

The Ardennes



Scenically, the Ardennes is Belgium at its best. This southeastern corner is home to deep valleys, forested hills, meandering rivers and, in its quieter recesses, tranquil stone villages and ancient castles. For those into nature, this is as wild as Belgium gets. The region comprises three Walloon provinces – Namur to the west, Luxembourg to the south and Liège in the east.

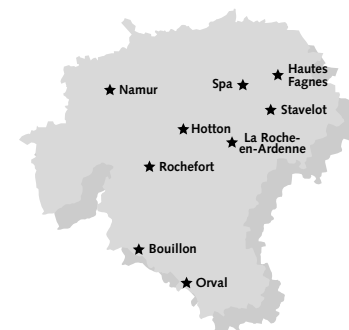
By and large, the first port of call is Namur, the capital of Wallonia and a positively pleasant riverside town. From here, the Meuse River (Maas in Flemish) winds along to the tourist town of Dinant. The Ardennes' most inspiring stretch reaches to the villages of Rochefort and Han-sur-Lesse, both known for ancient caves that drip with enormous natural sculptures. Near the French border is Bouillon, an old town dominated by its fine castle, and a superb base for hiking and kayaking. Another outdoor playground and picturesque riverside retreat is La Roche-en-Ardenne. It's also close to the marvellous caves at Hotton.

In the north is industrial Liège, the Ardennes' largest city. Staunchly parochial, it has long been at the heart of life in this area. Within easy striking distance of Liège is the revamped resort of Spa and, nearby, the twin towns of Stavelot and Malmédy, which both burst with revelry around carnival time. A short hop east of Liège is Verviers, a former industrial town that has keenly kept abreast of modern times. Nearby is Eupen, the capital of Belgium's German-speaking Ostkantons (Eastern Cantons). Here too lies the windswept plateau of the Hautes Fagnes.

In a nutshell, the Ardennes is a place to relax – even if you're travelling with kids.

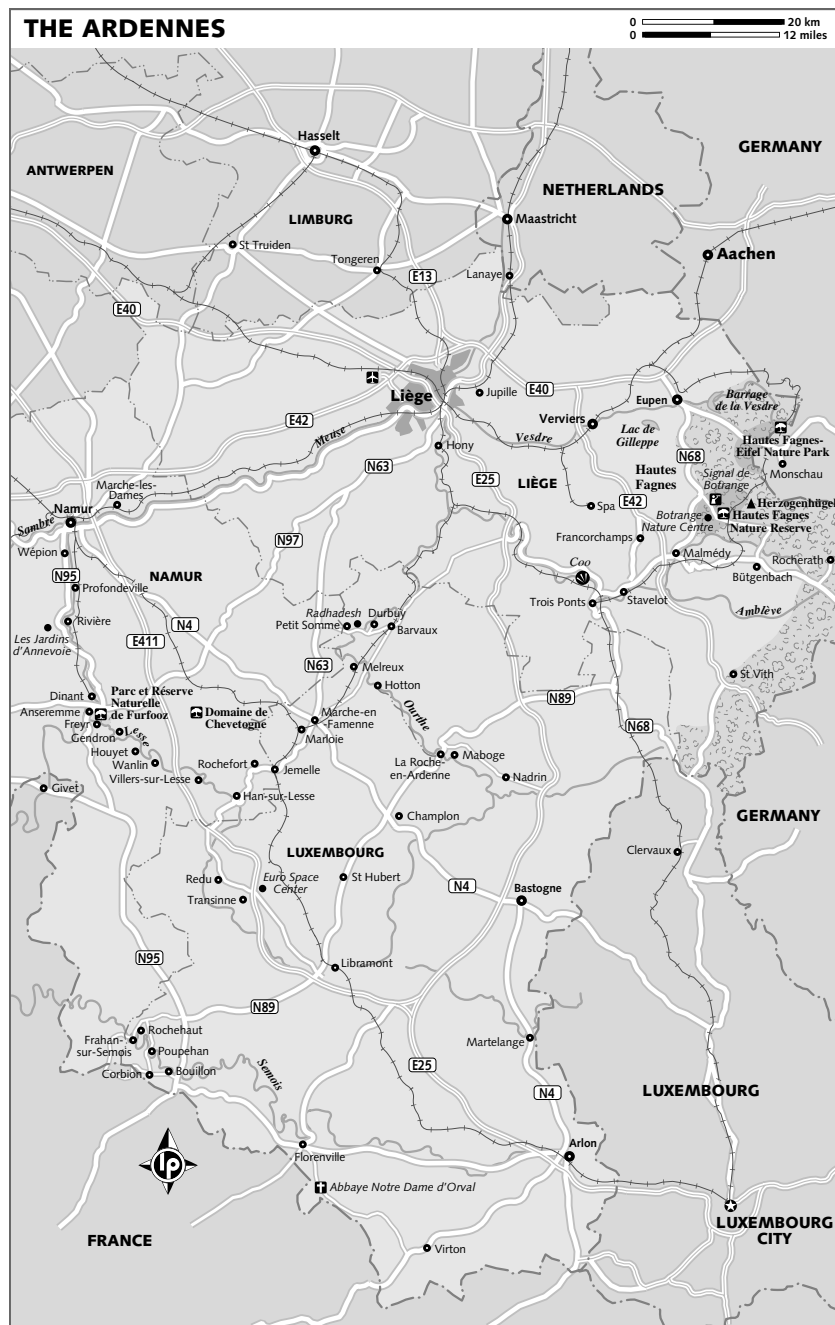
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Art Treasures** Mosan art at the Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies (p232) in Namur
- **Carnival Celebrations** Stavelot's Laetare festivities (p257)
- **Bubble Forth** Spa (p254), Europe's first health retreat
- **High Spot** The Hautes Fagnes' fascinating landscape (p259)
- **Forest Hikes** La Roche-en-Ardenne (p246)
- **Scenic Cycling** Rochefort's RAVeL bike path (p238)
- **Natural Gem** Ancient formations in the grottoes at Hotton (p248)
- **Trappist Brew** The Abbaye Notre Dame d'Orval (p243)
- **Time-Warp Experience** The castle at Bouillon (p241)



■ PROVINCES: LIÈGE (CAPITAL LIÈGE), LUXEMBOURG (CAPITAL ARLON), NAMUR (CAPITAL NAMUR)

■ LANGUAGES: FRENCH, GERMAN



NAMUR

pop 106,200

Namur (Namen in Flemish) is a great jumping-off point for exploring this part of the Ardennes. Some 60km southeast of Brussels, it's a picturesque town, built at the confluence of the Meuse and Sambre Rivers and presided over by a citadel that, in times gone by, ranked as one of Europe's mightiest. Good transport connections to more-remote parts of the Ardennes puts it on the map for travellers without their own vehicle. And for those simply into wining, dining and visiting, it has a lively restaurant and *café* (pub/bar) scene, and a clutch of interesting museums.

History

Namur has been shaped by its strategic military position on the rivers. The Celts first established a fortification here, and later the Romans set up camp. In the Middle Ages, the counts of Namur built a well-protected castle on the craggy rocks overlooking the rivers. Under Spanish rule in the 1640s, the castle was strengthened and thus brought to the attention of the French, who captured the town in 1692; Louis XIV's renowned military engineer Vauban set about redesigning and rebuilding it as the perfect fortification. During the next hundred or so years, the fort was razed and rebuilt, this time by Dutch military prowess.

In WWI, the so-called impregnable fort was taken within three days of the German invasion. With a history like this, there was no way WWII could pass Namur by; the town was bombed and extensively damaged. Its military connections continued right up until 1977, when Belgian army paratroopers packed up and moved out of the citadel.

Although Namur is far from being Wallonia's largest city, it proudly holds the seat of the Conseil de la Région Wallonne, the region's parliament, housed in a former hospice beside the Meuse River.

Orientation

The citadel sits above the meeting of the rivers, a point known as Port du Grognon and marked by a statue of King Albert I on horseback. It was not far from here, in Marche-les-Dames, that the king came to his end while climbing the cliffs along the Meuse.

The town centre stretches north from here along the main shopping streets – Rue de l'Ange and its continuation Rue de Fer –

before abruptly ending at the train station. Pl d'Armes, a largely unattractive square, is the town's nominal heart, and immediately west of here is Namur's good-looking ancient quarter, home these days to some hip pubs and casual eateries.

Information

Ambulance/Fire (☎ 100)

ATM (Post office, Pl d'Armes)

Laverie (Rue Borgnet 18) Self-service.

Main post office (Blvd E Merlot)

Net@Food (☎ 081 22 62 49; Rue Godefroid 1; per hr €2;

☎ 9am-11.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun) Internet.

Office du Tourisme (☎ 081 24 64 49; www.pays-de-namur.be; Sq Léopold; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) Near the train station. Pick up a copy of the free *Storming the Citadel of Namur* brochure – it has an excellent map showing five self-guided walking tours ranging from one to three hours.

Police (☎ 101)

Post office (Pl d'Armes)

Tourist office kiosk (☎ 081 24 64 48; Pl du Grognon;

☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep) At the citadel's base.

Sights & Activities

What remains of Namur's once-mighty **Citadelle De Namur** is slung high above the town on a rocky outcrop. Due to centuries of military expansion (see left), it covers a huge area, though only towers, tunnels and much of the outer walls exist today. Visitors are free to wander around, and access is possible by car, bike, foot or minibus (one way €1.50). The latter depart regularly from the tourist office and stop at Terra Nova. To reach the citadel on foot, head up from the path on Pl St Hilaire; by car or bike follow the Rte Merveilleuse. The best place to start is the new information point, **Terra Nova** (☎ 081 65 45 00; www.citadelle.namur.be; Route Merveilleuse; ☎ 11am-6pm). Oddly, it's not signposted as such – instead, look out for the sign 'Domaine fortifié'. Attractions here include a **petit train** (☎ Apr-Nov) that shuttles around parts of the citadel and is well worth taking if you're without wheels, and the **souterrains**, underground galleries used over the centuries for all manner of wartime purposes. A combination ticket (adult/child €6/3) for the petit train and the souterrains also includes entry to the nearby paratrooper's museum. Terra Nova is also home to a *café/brasserie*. About 200m down the road from Terra Nova is a section of the citadel known as **Château des Comtes**. There's not much here besides another *café/restaurant* and, nearby, Belgium's only

perfume-maker, **Parfumerie Guy Laforge** (☎ 081 22 12 19; www.delforge.com; Route Merveilleuse; admission free, guided tour 3.30pm Sat €3; ☎ 9.15am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2.15-5.30pm Sun). Tours take in the cold Charles V garments that the perfumes are stored.

Don't miss the **Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies** (Treasury of the Priory of Oignies; ☎ 081 23 03 42; Rue Julie Billiard 17; admission €2; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm, closed Sun & Mon). This one-room treasury is housed in a modern convent and is guarded by the Sisters of Our Lady. Ring the bell to be taken on a guided tour of the exquisite hoard of Gothic religious treasure (chalices, crosses and reliquaries), much of which was created by Brother Hugo d'Oignies (see boxed text, opposite). Like other famous artworks in Belgium, this collection has a colourful his-

tory. During the French Revolution, when art treasures were being carted off to Paris, the monks in charge of the priory where Brother Hugo had lived took the artworks to a local farmer who walled them up in his house. When the last monk died in 1818, the treasure was given to the Sisters of Our Lady in Namur. During WWI, the Germans destroyed the sisters' convent but the treasure remained intact, wisely buried at the outbreak of war. These days it's kept behind barred doors, though many pieces travel the world as part of international exhibitions.

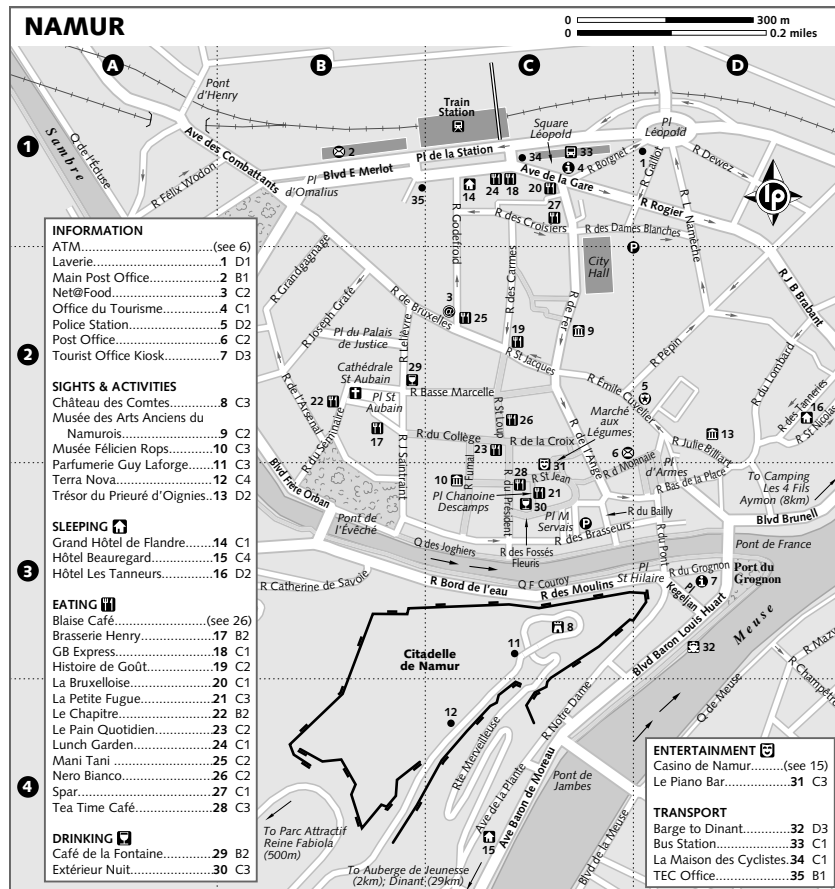
Housed in an 18th-century mansion just a few minutes' walk from the Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies, the small **Musée des Arts Anciens du Namurois** (Museum of Ancient Art; ☎ 081 22 00 65; Rue de

MOSAN ART

In the early Middle Ages, the Meuse River valley in Belgium (basically from Dinant to Liège) was well known for its highly skilled artisans, particularly those who worked in metals – copper, bronze, brass and gold. Their works are now called Mosan art, and several fine museums throughout this region devote themselves to this art form.

Brother Hugo d'Oignies was one of the region's most masterful medieval metal smiths. With his three brothers, Hugo founded a priory at Oignies (on the nearby Sambre River) in the 12th century and spent his life making religious works of art, many of which are now exhibited in Namur's Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies (opposite). His works mirror the transition from Romanesque to Gothic, and he's best known for pieces like jewel-studded crosses and elaborate reliquaries with beaded gold rims; the latter were used to hold religious relics brought back from the Holy Land by Jacques de Vitry, a Frenchman whom Hugo had met. Hugo perfected the use of filigree, giving the decorative features – be it animals, people or leaves – depth when raised from the background. He also worked with a technique called *niello*, which allowed delicate lines to be created on a gold background.

Two other museums well worth exploring are the Musée de la Vie Wallonne (p251), which recreates the lifestyles of early Mosan artisans, and the Musée d'Art Religieux et d'Art Mosan (p251), chock-full of Mosan art from the 11th century onwards. They're located almost side by side in Liège.



For 24; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) holds a simple but pleasant collection of old artworks from the region, including paintings, religious pieces and Mosan metalwork (see boxed text, above).

The **Musée Félicien Rops** (☎ 081 22 01 10; www.ciger.be/rops; Rue Fumal 12; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, daily Jul & Aug) is devoted to 19th-century Namur-born artist Félicien Rops (1833-98), who fondly illustrated erotic lifestyles and macabre scenes. Born a few streets away at Rue du Président 33 (the house is marked with a plaque), Rops worked mainly in Paris and Brussels. He was never embraced by the art worlds in either city and became highly critical of them.

Children's amusement park **Parc Attractif Reine Fabiola** (☎ 081 73 84 13; Rond Point Thonar; adult/child under 1m €3/free; ☎ 11am-6pm mid-Apr-mid-Oct) is located on top of the hill near the citadel.

The **bike ride** to Dinant (28km) is popular with casual cyclists (for bike-rental details, see p235). Flat riverfront bike paths trace some of this scenic route, though there are also stretches where cyclists must join the busy main road. You can also combine cycling with a train trip – ride to Dinant, then return to Namur by train.

Festivals & Events

Namur's most famous annual shindig is the **Combat de l'Échasse d'Or** (Fight for the Golden Stilt), held on the third Sunday in September. Two teams of stilt-walkers – the Mélans (with

yellow and black stilts) and the Avresses (red and white) – joust in medieval garb on Pl St Aubain.

Sleeping

Namur's proximity to Brussels has long made it a daytrip destination. The town's overall dearth of decent accommodation is luckily counterbalanced by a couple of inspiring places to stay.

Camping Les 4 Fils Aymon (☎ 081 58 02 94; Chaussée de Liège; camp sites per adult/tent €3.50/3; ☎ closed Oct-Mar) Pleasant ground located about 8km east of Namur – bus 12 departs hourly from the bus station.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 081 22 36 88; www.laj.be; Rue Félicien Rops 8; dm/s/d €16.60/29/42; ☎ ☎) Attractive riverfront hostel located about 3km southwest of the train station. The main building occupies a distinct red-brick mansion that was formerly a studio of Félicien Rops (see Musée Félicien Rops, left). There's also a series of modern, interconnecting bungalows out the back. It has a quiet location and a view over the Meuse; there's also a kitchen, bar and small terrace. Babies (cot provided) and children are welcome. It's a good place to stay with kids as there's a playground just 100m away. Buses 3 and 4, which both depart hourly from Pl de la Station, stop nearby.

Hôtel Les Tanneurs (☎ 081 24 00 24; www.tanneurs.com; Rue des Tanneries 13; s €45-200, d €60-215, breakfast €10; ☎ ☎) Unique hotel situated on a shabby

street in the heart of town. It unites modern comfort with 17th-century charm. The 30 rooms are part of a renovated tannery and each is totally different – some have water beds, private Jacuzzis or rambling rooftop views. The cheaper rooms are very small and less atmospheric, but are still good value. Children and babies are welcome. Book well ahead.

Hôtel Beaugard (☎ 081 23 00 28; hotel.beaugard@skynet.be; Ave Baron de Moreau 1; r €70; breakfast €8.50) Big, tired hotel draped along the base of the citadel. Tries to be flash but ultimately it's mutton dressed as lamb. The rooms are good value – comfortable and light with views over the river – and, if insomnia sets in, you can pop into the attached casino. Ask about weekend discounts.

Grand Hôtel de Flandre (☎ 081 23 18 68; www.hotel.flandre.be; Pl de la Station 14; s/d/tr €72/80/96; ☒ ☑) This place is anything but grand, but it is centrally located and comfortable enough, with 33 large, modern rooms boasting double-glazed windows to keep train and traffic noise at bay.

Eating

Namur has an excellent range of options to suit all budgets.

CAFÉS & BRASSERIES

Tea Time Café (☎ 0496 52 44 22; Rue St Jean 35; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Tue–Sat) Stylish sandwich shop/tearoom that serves mean crepes (€3.50), waffles and salads (€6.50 to €8.50), and has a pleasant outdoor terrace. Also good for takeaway baguette sandwiches.

Le Pain Quotidien (☎ 081 22 16 66; Rue du Collège 5; snacks €4–10; ☎ 7.30am–5.30pm) Atmospheric option for a light bite to eat at any time of the day (for more, see p103).

Brasserie Henry (☎ 081 22 02 04; Pl St Aubain 3; mains €10–27; ☎ noon–midnight Mon–Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat) Sociable brasserie that's become an institution among Namur's late eaters. Expect well-priced Belgian cuisine (vegetarian offerings, too), efficient service and spacious surroundings. It's child friendly and highly recommended.

RESTAURANTS

Histoire de Goût (☎ 081 26 03 30; Rue St Jacques 38; mains €13–25; ☎ lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) Cute little French restaurant/tearoom where the house speciality is homemade foie gras. Make sure

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Chapitre (☎ 081 22 69 60; Rue du Seminaire 4; mains €10; ☎ lunch Mon–Sat, dinner Thu–Sat) Convivial and very cosy restaurant huddled in a corner beneath the tower of Cathédrale St Aubain. Specialises in regional cuisine, Breton crepes, and Belgian beers, all at very affordable prices. A blackboard lists the available brews (usually around 30), and the décor's charmingly rustic.

you order the coconut-tinged *crème brûlée* for dessert.

La Bruxelloise (☎ 081 22 09 02; Ave de la Gare 2; mains €16–25; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) Don't come for the '70s décor – it's the plump and succulent mussels, claimed by some to be Wallonia's best, that attract diners from far and wide. Belgian specialities are the staple – *filet américain* (a blob of minced beef served raw) is also on the menu.

La Petite Fugue (☎ 081 23 13 20; Pl Chanoine Des-camps; mains €17–28; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed lunch Sat) Oozes understated chic. Just two small rooms (and a terrace in summer), personal service and modern interpretations of classic French cuisine have made it a winner among locals.

Blaise Café/Nero Bianco (☎ 081 26 25 25; Rue St Loup 4; café mains €10–16; ☎ noon–2.30pm Tue–Sat; restaurant mains €35; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat) This duo doing modern Italian cuisine occupies an elite corner of Namur. Delvaux and Pierre Marcolini are also present, making it *the* spot to dine and shop. The ground-floor Blaise Café has a semiprivate courtyard, or you can take to the soft seats inside, watched by military mannequins. Upstairs, Nero Bianco's modern décor is accentuated by lamps that hang over the tables like great praying mantises.

QUICK EATS

Mani Tani (☎ 081 22 74 37; Rue Godefroid; sandwiches €2.15–2.85; ☎ 7am–6pm Mon–Sat, closed mid-Jul–mid-Aug) This takeaway joint in the student quarter does the best baguette sandwich (known here as a *dagobert*) in town.

Lunch Garden (☎ 081 41 49 35; Passage de la Gare; plat du jour €5; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4pm Sun) Self-service cafeteria that's good if euros are short or the kids are starving.

SELF-CATERING

GB Express (Pl de la Station 2) Supermarket.

Spar (Rue des Croisiers 8) Supermarket.

Drinking & Entertainment

The cobbled streets around Pl Chanoine Des-camps and the nearby tree-lined Pl du Marché aux Légumes make up the town's liveliest quarter.

Le Piano Bar (☎ 081 23 06 33; Pl du Marché aux Légumes 10) Grungy jazz bar that's been going strong for more than two decades and continues to feature live jazz (free) on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights from 10pm.

Extérieur Nuit (☎ 081 23 09 09; Pl Chanoine Des-camps 6; ☎ 2pm–2am Tue–Sun) Spacious modern brasserie/bar that serves as a popular apéritif pit stop for locals en route to nearby restaurants, and also as a late-night haunt.

Café de la Fontaine (Rue Lelièvre 2; ☎ 11am–1am, to 3am Fri & Sat) A raw student pub that's considerably more appealing than most of the other dives in this part of town. Has a popular terrace overlooking the great hulk of Cathédrale St Aubain.

Casino de Namur (☎ 081 22 30 21; Ave Baron de Moreau 1; ☎ from 2pm) Riverside casino attached to Hôtel Beaugard.

Getting There & Away

BOAT
Taking the Meuse River from Namur south to Dinant provides one of the most scenic boat rides in Belgium, passing sheer rock faces, forested hillsides and villages such Wépion, famed for its roadside strawberry stalls in May, and Profondeville, with its distinct turreted river-front mansions. A converted **barge** (Blvd Baron Louis Huart; ☎ Sat & Sun mid-Jul–mid-Aug) plies the river, departing from the pier in Namur. Choose from a return trip to Wépion (adult/child €9/7.50, 1¼ hours) or Dinant (adult/child €19/16, 3½ hours).

BUS

Local and regional buses are operated by **TEC** (☎ 081 25 35 55; Pl de la Station; ☎ 7am–7pm). Regional buses leave from either the bus station near the C&A department store or from Pl de la Station. For information on TEC tickets, see p320. Details of bus services to towns and villages in this region are given in the various Getting There & Away sections.

TRAIN

Namur's modern **train station** (☎ 02 528 28 28; Pl de la Station) is a major rail hub in this part of Belgium. Regional connections include the following (the prices listed are full one-way fares):

Destination	Fare (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency
Brussels	7.40	60	2 per hr
Charleroi	4.70	30	2 per hr
Jemelle	7.40	40	1 per hr
Libramont	10.70	60	1 per hr
Liège	7.40	60	2 per hr
Luxembourg City	22.60	120	1 per hr
Marloie	6.70	35	1 per hr
Mons	9.50	60	1 per hr
Villers-la-Ville	5.70	45	1 per 2hr

Getting Around

City buses depart from either Pl de la Station or Ave de la Gare.

Bikes can be hired from **La Maison des Cyclistes** (☎ 081 81 38 48; www.velonamur.be in French; Pl de la Station 2b; per half-/full day/weekend €7/9/14; ☎ 8.30am–1pm Mon, 1–6pm Wed & Fri), a small kiosk opposite the train station.

AROUND NAMUR

Halfway between Namur and Dinant is **Les Jardins d'Annevoie** (☎ 082 61 15 55; www.jardins.dannevoie.be; Rue des Jardins 37, Annevoie; adult/child/senior €7.50/5/6; ☎ 9.30–6.30 Jul & Aug, 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct). This classical garden was laid out in 1758 around the manor house of Charles-Alexis de Montpellier, and both the house and gardens are still owned by this family. Montpellier blended French, Italian and English styles and incorporated water as the garden's key element – fountains and tree-lined waterways are used extensively.

To get here from Namur's bus station, take bus 21 (€1.60, 30 minutes) to the stop in front of the gardens. This bus continues on to Dinant. During school terms, visitors really need their own transport as there's only one bus per day, and the return bus departs an hour later (leaving little time to visit the gardens). During school holidays (p308) services increase to three per day, with better return connections.

With your own transport, an interesting place to stay or stop in for a bite to eat is **Brasserie/Hôtel les 7 Meuses** (☎ 081 25 75 75; www.7meuses.be; Rue du Sart à Souilles, Rivière; s/d €50/80; ☎ closed Dec & Jan). Atypical of accommodation around here, it's modern, minimal and painted a startling orange. It sits high on the hillside above the Meuse River and has a spacious brasserie and huge terrace that juts out over the forest. The six rooms are done in white and are severely minimal. Avoid rooms one and six because they're at either end of the

SAX APPEAL

Antoine-Joseph Sax (1814–1894), popularly known as Adolphe Sax, invented the musical instrument that has taken centre stage in jazz and other 20th-century musical genres.

Born in Dinant, he inherited a fascination with music from his father, who made wood and brass instruments as well as pianos and harps. He studied at Brussels' Conservatoire Royal de Musique and in 1841 submitted nine musical inventions to the Brussels Industrial Exhibition. However, the organisers considered him too young to be awarded top prize.

In 1842 Sax went to Paris, where he launched one of his inventions, the saxophone – a single-reed instrument made of metal, which he constructed while attempting to improve the sound of his bass clarinet. Though the French were initially less than thrilled by the new instrument, the French army eventually ordered saxophones for its bands. Sax patented the saxophone in 1846 and, a decade later, the Paris Conservatoire inaugurated saxophone classes with Sax as the instructor.

Despite his inventions, Sax never reaped great financial rewards. He died penniless after a decade of legal disputes with rivals who sought to have his patents revoked. Some of Sax's unusual creations, including the saxhorn, are on display at Brussels' Musée des Instruments de Musique (p83).

building and don't have views. To get here, take the Namur–Dinant road to the hamlet of Rivière (14km from Namur), where there's a signposted turn-off to the right. From here it's a steep climb.

DINANT

pop 12,700

Pressed between rock and river, Dinant is one of the Ardennes' tourist hot spots. About 28km south of Namur, its bulbous church competes for attention with the cliff-front citadel, while below, a hive of boat operators vie for the Meuse River day-trippers or the Lesse Valley kayakers. In summer the main thoroughfares through town are choked with traffic and the place feels hot and claustrophobic. That, combined with few accommodation options, makes it good for a pit stop, but there are better places deeper in the Ardennes to really kick back.

Historically, Dinant was a major centre for *dinanderie* (copper work), a trade that flourished between the 12th and 15th centuries but shrivelled as mining and textile industries took over.

The **tourist office** (☎ 082 22 28 70; www.dinant.be; Ave Cadoux 8; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–7pm Sat, 10am–6pm Sun) is in a whitewashed riverfront building on the opposite side of the river from the cathedral.

Sights & Activities

You don't need to visit Dinant to see its Gothic **Église Notre Dame** (Pl Reine Astrid; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm). The onion-topped church must have made the cover of every brochure

ever published on the town, but there's actually little to see inside.

The lofty **citadel** (☎ 082 22 36 70; www.citadelle.dinant.be; Le Prieuré 25; adult/child €6.50/4; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Sat–Thu Nov–Mar) can be accessed either by 408 steps that were cut centuries ago and lead up from next to the church, or by the neighbouring *téléferique*, a cable car that's been operating for over 50 years. The citadel affords worthy views over the town and the Meuse, though there's little of interest within its sturdy walls aside from a staid museum. Built around 1818 by the Dutch, the citadel was taken by the Germans in WWI; subsequently, nearly 700 townsfolk were killed and much of the town was razed.

Dinant was the birthplace of two well-known Belgians – painter Antoine Wiertz, who lived most of his life in Brussels (where a museum is devoted to his unusual works – see p86) – and Adolphe Sax (above). If you're into jazz memorabilia, wander along Ave Adolphe Sax to No 35, where a **stone plaque** and a little **stained-glass window** commemorate the instrument's inventor. A bit further along the same street is a big sax **statue**.

Belgium's older set loves Dinant for its sedate **boat cruises** down the Meuse. Several companies offer excursions, all departing from Quai de Meuse, on the southern side of the bridge over the river. Voyages include a 45-minute return trip to the town of **Anseremme** (adult/child €5/4; ☎ every 30min 10am–6.30pm April–Oct) or a 1¼-hour return voyage a bit further upriver to **Freyr** (adult/child €9/7.50; ☎ 2.30pm May–mid-Sep).

Kids and young families come to Dinant to get wet. The Lesse River is the **kayaking** focus,

and several companies have trips departing in the morning from Anseremme. A bus takes you upstream to one of two destinations from where you paddle back to Anseremme. From Houyet it's 22km and takes about five hours; from Gendron it's 12km and can be done in about three hours. You'll be looking at about €17 for single kayaks or €20 for a two-seater for either trip. Be warned, this is one of Belgium's most popular kayaking runs, and on weekends in summer the river is littered with craft and people. For more details contact **Ansiaux** (☎ 082 21 35 35; Rue du Vélodrome 15, Anseremme).

Cycling around this area offers contrasting terrains – either you're cruising along dead-flat riverside bike paths or climbing strenuous hills on small narrow roads shared with cars. Mountain bikes can be hired from **Ansiaux** (☎ 082 21 35 35; Rue du Vélodrome 15, Anseremme; per half-/full day €14/20); normal bikes are available from Dinant train station (€9.50 per day). If you're really into pushing uphill and then coasting down, ride to Brasserie/Hôtel Les 7 Meuses (p235).

Sleeping & Eating

Au Fil de l'Eau (☎ 082 22 76 06; Ave Colonel Cadoux 88; s/d €40/48, child extra €10) Little B&B well located out of the tourist hype and with a privileged view back to town. The squat, whitewashed river-front building, about 400m from the town's main bridge, has just one homey room full of kitsch. The breakfast compensates. Exiting the train station, turn left, head straight down to the river, and follow the road to the left.

Hôtel Ibis (☎ 082 21 15 00; www.ibishotel.com; Rempart d'Albeu 16; r Sun–Thu €70, Fri & Sat €75, with river view extra €5, breakfast €9; ☎ ☎ ☎) The only hotel in town, this trim and modern three-storey riverside hotel is shaped like a boat. It's next to the casino, and is 1.2km from the train station – to get here, cross the bridge into town, turn right, and follow the river.

For nearby countryside retreats, see La Ferme des Belles Gourmandes (p238) and Brasserie/Hôtel les 7 Meuses (p235).

Pâtisserie Jacobs (☎ 082 22 21 39; Rue Grande 147; ☎ 8am–8pm) For coffee and a *couque* (biscuit), go directly to this pâtisserie/café. Dinant is known throughout Belgium for its *couque de Dinant*, biscuits made in huge wooden moulds of assorted shapes – from kids peeing on chamber pots, to elephants. Unlike Belgium's better-known *speculaas* (cinnamon-flavoured biscuits), Dinant biscuits don't contain sugar – they're honey-based. This

bakery, established in 1860, is worth a look just for the window display.

La Broche (☎ 082 22 82 81; Rue Grande 24; mains €16–22; ☎ lunch Thu–Mon, dinner daily) Down the far end of the main drag, this French restaurant is a firm favourite with locals. The décor's an unfussy modern blend of blacks and creams and the prices won't strip your wallet.

Le Jardin de Fiorine (☎ 082 22 74 74; Rue Georges Cousot 3; mains €23–30, multicourse menus from €30; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Wed & dinner Sun) One of the area's best-known gastronomic restaurants, located on the edge of town near Hôtel Ibis. It occupies a century-old riverside mansion, and does classic Belgian cuisine with a modern dash.

Getting There & Away

Dinant's train and bus station is about 300m from the centre of town – turn right when you leave the station and follow the road around to the river. There are hourly trains from Namur to Dinant (€3.90, 30 minutes). Bus 433 (50 minutes, every two hours) also connects the two towns and departs from next to the train station. For bike rental, see left.

AROUND DINANT

Exploring the Lesse River by kayak is one of the most popular excursions from Dinant – see opposite.

However, if you really want to get off the beaten track, head to **Parc et Réserve Naturelle de Furfooz** (☎ 082 22 34 77; www.parcdefurfooz.be in Flemish & French; Rue du Camp Romain, Furfooz; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Jun–Aug, 10am–5pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun Mar), about 8km upstream from Dinant on a knoll that juts out into the Lesse River. Sprinkled around the forested limestone hillside is a handful of old Roman sites, including a reconstructed bath and the remains of a medieval fortress, as well as caves, *trous* (deep water holes) and cliffs. A 4km marked walking trail winds around most of the sites.

To get here, take the Houyet-bound train from Dinant and get off at the Gendron stop (10 minutes, every two hours) from where it's a 1km walk along the GR126 trail to the park's southern entrance. With a car, go south from Dinant to Anseremme, take the Celles/Houyet turn-off and follow it until just before Celles, where you'll see the signpost for Furfooz. Follow the Furfooz signs for another few kilometres until the road abruptly ends at the park's other entrance.

La Ferme des Belles Gourmandes (☎ 082 22 55 25; www.lafermedesbellesgourmandes.com in French; Rue du Camp Romain 20, Furfooz; s/d €50/55) is a lovely well-priced country retreat about 8km from Dinant. A converted dairy farm, this grey-stone hotel/restaurant radiates rural tranquillity, and the owners speak English. The rooms are simply furnished and homey.

ROCHEFORT

pop 11,900

As a base in this part of the Ardennes, Rochefort's hard to beat. Together with its neighbour Han-sur-Lesse, Rochefort is famed for the millennia-old underground limestone grottoes that attract visitors from all over Belgium. The caves at Han are the more spectacular of the two but that village is a tourist trap. Ideally, base yourself in Rochefort and, if you're without a car, bus it to the Han caves.

Rochefort is also well known for the Trappist beer brewed by local monks, and there's no shortage of watering holes at which you can sample these brews.

The town is slung along a low hill with the Lomme River passing almost unnoticed in a valley below the long main street, Rue de Behogne. The **tourist office** (☎ 084 34 51 72; www.valdelesse.be; Rue de Behogne 5; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun) is in the centre of town and can provide access to the internet (€2 per hour). The **Fortis Banque** (☎ 084 37 03 70; Rue de Behogne 9; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat), next to the tourist office, has an ATM.

Sights & Activities

The premier sight is the **Grotte de Lorette** (☎ 084 21 20 80; Drève de Lorette; adult/child €7.25/4.70; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mar-Oct), about 600m south of Pl Albert Ier, the town's nominal heart. It was discovered in 1865 and basically comprises one enormous cave, the Salle du Sabbat. The cave's custodians use tricks of the trade to give a sense of its enormous proportions – a sound-and-light show and miniature hot-air balloon are part of the fun. Tours take just over an hour, and run roughly every 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the season. If you plan to visit the Grottes de Han as well, invest in a combination ticket (adult/child €16.50/10.80).

Rochefort takes its name from the Latin *Rochafortis*. It refers to a rocky outcrop to the south of town that has been partly obscured by buildings in recent times but has been fortified since the 12th century, possibly earlier.

On top of it stands the ruins of the **Château Comtal** (☎ 084 21 44 09; Rue Jacquet; adult/child €1.80/1.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct), a castle built by an 18th-century local count and incorporating some of the earlier fortifications.

Rochefort's Trappist beer is brewed at the **Abbaye de St Rémy**, a Cistercian monastery a couple of kilometres due north of town. The complex is not open to the public, but visitors can enter a small church inside the grounds, and the signposted walk from town to the abbey is decidedly pleasant. For more on Rochefort beer, see p48.

The area is a great base for **walking** and **cycling**. The tourist office sells a regional IGN map entitled *Rochefort et ses Villages* (scale: 1:25,000; €7.50), which covers numerous walking trails – all signposted with coloured markers – as well as mountain- and city-bike routes. Seven of the walks originate on the square just outside the tourist office. The 9km walk, **Belvédère de Han-sur-Lesse**, is marked by a green diamond and takes you south to a plateau from where there are magnificent views. For something shorter and less strenuous, the 5km trail, entitled **Abbaye** (marked with a red rectangle), is a countryside hike to Abbaye de St Rémy and back. The 5km **Rond du Roi** (red diamond) involves walking up to the chateau and then making a steep climb to the wooded plateau above, from where there's a valley panorama.

Cyclists also have plenty of choice, but one highly recommended trail is **RAVel** (www.ravel.walonie.be), an 18km-long stretch of disused railway line linking Rochefort and Houyet. It's one of Wallonia's four RAVel paths (see boxed text, p301). For those with kids, this path is a boon – there's no traffic danger, it's flat and cemented, and it's wide enough for two bikes to cycle comfortably alongside each other. Count on the round trip taking two to three hours, longer with children or if you stop off for a drink en route (try Le Clé des Champs at Wanlin). The path starts at Rochefort's former railway station, a whitewashed building at the end of Ave de Forest, which has been converted into the local library. **Cycle Sport** (☎ 084 21 32 55; Rue de Behogne 59; rental per morning/afternoon/full day €10/15/20; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-noon Sun), about 400m downhill from the tourist office, hires out adult bikes, kids' bikes and toddler seats. The tourist office sells a map entitled RAVel (€1).

Parcs des Roches (☎ 084 22 12 32; Rue de la Passerelle) has two open-air swimming pools, minigolf

and a free playground. It's easily accessed via the path leading down from the square in front of the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Le Vieux Logis (☎ 084 21 10 24; www.levieuxlogis.be; Rue Jacquet 71; s/d/tr/f €59/72/92/112) A two-star hotel located near the ruined chateau, roughly 1km from the tourist office. This rustic old place has been around for over three centuries, as is evidenced by the creaky staircase. The 10 rooms – all decorated with old-style furnishings – are modest but comfortable. Some have private bathroom facilities; some have low doorways that command a bow upon entering; some are a bit over the top (pink bathrooms went out in the '70s). A baby cot is available.

La Fayette (☎ 084 21 42 73; www.hotellafayette.be in French; Rue Jacquet 87; s/d/tr/f with bathroom €45/50/65/75, without bathroom €40/45/60/70, breakfast €5, mains €12-25) Yet to emerge from the '70s, this little white-washed hotel overlooking the chateau has corridors plastered with pink or yellow wallpaper, floors covered in orange lino, and retro rooms. The reception area and adjoining restaurant are posher, but only just.

Hôtel La Malle Poste (☎ 084 21 09 86; www.malleposte.be; Rue de Behogne 46) This survivor from days long past was the town's original stagecoach house. Choose from three different sections: the cute and cosy Maison du Cocher (single/double €60/85), with small beds, whitewashed walls and floral décor; the brand-new Les Thermes (single/double from €75/100) with fabulously large rooms, all with Jacuzzis and stylish understated furnishings; or a room in the original mansion La Malle Poste (single/double €120/150). The hotel's restaurant, La Calèche (mains €16 to €25, open lunch Friday to Wednesday, and for dinner Friday to Tuesday), serves French cuisine.

Couleur Basilic (☎ 084 46 85 36; Sq Crépin 4; mains €18; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) Simple but vibrant little restaurant on a quiet tree-lined square one block behind the main street (direction Han-sur-Lesse). It's the best place to get away from weekend crowds, and the French cuisine, spiced with international flavours, is superb. In fine weather the owners set up tables near the bandstand on the square.

Other recommendations:

Camping Communal (☎ 084 21 19 00; Rue du Hableau; camp sites per adult/car/tent €2/3/3; ☎ Easter-Oct) Next to the Lomme River immediately below the main part of town.

Le Vieux Moulin (☎ 084 21 46 04; www.giterochefort.be; Rue du Hableau 25; demi pension under 25yrs/over 26yrs €18.50/21.25; ☎ year-round) Pleasant *gîte d'étape* (dorm-style) hostel.

Bella Italia (☎ 084 22 15 20; Rue de Behogne 50; pizza & pasta €6.50-12.50) Piping-hot, wood-oven-baked pizzas are the house speciality.

La Gourmandise (☎ 084 21 09 86; Rue de Behogne 24; mains €9-21) Stop in for a Rochefort beer or stay for dinner – local cuisine, such as chicken in Trappist sauce, is served.

Eurospar (Pl du Baty) Supermarket at the northern end of town.

Getting There & Away

Rochefort is linked to the train station of Jemelle. To get here from Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Jemelle (€7.40, 40 minutes, hourly) and from there the hourly bus 29 to Rochefort (€1.20, seven minutes), which continues to Han (€1.50, seven minutes).

AROUND ROCHEFORT

Han-sur-Lesse

This village lives largely off tourism generated by a marvellous underground gallery of limestone caves. Start a visit at the **Domaine des Grottes de Han** (☎ 084 37 72 13; Rue Lamotte 2; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Apr-Oct, 11.30am-4pm Nov, Dec, Feb & Mar). This is the information and ticket office for the main attractions – the *grottes* (caves), a nearby animal park and the new Speleogame. Investigate the various combination tickets.

The **Grottes de Han** (☎ 084 37 72 13; www.grotte-de-han.be; Rue Lamotte 2; adult/child €12/7 incl Speleogame; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 11.30am-4pm Nov, Dec & Mar) are situated a little out of town – a toy train takes you to the entrance from where you walk underground for 2km to the Lesse River. Here, a barge quickly brings you to the exit. The whole excursion takes about 90 minutes. The caves were discovered in the 19th century and tourists have been coming here ever since. Early visitors used fire lamps to explore the many galleries and, as a result, some of the roofs and walls are discoloured. Stalactites and stalagmites are abundant – the oldest stretches for 7m. The Salle du Dôme is the biggest gallery – rising for 20m and impressively dark and dank. As you'd expect, the caves are cold throughout the year – come prepared.

The **Réserve Animalier** (adult/child €8.75/5.25) covers 250 hectares (a sizable park by Belgian standards) and is stacked with deer, wild boar, wild ox, bison, ibex, chamois and donkeys. Green safari trucks loaded with grandparents,

parents and schoolkids drive around for 1¼ hours in search of the critters.

The **Speleogame** (☎ 084 37 82 31; Rue des Grottes 46; adult/child €8.75/5.25; ☹ noon-6pm) is generally visited on the walk back to town after visiting the caves, and admission is included in the ticket for the caves. It's basically a big-screen computer game.

Han's only other sight is the **Musée du Monde Souterrain** (☎ 084 37 70 07; Pl Théo Lannoy 3; adult/child €3.50/2.50; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Nov), on the square behind the church. The caves' geological formation is explained here, and a few Neolithic relics found locally are displayed.

Han is linked to Rochefort (6km away) and the train stations of Jemelle and Houyet by bus. To get to Han from Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Jemelle (€7.40, 40 minutes, hourly) and then the bus 29 (via Rochefort) to Han (€1.50, 14 minutes, hourly).

Domaine de Chevetogne

Families with a car may want to explore this 550-hectare public **park** (☎ 083 68 88 21; www.province.namur.be/sections/culture/loisirs/; Chevetogne; adult/child under 6yr €5/free Easter-Oct, free for everyone rest of year) located 8km northwest of Rochefort at Chevetogne. It boasts free open-air activities – swimming pools and 10 playgrounds – plus boating, woodland walks, a unicorn garden, restaurants and cafés.

REDU

pop 700

Years ago, if you asked most Belgians to pinpoint the village of Redu, they would have floundered. But in 1984 this little village in Luxembourg province was saved from eternal insignificance by Noel Anselot, an antiquarian bookseller who set up Redu as continental Europe's first book village. It followed in the footsteps of Hay-on-Wye, a dying Welsh town that metamorphosed into a thriving centre for secondhand books in the '60s.

These days this village, on a gently sloping hillside about 18km south of Han-sur-Lesse, attracts 200,000 book-lovers a year. The two biggest events are Easter's **Fête du Livre** and, even more popular, August's one-night festival **La Nuit du Livre**, when bookshops and eateries stay open until dawn and fireworks illuminate the midnight sky.

There's nothing as such to see – people come here to spend a lazy summer weekend trawling bookshops and, for the more energetic, walking

to the Lesse River and nearby villages. Although some of the bookshops are open weekdays, many aren't. The **Maison du Tourisme** (☎ 061 65 65 16; www.redu.info.be; Pl de l'Esro 63; ☹ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar), next to the church, hands out a free town map that gives a rundown (in French) of each bookshop.

The best selection of English books is kept by **De Eglantier & Crazy Castle** (☎ 061 65 66 15; Rue de Transinne 34; ☹ 11am-6pm Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Jun).

La Gourmandine (☎ 061 65 63 90; Rue de St Hubert 16; s/d with bathroom €40/60, without bathroom €30/45; ☹ daily Jul & Aug, Sat-Mon Sep-Jun), directly behind the church, is the most atmospheric option for eating and sleeping. The rooms are spacious and well kept.

Le Fournil (☎ 061 65 56 32; www.le-fournil.be; Pl de l'Esro 58; s/d without bathroom €25/50, mains €14-17), adjacent to the church, is the next best option, with a large terrace and run-of-the-mill rooms.

To get to Redu from Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Libramont (€9.60, one hour, hourly) then bus 61 (€2.10, 1¼ hours, three daily Monday to Friday), which stops at the church.

AROUND REDU

About 6km east of Redu, right next to the E411 motorway, is the **Euro Space Center** (☎ 061 65 64 65; www.eurospacecenter.be; Rue devant les Hêtres 1, Transinne; adult/child €11/8; ☹ 10am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Easter-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov). Dedicated to bringing space travel to the armchair viewer, this centre has a full-sized model of a space shuttle, plus movies and gadgets enjoyed by kids of all ages. Belgian families love this place. From Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Libramont (€9.60, one hour), then bus 61 (€1.80, one hour, three daily Monday to Friday), which stops outside the centre. By car from Namur, head south on the E411 to exit 24 (Transinne).

ST HUBERT

pop 5700

Unless you're into hunting, don't bother with St Hubert. This village, 22km southeast of Rochefort, is named after the patron saint of hunters. According to legend, Hubert, a local 7th-century count, was about to do in a stag when Christ appeared between the creature's antlers imploring him to embrace a religious life. The count gave up his land and worldly goods and took to the forest where he lived as a hermit.

Deer and wild boar still live in the region and the town has remained a favourite hunting haunt – so much so that St Hubert bills itself as the 'European Capital of Hunting & Nature'. On the first weekend in September, red-coated horn blowers announce the start of the **Journées Internationales de la Chasse et de la Nature**, a two-day hunting festival complete with medieval pageantry, a hunting dog show, and an elaborate horn-blowers' concert performed in the town's basilica.

The **Maison du Tourisme** (☎ 061 61 30 10; www.saint-hubert-tourisme.be in French & Flemish; Rue St Gilles 12; ☹ 9am-5.30pm) is 100m from Pl du Marché, the town's main square. It hands out a pamphlet for a two-hour walking tour.

The all-dominant **Basilica St Hubert** (☎ 061 61 23 88; Pl de l'Abbaye; ☹ 9am-6pm, to 5pm Nov-Easter) is the only real sight. A great grey slab of a thing, it's the largest place of worship in this corner of the Ardennes – it's drawn pilgrims since the 9th century, when St Hubert's remains were interned here. It's well worth a look if you're passing through town – the late-Gothic interior is much more beautiful than the austere baroque façade would suggest.

The best place to stay is the new **L'Ancien Hôpital** (☎ 061 41 69 65; www.ancienhopital.be; Rue de la Fontaine 23; d from €80, per extra person €25, ste €130; ☹). Once an old hospital, it now offers six rooms with stylish décor. Expect a gourmet three-course breakfast, a smoking salon, a cosy wine bar, free use of mountain bikes and a garden. Book the Jacuzzi suite, if possible – it occupies the old chapel.

At the foot of the basilica, brasserie/restaurant **Le Basilic** (☎ 061 50 48 58; Pl de l'Abbaye 8; mains €15-21, menu €25; ☹ Tue-Sun) has simple décor and a young chef who creates the town's best food.

Taverne Le Dialogue (☎ 061 32 13 91; Pl du Marché 13; snacks €5-10; ☹ 11am-9pm Tue-Sun; ☒) is a modern café set in the traditional surroundings of an 18th-century cellar.

To get to St Hubert from Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Libramont (€9.60, one hour, hourly) and then local TEC buses 51 or 162b (€1.60, 25 minutes, 10 daily) to St Hubert; they stop at Pl du Marché.

BOUILLON

pop 2200

Bouillon is justifiably one of the Ardennes' premier resort towns. It's an immediately likeable place, occupying a loop in the Semois River, lorded over by one of Europe's most im-

pressive medieval strongholds and surrounded by some of the region's wildest scenery. It's the sort of place where you can just chill out and do nothing... though there's actually plenty to do. Hiking and kayaking to nearby villages, exploring the intriguing castle or enjoying a riverfront terrace are all on the cards.

Information

Maison du Tourisme (☎ 061 46 52 11; www.bouillon-tourisme.be; Quai des Saulx 12; ☹ 10am-6pm, to 5pm winter) Tourist information on the town and the region is available at this office inside the Archéoscope (p242).

Syndicat d'Initiative (☎ 061 46 62 57; www.bouillon-sedan.com; Esplanade Godefroid de Bouillon; ☹ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Dec-Feb, 10am-5pm Mar, Oct & Nov) Tourist office at the castle entrance.

Sights & Activities

A **combination ticket** (adult/child/student €13/8.80/11.30) – valid for the castle, the Musée Ducal and the Archéoscope – is available from either tourist office.

Slouching like a great grey dragon on the rocky ridge above town, the **Château de Bouillon** (☎ 061 46 62 57; Rue du Château; adult/child €5.20/3.50; ☹ 10am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Dec-Feb, 10am-5pm Mar, Oct & Nov) is Belgium's finest feudal castle. It commands views over the huddle of houses below and sits rock solid as the town's focal point. Flanked on both sides by the Semois River, a fortress has existed here since about the 8th century, but this castle harks back to 988 and the days of Godefroid de Bouillon (see boxed text, p242). It was expanded in the 15th century, and 200 years later France's military engineer, Vauban, was charged with bringing it up to scratch.

Although much of what exists today dates from Vauban's time, it's still everything you could wish for in a castle – dark, sordid and musty with poorly lit corridors and rough-hewn stairwells winding up and down and around towers, past battlements and through dungeons. Take a **torchlit tour** (€5.20 plus €2 for a mandatory torch; ☹ 10pm Wed & Fri-Sun Jul & Aug) to really give yourself the heebie-jeebies. Access to the castle by car is via Rue du Château; by foot there are steps leading up from both Rue du Moulin and Blvd Heynen (next to the tennis court near Pont de la Poulie).

In the summer months, the castle is home to a small contingent of birds of prey (eagles, hawks, falcons and African vultures), the pets

GODEFROID DE BOUILLON

At the heart of Brussels' busy Pl Royale stands a statue of Godefroid de Bouillon. This 11th-century crusader is seen as one of Belgium's ancient heroes, though the actions of his army would receive few medals today.

Godefroid – or Godfrey in English – was born in 1060 and was the last of the five dukes of Bouillon who lorded over the town from their mighty castle. In 1096 Godefroid sold the ducal castle to the prince-bishop of Liège and, with that money, led one of three Crusader armies across Europe to the Holy Land, which they hoped to recapture from the Muslims. Along the way Godefroid's army of 60,000 seriously degenerated in both number and ethics – his supposedly Christian army slaughtered thousands of Jews in towns across Germany soon after setting off.

It took three years to reach Jerusalem. Godefroid's soldiers breached the city walls on 15 July 1099 and proceeded to massacre an estimated 40,000 Muslims and Jews. According to a contemporary account, six months after the orgy of slaughter the streets still reeked of rotting bodies.

Godefroid declined the title of 'King of Jerusalem' and settled instead for 'Defender of the Holy Sepulchre'. He died a year later in Jaffa, north of Jerusalem.

of a local falconer. He organises half-hour feeding shows, known as **Spectacle de Fauconnerie** (☎ 11.30am, 2pm & 3.30pm Easter-Jun, plus 5pm Jul & Aug), at a small amphitheatre inside the castle.

Still up on the ridge, but outside the castle walls, is the **Musée Ducal** (☎ 061 46 41 89; www.museeducal.be; Rue du Petit 1; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Easter-Sep, 10am–5pm Oct–mid-Nov). This museum is spread over two adjoining buildings and contains displays based on Godefroid's life and the Crusade; period rooms highlighting the local metallurgy industry; a room devoted to local artist Albert Raty (1889–1970) and some mean medieval weapons.

Archéoscope Godefroid de Bouillon (☎ 061 46 83 03; Quai des Saulx 14; adult/child €6/4.50; ☎ 1–4pm Tue–Fri & 10am–4pm Sat & Sun Dec–Feb, 10am–4pm Mar, Apr & Sep, 10am–5pm May–Aug, 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Oct & Nov) is Bouillon's flashiest attraction, located in a renovated 17th-century convent. The film and associated bits and pieces are designed to bring Godefroid's story to life for 21st-century folk. It's multilingual, and kids usually enjoy the sound and lighting effects.

Kayaking on the Semois is organised by **Semois Kayaks** (☎ 0475 24 74 23; Rue de Libehan 6; ☎ Easter-Sep). Choose from a three-hour trip (Bouillon to Poupehan, one-/two-seater kayak €17/30, 15km) or a one-hour jaunt (Poupehan to Frahan-sur-Semois, €12/18, 5km). Both trips are relaxed and peaceful, and there are far fewer traffic jams on the Semois than on journeys down the Lesse near Dinant. On the whole, the Semois is a gently flowing but wonderfully winding river that meanders through umpteen S-bends before it joins the Meuse across the border in France.

If you're into combining kayaking and hiking, you could kayak to Poupehan and then follow one of the paths that circle around Poupehan before returning to Bouillon on a kayaking bus, or alternatively kayak to Poupehan and then walk back to Bouillon via the village of Corbion. For the latter you'll need to pick up the *Cartes des Promenades du Grand Bouillon* walking map (scale 1:25,000, €7) from the tourist office before setting off. This map also details other walks through the oak and beech forests – Belgium's most extensive – that surround Bouillon.

For cycling, see opposite.

On warm summer days, a great spot for **swimming** and cooling off with the kids is the stony beach on the bank of the Semois at Pont de la Poulie. It's on the western side of the castle – to get here from the town centre, head up Rue du Nord and then down Rue de la Poulie, or take the centuries-old walking track that leads down from the castle car park.

Sleeping & Eating

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 061 46 81 37; www.laj.be; Route du Christ 16; dm/s/d €14.50/29/42; ☎ closed Nov–mid-Jan) A hostel perched on the ridge opposite the castle and with views over the whole town. Arriving by bus, turn left out of the bus station, follow Rue des Champs to the T-junction, turn right and you'll wind into Rte du Christ. From the town centre, take the short cut via the stairs that lead up from near Pl St Arnould.

B&B Baugard (☎ 061 46 78 91; www.chez.com/mbaugard; Rue des Hautes Voies 23a; s/d €35/50) The pick of the town's *chambres d'hôtes* (B&Bs). This place has a superb castle view, especially from the formal

dining room, where breakfast is taken. The owner is very friendly and the shared bathroom facilities are well kept. Close to the bus station.

B&B Belle Vue (☎ 061 32 17 71; www.belle-vue.info; Au dessus de la Ville 4; s/d €45/55). Another good place – it's even higher than B&B Baugard, and has lovely rooms and a terrace with a view.

Hôtel Panorama (☎ 061 46 61 38; www.panoramahotel.be; Rue au Dessus de la Ville 23; s/d €60/75, mains €21, 3-course menus €28–42; ☎) High above town with forest on one side and the castle on the other. The room décor is modern and warm, there's a great terrace for a drink in summer, there's also a cosy salon, and the hotel is child-friendly.

Hostellerie La Pommeraië (☎ 061 46 90 17; www.hotelpommeraië.com; Rue de la Poste 2; s/d demi-pension May–mid-Sep from €120/160, s/d mid-Sep–Apr from €90/110, mains €20–30) The town's most exclusive hotel/restaurant. A charming ivy-clad mansion with just 10 rooms, all with different furnishings, all individually named after herbs, and some with four-poster beds. The view of the castle is not bad, and on summer evenings you can dine on French cuisine on an old stone terrace with the flood-lit chateau in the background. Superb.

La Vieille Ardenne (☎ 061 46 62 77; Grand Rue 9; mains €14–24; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Wed–Sep–Jun) One of the few pubs/restaurants in town that's not attached to a hotel. It's a friendly old establishment, one block back from the river, that caters mainly for meat-eaters with hearty appetites – the seasonal menu is noted for *gibier* (game) in October and November. Decked out with heavy, typically Ardennes décor, it has a great atmosphere for sampling a local beer such as Cuvée de Bouillon or Godefroy.

Roy de la Moule (☎ 061 46 62 49; Quai du Rempart 42; mussels €12.50–17; ☎ lunch & dinner) Region's best mussel restaurant, with a choice of 32 different varieties – from the traditional white wine to mussels cooked in Trappist beer. Casual and kid friendly, and absolutely chockers on weekends in summer.

Other recommendations:

Camping Halliru (☎ 061 46 60 09; Rte de Corbion 1; camp sites per adult/child/site €3/1.50/4.50; ☎ closed Oct–Mar) One kilometre south of town along the river.

Route66 Burger (Quai du Rempart 21; snacks €4–9) Frites and burgers are the go at this popular snack bar.

Colruyt (Rue du Collège) Supermarket near the Archéoscope.

Getting There & Away

From Namur, take the Luxembourg-bound train to Libramont (€9.60, one hour, hourly),

then bus 8 (50 minutes, six services per day). Buses stop at both Quai du Rempart near Pont de Liège and at the **TEC bus station** (☎ 081 25 35 55) at the southern end of town above Pont de France.

AROUND BOUILLON

The ultracate village of **Frahan-sur-Semois**, 16km northwest of Bouillon, sits in one of the many loops formed by the Semois as it makes its way downriver. It's surrounded by lush green pastures, hedges and forests, and is dotted with whitewashed, grey-tiled-roofed houses and several hotels, all booked way in advance in summer. There are no shops or other facilities and there's absolutely nothing to do but look at the river, eat way too much, walk it off along lovely forested tracks...and then start the whole process over again. One great walk is up to **Rochehaut**, a village high on the plateau overlooking Frahan, where you can get a drink or go **cycling** – mountain bikes can be hired from **Free Time** (☎ 061 46 86 20; Rue Le Routi 22, Rochehaut).

Aux Roches Fleuries (☎ 061 46 65 14; www.auxrochesfleuries.be; Rue des Crêtes 32, Frahan; s/d €80/85, menus €20–56; ☎ closed Jan & Mar) is the nicest hotel/restaurant in Frahan. This family-run establishment has a great view down to the river, and the rooms are stylish with individual balconies. Kids are welcome.

Auberge de la Ferme (☎ 061 46 10 00; www.aubergedelaferme.be; Rue de la Cense 12, Rochehaut; s/d from €45/85, menus €30–60; ☎ closed Jan) up in Rochehaut has pleasant rooms, some with four-poster beds, as well as a popular tavern and terrace. It also welcomes children.

Public transport from Bouillon to either Frahan (€1.60, 20 minutes) or Rochehaut (€1.80, 35 minutes) is almost zilch – there's just one bus per day (No 45, direction Bertrix), which leaves Bouillon at around 6.30am.

ORVAL

The **Abbaye Notre Dame d'Orval** (☎ 061 31 10 60; www.orval.be; adult/child €4.50/2.50; ☎ 9.30am–6.30pm Jun–Sep, 9.30am–6pm Mar–May & Oct, 10.30am–5.30pm Nov–Feb) lies enclosed by verdant forests 30km southeast of Bouillon on the N88 (heading to Virton). From legendary beginnings, this monastery has grown into a composed complex of mustard-toned buildings that is home to some two dozen Cistercian monks and successful beer-, bread- and cheese-making industries. In international circles, Orval is

best associated with its Trappist brew (p48), but its story is richer than just beer.

The monastery was founded by Italian monks in 1070 and became Cistercian in 1132. In the 11th century the Countess Mathilda of Tuscany accidentally dropped her wedding ring, a present from her dead husband, into a stream here. In despair, she prayed to the Virgin and her ring was returned in the mouth of a fish. Centuries later, a trout carrying a golden ring has become Orval monastery's distinctive logo. The present buildings date from the mid-1920s, when the monastery was totally rebuilt – it had been ransacked and destroyed during the French Revolution, and subsequently abandoned.

Only the ruins of the original 12th-century abbey and a small museum located in an 18th-century cellar are open to visitors. Clear waters still bubble forth from a well hidden among the ruins, and there's a medicinal herb garden and a 300-year-old oak tree. The whole place has an evocative air of centuries long gone and is well worth a visit (providing you have your own wheels; otherwise, it's hard to reach). The brewery is closed to visitors, but samples of the monastery's produce – including young and old cheese, organic wholemeal bread called *Miche d'Orval* and the famous amber beer – can be bought at the reception shop.

The monastery has its own **guesthouse** (☎ 061 3251 10; hotellerie@orval.be; r €30) where those interested in learning about monastic life can stay (for two to seven nights).

Alternatively, there's **La Nouvelle Hostellerie d'Orval** (☎ 061 31 43 65; fax 061 32 00 92; Villers-devant-Orval; s/d €38/50, half-pension €55/85, menus €18-30; ☒ closed Dec-Feb). This hotel/restaurant marks a road junction 400m from the abbey and has five basic but clean rooms.

Getting to Orval by public transport is difficult. Bus 24 (€1.50, 10 minutes, one to two daily) runs to Orval from the nearest town, Florenville, 8km northwest.

ARLON

pop 25,800

Down in the deep south, Arlon (known as Aarlen in Flemish) is just kilometres from the border with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and is the largest town in Belgium's Luxembourg province. It's an old place, first settled as a Roman trading post, and bits from this time can be seen at the town's only sight, the **Musée Archéologique** (☎ 063 22 61 92; www.ial.be;

Rue des Martyrs 13; adult/child €6/4; ☒ 10am-noon & 1.30-5.50pm Tue-Sat, plus Sun mid-Apr-mid-Sep).

The **Maison du Tourisme** (☎ 063 21 94 54; www.arlon-tourisme.be; Rue des Faubourgs 2; ☒ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) is just off the main square, Pl Léopold.

Arlon's train and bus stations are a 10-minute walk south of Pl Léopold. Arlon is a major stop on the railway line between Brussels (€17.70, 2½ hours, hourly) and Luxembourg (€8.60, 20 minutes, hourly). Bus 3 runs to Martelange, from where bus 2 heads to Bastogne.

BASTOGNE

pop 14,100

It was in Bastogne, close to the Luxembourg border, that thousands of soldiers and civilians died during WWII's Battle of the Bulge (see opposite). Today this little town is full of wartime reminders, and the main square – a car park adorned with a tank – has even been renamed Pl McAuliffe after the famous American general whose reply to the German call to surrender was 'Nuts!'. On this square you'll find the **Maison du Tourisme** (☎ 061 21 27 11; www.paysdebastogne.be; Pl McAuliffe; ☒ 9am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1-5.30pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun).

Sights

Bastogne's main attraction is the huge star-shaped **American Memorial** (Colline du Mardasson), just over 2km northeast of town – follow Rue du Vivier, the town's main shopping thoroughfare, downhill until it joins the road to Wiltz/Clervaux in Luxembourg and then follow signs to 'Mardasson'. The memorial was inaugurated in 1950 and is inscribed with the names of the American states as well as principal moments in the course of the battle. In good weather it's possible to climb to the top for local views. A crypt at the memorial's base contains mosaics by Fernand Léger.

Next to the memorial is the **Bastogne Historical Centre** (☎ 061 21 14 13; Colline du Mardasson; adult/child €8.50/6; ☒ 10am-4.30pm Mar, Apr & Oct-Dec, 9.30am-5pm May, Jun & Sep, 9.30am-6pm Jul & Aug). Here the Battle of the Bulge is recounted with a 30-minute film using actual war footage and period displays – Allied and German uniforms, weaponry and a couple of dioramas depicting the freezing conditions of that winter in '44. If you're into buying war-related kitsch, the souvenir shop is full of it.

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

The Battle of the Bulge, officially known as the Battle of the Ardennes, was one of the most fierce confrontations of WWII. In September 1944, both Belgium and Luxembourg were liberated by American troops after four years of occupation. The Allies' plan to continue pushing the Germans back from bases in the Netherlands and France meant there was little defence of their frontline in the forested section of eastern Belgium and into Luxembourg.

On 15 December, in the depths of winter, Hitler launched a surprise raid – the Von Rundstedt Offensive – through the hills and valleys of northern Luxembourg and into Belgium. It was a desperate attempt to capture the River Meuse and the port city of Antwerp, thereby blocking supplies from reaching the Allies. Hitler's army got within sight of Dinant in Belgium, forming a bulge in the Allied line but failing to break through.

The town of Bastogne was surrounded during the invasion but the American 101st Airborne Division stationed in the town repelled the Germans until Allied reinforcements were able to drive Hitler's forces back through Luxembourg into Germany. The battle was over by the end of January 1945, at the cost of nearly 80,000 Americans, 100,000 Germans and many Belgian and Luxembourg civilians.

Many towns in the Belgian Ardennes and Luxembourg suffered heavily in the course of the battle. Memorials to this tragic Christmas are numerous, and include those in Bastogne as well as Luxembourg City's military cemeteries (see p274) and poignant museums in Diekirch (p289), Ettelbrück (p288) and La Roche-en-Ardenne (p246).

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Le Caprice (☎ 061 21 81 40; www.horest.be; Pl McAuliffe 25; s/d/tr €55/70/95) Pick of the crop if you're travelling with kids – under-eights stay for free. Handy location and saccharine-sweet pink rooms.

Hôtel Collin (☎ 061 21 43 58; www.hotel-collin.com; Pl McAuliffe 8; s/d/tr €67/85/105) Bastogne's most expensive hotel, with modern rooms fitted out in warm, rustic tones. Baby cots are available (€15).

Restaurant Léo (☎ 061 21 14 41; Rue du Vivier 4; mains €12-20; ☒ 11.30am-9.30pm Tue-Sun) Just off Pl McAuliffe, at the head of Bastogne's main shopping street, this restaurant occupies a renovated yellow-and-blue train carriage and is the most popular eatery in town. There's an extensive menu, good service and an excellent *assiette ardennaise* (plate of mixed local charcuterie), featuring 11 types of meat, for €13.50.

Other recommendations:

Camping de Renval (☎ 061 21 29 85; Route de Marché 148; camp sites per adult/child/site €5.50/3/16) About 1km from the tourist office.

Spar (Rue du Vivier 85) Supermarket.

Bistro Léo (☎ 061 21 65 10; Rue du Vivier 6; ☒ 11am-9.45pm Tue-Sun) More casual than the next-door Restaurant Léo.

Drinking

Le Latino's (☎ 0495 18 58 10; Rue Lamborelle 4; ☒ 11am-11pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, 4pm-4am Tue-Sun Jul & Aug) Lati-

no's is the town's coolest bar, located on nightlife street Rue Lamborelle, 100m from Pl McAuliffe (head downhill along Rue du Vivier and take the first left).

Brasserie Lamborelle (☎ 061 21 80 55; Rue Lamborelle 5; ☒ 11am-1am Tue-Sun) Rustic stone corner building with warm mustard tones and an excellent list of 80 beers.

Getting There & Away

Bastogne's train line was decommissioned years ago. The closest link is now the rail junction of Libramont, from where bus 163b departs every two hours for Bastogne (€3.20, 45 minutes).

LA ROCHE-EN-ARDENNE

pop 4200

La Roche is a lovely and vibrant little town, hidden in a deep valley, crowned by a ruined castle and surrounded by verdant hills. It hugs a bend in the Ourthe River, 30-odd kilometres northwest of Bastogne, and it is one of the Ardennes' most popular summer resorts. Good eateries, a few lively bars, a smattering of history and the possibility of getting seriously active make La Roche one of the best bases you'll find for a varied few days. Needless to say, it's a great family destination and, for those who are into ham, join the queue – this is where Belgian holiday-makers come to buy up big.

Orientation & Information

Arrive from the west or south and the perfect orientation opportunity presents itself: La Roche suddenly appears in the valley below and from this vantage point it's easy to follow the Ourthe's meandering course through town. The main street – Rue de l'Église – and its continuation Rue Châmont crosses the river and ends at Pl du Bronze, the nominal heart of town (though it's little more than a car park).

The town's **tourist office** (☎ 084 36 77 36; www.la-roche-tourisme.com; Pl du Marché 15; internet access per hr €5; ☹ 9am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5pm Sep-Jun) is on the main street and can provide internet access.

Sights & Activities

From the main street, steps head up to the ruins of La Roche's picture-postcard medieval **castle** (adult/child €3/2; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Perched on the crag

above town, there's not actually much to see – a small museum with a few archaeological relics is the focal point. The castle dates from the 11th century and was expanded throughout the next few centuries. Inhabited until 1780, it was then abandoned and fell into ruin. It's a pleasant spot to wander, and watch out for the ghost in summer (July and August).

Grès de La Roche (☎ 084 41 18 78; Rue Rompré 28; adult/child €4.50/3.25; ☹ 10am-noon & 1.30-5pm Apr-Oct, closed Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is upstream from Pl du Bronze. It combines two rather odd bedfellows – blue earthenware and ham. La Roche prides itself on its smoked ham, and huge pigs' shoulders adorn butcher's shops dotted along the main street. At this museum you'll find out what all the fuss is about.

Musée de la Bataille des Ardennes (☎ 084 41 27 25; Rue Châmont 5; adult/child €6/3; ☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Dec) tells of La Roche's involvement in the

Battle of the Bulge (see p245). Like other Ardenne villages, La Roche fared badly during this time – 90% of its buildings were flattened, and many townsfolk were killed. This museum spans three floors and includes the new Salle des Vétérans where uniforms donated by veterans are being assembled.

The **Petit Train Touristique** (☎ 084 41 19 00; adult/child €5/4; ☹ hourly 10am-6pm Apr-Sep) is a lazy way to look round town (50 minutes), and is usually brimming with kids and elderly visitors. It departs from the church on Rue de l'Église, but tickets must be bought from Ardenne-Aventures (see boxed text, opposite). It only runs in good weather.

The **Parc à Gibier** (Wildlife Park; ☎ 084 41 23 14; Plateau Dester; adult/child €4/2; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Easter-Jun & Sep–mid-Oct, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Oct–Easter), about 2km east of town on the Dester plateau, is home to deer, wolves and wild boars. You can access the park via hiking trail No 4, which winds up from La Roche, or take the tourist train (see above).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Le Vieux Moulin (☎ 084 41 13 80; www.strument.com; Petite Strument 62; camp sites per adult/child/tent €2.50/2.50/8; ☹ Easter-Oct) Draped for what seems an eternity along a stream next to the Hôtel Moulin de la Strument (right). Great site.

Domaine des Olivettes (☎ 084 41 16 52; www.lesolivettes.be; Chemin de Soeret 12; dm €12, s €50-60, d €60-80) This hotel/hostel/equestrian centre (see boxed text, opposite) offers the only cheap place to sleep in town. It's perched on a hill and has two styles of accommodation – the hotel, which has pleasant rooms (some with great views); or the separate hostel, with dormitory-style accommodation (four to 10 beds).

B&B La Fontanella (☎ 084 41 17 73; www.lafontanella.be; Rue Châmont 32; r €55) New B&B located on the main street, with four rooms situated above a restaurant that's run by the same owners. It's modern and functional and feels more like a tiny apartment than a typical B&B. Don't expect much contact with the owners – breakfast is a self-service affair, taken inside your room.

La Maison au Bord de l'Eau (☎ 084 41 10 88; www.bearadu.be; Clérué 54; apt per day/weekend/week €60/150/350) A self-contained holiday apartment run by a friendly couple and fabulously sited in a cosy V-shaped stone house. The apartment flanks the Ourthe River, just 250m from Pl du Bronze – watch kayakers paddle past from the kitchen window, or step out the front door onto a

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Maison Bouillon et Fils (☎ 084 41 18 80; Pl du Marché 9; shop ☹ 7pm Jul-Sep, 7.30am-7pm Wed-Mon Oct-Jun, salon ☹ 11am-6pm) Where but in the Belgian Ardenne would a *boucherie* (butcher's shop) have its own *salon de dégustation* (tasting salon)? Dine in with an *assiette ardennaise* (plate of mixed local charcuterie, €9) or, for the gourmand, an *assiette du chef* (a mix of ham, sausages and pâté, €10.50), at this must-see *boucherie*. It's also a good place to try Prunalet, a local plum liqueur.

riverside footpath that leads into town. Inside, the setup is modern but homey, and includes a double bedroom plus a sofa bed for two. Inquire about seasonal discounts.

Hôtel Moulin de la Strument (☎ 084 41 15 07; www.strument.com; Petite Strument 62; s/d €65/75, 1st night per person extra €5; ☹ closed Jan) The town's most charming hotel. It's part of an old mill (that's now a tiny museum) and is nestled in a secluded, wooded valley next to a babbling stream about 800m from Pl du Bronze. The eight rooms are fitted with country-style décor and there's a matching breakfast room. The attached restaurant has been around for years and has a good reputation.

Le Clos René (☎ 084 41 26 17; Rue Châmont 30; snacks €6-10; ☹ 11am-11pm Jul & Aug, 11am-11pm Fri-Wed Sep-Jun) When you can't stand the sight of another smoked ham, this tasteful brasserie/creperie is the perfect escape. Sweet and savoury crepes are the mainstay, but there are also sandwiches, salads and omelettes. Very child-friendly, and with an innovative interior.

Other recommendations:

La Brasserie Ardennaise (☎ 084 41 28 70; Rue du Pont 1; mains €8-30; ☹ 9am-midnight, kitchen closes 10.30pm) Big brasserie with a prized covered terrace slung next to the river. The food and service are OK but it's the location that's the attraction.

Spar (Quai du Gravier 1) Supermarket close to the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

Buses are the only form of public transport that reaches La Roche. The most convenient central stops are at Quai de l'Ourthe and Pl du Bronze.

From Namur, take the train to Marloie (€6.70, 35 minutes, hourly), from where bus

GETTING INTO ACTION

Walk, ride or paddle off those breakfast croissants...La Roche offers plenty of activities.

There are two **kayaking** possibilities: a bus takes you to either the Barrage de Nisramont, a dam to the southeast near the village of Nadrin, from where you paddle back (€20, four to six hours, 25km); or to the village of Maboge from where it's a two-hour descent (€15, 12km). Alternatively, you can do a kayaking-cycling combo by mountain biking it to Maboge and kayaking back from there (€25, eight hours). The kayaking season is generally from April to mid-October but, in the height of summer, low water levels sometimes prevent kayaking.

Mountain bikes can be hired for €15/22 for a half-/full day (or €25/45 for 24/48 hours), and the tourist office sells a map (€3.80) detailing good VTT (*vélos tout-terrains*, or mountain bike) routes. These are marked by a triangle above two circles. Kids' bikes are also available (same price as for adult bikes), but you'd be wise to book ahead, as numbers are limited. Bike helmets cost €1.25 extra.

The town's two kayaking/biking operators are **Ardenne-Aventures** (☎ 084 41 19 00; Rue du Hadja 1), next to the bridge at the northern end of town, or **Les Kayaks de l'Ourthe** (☎ 084 36 87 12; Rue de l'Église 35), near the tourist office.

Horse riding is organised by the **Domaine des Olivettes** (☎ 084 41 16 52; www.lesolivettes.be; Chemin de Soeret 12). You must be experienced, and reservations are necessary; prices are €35 for 2½ hours and €75 for one day. Weekend package deals with accommodation and meals at the hotel are also possible.

The hills around La Roche are crisscrossed by lovely **hiking** trails. Most are numbered, and identified with either a red circle or a shoe-shaped marker. The multilingual *Carte de Promenades* (€5), sold at the tourist office, gives very basic information (in English) on a dozen popular regional hikes ranging from 6km to 13km (or roughly two to four hours).

Hike No 5 (13km) is the longest and is generally considered the most interesting. It begins at Rue Bon Dieu de Maka near Pl du Bronze and climbs sharply to a plateau east of town. From here you cross forests and fields before descending steeply to the hamlet of Maboge, which contains little more than a couple of terrace *cafés* nicely positioned along the bank of the Ourthe. Cross the river and follow the road northeast for a few hundred metres before veering left (north) along a small tributary of the Ourthe. This leads to a farm at Borzée where path Nos 5 and 12 intersect. Take the left-hand path (west) to head back to La Roche, a generally easy and pleasant wooded walk that ends with a sharp descent before joining the road that leads back to town.

15 goes to La Roche (€1.80, 35 minutes, seven per day).

From Liège, get a train to Melreux (€6.40, one hour, every two hours) and then bus 3 to La Roche (€1.80, 30 minutes, seven per day).

There are no buses linking La Roche with Bastogne or Durbuy.

AROUND LA ROCHE

The **Grottes de Hotton** (Apr–Nov ☎ 084 46 60 46, Dec–Mar ☎ 083 68 83 65; www.grottesdehotton.com; adult/child €8/6; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Nov, 2pm Sat & Sun Dec–Mar), near the pleasant village of Hotton, is 17km northwest of La Roche. Discovered in 1958, the caves have been open since the early '60s but it has taken recent listing as a classified monument to spark public interest. Tours lasting 70 minutes and led by enthusiastic guides delve deep into the underground network – the river cavern has no equal in Belgium and is simply breathtaking. If the hype at caves like Han and Rochefort are not your style, visit Hotton instead. The caves are cold throughout the year – come prepared.

To get here from La Roche, take bus 13 (€1.60, 20 minutes, every two hours). It stops at the bridge in the centre of Hotton. The nearby tourist office will be able to advise whether a footpath leading up to the caves from Hotton's park has been completed (it was expected to be finished in late 2006 and will provide a shortcut for hikers). If not, head through town (direction Marche-en-Famenne) until you reach the signposted turn-off; it's about a 2km walk, all up.

DURBUY

pop 10,300

The smallest 'city' in the world...that's Durbuy's claim to fame and the villagers will hear no ifs or buts about it. This picturesque village flanks the Ourthe River, some 30-odd kilometres northwest of La Roche-en-Ardenne, and is little more than a huddle of quaint cobblestone streets and beautifully kept half-timbered, grey-stone buildings (plus a horde of tourist attractions). It has been around since at least the 11th century, when a local count built a castle here. By 1331 the village had a castle, a courthouse and police – all the prerequisites to be called a 'city' – and was granted city status. Nearly 800 years later, it's still celebrating.

Belgians and Japanese love Durbuy. It has everything for a fun-filled day out or a leisurely weekend – delightful hotels and good restaurants and bars. And extras – a topiary garden, a pint-sized brewery, stuffed *sanglier* (wild boars),

a jam-making shop, an ice-skating rink (in winter), a castle (not open to visitors) and heaps of summer activities from cycling to kayaking to hiking. All this in such a compact area means the village becomes one big amusement park on crowded weekends in summer. At other times it turns back into a pumpkin and becomes the picturesque little village that it always was.

The **tourist office** (☎ 086 21 24 28; www.durbuy.info .be; Pl aux Foires 25; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 1–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–12.30pm & 1–5pm Sat & Sun Sep–Jun, 9am–6pm Jul & Aug) is on the main square. There is no ATM or bank in town.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Le Vedeur (☎ 086 21 02 09; Rue Fond de Vedeur, adult/tent/car €3/5/3) Durbuy unashamedly cashes in on tourists – there's no bottom-end market unless you're equipped to camp at this riverside camping ground.

B&B Au Milieu de Nulle Part (☎ 0476 41 88 21; www.aumilieudennullepart.com; Rue des Recollectines 5; d/ste €125/180; ☎ closed Tue & Wed) Gorgeously rustic B&B on the quaintest pedestrianised backstreet in the middle of town. Subtle grey-and-brown décor, old lamps, flaking paintwork and not a hint of fuss or bother. The five rooms each have different furnishings.

Hôtel Victoria (☎ 086 21 23 00; www.hotel-victoria .be; Rue des Recollectines 4; d Mon–Thu from €60, Fri–Sun from €80) An ivy-clad building dating back some 330 years and situated on one of the nicest streets in town. Creaking wooden steps worn by time lead up to 10 comfortable old-style rooms. Those on the top floor have the charm that comes with exposed timber beams and an A-frame ceiling. The fire escape spoils the overall look, but it's a modern-day necessity.

Les Clos des Recollets (☎ 086 21 29 69; www.closdes.recollets.be; Rue de la Prévôté 9; s/d/tr/f €70/85/112/130, mains €18–26) Hotel/restaurant with 14 rooms scattered around three connecting half-timbered houses. The rooms are pleasant but unexceptional – it's the general atmosphere that's so charming. The restaurant dishes up French cuisine and is very popular in summer when you can dine on an intimate tree-lined square across the street from the hotel.

Three of the most expensive hotels in town have formed a pact and reservations for any of them must be made through **Hôtel Le Sanglier des Ardennes** (☎ 086 21 32 62; www.sanglier-des-ardennes.be; Rue Comte d'Ursel 14; s/d/t Mon–Thu €105/105/140, Fri–Sun €140, breakfast Mon–Thu €12, Fri–Sun €15). Of the trio, Hôtel Aux Vieux Durbuy is arguably the most quiet,

cosy and rustic, situated on a pedestrianised backstreet and sporting just 12 rooms done out in mellow caramel or apricot tones. To dine, head to the restaurant at **Le Sanglier des Ardennes** (mains €16–24), which has a view over the river and serves regional cuisine such as *côte de sanglier avec stoemp aux choux* (wild boar served with mashed potato and cabbage). This place also serves a popular Sunday brunch (€30).

Le Moulin (☎ 086 21 29 70; Pl aux Foires 17; mains €14–20; ☎ closed Tue) Light and airy French restaurant just footsteps from the main square and specialising in aromatic Provençal cuisine. It was once an old mill and has a lovely calm ambience.

Le Fou du Roy (☎ 086 21 08 68; Rue Comte d'Ursel 4; 2-/3-course menu €28/34; ☎ Wed–Sun) For something more upmarket, head to Le Fou du Roy – housed in the castle's former concierge quarters, this cosy restaurant with its wicker chairs and outback courtyard is noted for original cuisine.

Drinking

La Ferme au Chêne (☎ 086 21 10 67; Rue Comte d'Ursel 115; ☎ closed Wed & Thu Nov–Mar) A tiny brewery/brasserie producing Marckloff, a blond-brown beer (6.5%) with a strong, slightly bitter flavour. This place is pure homespun – the Mrs works behind the bar while Mr Brewer (not his real name) ushers visitors on a tour of the big stainless steel kettles and invites discussions on the merits of his beer.

Getting There & Away

Reaching Durbuy by public transport is possible but, outside the high season, buses are very limited. From Namur, take the train to Barvaux (€9, 50 minutes, every two hours) then a TEC bus to Durbuy (15 minutes). In July and August there are six buses per day; from April to June and September to November there are just three services on Saturdays and Sundays only. No buses run from December to March. Heading back to Barvaux, the last bus departs around 6pm. If you want to stay later into the evening, it's possible to walk the 3km back to Barvaux along a forest track. For bus times and information, contact the **Namur TEC office** (☎ 081 25 35 55; Pl de la Station; ☎ 7am–7pm).

AROUND DURBUY

About 3km west of Durbuy near the hamlet of Petite Somme sits **Radhadesh** (☎ 086 32 29 26; www.radhadesh.com; Château de Petite Somme, Septon; tours adult/child €4.75/2.40; ☎ 10.30am, 11.30am, 3pm, 4pm &

5.30pm Apr–mid–Nov, 11.30am, 3pm & 4pm mid–Nov–Mar), the headquarters of Belgium's Hare Krishna community. It's located on a forested hill in a restored 13th-century castle and is home to about 60 devotees, with more Hare Krishna families living nearby. One-hour tours of the chateau (phone ahead to arrange an English-language tour) are available, and there's a **vegetarian restaurant** (☎ 086 32 14 21; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun Apr–mid–Nov, Sat & Sun mid–Nov–Mar) serving well-priced Indian-style fare (such as thali for €11). To get here from Durbuy, head south on the N833 to the turn-off – look for the sign 'Château de Petite Somme'.

LIÈGE

pop 185,500

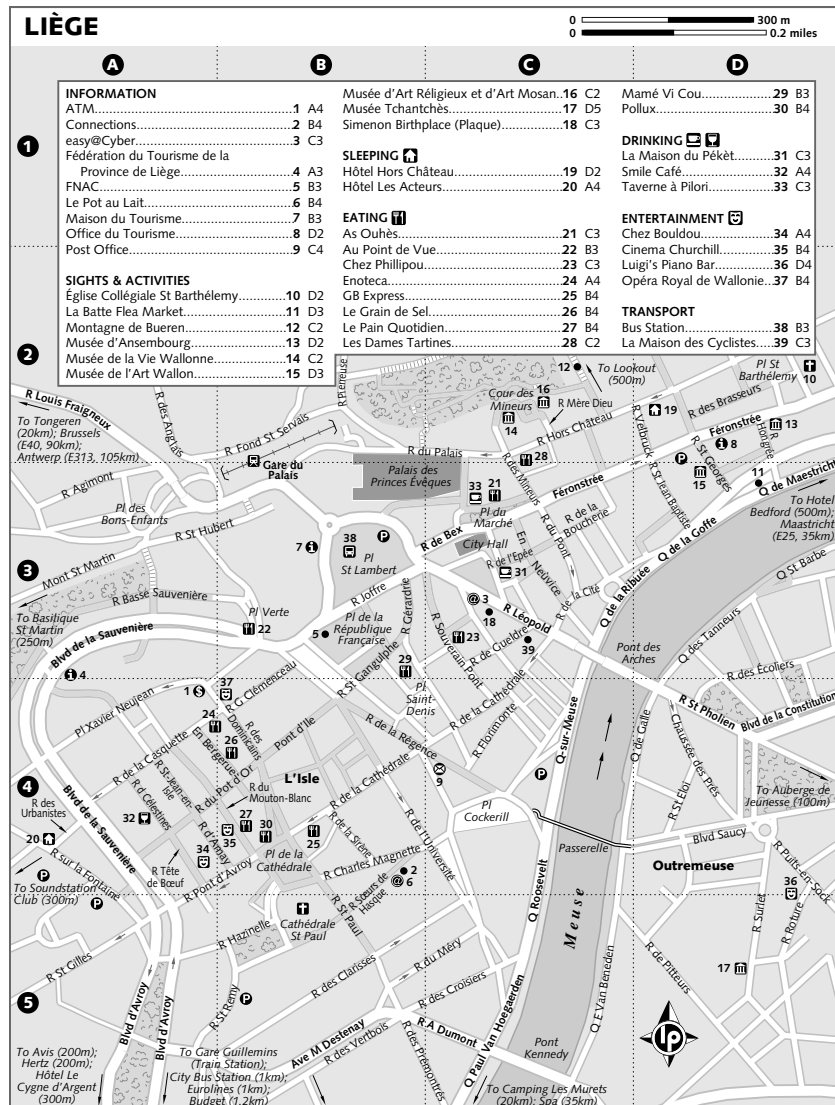
Liège (Luik in Flemish) is one of those cities people love or loathe. Sprawled along the Meuse River about 90km east of Brussels, it's the Ardennes' largest city and the capital of its own province. Industrial, decaying and gritty, it's the sort of place that takes time to get to know – there are quirky charms and some old intimate quarters, but they're not immediately apparent.

The city's museums hold a rich showcase of medieval religious art, the likes of which you won't see elsewhere in Belgium – for that alone Liège merits an overnight stop. Fans of Inspector Maigret may also want to pay homage here, as Liège is the birthplace of writer Georges Simenon (see boxed text, p253).

History

Liège grew from a humble chapel built on the Meuse in 558. In 705 the Bishop of Tongeren-Maastricht was murdered at the chapel and from then on it became a pilgrimage destination. Was his murder the start of the city becoming a capital of crime? Probably not, but Liège did have Europe's highest crime rate in 2001, according to European Commission figures.

In the 10th century, Liège became the capital of a principality ruled by prince-bishops who had both religious and secular powers. It managed to remain independent for the next 800 years, right through the reign of Burgundians, Spanish and Austrians. When rumblings broke out in Paris in 1789, revolutionary desires were whetted in Liège, and the locals, with the assistance of French soldiers, ousted the last prince-bishop, Antoine de Méan. In 1794 the long-independent principality was swallowed by France.



Liège entered the industrial age with verve. Coal mining had started here as early as the 12th century, and when the Industrial Revolution swept through in the 19th century, Liège developed its natural assets. Although the steel industry still survives, coal mining has ground to a halt and the city's periphery is dotted with the abandoned remnants of its prosperous past.

The Liègois are known for their liberal, left-wing passions. They were the first to lend their support to Brussels during the 1830 revolution against Dutch rule, and later that century fought heavily for better working conditions. After WWII, they were at the forefront of the campaign that eventually brought down King Léopold III (see p27).

LIÈGE ON FILM

Liège was the setting of both *Rosetta* and *L'Enfant*, two award-winning films by brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne (p38). *Rosetta*, shot in a poor suburb close to where the directors grew up, breathlessly follows the day-to-day life of a teenage girl, played by Émilie Dequeune, desperate to escape her harsh reality. The fly-on-the-wall approach is hard to watch but its gritty realism is typical of the Dardenne's approach, and it aptly portrays the city. Likewise *L'Enfant*, starring Jérémie Rénier and Déborah François, is a microcosm of Liège and its suburbs, though only a few flashes of its broad river give the location away.

Orientation

The central district is large and initially quite disorientating. The city is strewn along the western bank of the Meuse River, which splits in two, creating the island of Outremeuse. The island is one of the city's original working-class neighbourhoods, and its jumbled streets retain a busy, down-to-earth atmosphere.

The main train station, Gare Guillemins, is 2km south of the huge Pl St Lambert, the city's heart. Pl St Lambert is the main bus hub and is also home to a branch of the tourist office as well as the Palais des Princes Evêques, the former palace of the prince-bishops (now a courthouse). The city's historic quarter is based around a street called Féronstrée, where you'll find another tourist office. The 'newer' hub, with shops and the bulk of the restaurants and lively bars, is centred on Rue Pont d'Avroy and the clutch of little pedestrianised streets leading off it.

Information

ATM (Rue des Dominicains) Attached to Dexia Bank.

Connections (☎ 04 223 03 75; Rue Sœurs de Hasque 7) Travel agency.

easy@Cyber (Rue Léopold 14; per hr €0.50; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Cheap, well-patronised internet space.

Fédération du Tourisme de la Province de Liège (☎ 04 237 95 26; www.prov-liege.be/tourisme; Blvd de la Sauvenière 77) Provincial tourist office.

FNAC (☎ 04 232 71 11, ticket sales 04 232 71 12; Rue Joffre 3; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Department store with a large section of books, including travel guides and maps. FNAC also handles reservations for concerts and theatre.

Le Pot au Lait (☎ 04 222 05 84; Rue Sœurs de Hasque; per hr €2; ☎ from 1pm) At the end of a walkway festooned with psychedelic murals, this loud, smoky student pub has 10 internet terminals in a side room.

Maison du Tourisme (☎ 04 237 92 92; www.liege.be; Pl St Lambert 32; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Oct-May) City tourist office.

Office du Tourisme (☎ 04 221 92 21; www.liege.be; Féronstrée 92; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) City tourist office.

Post office (Rue de la Régence 26)

Sights & Activities

Liège's museums are regionally based and give good insight into the area's former wealth. The best ones are dotted around the city's historic quarter and are within easy walking distance of one another.

A good starting point, especially for orientation, is **Montagne de Bueren** (Rue Hors Château). This impressive flight of 373 stairs leads up to a former citadel (now a hospital) where a viewpoint, marked by a monument to the two world wars, gives an excellent panorama of the city.

Also worth a wander is **La Batte** (☎ 9am-2pm Sun), a flea market that stretches along 1.5km of river quays.

Close to the base of Montagne de Bueren is the **Musée de la Vie Wallonne** (Museum of Walloon Life; ☎ 04 223 60 94; Cour des Mineurs; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun). Everything that's Walloon and old-fashioned is extolled here, from 12th-century Mosan metalwork (see boxed text, p233) to old wooden puppets and biscuit moulds (capable of making mega 5kg biscuits). There are reconstructed ateliers (workshops) from various trades including candlestick-making, basket-weaving and coo-erage, as well as industries specifically associated with this region like glass-blowing and *dinanderie*, a craft that's still practised in Dinant. It's all housed in a restored convent and makes a fascinating amble through the region's past.

Just steps away is the excellent **Musée d'Art Religieux et d'Art Mosan** (Museum of Religious Art & Art from the Meuse Valley; ☎ 04 221 42 25; Rue Mère Dieu; adult/child €3.80/2.50; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun). Spanning several floors, this museum is chock-full of well-preserved religious relics and paintings from the region. Start on the 3rd floor – home to glowing 16th-century statues of St Hubert, the region's patron saint of hunters – then weave your way down. On the 2nd floor, note the worn but nevertheless delicate wood carving of the *Vierge* (Virgin) that dates right back to 1070.

TCHANTCHÈS

Liège's mascot and oldest 'citizen' is a wooden puppet called Tchantchès, with a big nose and bad behaviour. Supposedly born in the 8th century between two cobblestones in the city's old Outremeuse quarter, he has a penchant for getting riotously drunk on *pékèt* (a light version of gin) and head-butting people but, despite these flaws, is supposedly good-hearted and much loved. According to the Liègeois, he typifies their free spirit. Get to know him better at the **Musée Tchantchès** (☎ 04 342 75 75; www.tchantches.be in French; Rue Surlat 56; admission €1; 🕒 2-4pm Tue & Thu, puppet shows 2.30pm Wed & 10.30am Sun Jun-Sep) in Outremeuse, where you can catch a puppet show and view part of his wardrobe.

Two other museums are located close to the tourist office. Life as it was for some in the 18th century is depicted in the beautiful **Musée d'Ansembourg** (☎ 04 221 94 02; Féronstrée 114; adult/child €3.80/2.50; 🕒 1-6pm Tue-Sun). If you've just come from either the Musée de la Vie Wallonne or the Musée d'Art Religieux et d'Art Mosan, you'll find this rich, Regency-styled mansion wonderfully uncluttered. Highlights include four original 17th-century Oude-naarde tapestries, pieces of antique delftware pottery and, upstairs, a six-faced clock. The latter simultaneously shows the time in 50 countries and was invented in 1795 by Hubert Sarton; it still works.

The **Musée de l'Art Wallon** (☎ 04 221 92 31; Féronstrée 86; adult/child €3.80/2.50; 🕒 1-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) occupies a modern building that's accessed from Rue St Georges. It accommodates a very enjoyable collection of art by French-speaking Belgians, including 16th-century paintings by Henri Blès (1510-55). There are also works by some of the big guns including Constantin Meunier, Antoine Wiertz, René Magritte and Paul Delvaux.

Romanesque **Église Collégiale St Barthélemy** (Pl St Barthélemy; adult/child €1.25/1; 🕒 10am-noon Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has one attraction – a brass baptismal font crafted between 1107 and 1118 and believed to be the work of either Lambert Patras, a coppersmith from Dinant, or Renier, a goldsmith from Huy. This enormous bowl rests on oxen and is adorned with five baptismal scenes (elaborately described in a video screened near the font).

The tourist office has an English-language brochure, the *Simenon Route*, which describes a walking tour around Outremeuse, where writer Georges Simenon (opposite) spent his youth. One of the most tangible references to Simenon is the brass **plaque** marking his nearby birthplace at Rue Léopold 24. Alternatively, a French-language **audio tour** (€6, two

hours) entitled 'Sur les Traces de Simenon' starts at the Maison du Tourisme.

Sleeping

Liège has a smattering of atmospheric hotels, all dotted around the city centre. That said, none are really outstanding, and don't bother looking for a B&B – there's little on offer.

Camping Les Murets (☎ 04 380 19 87; Chemin d'Enonck 57, Hony; camp sites €12.70; 🕒 Apr-Oct) One of the closest grounds to the city, located about 20km to the south. To get here, take a Jemelle-bound train to Hony (€1.60, 35 minutes), then walk 200m.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 344 56 89; www.laj.be; Rue Georges Simenon 2; dm/s/d €16.60/29/42; 🕒) A modern hostel in Outremeuse. To get here from Gare Guillemins, take bus 4 to Pl St Lambert and change to bus 18, which stops out the front at Pl Léopold.

Hôtel Les Acteurs (☎ 04 223 00 80; www.lesacteurs.be; Rue des Urbanistes 10; s/d €56/77) A comfy modern hotel that tries hard to look artistic. It's well located, and buses 1 and 4 stop about 200m away.

Hôtel Le Cygne d'Argent (☎ 04 223 70 01; www.cygne.dargent.be; Rue Beekman 49; s/d €58/70, breakfast €9) Sits on a quiet backstreet about halfway between Gare Guillemins and the city centre. The 20 rooms are modern, spacious, well presented and have an aura of respectability.

Hôtel Hors Château (☎ 04 250 60 68; www.hors-chateau.be; Rue Hors Château 62; s/d €85/100) Ordinary, small, functional rooms are the trademark of this hotel but the excellent central location in the city's historic quarter makes up for the dearth of atmosphere. Take breakfast in the ground-floor bar.

Hotel Bedford (☎ 04 228 81 11; www.hotelbedford.be; Quai St Léonard 36; s/d Mon-Thu €210/235, Fri-Sun €95/115) Liège's best hotel. It's a six-storey affair facing the river and a multilane boulevard – ask for a rear room if traffic noise bothers you. The

LARGER THAN FICTION

Georges Simenon (1903-89), Belgium's most prolific writer, was born in Liège and is best known for his pulp fiction but was also well regarded in some literary circles. His astounding career and exuberant life is most easily summed up in figures:

- Wrote more than 300 novels, including 76 devoted to crime-buster Inspector Maigret, during a 50-year career.
- Sold more than 500 million copies of his works around the world. Published in about 80 languages.
- Worked, on average, six hours a day, during which time he completed 100 pages and smoked six pipes.
- Completed a book in, on average, 11 days (though one novel took just a quarter of that time).
- Left Liège at the age of 19 and lived in far-flung parts of the world, moving house more than 33 times.
- Boasted to have had sex with 10,000 women, though his second wife claims it was only 1200.
- Died in Switzerland in 1989 at the age of 86.

hotel is geared to business people and décor-wise it's bland and functional.

Eating

For serene surroundings, cross the river to Outremeuse, where there's an old cobbled street, Rue Roture, lined with little restaurants. In the city centre, Rue St-Jean-en-Isle and Rue St Paul are also filled with restaurants and brasseries.

Le Grain de Sel (☎ 04 232 03 23; En Bergerue 15; mains €12-16.50, salads €9.50; 🕒 lunch Tue-Sat & dinner Mon-Sat) Cheery eatery set up in three connecting rooms. The house speciality is *tartines Corses* (€7.50), sandwiches of sorts with a base of mozzarella cheese and tapenade. A good respite for vegetarians.

Mamé Vi Cou (☎ 04 233 71 81; Rue de la Wache 9; mains €10-20; 🕒 closed Wed) Traditional Liègeois fare such as *rognon de veau au pékèt* (veal kidneys in a light gin-based sauce) served in cavernous surroundings.

As Ouhès (☎ 04 223 32 25; Pl du Marché 21; mains €14-22, menu €25) Specialises in rich Walloon cuisine with ultragenerous portions, attentive service and reasonable prices. Note the restaurant's apt logo – a gluttonous man sitting on a mound of hams, waffles and sausages.

Au Point de Vue (☎ 04 223 64 82; Pl Verte 10; mussels €16.50-25, mains €13-26) This restaurant occupies a house dating from 1652, and it's busy but informal. A must are the seasonal mussels, shrimps in a cognac sauce and the house speciality, *lapin à la Liègeoise* (rabbit done the local way).

Enoteca (☎ 04 222 24 64; Rue de la Casquette 5; menus €17-31; 🕒 closed lunch Sat & closed Sun) The décor's dark and heavy – black marble tables, cushioned brown chairs and wood-panelled walls – but the Italian food is light and luscious, and you can see it being prepared in the white-tiled open kitchen.

Other recommendations:

Les Dames Tartines (☎ 04 232 17 10; Rue des Mineurs 20; snacks €2.75-4.50; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) Teensy *sandwicherie* noted for its filled baguette sandwiches.

Le Pain Quotidien (☎ 04 223 60 12; Rue du Mouton-Blanc 19; breakfast €5, lunch €10; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) Salads, savoury pies and breakfast items. See boxed text, p103, for more on this popular chain bakery/tearoom.

Pollux (Rue du Pont d'Avroy; waffles from €2.10) The best *gaufres Liègeoises* (waffles made the local way).

Chez Phillipou (☎ 04 222 18 22; Rue Souverain Pont 21; mains €15; 🕒 Tue-Sun) Simple but very popular Greek eatery.

GB Express (Rue de la Cathédrale) Supermarket.

Drinking

Pick up *La Référence*, a free bi-monthly entertainment booklet (in French) that details everything from rock and jazz to theatre festivals and classical concerts.

Taverne à Piloni (☎ 04 222 18 57; Pl du Marché 7; 🕒 10am-1am) A classic Liègeois pub that's pretty much always open. Customers transcend age and class barriers, and regulars mix comfortably with whomever happens upon it.

La Maison du Pékèt (☎ 04 232 04 66; Rue de l'Épée 4; 🕒 11am-2am Tue-Sun) Directly behind the Hôtel

de Ville. This bar specialises in *genièvre* (gin – also known as *jenever*) and turns out exotic fruit *genièvre* served in long, tall glasses, or shots of older varieties (€2.60) poured from pottery bottles.

Smile Café (Rue des Célestines 16; ☎ 5pm–2am Tue–Sun) One of many bars in the city's lively nightlife area. This one has a good ambience and is less intimidating than some of its counterparts.

Entertainment

Cinema Churchill (☎ 04 223 41 07; Rue du Mouton-Blanc 18) Three-screen cinema located behind a grand stained-glass façade and home to quality films. All screenings are in their original language, with French and Flemish subtitles.

Soundstation (☎ 04 232 13 21; Rue Pouplin 6; ☎ 7.30pm–dawn) A former train station that now sports house parties and live rock most Friday nights.

Chez Bouldou (☎ 0477 78 86 10; Rue Tête de Bœuf 15; ☎ from 7pm Mon–Sat) Happening cellar venue with acoustic guitar concerts on Monday nights and pop/rock concerts each Thursday from 8pm.

Other recommendations:

Luigi's Piano Bar (Rue Roture 22; ☎ from 7pm Fri & Sat) Laid-back bar with concerts Friday and Saturday nights.

Opéra Royal de Wallonie (☎ 04 221 47 20; www.orw.be in French; Rue des Dominicains 1)

Basilique St Martin (☎ 04 223 67 74; Mont St Martin) Venue for classical concerts, located west of the city centre.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Eurolines (☎ 04 222 36 18; Rue des Guillemins 94) buses leave from Rue du Plan-Incliné next to the train station.

CAR

Rental outfits:

Avis (☎ 04 252 55 00; Blvd d'Avroy 238b)

Budget (☎ 04 229 96 50; Rue du Plan-Incliné 105)

Hertz (☎ 04 222 42 73; Blvd d'Avroy 60)

TRAIN

Liège is a major international and regional rail junction. The principal train station is **Gare Guillemins** (☎ 02 528 28 28), newly renovated and now accommodating Thalys fast trains.

Sample international and regional connections (the prices listed are full one-way fares):

Destination	Fare (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency
Brussels	12.40	65	2 per hr
Cologne	30.10	90	7 per day
Eupen	5.70	45	1 per hr
Hasselt	6.70	55	1 per hr
Jemelle	9	90	1 per 2 hr
Leuven	9	50	1 per hr
Luxembourg City	32.20	150	7 per day
Maastricht	7.50	30	1 per hr
Namur	7.40	50	2 per hr
Spa	4.30	50	1 per hr
Tongerren	3.80	30	1 per hr
Trois Ponts	7.10	60	1 per 2hr
Verviers	3.40	20	1 per hr

Getting Around

Liège's main train station, Gare Guillemins, is 2km south of Pl St Lambert. To get to the city centre, either take buses 1 or 4 from the bus platforms to the right as you exit Gare Guillemins, or catch another train to the city's most central train station, Gare du Palais, close to Pl St Lambert. The latter option costs nothing (just use the same ticket you purchased for your journey to Liège) and takes an extra seven minutes.

Otherwise, **TEC buses** (☎ 04 361 94 44) are the main form of inner-city transport; the main bus hub is Pl St Lambert.

For a taxi call **Liège Taxi** (☎ 0800 322 00).

La Maison des Cyclistes (☎ 04 222 20 46; www.provelo.org in French; Rue de Gueldre 3; ☎ 2–6pm Fri–Wed May–Sep) has rental bikes for one hour (€2) or for a half-/full day (€6/8).

SPA

pop 10,500

Spa, Europe's oldest health resort, is on the up. Just a few years ago, the fortunes of the town that launched a thousand spas were flagging. But thanks to a new generation that's into health and wellbeing (and the opening of the lavish new hilltop Thermes de Spa), the town is seeing a revival – there's just no bursting its bubble.

Spa sits in a valley about 40km southeast of Liège. For centuries it embraced royalty and the wealthy, who came to drink, bathe and cure themselves in the mineral-rich waters that bubble forth from 200 springs here. The healing properties of the warm waters were recognised as far back as the 1st century AD. By the 16th century it was an established health resort – Henry VIII, occupying Tournai at the

time, praised the waters' curative powers – and by the 18th century the town had become the luxurious retreat for European royalty and intellectuals. A long list of distinguished visitors – from a Russian tsar to Joseph II (former emperor of Austria), and writers Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas – came here to rejuvenate themselves. Such was its pull that Spa became known as the 'Café of Europe'. But it didn't last – by the 19th century its popularity had waned and until the recent opening of the new Thermes complex, the town was all but a run-down reminder of what was.

Information

The Office du Tourisme (☎ 087 79 53 53; www.spa-info.be in Flemish & French; Pl Royale 41; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Apr–Sep, to 5pm Oct–Mar), located in a picturesque pavilion built by Léopold II, sells regional walking maps (€7).

Sights & Activities

The palatial **Thermes de Spa** (☎ 087 77 25 60; www.thermesdespa.com; Colline d'Annette et Lubin; ☎ 10am–9pm) sits on a hilllock immediately above central Spa. If you're without a car, it can normally be reached by a state-of-the-art Austrian funicular (one way €1) from near the tourist office. However, the funicular is temperamental, and if it's not working you'll have a 20-minute hike up the next-door footpath.

Peat baths (good for relieving the aches of rheumatism and other disorders), water and beauty treatments, fitness facilities, swimming pools and Jacuzzis are all offered. Go for a three-hour dip in one of the hydrotherapy pools (€17), or submerge yourself for a day (€27). After paying this admission, you can access many of the facilities, including the indoor and outdoor pools, icy plunge pool, saunas, Turkish baths and fitness room. Alternatively, if the shoe fits, join the Institut Maman-Bébé, where new mothers and their babies can mooch around for five days (€695) while mum gets back into shape.

Back down in town, if you'd prefer to simply gulp a mouthful of water, head to the spring, **Pouhon Pierre-le-Grand** (Rue du Pouhon; ☎ 10am–noon & 1.30–5pm Apr–Oct, 1.30–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–noon & 1.30–5pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar). It's named after Peter the Great, the Russian tsar who visited in 1717. He found that the iron-rich waters improved his sense of wellbeing; you might find the same after downing a plastic glass (€0.25) of rather vile-tasting water. Better still,

take a bottle (€0.50) back to the hotel and sip at your leisure.

Four other **springs** – Tonnelet, Sauvenière, Géronstère and Barisart – are all a few kilometres out of town. A **petit train** (adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Jun–Sep) passes them on its rounds but you can't normally stop to taste the waters.

More water samples can be had at **Spa Monopole** (☎ 087 79 41 11; www.spa.be in Flemish & French; Rue Auguste Laporte 34; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri), the factory where millions of bottles of Spa water are produced annually. A public gallery overlooks the production floor and at the end you can try either the *plat* (nonsparkling) or *gazeuse* (sparkling) water. It's a 15-minute walk from the tourist office.

The **Musée de la Ville d'Eaux** (☎ 087 77 44 86; Ave Reine Astrid 77; adult/child/concession €3/1/2; ☎ 2–6pm Jul–Sep, 2–6pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–Jun & Oct–Dec) occupies Villa Marie-Henriette, a former royal abode, and harks back to the good ol' days with posters and memorabilia from the town's past. The only other sight is the **Musée de la Lessive** (☎ 087 77 14 18; Rue de la Géronstère 10; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 2–6pm Jul & Aug, 2–6pm Sat & Sun Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct). Water is the obvious theme of this laundry museum and if you've a yearning to see old tubs and scrubbers, this is the place.

Every Sunday morning there's a **flea market** near the tourist office.

Should you want to hit the world's first **casino** (☎ 087 77 20 52; Rue Royale 4; ☎ from 11am), you'll need to be over 21 years of age and have your passport handy.

About 2km east of town is **Lac de Warfaaz**, a pleasant lake dotted with a few waterfront cafés and restaurants and where **pédalos** (single/double €5/7) can be rented. If you've hired a bike in town, the lake is a good cycling destination as there's a separate bike path most of the way to and around it. **Velodroom** (☎ 087 77 11 77; Rue Général Bertrand 6; half-/full day €14/22; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat), behind Pouhon Pierre-le-Grand, rents out mountain bikes.

The **Piscine communale de Spa** (☎ 087 77 21 10; Ave Amédée Hesse 9) comprises an outdoor and indoor swimming pool, plus waterslides, and is set amid the forest en route to Lac de Warfaaz.

Spa's popularity as a resort town is not confined to summer. Besides relaxing in a hot mud bath at the Thermes, the other obvious winter attraction is **skiing**. Several cross-country tracks and a small alpine run are located at the

BOOK AHEAD

The region around Spa, Stavelot and Malmédy is a popular summer resort area. It's normally possible to find accommodation but there are a few annual shindigs that require prior planning and advance hotel bookings.

The pre-Lent carnival celebrations at Stavelot and Malmédy (see boxed text, p223) are immensely popular events, as are some motor-racing meets, which are held at the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, halfway between Spa and Stavelot. Of the latter, the three-day Grand Prix de Belgique de Formule 1 in mid-September is the biggest gathering, though other well-attended races include the 24 Heures de Motocross (end July) and the 1000km of Francorchamps (mid-May).

Pistes de Ski du Thier des Rexhons (☎ 087 77 30 28), 3.5km south of town.

And if you happen to be around at Christmas time, the old hall behind the main spring is transformed into a wonderfully atmospheric *patinage à glace* – ice-skating rink.

Festivals & Events

Spa has two main annual events:

Les Francopholies de Spa A few days of exclusively French-language entertainment, from music to theatre and song, in July.

Grand Prix de Belgique de Formule 1 Motor-racing carnival (see boxed text, above) in mid-September.

Sleeping & Eating

B&B La Primavera (☎ 087 77 49 16; www.ives.be; Rue de la Chapelle 2; d €65, studio €85, holiday house weekly €300) Situated on a hillock about 300m from the town centre, this B&B is surrounded by a pleasant garden and is run by a friendly man who imports wines from Spain. The main house, containing one guestroom plus a studio with a kitchenette, is a stone building that's full of character; the rooms are large but not flash. There's also a separate half-timbered holiday house next door that's ideal for families (sleeps four).

B&B L'Étape Fagnarde (☎ 087 77 56 50; www.etapefagnarde.be; Ave Dr Gaspar 14; guestroom s/d €65/75, cottage 3/7 nights €450/850) A century-old whitewashed villa on a leafy lane 800m uphill from the tourist office. It's a huge place, with five guestrooms (each named after a spring), a sauna, a big patio and a large rhododendron garden. There's also

a restored self-contained caretaker's cottage for longer stays. The friendly owners take B&B business seriously, and even welcome guests to their dinner table in the evenings.

B&B La Vigie (☎ 087 77 34 97; www.lavigie.be; Ave Professeur Henrijean 129; r from €80) Well-established B&B that's modern and muted, and perfect for a romantic getaway.

Hôtel Cardinal (☎ 087 77 10 64; www.hotel-cardinal.be; Pl Royale 21; s/d/f €105/125/150) With an excellent location opposite the old Thermes in the town centre, this hotel has 29 recently renovated rooms with typical modern décor. The exception is room No 2, a classic. It has a Louis XI style bed and a matching green wardrobe and bedside tables, plus ceiling friezes and a sunken bath – if you're into something different, it's the pick. Ask about discounts during low periods.

Radisson SAS Palace Hotel (☎ 087 27 97 00; www.radissonsas.com; Pl Royale 39; s/d from €125/145) The newest and most luxurious hotel in town, located at the base of the Thermes, and with direct funicular access to it. *The* place to stay if your mission is the pools.

Le Jardin des Elfes (☎ 087 77 17 18; Lac de Warfaaz; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) This lake-front café offering standard Belgian snacks – waffles and the *croque monsieur* (grilled ham and cheese sandwich) – is well geared for the summer flocks. In winter there's a heated terrace. The large playground with trampolines keeps youngsters happy.

L'Art de Vivre (☎ 087 77 04 44; Ave Reine Astrid 53; mains €24-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Tue) Refined little family-run restaurant about 200m west of the tourist office and housed in a pretty villa. It's out of the main tourist hubbub, and is much loved by locals. Light healthy French cuisine with original twists is the trade and, if the weather's good, you can dine on a shady tree-lined square to the trickle of a fountain bubbling nearby.

Other recommendations:

Camping Parc des Sources (☎ 087 77 23 11; Rue de la Sauvenière 141; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car €5/3.30/6/3; ☎ closed Dec-Mar)

Glacier Gérard (☎ 087 64 68 64; Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville 8; ☎ 10.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sun) Modern ice-cream café.

GB Express (Pl du Monument 9) Supermarket.

Getting There & Away

Spa sits at the end of a train track that branches off from the Liège–Verviers line. The **train station** (☎ 02 528 28 28) and neighbouring bus station are at Pl de la Gare, about 500m from the tourist office – when you exit the station head down

Rue de la Gare, then turn right at the bottom into Ave Reine Astrid. There are trains to Liège (€4.30, 50 minutes, hourly) and Verviers (€2.50, 22 minutes, hourly). Bus 744 runs four times per day to Stavelot (€1.60, 25 minutes).

STAVELOT

pop 6600

Stavelot sits on the slope of a hill above the Amblève River about 24km south of Spa. A summer resort town, it's a delightful place to stay, driven by its proximity to the natural beauty of the nearby Hautes Fagnes. The best time to visit is during the springtime Laetare carnival (see right). Even if you can't be here then, the town is still worth a visit for its interesting history – brought to life in state-of-the-art museums housed in a restored abbey – and for its quaint character, most evident in the 18th-century houses with exposed wooden beams dotted around town.

Orientation & Information

The heart of town is Pl St Remacle, a sloping square at the centre of all the carnival fun. The **Office du Tourisme** (☎ 080 86 27 06; www.stavelot.be; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is inside the abbey, just off Ave Ferdinand Nicolay, the main road through town. For internet access, head to the **library** (access free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri) at the abbey.

Sights & Activities

The premier sight is the **Abbaye de Stavelot** (☎ 080 88 08 78; www.abbayedestavelot.be; Ave Ferdinand Nicolay; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, closed Mon Oct-Apr), the unmissable red building in the town centre. Stavelot and its nearby sister town, Malmédy, grew up as a result of this former abbey, which was built in the 7th century. From then on, it was the home to a line of abbot-bishops, founded by St Remacle (also known as the Apostle of the Ardennes), who kept the region independent for over 1000 years and who ruled over the minds and souls of folk in their fiefdom. Their reign came to an end with the French Revolution, and when the region was carved up in 1815, Stavelot was attached to the Netherlands while Malmédy became part of Prussia.

The abbey complex reopened a few years ago after extensive renovation, and houses three **museums** (combination ticket adult/student €6.50/5). The **Musée de la Principauté de Stavelot/Malmédy**, devoted to local history, winds its way around the ground floor, using colour-coded stages to tell Stavelot's story, from the abbey's beginning in 647 to the

abolition of the abbot-bishops' rule in 1794. It's tastefully set out, and it goes out of its way to be clear and engaging. Pick up an English-language audio-guide before setting off.

The second museum, **Musée Guillaume Apollinaire**, occupies a small section on the 1st floor and contains sketches and poetry by French writer Guillaume Apollinaire, who stayed briefly in Stavelot in 1899. Once again, the audio-guide is essential for those who don't speak French. After the serenity of the Musée Apollinaire, descend to the vaulted cellar where the buzz of Formula One racing cars permeates the air in the **Musée du Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps**. Most of the cars here are privately owned and are in working order – the displays change regularly as owners take their vehicles out for a ride or to a rally. Send kids off to the room devoted to PlayStation2, the virtual track.

Some lovely **hiking trails** lead off from the town, and the museum shop sells a map, *Pays de Stavelot – Promenades* (€6), that outlines 14 local walks. Most are marked by green arrows. A good choice is walk No 10 to Coö (7km), which heads west over the hills, passing through the peaceful hamlet of Ster before arriving at Coö (p258).

Festivals & Events

In winter Stavelot falls into a deep slumber and appears almost dead. From this slumber erupts one of Belgium's most colourful celebrations – the **Laetare** carnival, held around the fourth Sunday in Lent. See boxed text, p223, for a full account of the festivities. Without a doubt, this is the best time to be here.

Sleeping & Eating

It's essential to book accommodation in advance if you plan to be here for Laetare.

Hostellerie La Maison (☎ 080 88 08 91; www.hotel.lamaison.info in French & Flemish; Pl St Remacle 19; s/d Mon-Thu €65/87, Fri-Sun €69/95, mains €22-25; ☎ closed 2 weeks mid-Sep) This is a Liège-style 19th-century manor house superbly situated at the top end of Stavelot's main square. The whole place radiates a calm, distinguished air – from the classy restaurant to the charming peachy-toned rooms adorned with antiques, colourful ceiling friezes and fireplaces. Note the old oak staircase leading up to the 12 rooms.

Hôtel/Restaurant d'Orange (☎ 080 86 20 05; www.hotel-orange.be; Devant les Capucins 8; s/d/tr/f €70/80/110/120, mains €18-25; ☎ Apr-Nov, weekends & school holidays

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Dufays (☎ 080 54 80 08; www.bbb-dufays.be; Rue Neuve 115; r €105) A new boutique hotel located at the top end of Rue Neuve, just 300m from Pl St Remacle. The exquisitely restored stone building dates back to 1820, and inside there are just six rooms, each individually styled to suit personal taste. Silk cushions await in 1001 Nights, or there's the Deco decadence of *Années 30* (The Thirties). Whichever theme you choose, expect subtle furnishings and graceful high ceilings. Breakfast, too, is a delightful experience, as you'd expect in a place created by so much personal effort. Frank and Ad, the two gents who run it, are delights.

Dec-Mar; ☑) This place has been owned and run by the same family for five generations, and the current maître d'hôtel is as friendly and jovial as they come. The 17 rooms are decked out with heavy wooden furniture and rose-patterned wallpaper typical of the Ardennes. The restaurant (closed at lunchtime on Wednesday) adapts itself seasonally. It's family-friendly, and cots and highchairs are available.

Auberge St Remacle (☎ 080 86 20 47; www.auberge-stavelot.be; Ave Ferdinand Nicolay 9; s/d €40/50) A standard-issue hotel with just five rooms, done out in pastel tones, ranging from poky to pleasant. No 3 is the largest and has a view over the abbey. The downstairs bar/brasserie can be noisy until the early hours.

Figaro (☎ 080 86 42 86; Pl du Vinave 4; mains €6-9; ☑ lunch & dinner) This casual Italian restaurant has bright décor, and outdoor tables set up on Pl St Remacle. It's a great spot to eat on a warm summer's evening.

Other recommendations:

Camping de Challes (☎ 080 86 23 31; Rte de Challes 5; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car €5/2.50/1/1.50; ☑ closed Nov-Mar) Closest ground for campers, located about 2km east of town.

Spar (14 Rue Haute) Supermarket one block uphill from Pl St Remacle.

Getting There & Away

Stavelot is not on a train line. If you're coming from Liège, the closest train station is Trois Ponts (€7.10, one hour, every two hours). From Trois Ponts, bus 294 (€1.20, 10 minutes, hourly) covers the 6km to Stavelot.

From Spa, bus 744 runs four times per day to Stavelot (€1.60, 25 minutes).

COO

Coo (pronounced 'coh') is a tiny hamlet, 7km west of Stavelot, with a handful of buildings clustered around its premier sight – an impressive waterfall built in the 18th century by monks from Stavelot's abbey. The place is popular with summer holidaymakers staying in the nearby towns and has all the aura of a sideshow alley.

Opposite the waterfall is **Plopsa Coö** (☎ 080 68 42 65; www.plopsacoö.be in Flemish & French; person above/under 1m €15/free), an amusement park including a hillside sled ride (*luge* in French), bumper cars, minigolf and more. Here too is a **télésiège** (chairlift; adult/child €6/4; ☑ 10am-6pm May-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) that rumbles up the hillside and provides a pleasant view over a nearby lake and an easy walk (20 minutes) back to Coö. For something more adventurous, there's a plethora of options offered by **Coo Bike Adventure** (☎ 080 68 91 33; Petite Coö 4), located near the bridge over the waterfall – whitewater rafting (€21 for a 23km trip), kayaking (€20) and mountain bike hire (half-/full day €14/20) are all available.

The best bet for dining is **Au Vieux Moulin** (☎ 080 68 40 41; Cascade de Coö 2; mains €12-18; ☑ closed Tue dinner & Wed), a lovely stone building where typical Walloon cuisine is served. An open fire warms the place on cold days, and some tables have a river view.

Coo is on the Liège–Clervaux train line; the station is about 300m from the waterfall and there are trains from Liège (€6.20, 55 minutes, every two hours) or Trois Ponts (€1.60, three minutes). If you've hiked from Stavelot, you can return by walking (or catching the train) south to Trois Ponts (2km) from where there are hourly buses back to Stavelot.

MALMÉDY

pop 11,600

Malmédy, like Stavelot 12km to the southwest, is a popular summer holiday base for Belgians and is best known for its carnival called *Cwarmé* (see boxed text, p223). It shares much of its history (right up to the early 19th century) with Stavelot, as both were part of the independent lands overseen for more than a millennium by powerful abbot-bishops who ruled from the abbey at Stavelot. In 1815, after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, most of Belgium was incorporated into the Netherlands

but Malmédy became part of Prussia and later was incorporated into Germany.

These days, Malmédy is part of the German-speaking Eastern Cantons. However, many of the people living here prefer to speak French. The town's popularity as a holiday destination with folk from Flanders means Malmédy is very much a trilingual town and, perhaps more than anywhere else in the whole country, it has grown to accommodate Belgium's three language groups.

There is very little to actually see in Malmédy – most visitors stay here as it makes a convenient base for exploring the Hautes Fagnes. If you're tossing up between Malmédy and Stavelot, pick the latter – it has more charm and better accommodation.

Information

The Maison du Tourisme (☎ 080 33 02 50; www.eastbelgium.com; Pl Albert ler 29a; ☑ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Nov-May) is a big modern building in the heart of town.

Sights & Activities

The town's two main museums are the **Musée du Cwarmé** (☎ 080 33 70 58; Pl de Rome 11; adult/child incl Musée National du Papier €3/2; ☑ 2-5pm Tue-Sun) and the **Musée National du Papier**, both housed in a former orphanage. Neither is terribly engrossing but they're a good way to spend a rainy hour. The latter is devoted to the town's paper manufacturing industry and the former to the characters who come alive each year at *Cwarmé*.

Otherwise, the only other so-called 'sight' is the **American Memorial** at a crossroad in the hamlet of Baugez, about 4km southeast of town on the N62 to St Vith (accessible by bus 395). A tall cross flying the US flag commemorates the 150 servicemen who were captured by a German combat group at this road junction in December 1944 and then gunned down by tank fire; 43 men survived.

For **walking**, the Hautes Fagnes (see p260) is the best area. However, if you decide to stick around town, there are several hiking paths, ranging from 6km to 19km, that start here. Walk M2 (13km, marked with a vertical yellow stripe) and M1 (19km, horizontal yellow stripe) both offer views – the latter climbs Parc de Livremont immediately north of the town centre. Purchase the walking map *Au pied des Fagnes* (€7) from the tourist office before setting off.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Familial (☎ 080 33 08 62; www.campingfamilial.be in Flemish & German; Rue des Bruyères 19; 2 adults plus tent & car €18.50) Located high on the forest's edge at Arimont, about 3km from Malmédy, this is an excellent spot for hiking. To get here, take bus 745 from Trois Ponts train station to Malmédy (€1.60, 20 minutes, hourly), where the owners will pick you up for free.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 080 33 83 86; www.laj.be; Rte d'Eupein 36, Bévécé; dm/s/d €16.60/29/42) This hostel is 5km north of Malmédy; bus 397 (direction 'Mont', €1.10, three to five services per day) stops out the front.

Hôtel Albert Premier (☎ 080 33 04 52; www.hotel-albertpremier; Pl Albert ler 40; s/d €60/85, mains €15-25; ☑) Unquestionably the best hotel/restaurant in town. This modern sliver of a building overlooks the main square and has just six rooms, all spacious and modern, staged between the 2nd and 5th floors. The downside is that there's no elevator. The sleek restaurant dishes up classic French cuisine.

Hôtel St Gérard (☎ 080 33 06 77; fax 080 33 97 46; Pl St Gérard 7; s/d/tr/f €55/65/90/110) Grey-shingled hotel one block behind the tourist office, with 10 tidy modern rooms plus a popular bar.

À vi Mâm'di (☎ 080 33 96 36; Pl Albert ler 41; mains €11-18; ☑ lunch & dinner) This down-to-earth tavern is on the main square. The interior is rustic and the food features typically hearty Ardennes fare such as *jambonneau grillé*, a slab of ham on the bone topped with a mustard-based sauce (€12.50). Kids are most welcome.

Other recommendations:

Taverne St Pierre (☎ 080 33 84 16; Pl Albert ler 19; menu €15; ☑ lunch & dinner) Opposite the tourist office, tucked away in a corner of the square, this tavern does well-priced *Ardennaise* cuisine.

Market (Pl Albert ler; ☑ 7am-1pm Fri) Fresh produce.

Getting There & Away

Malmédy is not on a train line; regional buses depart from the Gare des Autobus at Rue de la Gare, a few minutes' walk from Pl Albert ler.

From Verviers, bus 294 (€3.60, 45 minutes, hourly) goes to Malmédy. From Liège, you can get a Clervaux-bound train to Trois Ponts (€7.10, 55 minutes, every two hours) near Stavelot from where bus 745 goes to Malmédy (€1.60, 20 minutes, hourly).

HAUTES FAGNES

The Hautes Fagnes (also known as Hohes Venn in German, or High Fens) is a high plateau that

HAUTES FAGNES NATURE RESERVE

Belgium's Hautes Fagnes area has been twinned with the Nordeifel region in neighbouring Germany to make what's known as the **Hautes Fagnes-Eifel Nature Park** (www.centrenaturebotrange.be in French & Flemish or www.naturpark-eifel.de in French & German) The park covers some 2000 sq km, though only a third of it is in Belgium, and it uses the black grouse as its emblem.

Within this populated park is Belgium's largest nationally protected reserve, the **Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve**, established in 1957. Its 4000 hectares are a haven for rare fauna and flora such as wild boar, roe deer, tetras lyre bird, hen harrier, black grouse and the *Drosera rotundifolia* (carnivorous sundew plant). The reserve's logo is the *Trientalis europaea* (Wintergreen Chickweed), a rare flower with seven petals. Much of the reserve is open to visitors but some areas are accessible only with a registered guide and other areas are closed to the public in order to conduct research and protect delicate ecosystems. During the breeding season of the black grouse (mid-March to mid-June), the whole of the nature reserve is closed to the public.

stretches from south of Malmédy up to Eupen and sweeps over to Germany's Eifel hills. It's a region of swampy heath, woods and wild wind-swept moors that covers about 300 sq km and signals the end of the Ardennes. Known to be one of the country's coldest and wettest places, it's often shrouded in mist and low cloud, making it the perfect home for the region's ecologically fragile sphagnum bogs. It also makes it one hell of a bleak winter landscape; in summer it's lush, green and picturesque. Belgium's highest point (694m) is here, marked by a tower called the **Signal de Botrange**.

Sights & Activities

Start a visit at the **Botrange Nature Centre** (☎ 080 44 03 00; www.centrenaturebotrange.be in French & Flemish; Rte de Botrange 31; general admission free, museum adult/child €3/1.20; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), located 1km from the sturdy stone Signal de Botrange. It sports an information centre, a café, a huge fireplace and a small museum explaining the Hautes Fagnes' evolution and the impact humans have had on the landscape through sheep grazing, peat extraction and logging.

It's also the best place to investigate hiking, cycling and skiing (cross-country ski hire per half-/full day €6/10) – all possible in certain parts of the park. The centre's staff can tell you which zones are closed to the public and which can be visited freely or in the company of a guide only. A map, *Hautes Fagnes Carte des Promenades* (scale: 1:25,000, €7), also explains (in French, German and Flemish) the various zones and hiking trails. Guided walks are organised from April to November but the base price for a three-/six-hour walk is €45/60 – fine if you're in a group but pricey otherwise.

Those wanting just a short circular walk through this bleak but interesting landscape should head to the **Fagne de la Poleür** boardwalk at Mt Rigi, 2.5km from the centre. This 4km-long raised boardwalk (accessible to wheelchairs) offers a wonderful introduction to the moorland habitat and allows visitors access to the region while minimising human interference. The path winds past an old peat mine – peat was extracted in this region right up until the 1960s primarily for heating houses. Formed by layers of decaying sphagnum moss, these bogs covered about 1000 hectares of the Hautes Fagnes 5000 years ago; today there are just 125 hectares remaining.

If you want to extend the Fagne de Poleür walk by 30 minutes or so, follow the path (which is actually part of the GR573 walkway from Liège through Eupen and Spa back to Liège) along the lovely creek to Pont de Bêléu, cross the stream and return to the boardwalk via the track on the opposite bank.

Longer walks include a 16km track to **Herzogenhügel**, a hill to the east, and back. This path crosses the marshes and passes a few old six-sided border stones, used to mark the 1815 frontier between the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and Prussia. It's a mix of mud, turf, wooden boardwalks and tracks through the protected reserve and also takes in part of the GR573.

Other long-distance walks that pass through this beautiful area are the circular GR56 (156km) from Malmédy via Rocherath, Bütgenbach and St Vith; the GRAE (Ardenne-Eifel, 200km), which runs from Monschau (in Germany), via Eupen, Spa and Bastogne to Martelange; and, for those really into a hike, the GR5 from the North Sea to the Mediterranean coast.

Getting There & Away

Botrange Nature Centre is about 13km north-east of Malmédy, 19km south of Eupen and 21km southeast of Verviers. It can be reached by bus 394 from Eupen to St Vith (€3.60, 20 minutes, three daily) or bus 390 from Verviers to Rocherath (€3.60, 30 minutes, five daily).

VERVIERS

pop 52,800

Verviers sits 20-odd kilometres east of Liège, deep in the valley of the Vesdre River. From a modest medieval village it shook hands with the Industrial Revolution to become an international centre for wool processing and textile production in the early 1800s. Although these industries have since declined, the town still has two cloth factories – one processing cashmere and the other producing cloth for billiard tables (Belgium's love of this game makes it a worthwhile endeavour) – and students come from around the globe to attend wool courses at the town's industrial college.

Although Verviers is hardly essential viewing, this French-speaking town is a pleasant enough place for an overnight halt and boasts an excellent museum dedicated to its industrial past.

Information

Espace Full Option (☎ 087 31 19 84; Rue Xhävée 22; per hr €1; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) Internet bar, 100m from Pl Verte.

Maison du Tourisme (☎ 087 30 79 26; www.paysdesvedre.be; Rue de la Chapelle 30; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Inside the Centre Touristique de la Laine et de la Mode.

Sights

A handful of museums are dotted around town but the most engaging is the **Centre Touristique de la Laine et de la Mode** (☎ 087 35 57 03; www.verviersima.be; Rue de la Chapelle 30; adult/child/concession €6/3/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar). This 'wool and fashion centre' occupies a 19th-century wool store on a small side street in a formerly run-down part of town. Visitors are taken on a tour using state-of-the-art multilingual headphones that tell the tale of Verviers' rise and fall. Well-preserved equipment – from old wool combs to mechanical spinners – are displayed and there are also examples of equipment invented in Verviers, such as the fouler, a napping machine.

The town's other two museums are the **Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la Céramique** (☎ 087 33 16 95; Rue Renier 17; adult/child/concession €2/free/1.50; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 3-6pm Sun), which houses a small but high-quality collection of paintings from the 14th to 19th centuries and a very good collection of ceramics; and the nearby but less interesting **Musée d'Archéologie et de Folklore** (☎ 087 33 16 95; Rue des Raines 42; adult/child/concession €2/free/1.50; ☎ 2-5pm Tue & Thu, 9am-noon Sat, 10am-1pm Sun).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Wesertal (☎ 087 55 59 61; Rue de l'Invasion 68, Membach-Baelen; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car €4/2/4.50/2) One of the closest camping grounds to town. It's located about 15km from Verviers in the direction of Lac de Gilleppe.

Chez Paul (☎ 087 23 22 21; www.chezpaul.be; Pl Albert I 5; s/d €95/120, menu €35) Easily the town's most interesting accommodation option. This pricey B&B is located in a hillside mansion above a restaurant of the same name, just out of the town centre but within easy walking distance. The four enormous rooms sport wooden floors and heavy furnishings typical of this region – antique beds and big old bathtubs – and are painted in bright modern colours.

Hôtel des Ardennes (☎ 087 22 39 25; www.hoteldesardennesverviers.be in French; Pl de la Victoire 15; s/d with bathroom €50/65, without bathroom €35/50) This amiable little hotel is located across the square from the train station. Rooms are done out in creamy, floral tones – a world apart from the reception and 1900s-style brasserie, which feature rich reds, deer antlers and stained-glass windows.

L'Arsène du Pain (Pl Verte 42; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) A good range of French-style, lip-smacking baguette sandwiches (€2.20 to €3.50) are available at this takeaway shop on Pl Verte, the town's main square. Also serves pastas and soups.

Brasserie de la Bourse (☎ 087 31 12 71; Rue Xhävée 2; mains €8-15; ☎ dosed lunch Sun) A cheap corner café flanking Pl Verte, popular with locals for a sausage/chop fry-up. The exterior, with exposed wooden beams, is attractive.

Jean-Philippe Darcis (☎ 087 33 98 15; Rue Crapaurue 121; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Modern tearoom and *chocolaterie/pâtisserie* that bills itself as the 'ambassador of Belgian chocolate'. Needless to say, it's firmly entrenched on the ladies' lunch circuit. The fruit tarts and pralines are scrumptious.

La Fourchette (☎ 087 33 52 79; Rue Crapaurue 181; mains €16-22, 3-course lunchtime menu €24) Rustic little French/Belgian restaurant just off Pl Verte. It

serves an excellent *waterzooi* (cream-based fish or chicken stew).

Getting There & Away

Verviers' **train station** (☎ 025 28 28 28) is about 500m southwest of Pl Verte, the town's hub. The town is on the main train line between Liège (€3.40, 20 minutes, hourly) and Eupen (€2.90, 20 minutes, hourly). It's also possible to go from here to Spa (€2.50, 22 minutes, hourly), which is on a branch line.

TEC buses also leave from the train station. Bus 390 runs to Rocherath via the Botrange Nature Centre (€3.60, 30 minutes, five daily); and bus 395 heads to Malmédy (€3.60, 45 minutes, hourly).

EUPEN

pop 17,800

Wander into Eupen, and watch Belgium's identity change yet again. German is the language here (though most people understand French as well) and there's an undeniable Germanic feel to the place. Eupen is the capital of Belgium's Eastern Cantons (see boxed text, below), the small parcel of land that flanks Germany and also comprises the towns of Malmédy and St Vith. It's a small town, and pleasant enough, though there's little to do. Visitors mainly come to experience another piece of the Belgian jigsaw.

Information

Call Shop (Paveestrasse 37; per hr €3, ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) For internet access.

Office du Tourisme (☎ 087 55 34 50; www.eupen-info.be in Flemish, French & German; Marktplatz 7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun, closed Sun Sep-

POEPGELEI

The countryside between Liège and Verviers is known as the Pays de Herve. It's a pretty patchwork of undulating fields, hedges, dairy farms and orchards, and is home to Belgium's much-loved *sirup de Liège*. This sticky black substance is made from apples, pears and dates and is liberally spread on toast every morning in households around the country. Naturally enough, in Flemish kitchens it has a nickname – *poepgelei* or, wait for it, 'arse jelly'.

Jun) In the heart of town on the small main square and not far from the *Rathaus* (town hall). It publishes a free English-language walking-tour brochure that's well worth picking up if you intend wandering.

Sights & Activities

Opposite the tourist office is the office of the *Grenzecho*, Belgium's only German-language newspaper, which occupies a former cloth trader's house. A copy of the newspaper is displayed in a glass cabinet on the building's façade and is a focal point for passers-by.

From the other side of Marktplatz rises the twin-towered **St Nicolas** church, a heavy and distinct 18th-century structure. Inside, things are just as elaborate, with baroque embellishments including a lavish gilded pulpit.

The **Stadtmuseum** (☎ 087 74 00 05; www.eupener-stadtmuseum.org in Flemish, French & German; Gospertstrasse 52; adult/child €1.50/1; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-5pm Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun) holds bits and pieces associated with the town's history. It's a couple of blocks downhill from the tourist office.

EASTERN CANTONS

Belgium's Eastern Cantons (Ostkantons in German, Oostkantons in Flemish or Cantons de l'Est in French) evolved separately from the rest of the country after France's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo. While most of the land now known as Belgium and Luxembourg was incorporated into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the towns of Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith were given to Prussia and subsequently became part of Germany.

In 1919, after WWI, the trio were ceded to Belgium under the Treaty of Versailles. But 20 years later, when WWII broke out, Germany claimed them back and the men from these towns were forced to fight alongside soldiers of the Reich throughout this war. In 1945 the Americans liberated the towns and they were handed back to Belgium.

The Hautes Fagnes actually divides the 854-sq-km area into two – the predominantly industrial region close to Eupen and the more-rural area based around St Vith.

Since 1984 the Eastern Cantons has had its own parliament, the *Rat der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* (Council of the German-speaking Community), as well as its own government.

In an industrial estate on the northern outskirts of town is the **Chokolademuseum** (Chocolate Museum; ☎ 087 59 29 67; www.chocojacques.be in Dutch & French; Industriestrasse 16; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri). It's housed within the Jacques chocolate factory, and visitors can learn about the production of chocolate, including cultivation, early machines and present-day methods. Take bus 22 to get here.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping an der Hill (☎ 087 74 46 17; Hütte 46; camp sites per adult/child/tent €3.50/2.50/5; ☎ year-round; ☎) Closest ground to town, located on the southeastern outskirts of Eupen on the road to Monschau in Germany. Take bus 25 (direction Hütte).

Gîte d'Étape (☎ 087 55 31 26; www.gitesdetape.be; Judenstrasse 79; under/over 26yr €10.90/13.60) A large white hostel on the outskirts of town (10 minutes' walk from the centre), where you can bunk down in frugal rooms.

Rathaus Hotel (☎ 087 74 28 12; www.rathaushotel.com; Rathausplatz 13; s/d €60/75) On the main road through town and the most comfortable option, despite its unexciting rooms. The hotel's modern

brasserie, La Luna (☎ 087 55 83 85, pizzas €9 to €15, menus €17 to €25), is a popular local meeting place and is good for a drink or meal.

Other recommendations:

Pancieria (☎ 087 74 33 42; Marktplatz 3; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) Ice-cream parlour two doors from the tourist office, with yummy gelato.

Sandwicherie (☎ 087 56 13 70; Paveestrasse 28; ☎ Mon-Sat) Simple but decent fast-food-style outlet around the corner from the tourist office. Fat sandwiches from €5.

Getting There & Away

The **train station** ('Bahnhof' in German; ☎ 02 528 28 28) is about 10 minutes' walk north of the centre of town – head along Aachennerstrasse until you reach the *rathaus*, then turn left into Klosterstrasse. Eupen is easily reached by hourly train from Liège (€5.70, 45 minutes) or Verviers (€2.90, 20 minutes).

The **bus station** ('Bushof' in German; ☎ 087 74 25 92; Aachennerstrasse) is five minutes' walk from Marktplatz. Bus 394 goes from here to St Vith, calling in on the way at Botrange Nature Centre (€3.60, 20 minutes, three daily) in the Hautes Fagnes.

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