam	36.60	164	1
Antwerp	6.60	35-49	5
Binche	8.60	59	1
Bruges	12.90	62	2
Charleroi	8.60	60	2
Ghent	8.10	36	2
Hasselt	11.70	75	2
Kortrijk	11.70	69	1
Leuven	4.80	24-36	4
Liège	13.60	60-80	2
Luxembourg City	33.20	180	1
Mechelen	4	15-28	2
Mons	8.60	55	2
Namur	8.10	62	2
Nivelles	5.10	30	2
Ostend	15.40	75	1
Schiphol (Amsterdam airport)	34.20	148	1
Tournai	11.70	61-73	2
Ypres	16	105	1

For other international train services see p298.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Airport City Express (€3; ☎ 5.30am-12.20am) trains run four times hourly between Brussels Airport and the city's three main train stations, Bruxelles-Nord (15 minutes), Bruxelles-Central (20 minutes) and Bruxelles-Midi (25 minutes). Express-bus 12 links the airport to Bruxelles-Luxembourg via Nato HQ and Metro Schuman (pre-purchased/bought-aboard €3/4). It should take around 30 minutes but allow much more at rush hour. After 8pm at weekends slower route 21 is substi-

tuted. See www.stib.be for the rather complex timetables. An airport taxi to central Brussels costs around €30 (some accept credit cards) but once you're stuck in rush-hour traffic you'll probably wish you'd taken the train.

Bicycle

Intolerant drivers, slippery cobblestones and tram tracks combine to make Brussels a cyclist's nightmare. However, in 2009 the **Brussels Charter** (www.velo-city2009.com) gave the city international prominence in pushing for increased bicycle mobility and infrastructure. A network of bike paths (separated from the traffic) and bike lanes (usually painted red and marked with white lines) is being somewhat imperfectly introduced and bicycles may legally take certain (marked) one-way streets in the wrong direction: convenient but hazardous, as few car drivers realise. **Cycling In Brussels** (www.bicycle.irisnet.be) gives maps and more information. Bicycles can be carried on metros and trams except at rush hours (7am to 9am and 4pm to 6.30pm), once you've purchased a one-year €15 bike pass.

RENTAL

Villo! (☎ 078-051 110; <http://en.villo.be>; ☎ 24 hrs) is an system of 180 automated stations for short-term bicycle rental (30/60/90/120 minutes free/€0.50/1.50/3.50). First you need a subscription (day/week/year €1.50/7/30), then charges accumulate and are debited from your credit/bank card. When making stops the idea is to return the bike to the nearest station and take a new one when continuing. Failure to return the bicycle or to follow the rules could cost you €150. Read the website carefully for details and a station-finder map (note that only major ones issue subscriptions).

For longer bike hires try **FietsPunt/PointVelo** (Map p70; ☎ 02-513 0409; www.recydo.org; Pl Madeleine; per day/3 days €7.50/15; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri), which is also a cycle repair shop. You'll need ID and credit card or a €150 deposit. The shop is somewhat hidden: look left as you leave Bruxelles-Central station via the daytime-only Madeleine exit.

CYCLE TOURS

Cycle tours are available through Centre Vincent van Gogh (p93), **Maison des Cyclistes** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02-502 7355; www.provelo.be; Rue de Londres 15; ☎ noon-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) and **Brussels Bike Tours** (☎ 0484-898 936;

biketours.com; adult/student incl bicycle rental €25/22; ☎ 10am Feb–Nov, 10am & 3pm Apr–Sep). The latter's approximately four-hour tours (maximum group size 12) start from the Hôtel de Ville (Grand Place). Many first-time visitors love both the ride and the beers and *frite*-stops along the way (food and drink costs extra).

ROLLERSKATES

Belgium is perhaps unique in having special road rules for 'rollers' (those on rollerskates or rollerblades). On Friday evenings June to September certain major city streets give temporary right of way to rollers from 7pm (see www.belgiumrollers.com).

Car

The slightest hiccup on either ring road brings traffic to a halt especially on Friday afternoons. **Brussels-Mobility** (www.bruxellesmobilite.irisnet.be) maps real-time congestion problems. For information on road rules, see p305.

Street parking requires meter-payment when signs say *betalend parkeren/stationnement payant* (usually 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday).

Public Transport

Brussels' integrated bus-tram-metro system is operated by **STIB/MIVB** (www.stib.be) Main kiosk (Map p70; ☎ 02-515 2000; Rue de l'Évêque 2; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat); Branch kiosk (Map pp72–3; Gare du Midi; ☎ 7.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–2pm Sun). Public transport runs from about 6am to midnight, after which it's taxi only except on Friday/Saturday and Saturday/Sunday nights, when 17 Noctis night-bus routes (€3 single) operate twice hourly from midnight to 3am, most starting from Place de Brouckère.

TICKETS & PASSES

Tickets are valid for one hour and are sold at metro stations, STIB/MIVB kiosks, newsagents and on buses and trams. Single-/five-/10-journey STIB/MIVB tickets cost €1.60/7.30/11.20 including transfers. Unlimited one-/three-day passes cost €4.20/9.20. Note that airport buses are excluded and slightly higher 'jump' fares apply if you want to connect to city routes operated by De Lijn (Flanders bus), TEC (Wallonia bus) or SNCB/NMBS (rail). Children under six travel free.

Tickets must be validated, before travel, in machines located at the entrance to metro platforms or inside buses and trams. Tickets

without validation incur fines of €55. Random checks are made.

Brussels International (p76) sells one-day passes and Brusselscards (p76).

METRO

Metro stations are marked with a white 'M' on a blue background. Lines 1A (northwest–southeast) and 1B (northeast–southwest) share the same central stretch including useful stops at Bruxelles-Central, Ste-Catherine and Schuman (for the EU Area). Line 2 basically follows the Petit Ring. See map p75. Don't expect London-style frequency: trains only run every 10 to 15 minutes. While you wait there's often artwork to peruse. Highlights:

Bourse (Map p70) Paul Delvaux' *Nos vieux trams bruxellois* depicts old trams in the capital.

Horta (Map pp72–3) Relics from Horta's Maison du Peuple integrated into the foyer.

Porte de Hal (Map pp72–3) Old trams and futuristic vehicles merge in scenes mirroring the comic-strips of artist François Schuiten.

Stockel (Map pp66–7) Life-sized murals of Tintin and pals.

TRAM, PREMETRO & BUS

The vast web of bus and tram transport has no central hub so grab a free STIB/MIVB transport map before going too far. Underground *premetro* trams link Brussels-Nord (Gare du Nord) and Brussels-Midi (Gare du Midi) via the Bourse, travelling beneath the boulevard known consecutively as Adolphe Max/Anspach/Maurice Lemonier.

Taxi

Official taxis (typically black or white) charge €2.40 pick-up plus €1.35/2.70 per kilometre within/outside the Brussels region. There's a €2 supplement between 10pm and 6am. Waiting costs €25 per hour. Taxes and tips are officially included in the meter price so you should ignore requests for extra service charges. Taxis wait near the three central train stations, outside Hôtel Amigo (Map p70), near the Grand Place (Map p70) and at Place Stéphanie (Map pp72–3) on Ave Louise. Website www.bruxellesmobilite.irisnet.be/articles/taxi/ou-trouver-un-taxi lists other ranks and taxi operators including **Taxis Bleus** (☎ 02-268 0000) and **Taxis Verts** (☎ 02-349 4949). Cabbies have a reputation for aggressive, over-fast driving but if you're seriously dissatisfied you can report them toll-free on ☎ 0800-94001 – the receipt, which they must legally print for you, should have their four-digit taxi ID.

AROUND BRUSSELS

SOUTH OF BRUSSELS

For Waterloo, see p217.

Forêt de Soignes

This vast suburban **forest** (Zoniënwood in Dutch; www.zonienwoud.be; Map pp66-7) is a botanical cathedral of glorious towering beech trees. Many were planted by proto-Belgium's 18th-century Austrian rulers with oaks added by the French to provide timber for future naval ships. By the time those trees had matured, however, shipbuilders preferred metal, so the trees went uncut. Today the result is a delightful regional park with hundreds of kilometres of cycle, horse and walking paths. Tucked into the forest fringes you'll find the **Jean Massart Experimental Garden** (Map pp66-7; www.ulb.ac.be/musees/jmassart; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), arboreta at Tervuren and Groenendaal and an arts centre at **Rouge Cloître** (Map pp66-7; www.rouge-cloitre.be), site of a former 14th-century abbey.

SOUTHWEST OF BRUSSELS

Beersel

The 1310 **Kasteel van Beersel** (☎ 02-359 1646; Lotsestraat; adult/concession/child €2.50/1.25/1.25; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-mid-Nov, Sat & Sun only in winter, closed Jan) is the closest medieval castle to the capital. And from outside it's a beauty. The picture-perfect brick towers, rebuilt in 1498, are topped off with 17th-century roofs and rise proudly above a tree-ringed moat. However, it's an empty shell, the building having been used as a cotton factory in the 19th century. There's an appealing half-timbered restaurant-brasserie outside.

Around 1km west, the cramped, basic but inexpensive **Beersel Camping** (☎ 02-331 0561; campingbeersel@pandora.be; Steenweg op Ukkel 75, Beersel; adult/tent/car/caravan/camper-van €3/2/1.50/3/5) is one of the nearest year-round campgrounds to Brussels. Check-in at **Café Camping** (beer/kriek €1.30/1.85; ☎ 8am-midnight), a very down-market bar that redeems itself slightly by serving excellent draught Boon Kriek.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The castle is handily close to the west Brussels 'Ring' motorway (junction 19) and is right outside Beersel train station (west exit). Trains run thrice hourly from **Halle**, whose interesting historic centre is worth a quick look while you're in

transit. For the campsite, bus 154 from Halle is more convenient: alight at 'Windmolen'.

Gaasbeek

One of the finest rural castles within striking distance of the capital is the **Kasteel van Gaasbeek** (www.kasteelvangasbeek.be; adult/senior/youth €6/4/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Nov, last admission 5pm), set in an extensive 17th-century park 14km southwest of central Brussels. Originally built to guard the medieval Brabant-Flanders border, this was the castle that angry Brussels folk burnt down in response to the 1388 murder of Everard 't Serclaes (see p63). In 1565, Gaasbeek was briefly home to Count Egmond before he was executed by the Spanish (p83). Elements of each era are visible. The castle is furnished inside, romantically crenellated outside and looks quite different when viewed from different angles – though the majority of the structure is the result of an extensive 1897 renovation. By public transport take bus 142 from Metro Erasmus.

NORTH OF BRUSSELS

Nationale Plantentuin Van België

Belgium's **National Botanic Garden** (☎ 02-260 0920; www.botanicgarden.be; Domein van Boechout, Meise; adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar, last entry 1 hr before closing) is a 93-hectare park located in the village of Meise, 12km north of downtown Brussels. It's based around two lakes and includes the Kasteel van Boechout, a photogenic moated castle that Léopold II gave to his sister, Princess Charlotte, after her own at Tervuren burnt down in 1879.

Of the 18,000 plant species, the park's most prized orchids, carnivorous plants and famous giant Amazonian water lilies are housed in the 1966 **Plantenpaleis** (Plant Palace), a series of 13 connecting greenhouses. Other highlights are the outdoor medicinal garden and a small 1864 greenhouse shaped like a king's crown. That was built in by Balat, Horta's teacher and the architect responsible for the Serres Royales (p90). The 18th-century orangery has been converted into a *café* and shop.

De Lijn buses 250/251 run every 15 minutes from Bruxelles-Nord (35 minutes) via Metro Bockstael (20 minutes).

Grimbergen

Briefly its own principality (18th century), **Grimbergen** (www.grimbergen.be/toerisme/index.htm) lies

just 2km north of Brussels' ring road, (6km from the Atomium) and is one of Brabant's prettiest towns. The sweet little central square is dominated by **Sint-Servaasbasiliek** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm), Grimbergen's 1128 abbey-church, which was majestically rebuilt after 1660. Although since truncated it retains one of Belgium's most breathtaking baroque-rococo interiors plus a fine 49-bell **carillon** (🔊 bells played 8-9pm Fri, Jul-Aug & 4.30-5.30pm Sun Easter-Sep). Grimbergen is best known today for its abbey **beers** (www.grimbergenbier.be), especially the robust, golden Goud 8°. The beers are actually brewed industrially in Waarloos but there's a little **beer museum** (Abdijstraat 20; 🎫 by pre-arrangement only) tucked into the former abbey grounds (turn left through the big stone gate and it's opposite a stylish brasserie). Any of the town's tempting pubs and restaurants serve Grimbergen brews but great, atmospheric choices are at two historic watermill-pubs: **Tommenmolen** (☎ 02-269 7084; Tommenmolenstraat 18; beer €2.50-3, snacks €4-11, mains €14-18; 🕒 noon-9.30pm

Fri-Tue) and **Liermolen** (☎ 02-269 7690; Vorststraat 8; 🕒 noon-9pm Wed-Sun). Both are signposted and within 800m of the square. Both offer traditional craft demonstrations on summer weekend afternoons and technically form part of the family-friendly museum **het mot** (☎ 02-270 8111; www.mot.be; adult/child €3/1), whose three sites are linked by appealing walking paths. The museum's main building, **Guldenhal** (Guldenhal 20; 🕒 9am-5pm daily), is located 1km south of centre in the grand, arcaded former stables of the Merode Castle (Prinsenkasteel), a ruined moated tower of which remains are visible in the grounds. The museum displays '150 years of washing machines', there are lots of child-activity stations and even the toilets are educational.

Half-hourly buses 230/232 link Grimbergen to Brussels' Metro Bockstael (25 minutes). On summer Tuesdays and Thursdays there's a canal boat connection to/from Brussels Quai de Humbeek (€5, one hour) but prebook on ☎ 02-218 5410 (see www.bateaubus.be).

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