

# Eastern Flanders



Eastern Flanders takes in the Flemish-speaking provinces of Antwerpen, Vlaams-Brabant and, away to the east, Limburg. Its immediate pull is Antwerp, the region's largest centre and a dynamic and immediately likable city. Worldly and seedy, historic and hip, Antwerp is currently basking in a third Golden Age that has made it one of Europe's most fashionable getaways.

Within easy striking distance of Antwerp are the towns of Mechelen and Lier. Both are decidedly provincial, but they've got enough attractions to warrant an overnight halt, and Mechelen bathes in history.

Move south into the province of Vlaams-Brabant and there's Leuven, one of Flanders' leading university towns. Scholars have met here since the 15th century, and these days it's still alive with students, bars and cafés. Architecturally, it's home to one of Belgium's finest town halls. Nearby, forgotten little Diest has arguably the country's best *begijnhof*.

East of Diest is the agricultural province of Limburg. Its workaday capital is Hasselt, a pleasant if unexceptional town, whose main claim to fame is *jenever* (gin). A short drive from Hasselt is the Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum, an open-air museum that re-creates old Flemish lifestyles and is a hit with families.

South of Hasselt, the flat landscape changes to the undulating hills of the fertile Haspengouw region based around the towns of Zoutleeuw, Sint Truiden and Tongeren. Of this trio, Tongeren is the obvious attraction. It's Belgium's oldest settlement, dating to Roman times, and sellers and buyers from neighbouring countries come here weekly to unearth treasures at its bustling antique market.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Master Class** Rubens (p181) meets avant-garde fashionistas (p197) in Antwerp
- **Sunday Shopper** Antiques in Tongeren (p214)
- **Gothic Excess** Leuven's ornate stadhuis (p205)
- **In a Shot** Hasselt's Gin Museum (p211)
- **Architectural Gem** Diest's charming *begijnhof* (p209)
- **Pilgrim Pull** Scherpenheuvel's basilica (p210)
- **Carillon Chimes** Concerts in Mechelen (p201)
- **Yesteryear Revisited** Bokrijk Open-Air Museum (p212)



■ PROVINCES: ANTWERPEN (CAPITAL ANTWERP), LIMBURG (CAPITAL HASSELT), VLAAMS-BRABANT (CAPITAL LEUVEN)

■ LANGUAGE: FLEMISH

## ANTWERP

pop 455,000

Even the *New York Times* agrees – Antwerp (Antwerpen in Flemish, Anvers in French) is Europe's place to be. Appreciated by mode moguls, club queens, art lovers and diamond dealers, Belgium's capital of cool and the country's second-biggest city once again revels in fame and fortune.

Antwerp has a rollcall of drawing cards. Start with its manageable size and timeless quality. The old city centre, built around the country's most impressive cathedral, is as beautiful and intimate as it was centuries ago. Tucked away in cobbled lanes and backstreets are thousands of restaurants and bars, antique shops, art galleries, exclusive chocolate outlets, designer boutiques and diamond shops where Antwerpenaars enjoy spending money.

The whole city is something of an architectural museum, from the medieval riverside fortress to modern waterfront creations and the famous Cogels-Osylei, where architects ran riot. Most distinctive is its Gothic and Flemish baroque architecture; it was the home of Pieter Paul Rubens, northern Europe's greatest baroque artist. A visit to his home and studio in the city centre gives fabulous insight into the painter's personal life, after which you can track down some of his most acclaimed works in churches and museums dotted around the city.

Antwerp's role as a celebrated fashion hub means it's a magnet for shoppers. For a city of its size, it boasts an astonishing number of world-acclaimed fashion designers and many have set up boutiques here. Designer-led stores buzz with shoppers looking for the latest in hip clothing and accessories.

On the backbone of the fashion and growing gay scenes, Antwerp's club culture has expanded. The city runs on party time. Club extravaganzas burst out in summer and the nightly scene in the regenerated docklands to the north and south of town beat to the coolest vibes.

It doesn't end there. The world's largest diamond-cutting industry operates behind discreet façades in the Jewish neighbourhood. In the sailors' quarter just north of the city centre, bored women sit framed in red lights while itinerant Philippino, Sri Lankan and East European seaman wander the seedy streets. Turkish, African and Chinese com-

munities live northwest of Franklin Roosevelt-plaats, ultratrendy style victims have taken over the fashion district, and businessmen and upper-class Flemish hang out around Koning Albertpark.

Cosmopolitan, confident and full of contrasts...Antwerp's an essential stop on your Belgium itinerary.

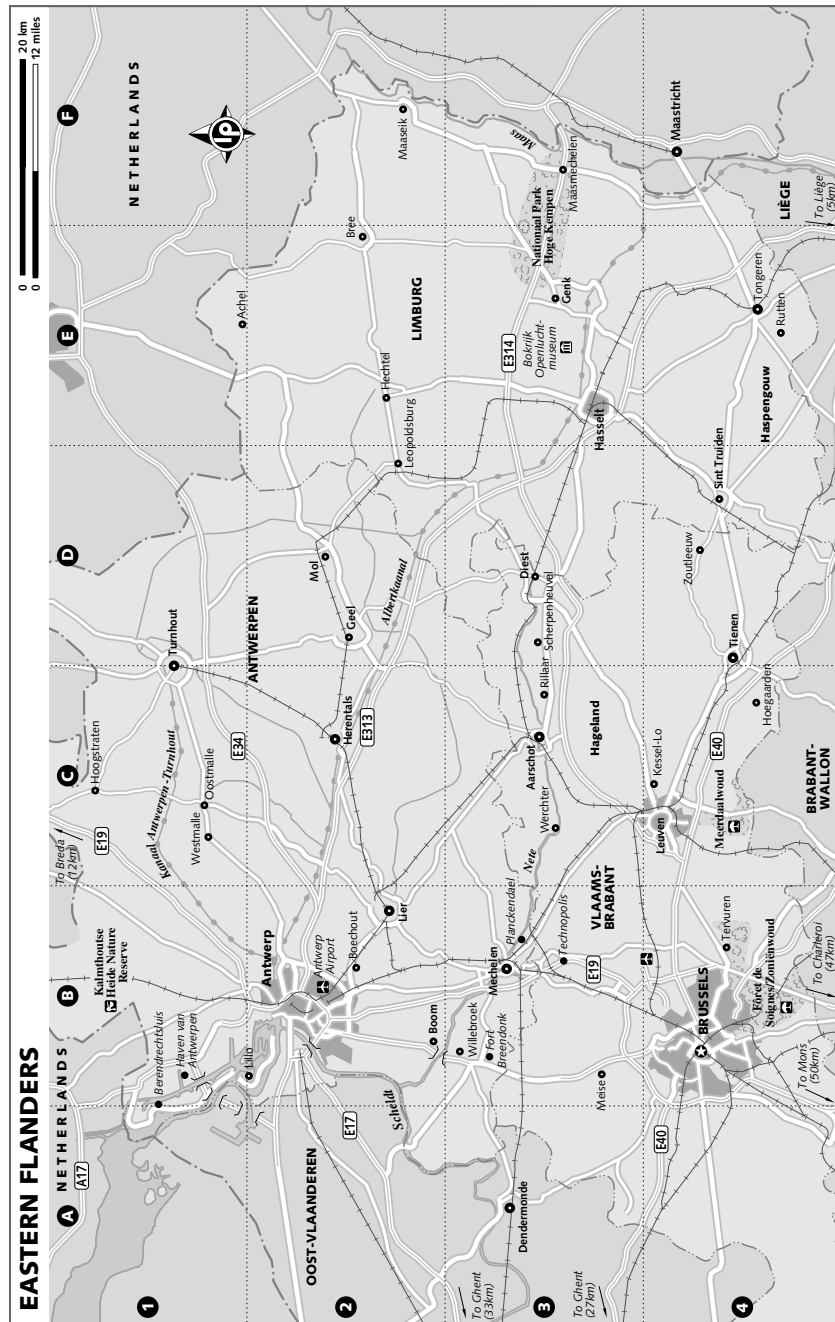
## History

Sailors from a north Germanic Frisian tribe are believed to have settled in Antwerp as far back as the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. It later attracted the Franks, who were Roman mercenaries before gaining power following the Romans' fall. During Charlemagne's time (768–814) a fort was built, which was visited by such noted Christian missionaries as St Amand and St Bavo, but destroyed by the Vikings in 836.

With a prime spot on the Scheldt River (Schelde in Flemish), Antwerp rapidly came to the fore as Western Europe's greatest economic centre. By the end of the reign of Charles V in 1555, the city was a trading, cultural and intellectual headquarters with a population of 100,000 and bustling docks and new mansions.

But the times of prosperity were ruthlessly cut short. When Protestants smashed up the city's cathedral in 1566 as part of the Iconoclastic Fury, the fanatically Catholic Spanish ruler Philip II sent troops to take control. Ten years later the unpaid garrison mutinied, ransacking the city and massacring 8000 people in three nights in what has become known as the 'Spanish fury'. Although the Spanish were driven out after the massacre, they besieged the city again in 1585. Antwerp held out for a year, but was finally forced to surrender and was incorporated into the Spanish Netherlands. As part of the peace deal, Philip II demanded that Antwerp become a Catholic city. Thousands of Protestants, including many skilled workers, headed north to the relative safety of the United Provinces (ie today's Netherlands). By 1589 Antwerp's population was more than halved to 42,000.

A second flush of prosperity came in 1609 with the Twelve Years' Truce, signed by the rulers of the United Provinces and the Spanish Netherlands. No longer cut off from the rest of the world, trade and the arts flourished with new industries such as diamonds and master



painters, including Rubens who had gained an international reputation. The city's printing houses also became known throughout Europe.

But the final blow came in 1648 when, under the Treaty of Westphalia which concluded the Thirty Years' War, the Scheldt was closed to all non-Dutch ships. Antwerp's vital link to the sea was lost and the city ruined. Amsterdam rose as the region's trade capital, and it wasn't until Napoleon arrived in 1797 and the French rebuilt the docks that Antwerp got back on its feet.

By the second half of the 19th century Antwerp had become the world's third-largest port after London and New York, due largely to new rail links connecting other parts of Europe. The city hosted the Olympic Games in 1920 and, in 1928, construction began on Europe's first skyscraper, the 27-storey Torenggebouw.

Immigration in the 1960s saw many Moroccans settle in Antwerp, but racial tensions have risen sharply in recent years. These days the city is a tight package of cultural diversity. For more on the city's multicultural make-up, see p32.

### Orientation

Antwerp flanks the Scheldt River and is bordered by the Ring, a motorway that skirts three-quarters of the city. The old city centre, based around the Grote Markt on the right

bank of the river, is 1km from the impressive Centraal Station. The two are linked by the pedestrianised Meir (pronounced 'mare'), a bustling shopping thoroughfare.

Many of the city's major sights are concentrated between Centraal Station and the old city centre, an area easily covered on foot, although the attractions outside the old city centre should not be overlooked.

St Andries, a relatively down-at-heel quarter close to the old city centre, is the fashionista hub. Het Zuid (The South), commonly abbreviated as 't Zuid, is one of the nightlife zones. This area, first developed as a dockland in the latter half of the 19th century, now sports museums, art galleries, trendy restaurants and clubs. Focal points are the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts) and, way to the south, the city's brand-new Justitiepaleis (Justice Palace).

North of the Grote Markt, between the city and the massive modern-day port, is the sailors' quarter, 't Schipperskwartier, and, a little further north, the regenerated 19th-century docklands known as 't Eilandje (Little Island). A small red-light district is based around St Paulusplaats. Much of the sailors' quarter has a seedy, dog-eared feel, although gentrification is becoming increasingly evident.

Immediately south of Centraal Station is the Jewish neighbourhood, with its diamond industry based around Hoveniersstraat.

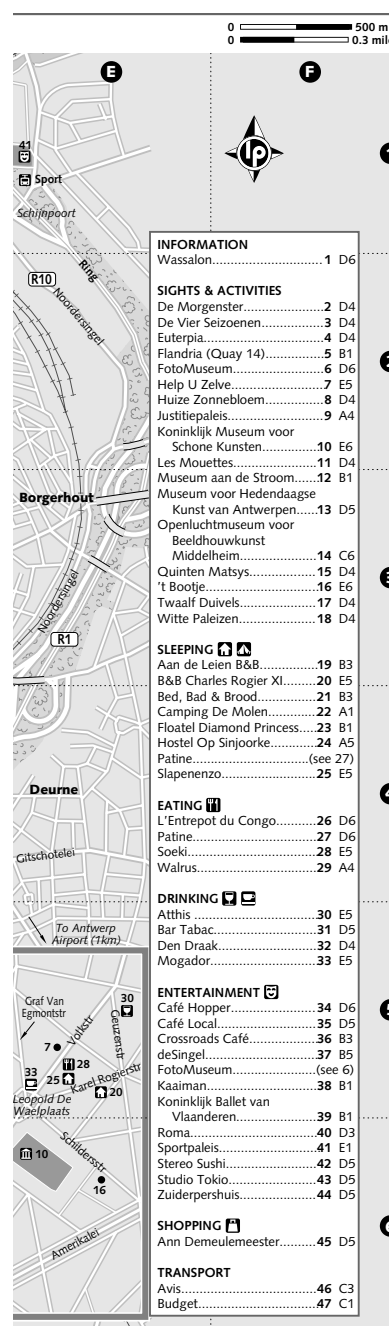
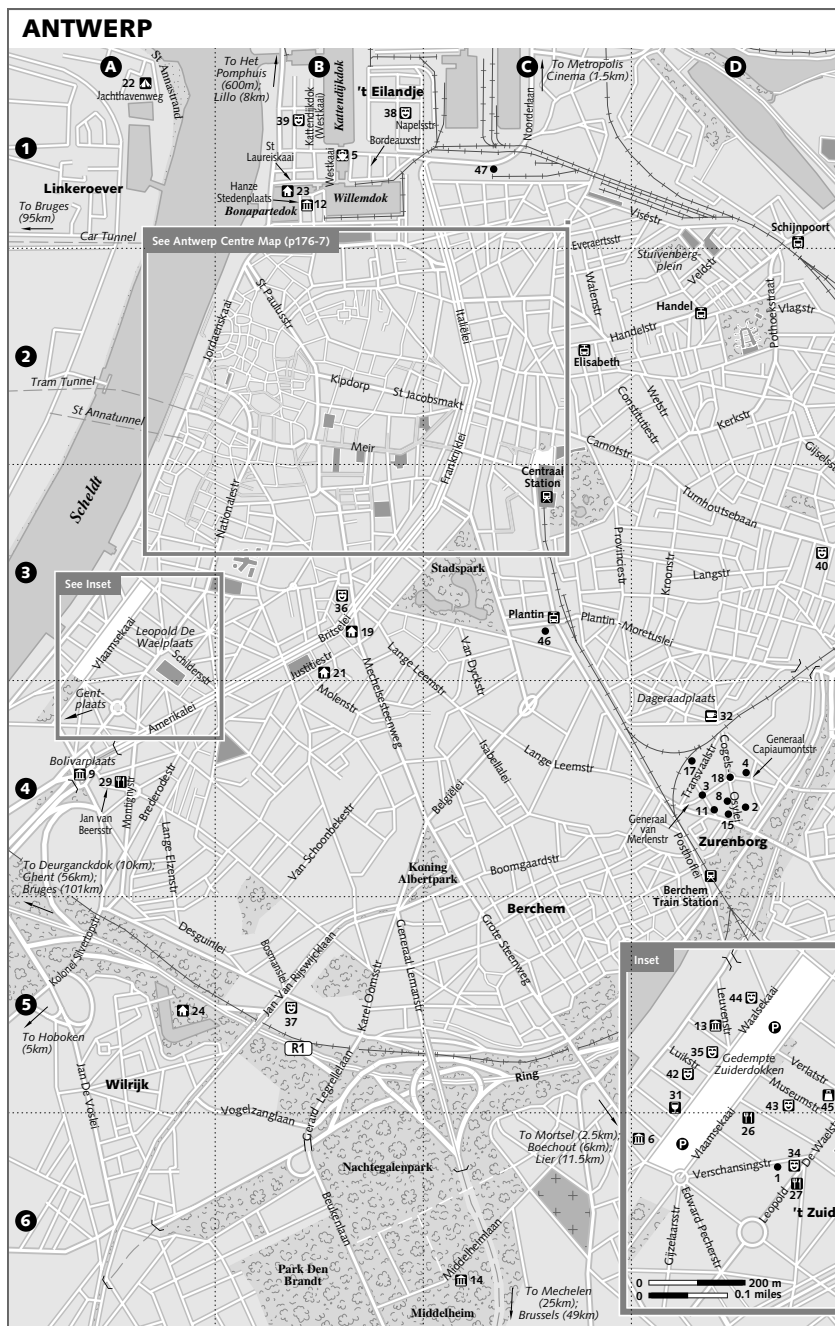
### ANTWERP IN...

#### One Day

Start with the **Grote Markt** – the city's opulent central square – and then indulge in masterpieces by Rubens at **Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal**. Soak up the old city centre's ambience in an idle wander that finishes at **Zuiderterras**, a fab riverside spot for lunch or a drink. In the afternoon, weave your way through **St Andries'** fashion quarter, popping into **MoMu**, before continuing through the intimate backstreets to **Rubenshuis**, where the master lived and worked. For a late-afternoon drink there's **Oud Arsenaal**. Dine at one of the many restaurants in the old city centre before embarking on a seemingly never-ending pub crawl.

#### Two Days

Day two is devoted to **'t Zuid**. Start with the **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Royal Museum of Fine Arts), then lunch at one of the many nearby eateries – **Patine** is highly recommended. In the afternoon there's either the **Museum Voor Hedendaagse Kunst Van Antwerpen** (Museum for Contemporary Arts of Antwerp) or the excellent **FotoMuseum**, followed by a browse past some **Art Nouveau buildings** and a look at avant-garde fashions at **Ann Demeulemeester's** boutique. Further afield is the new **Justitiepaleis** (Justice Palace). While in 't Zuid, suss out a restaurant and return in the evening for dinner, followed by a movie at the FotoMuseum and some nightclubs and bars.



Further southeast is Zurenborg, today considered one of the city's finest neighbourhoods. The area is famed for its rich *belle-époque* quarter, based around a street called Cogels-Osylei.

From the Ring, Antwerp fans out into suburbs, such as Berchem, Deurne, Hoboken and Wilrijk. It also extends west to Linkeroever (Left Bank), easily accessible via the pedestrianised St Annatunnel under the Scheldt.

**MAPS**

Many maps of Antwerp are very poor quality and prove quite useless for navigating the maze of streets in the old city centre. The detailed maps in this book should stand you in good stead. For exploring further afield, Geocart's *Super Plan No 69* (scales 1:17,500 and 1:10,000) of Antwerp and its environs also lists streets and useful addresses.

**Information BOOKSHOPS**

**Copyright** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 94 16; Nationalestraat 28a; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun) Specialises in fashion, art and architecture; located next to MoMu.

**De Slegte** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 66 27; Wapper 5) Secondhand books, including English-language novels.

**FNAC** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 20 56; Groenplaats; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Fri) On 1st floor of the Grand Bazar shopping centre. All-round bookshop with a strong travel section.

**International Magazine Store** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 16 68; Melkmarkt 17; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-7pm Sat, 11am-6.30pm Sun) The place for foreign and local newspapers and top-selling magazines.

**Mekanik Strip** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 234 23 47; St Jacobsmarkt 73; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Excellent comic-strip shop with a little art gallery upstairs.

**Stripwinkel Beo** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 25 36; Oude Vaartplaats 16; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) City's largest comic-strip shop.

**EMERGENCY**

**Ambulance/Fire** (☎ 100)  
**Police** (☎ 101)

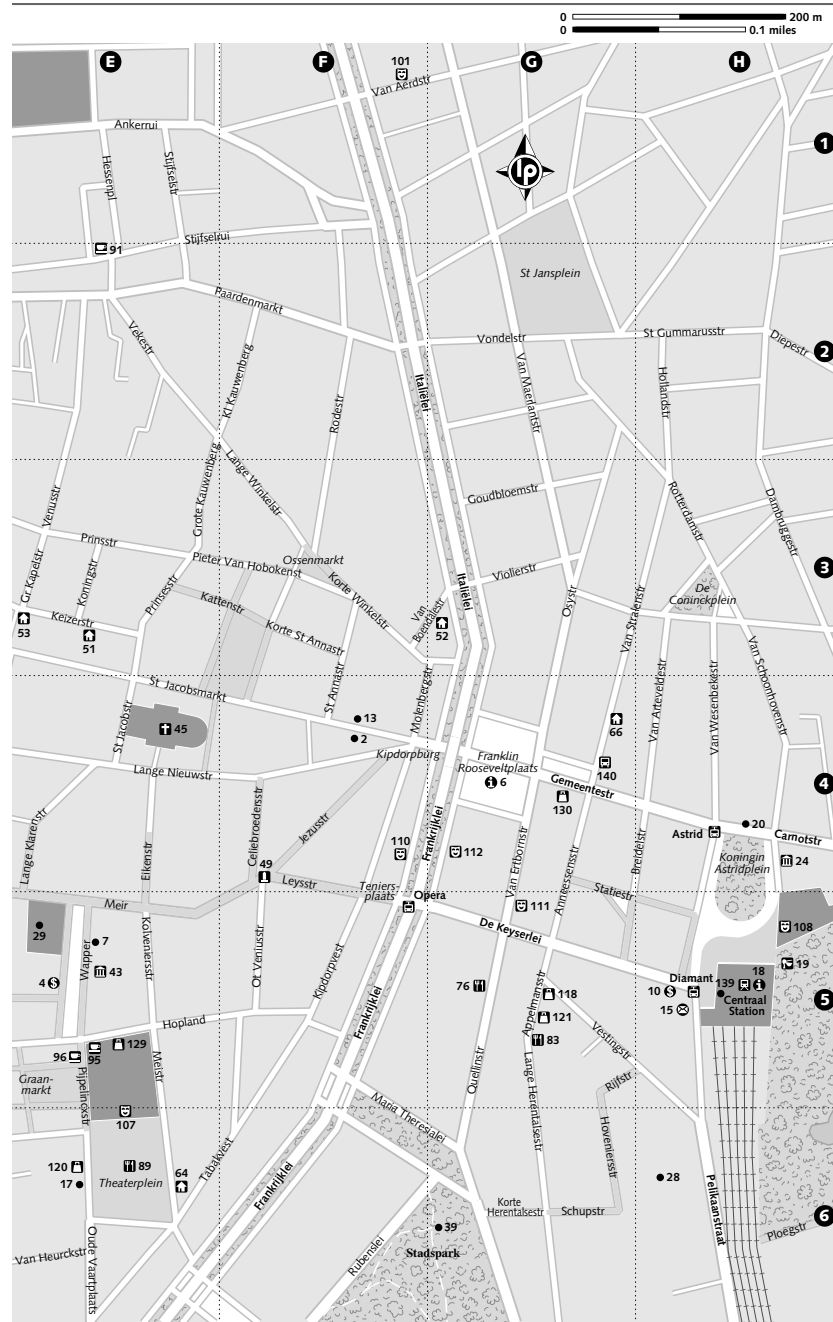
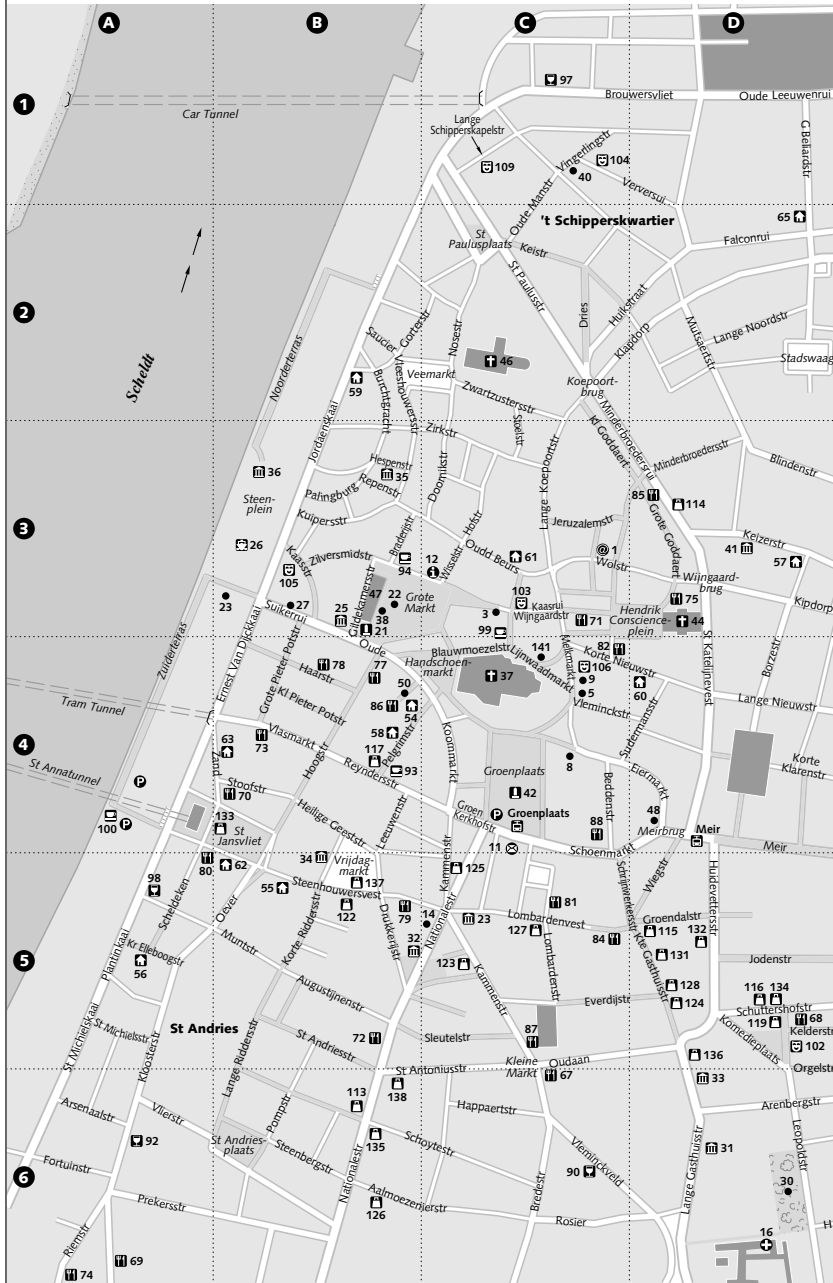
**INTERNET ACCESS**

**2Zones** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 24 00; Wolstraat 15; per hr €4.50; ☎ 11am-midnight) Cool internet bar with a dozen terminals. Under 26 year olds get a 50% discount.

**LAUNDRY**

**Netezon** (Map pp176-7; Nationalestraat 18) Near MoMu.  
**Wassalon** (Map pp174-5; Verschansingstraat 13) In 't Zuid.

ANTWERP CENTRE



## LEFT LUGGAGE

**Centraal Station lockers** (Map pp176-7; Centraal Station; per 24hr €2.60-3.60)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Apotheek Lotry** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 01 86; Grote Markt 56; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 2-7.30pm Mon-Fri) Handy pharmacy.

**St Elisabethgasthuis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 234 41 11, emergency ☎ 03 234 40 50; Leopoldstraat 26; ☞ 24hr) Central hospital.

## MONEY

**ATMs** (Map pp176-7) KBC Bank (Eiermarkt); main post office (Groenplaats); post office (Pelikaanstraat); Fortis Bank (Wapper)

<b>INFORMATION</b>					
2Zones.....	1	C3	St Carolus-Borromeuskerk.....	44	D3
Airstop/Taxistop.....	2	F4	St Jacobskerk.....	45	E4
Apotheek Lotry.....	3	C3	St Pauluskerk.....	46	C2
ATM Fortis Bank.....	4	E5	Stadhuis.....	47	B3
ATM KBC Bank.....	(see 48)		Torengedebouw.....	48	D4
ATM.....	(see 11)		Van Dyck Statue.....	49	F4
ATM.....	(see 15)		Vlaeykengang.....	50	B4
Connections.....	5	C4			
De Lijn.....	6	G4	<b>SLEEPING</b> ☞		
De Slegte.....	7	E5	Aandekeizer B&B.....	51	E3
FNAC.....	8	C4	B&B 2000.....	52	G3
International Magazine Store.....	9	C4	B&B Emperor's 48.....	53	E3
Leo Stevens.....	10	H5	B&B Le Patio.....	54	B4
Main Post Office.....	11	C4	B&B Siddhartha.....	55	B5
Main Tourist Office.....	12	C3	Big Sleep.....	56	A5
Mekanik Strip.....	13	F4	De Witte Lelie.....	57	D3
Netezon.....	14	C5	Den Heksenketel.....	58	B4
Post Office.....	15	H5	Hotel Antigone.....	59	B2
St Elisabethgasthuis.....	16	D6	Hotel Julien.....	60	D4
Stripwinkel Beo.....	17	E6	Hotel Rubens.....	61	C3
Tourist Office.....	18	H5	Hotel Scheldezicht.....	62	B5
			Hotel 't Sandt.....	63	B4
			Ibis Antwerpen Centrum.....	64	E6
			International Zeemanshuis.....	65	D2
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>			Vlaamse		
Antwerp Zoo.....	19	H5	Jeugdherbergcentrale.....	66	G4
Aquatopia.....	20	H4			
Bag Bearer Statue.....	21	B3	<b>EATING</b> ☞		
Brabo Fountain.....	22	B3	Berlin.....	67	C6
Centraal Station.....	(see 139)		Bourla & Mares.....	68	D5
Copyright.....	(see 32)		Dansing Chocola.....	69	A6
Dagbladmuseum.....	23	C5	De Kleine Zavel.....	70	B4
Diamantmuseum.....	24	H4	De Peerdestal.....	71	C3
Etnografisch Museum.....	25	B3	Delhaize.....	72	B5
Flandria.....	26	B3	Eethuisje De Stoempot.....	73	B4
Het Ruihuis.....	27	B3	El Pintxo's.....	74	A6
Het Steen.....	(see 36)		Façade.....	75	D3
Hoge Raad voor Diamant.....	28	H6	Faites Simple.....	76	C5
Koninklijk Paleis.....	29	E5	Frituur No 1.....	77	B4
Kruidtuin.....	30	D6	Gin Fish.....	78	B4
Maagdenhuis.....	31	D6	Het Dagelijks Brood.....	79	B5
ModeNatie.....	(see 32)		Het Nieuwe Palinghuis.....	80	A5
MoMu.....	32	B5	Hungry Henrietta.....	81	C5
Museum Mayer Van den Bergh.....	33	D6	La Cuisine.....	82	C4
Museum Plantin-Moretus.....	34	B5	Lamalo.....	83	G5
Museum Vleeshuis/Kank van de Stad.....	35	B3	Lombardia.....	84	C5
Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum.....	36	B3	Pottenbrug.....	85	D3
Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal.....	37	C4	Sir Anthony Van Dyck.....	86	B4
Peerdentram.....	38	B3	Soep & Soup.....	87	C5
Playground.....	39	G6	Super GB.....	88	C4
Prospekta.....	(see 12)		Vogelmarkt.....	89	E6
Red-Light District.....	40	C1			
Rent A Bike.....	(see 141)		<b>DRINKING</b> ☞ ☞		
Rockoxhuis.....	41	D3	Boekhandel 't Verschil.....	(see 114)	
Rubens Statue.....	42	C4	Bierhuis Kulminator.....	90	C6
Rubenshuis.....	43	E5	Café Hessenhuis.....	91	E2
			Chez Fred.....	92	A6
			De Vagant.....	93	B4
			Den Engel.....	94	B3
			Grand Café Horta.....	95	E5
			Oud Arsenal.....	96	E5
			Pier 19.....	97	C1
			Popi Café.....	98	A5
			't Elfde Gebod.....	99	C3
			Zuiderterras.....	100	A4
			<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> ☞		
			Boots.....	101	F1
			Bourlaschouwburg.....	102	D5
			Buster.....	103	C3
			Café d'Anvers.....	104	C1
			Cartoons.....	105	B3
			De Muze.....	106	C4
			FNAC Ticket Service.....	(see 8)	
			Het Paleis.....	107	E6
			Koningin Elisabethzaal.....	108	H5
			Red & Blue.....	109	C1
			Space.....	110	F4
			UGC.....	111	G5
			Vlaamse Opera.....	112	G4
			<b>SHOPPING</b> ☞		
			Anнемie Verbeke.....	113	B6
			Boekhandel 't Verschil.....	114	D3
			Burie.....	115	D5
			Cocodrillo.....	116	D5
			De Vagant Slijterij.....	117	B4
			Del Rey.....	118	G5
			Delvaux.....	119	D5
			Den Dorstvlégel.....	120	E6
			Diamondland.....	121	G5
			Episode.....	122	B5
			Fish & Chips.....	123	C5
			Goossens.....	124	D5
			Grand Bazar Shopping Centre.....	(see 88)	
			Het Modepaleis.....	125	C5
			Labels Inc.....	126	B6
			Louis.....	127	C5
			Nico Taeymans.....	128	D5
			Olivier Strelli.....	129	E5
			Pardaf.....	130	G4
			Philip's Biscuits.....	131	D5
			Pierre Marcolini.....	132	D5
			Rommelmarkt.....	133	B4
			Temmerman.....	134	D5
			Véronique Branquinho.....	135	B6
			Verso.....	136	D5
			Vrijdagmarkt.....	137	B5
			Walter.....	138	B6
			<b>TRANSPORT</b>		
			Centraal Station.....	139	H5
			Eurolines.....	140	G4
			Rent A Bike.....	141	C4

**Leo Stevens** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 18 43; De Keyserlei 64; ☞ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Excellent exchange rates, but handles cash only. Opposite Centraal Station.

## POST

**Main post office** (Map pp176-7; Groenplaats 43) Handy to the Grote Markt.

**Post office** (Map pp176-7; Pelikaanstraat 16) Opposite Centraal Station.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Main tourist office** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 01 03; www.visitantwerpen.be; Grote Markt 13; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun)

**Tourist office** (Map pp176-7; Centraal Station; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun)

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Airstop/Taxistop** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 070 23 31 88; St Jacobsmarkt 84)

**Connections** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 070 23 33 13; Melkmarkt 23)

## Sights

## OLD CITY CENTRE

As in every great Flemish city, life in Antwerp radiates out from the **Grote Markt** (Map pp176-7), a vast, pedestrianised, triangular market square presided over by the impressive Renaissance-style **stadhuis** (town hall; Map pp176-7). Designed by Cornelius Floris De Vriendt and completed in 1565, the stadhuis' palatial façade is a blend of Flemish and Italian styles, an innovative departure from the standard Gothic architecture prevalent at the time of construction. The commanding gable is topped by a fine gilded eagle and flanked by statues representing wisdom and justice.

The Grote Markt is lined on two sides by Renaissance-style **guildhalls**, most of which were reconstructed in the 19th century. The tallest and most impressive is No 7, topped by a gilded statue of St George astride a rearing horse as he spears a dragon.

The voluptuous, baroque **Brabo Fountain** (Map pp176-7) rises from a rough pile of rocks in the centre of the Grote Markt. Crafted in 1887 by Jef Lambeaux (who lived at Grote Markt 44), it depicts the legend of Antwerp's name (see boxed text, p180).

Next to the stadhuis entrance, the **Etnografisch Museum** (Ethnographic Museum; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 220 86 00; www.museum.antwerpen.be/etnografisch\_museum; Suikerrui 19; adult/concession €4/3; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) contains a highly respected col-

lection of traditional artefacts from around the world.

Next door again is the city's newest attraction, **Het Ruihuis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 01 03; Suikerrui 21; ☞ 9.30am-5.30pm Thu-Tue), an adventure through the city's underground sewer system. Expect things to be a bit pongy at the start, but then highly sanitised. Choose a three-hour guided tour (€14.50), or pop in for a visit *zonder gids* (without guide; €2.50).

The splendid **Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 213 99 51; Handschoenmarkt; adult/concession €2/1.50; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is the largest and finest Gothic cathedral in Belgium. It was 169 years in the making (1352-521) and the work of several architects (Appelmans, Domien and Keldermans). Its graceful 123m-high spire was a mighty landmark in early times and is still visible from kilometres around today. The combined effects of a fire in the Middle Ages, the Iconoclastic Fury and plundering during the French occupation mean that little of what you see today inside the cathedral is original Gothic. Instead, baroque decorations – notably four early canvases by Rubens – adorn its light but imposing interior. From the centre of the seven-aisled nave, look straight down to the high altar and Rubens' *Assumption* (1625). Although impossible to view up close, this painting's radiance is profound. To the left of the central crossing is *The Raising of the Cross* (1610), while the much smaller *Resurrection* (1612) hangs in a small chapel to the right of the high altar. The most celebrated of Rubens' four paintings is *The Descent from the Cross* (1612) immediately to the right of the central crossing. In this sensitive triptych, the deathly grey Christ is lowered by mourners while the Virgin reaches to touch her son.

Fashion followers must start with Antwerp's mode museum, **MoMu** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 470 27 70; www.momu.be; Nationalestraat 28; adult/concession €7/5; ☞ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). It's located in the much-celebrated **ModeNatie** (www.modenatie.com) complex, home also to both the Flanders Fashion Institute and the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Sticking firmly to avant-garde, MoMu changes its exhibits every six months. For more on Antwerp fashion, see boxed text (p197).

The World Heritage-listed **Museum Plantin-Moretus** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 221 14 50; www.museum.antwerpen.be/plantin\_moretus; Vrijdagmarkt 22; adult/concession €5/3; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is home to the

### THE LEGEND LIVES ON

Two stories tell the origins of Antwerp's name.

The not so popular, but more likely, explanation lies with archaeological remains found near the riverside castle, Steen. The findings proved that a Gallo-Roman settlement existed on a mound (*aanwerp*) that partly vanished when the quays were straightened in the 1880s.

The legend, of course, is much more colourful. It tells of Druon Antigoon, a giant, who lived at the bend of the Scheldt and forced passing shipmasters to pay a toll. Those who refused lost a hand. Along came Silvius Brabo, a Roman warrior, who killed the giant, chopped off his hand and chucked it in the river. *Hand werpen* (hand throwing) subsequently evolved into Antwerpen.

Today the city uses *Antwerpse handjes* (Antwerp hands) to symbolise friendship. All manner of gift items are made in the shape of little hands, from butter biscuits to chocolates.

world's first industrial printing works. This fascinating museum deals with a prosperous 16th- and 17th-century printing family headed by Christoffel Plantin. Plantin moved from France to Antwerp where he set up as a book-binder in 1548. Eight years later he started a printing business that eventually became the Low Countries' largest printing and publishing concern and a magnet for intellectuals, scientists and humanists. On Plantin's death, the business passed to his son-in-law, Jan Moretus, and later to Jan's son, Balthasar, a friend of Rubens. Some of the family portraits exhibited inside this museum are the master's works.

Built around a central courtyard, the museum is worth visiting for the mansion alone, but also for insight into old typesetting, proof-reading and printing processes. Room after room is filled with ancient presses, copper plates, old globes, Flemish tapestries and, of course, splendid manuscripts, including a rare copy of the Gutenberg Bible. In the age of email, it's hard not to admire the painstaking effort and dedication that was once needed to produce a 'simple' book.

Those really into printing should consider visiting the nearby **Dagbladmuseum** (Newspaper Museum; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 887 01 78; www.dagbladmuseum.be in Flemish; Lombardenvest 6; admission €5). It was here that the world's first newspaper, *Nieuwe Tydinghen*, was invented by Abraham Verhoeven in 1606. The museum doesn't have standard opening hours, so call ahead.

By the waterfront is the engaging **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum** (National Maritime Museum; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 201 93 40; www.museum.antwerpen.be/scheepvaartmuseum; Steenplein 1; adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Model ships, maritime maps and instruments are exhibited in the gatehouse and front section (which is all that remains) of the 13th-century castle, Steen. Highlights

include an intriguing nautical totem shaped like a snake's head and boats from around the world, including an 18th-century coracle or skin boat. Beneath the next-door raised promenade is the museum's open-air collection of river barges, canal boats and *De Schelde P905*, a 1950's Belgian navy patrol ship.

Due east of the Steen is the striking **Vleeshuis**, or **Museum Vleeshuis/Klank van de Stad** (Butchers' Hall; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 64 04; www.museum.vleeshuis.be; Vleeshouwersstraat 38-40; adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). This building, with its red-and-white layered stonework reminiscent of rashers of bacon, was the 14th-century headquarters of the butchers' guild. It's now a new music museum, known as Klank van de Stad, home to instruments specifically related to Antwerp. Time a visit with a concert given on one of the old instruments – the tourist office has the schedule.

The **Rockoxhuis** (Rockox House; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 201 92 50; Keizerstraat 10-12; adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a 17th-century mansion that once belonged to Nicolaas Rockox, a former city mayor and friend and patron of Rubens. It's built around a central courtyard, is furnished in classical Flemish style, and holds a small but esteemed collection of paintings, including works by Rubens, Jordaens, Van Dyck and Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Seek out the latter's *Proverbs* (*De Spreekwoorden*). This engaging work is no run-of-the-mill village scene – it depicts 108 Flemish proverbs. Find the man bashing his head against a brick wall (ie symbolising stupidity) or the guy peeing on the moon (ie trying to do the impossible). The museum sells a card (€1.25) explaining each proverb, but unfortunately it's not in English.

The stunning Flemish baroque **St Carolus-Borromeuskerk** (Map pp176-7; Hendrik Conscienceplein 6; admission free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) was built

in 1621 by the Jesuits on one of the city's most beautiful public squares. Much of the church, including the façade and tower, was designed by Rubens. Unfortunately, most of the marble interior and 39 ceiling paintings by Rubens and his colleagues were destroyed by fire in 1718. Baroque art at its prime can still be seen in the small *Onze Lieve Vrouwekapel* (Chapel of Our Lady), inside to the right of the entrance, which was spared by the flames.

### MEIR AREA

Just off the Meir, on a nondescript square known as Wapper, is the prestigious **Rubenshuis** (Rubens' House; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 201 15 55; http://museum.antwerpen.be/rubenshuis; Wapper 9-11; adult/concession €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). The home and studio of the city's most celebrated painter, Pieter Paul Rubens (below), it was little more than a ruin when acquired by the city in 1937. Superbly restored along original lines, it's now Antwerp's chief attraction, despite the fact that only a handful of Rubens' lesser works are exhibited

here. Rubens built this beautiful Flemish baroque mansion in 1611 when he was 34 years old; he died here 29 years later. The building is divided in two: on the left are the living quarters and an elaborate art gallery where Rubens displayed sculptures and paintings by artists he admired; to the right you'll see the master's studio where he taught and worked. Near the entrance is a baroque portico, and beyond this lies a formal garden. Much of the furniture inside the house dates from Rubens' era but was not part of the original décor.

The tomb of Rubens and his family is the reason most visitors come to **St Jacobskerk** (St James' Church; Map pp176-7; Lange Nieuwstraat 73; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 2-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 9am-noon Nov-Easter). The tomb, in a small chapel behind the high altar, is adorned with a painting, *Our Lady Surrounded by Saints*, which Rubens executed specifically for his tomb and which is a family portrait, with the master as St George and his wives and father the other figures. The church was *the* place of worship for the

### PIETER PAUL RUBENS

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) was Belgium's most influential early 17th-century artist. His paintings fused Flemish and Italian influences and his enormous canvases, with their glowing colours and animated forms, are baroque masterpieces. Rubens is best remembered for his sensuous women inspired by Greek mythology, but he's also noted for religious works. In the latter he combines a technical mastery of musculature with a deep sense of the spiritual, and these paintings may appeal to those who aren't fans of his ample nudes.

Rubens was born in Siegen (in Germany) in 1577 after his parents fled Antwerp due to religious turmoil. When his father died a decade later, the family returned to Antwerp, where Rubens started painting – by the age of 21 he was a master in the Antwerp Guild of St Lukas. In 1600 he journeyed to Italy and was soon appointed court painter to the Duke of Mantua. For the next eight years he travelled extensively in Italy and Spain, all the while painting for the wealthy and soaking up the rich Renaissance art and architecture.

When his mother died in 1608, Rubens returned to Antwerp. He worked on religious canvases, such as *The Descent from the Cross*, a huge painting filled with saints, muscular soldiers and distraught women that earned him immediate success. Today it's displayed in Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal, the city's cathedral. With commissions pouring in, he established a studio in his house in the city centre from where he proceeded to paint portraits of Europe's royalty and a series of grand religious canvases. Joined by contemporaries such as Antoon (Anthony in English) Van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens, the studio's output was staggering.

In the 1620s Rubens broadened his painting repertoire and also took on diplomatic missions, including a visit to England where he was commissioned to paint part of the ceiling of the Banqueting House in London's Whitehall Palace and was knighted by Charles I.

During his last decade he married Hélène Fourment, his second wife, whom he used as a model for some of his later, largely allegorical paintings.

Rubens' works are dotted around Antwerp, including Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal (p179), Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (p182), Rockoxhuis (opposite) and St Jacobskerk (above), and are also superbly exhibited in Brussels' *Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts* (p83). To discover the city in his footsteps, pick up one of the three walking-tour booklets (€4) sold at the tourist office.

aristocracy and is a showcase of their wealth. Started in 1491, it took nearly 150 years to build and the result is a Gothic façade cloaking mainly baroque embellishments inside.

**Museum Mayer Van den Bergh** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 42 37; www.museum.antwerpen.be/mayervandenbergh; Lange Gasthuisstraat 19; adult/concession €4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) occupies a simulated 16th-century townhouse, built in 1904 by the mother of Fritz Mayer Van den Bergh, a prosperous art connoisseur who had died a few years earlier aged 41. His highly prized collection of sculptures and paintings, including works by Quinten Matsijs and Cornelius De Vos, form the core of the museum. The collection's most famous piece is Pieter Breugel the Elder's *Dulle Griet* (Mad Meg), an allegorical painting in which a demented woman roams a grotesque war-torn landscape marked by demons and monsters. This is one of Breugel's most Bosch-like paintings and interpretations of its meaning vary – some say it's an allegory of misogyny, others of human madness.

Just down the road from Museum Mayer Van den Bergh is the **Maagdenhuis** (Maidens' House; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 223 53 20; Lange Gasthuisstraat 33; adult €3; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed-Mon, 1-5pm Sat & Sun). In the 16th and 17th centuries this building was an orphanage and refuge for girls of poor families. Today it's home to a small art collection. As you enter, note the sandstone carvings of young girls above the archway. Of the museum's exhibits, the most nostalgic items are the playing cards, or identification tokens. These cards were cut in half when girls were brought into the refuge – one piece was retained by the parent and the other kept with the child.

Secret garden fans shouldn't miss the city's tiny **Kruidtuin** (botanical garden; Map pp176-7; Leopoldstraat). Originally the herb garden of St Elisabethgasthuis, a hospital that dates back to medieval times, this informal garden has 2000 plant species and, despite its diminutive size, is a great getaway from crowds and vehicles.

### CENTRAAL STATION QUARTER

One of the city's premier landmarks is the extraordinary **Centraal Station** (Map pp176-7), designed by Louis Delacenserie at the start of the 20th century in a harmonious blend of styles. Steps lead from the main hall with its enormous dome up to the glass-covered train platforms. The station and adjoining Koningin Astridplein have been undergoing massive works for years to accommodate the Eurostar and Thalys fast

trains, thus directly linking the city to London and the rest of Europe. All is due to be finished by the time you read this. The station is also diamond central (see opposite).

**Antwerp Zoo** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 202 45 40; www.zoo.antwerpen.be in Flemish & French; Koningin Astridplein 26; adult/concession €16/11; 🕒 10am-7pm Jul-Aug, 10am-6pm May-Jun & Sep, 10am-5.30pm Mar-Apr & Oct, 10am-4.45pm Jan-Feb & Nov-Dec) ranks among the world's oldest. It opened in 1843 during Belgium's colonial heyday – its age is immediately evident by the striking lion and tiger mosaic panels that greet visitors. The 10-hectare park is home to an extremely diverse range of animals; some (such as the penguins) live in state-of-the-art enclosures but others are still in shoddy cages. The zoo is constantly upgrading accommodation and it also has a good reputation for its breeding programme.

Immediately southwest of Centraal Station is the **diamond district** (see opposite). The first things most people see of this quarter are the gold and diamond shops newly located inside Centraal Station. Here you'll find people from all over the world, including plenty of newly engaged Brits (prices here average 30% lower than in UK High Sts) browsing the bright lights and gleaming displays. But outside, it's a vastly different world. Orthodox Jewish men clad in distinctive black coats and hats shuffle around the lacklustre quarter, traders with briefcases handcuffed to their wrists hurry into diamond exchanges and armed guards keep watch over the little huddle of streets where multimillion-euro deals are going down.

The city's role as a world diamond centre can be explored at the **Diamantmuseum** (Diamond Museum; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 202 48 90; www.diamant.proviant.be; Koningin Astridplein 19-23; adult/concession €5/3; 🕒 1-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 1-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr). With an English-language audio guide in hand, start on the 3rd floor and let one of seven virtual guides assist in your quest for the perfect stone. The whole thing is very Antwerp – from the sultry fashions worn by the guides to the proud exhibits showing diamond-studded jeans.

### 'T ZUID

**Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten**  
The **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Royal Museum of Fine Arts; Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 78 09; www.antwerpen.be/cultuur/kmska; Leopold De Waelplaats; adult/concession/child €6/4/free, last Wed of the month free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) is a monumen-

### DIAMONDS

Diamonds have been changing hands in Antwerp for more than 500 years. As the world's uncut diamond capital, 80% of the world's rough diamonds are traded in the city's diamond quarter, an unassuming cluster of streets near the Centraal Station, and the industry employs some 30,000 people. But insiders are wondering whether things are on the rocks? Where once 25,000 skilled cutters and polishers were employed, now only 2000 struggle on. For hundreds of years the domain of Orthodox Jews, Indians now account for 60% of the district's trade and much of the manufacturing work has shifted to low-cost Asian countries. Dubai, the Middle Eastern business capital, is actively trying to snare Antwerp's trade. And the once laissez-faire attitude of the Belgian government, a boon to traders, has been replaced by strict EU regulation and tight customs procedures. These changes have come about partly to end the crisis of 'blood diamonds', stones which have been smuggled across borders in conflict zones in Africa, and which are used to fuel the arms trade and finance civil wars. Time will tell whether such measures will end this trade.

To get a glimpse of the amount of diamonds (and gold) being traded, just wander along Pelikaanstraat, Vestingstraat or Hoveniersstraat at any time during the day (on Saturday many shops are closed for Sabbath, the Jewish holy day). Don't expect fanfare or glitz – most of the trade goes on behind discreet, even shabby, façades and in the four *beurzen voor diamanthandel* (diamond exchanges) dotted along two pedestrianised streets – Hoveniersstraat and Rijfstraat. These high-security streets are also home to important financing banks and the industry's governing body, the **Hoge Raad voor Diamant** (Diamond High Council; Hoveniersstraat 22).

tal neoclassical edifice built at the end of the 19th century. Its stately rooms house an impressive collection of paintings dating from the 14th century to contemporary times and include works by Flemish masters.

The size of the museum's collection means that paintings are sometimes rotated. To find the highlights you'll need to pick up a museum plan and audio headset (both free) from reception.

The Flemish Primitives are represented by Jan Van Eyck, Hans Memling, Rogier Van der Weyden and Gerard David. Highlights include Van Eyck's unusual, almost monotone *Saint Barbara* (1437), Memling's rich *Christ among Angels Singing and Playing Instruments* and Van der Weyden's portrait of *Filips Van Croij*.

Sixteenth-century works to seek out include Quinten Matsijs' profound triptych *The Lamentation of Christ* (also called the *Triptych of the Joiners' Guild*). Matsijs, spelt Matsys in English, founded the Antwerp school of painting and his works reflect a deep understanding of landscape perspective. There are no originals by Pieter Breugel the Elder; however, paintings by his followers detail the enchanting peasant scenes for which Breugel was famous.

The museum's best section is undoubtedly the 17th-century Flemish baroque masters display. There are several enormous canvases by Rubens, including his famous *Adoration of the Magi* (1624), a hugely expressive and ani-

mated work, as well as a selection of smaller, preparatory paintings and oil sketches. The other local players of that time, Jacob Jordaens and Antoon Van Dyck, are also well represented. Watch out for Jordaens' *As the Old Sing, the Young Play Pipes* (1638), in which senior citizens are shown setting a good example to the young. Van Dyck was best known for his portraiture, a fine example of which is *Portrait of Maarten Pepijn* (1632).

Moving on to modern art, the museum has a diverse collection of paintings by James Ensor that traces his conservative beginnings – such as the *Woman Eating Oysters* (1882) – to his disturbing later works, exemplified here by *Masks Fighting over a Hanged Man* (1891).

Other Belgian artists of note whose works are exhibited include Constant Permeke and Rik Wouters, as well as surrealists René Magritte and Paul Delvaux.

Tram 8 from Groenplaats or bus 23 (direction Zuid) from Franklin Rooseveltplaats both stop out the front.

### Other Sights

**The Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst Van Antwerpen** (MuhKA; Museum for Contemporary Arts of Antwerp; Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 59 60; www.muhka.be in Flemish; Leuvenstraat 23; adult/concession €4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is housed behind an Art Deco façade in a building that started life as a grain silo. It contains a permanent collection of Belgian



and international art dating from the 1970s onwards, although only a fraction is displayed at any one time. Temporary exhibitions are often staged. Bus 23 (direction Zuid) from Franklin Rooseveltplaats stops nearby.

Five blocks south of MuHKA and with an excellent reputation is the newly renovated and expanded **FotoMuseum** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 242 93 00; www.fotomuseum.be; Waalsekaai 47; adult/concession €6/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Once again housed in a renovated warehouse, this museum has a huge collection of B&W photographs, old portraits and ancient cameras. One of the highlights is the Keizerspanorama, a huge, motorised, slide-viewing contraption built in 1905 for Antwerp Zoo. In the evening you can take in a golden-oldie film in one of two auditoria. To get to the museum, take bus 23 (direction Zuid) from Franklin Rooseveltplaats.

Although Zurenberg (right) has the city's most dense concentration of Art Nouveau architecture, two other fine examples can be seen in 't Zuid and both are just short walks from the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. **Help U Zelve** (Map pp174-5; Volkstraat 40) is arguably the city's most beautiful and harmonious Art Nouveau façade. Built in 1901 by architects Van Asperen and Van Averbek, it features mosaics and strongly geometric wrought-iron work. It's now used as a Rudolph Steiner school. **'t Bootje** (Map pp174-5; cnr Schildersstraat & Plaats-nijdersstraat) has a little ship-shaped balcony that is part of a 1901 townhouse called De Vijf Continenten (The Five Continents).

The city's new **Justitiepaleis** (law court; Map pp174-5; Bolivarplaats), reminiscent of Sydney's Opera House, will blow away any preconceptions that architecture in Antwerp is all old hat. The work of renowned British architect Richard Rogers, the man behind London's Lloyd's building and Paris' Pompidou Centre, its gleaming sails can easily be seen rising at the end of Amerikalei, down the southern end of 't Zuid. This area has largely been left begging in recent decades, but this flashy new addition has already sparked a real-estate boom. During its construction in 2005, controversy reigned over its cost – quoted at €75 million but eventually coming in at around €250 million. Take tram 12 (direction Bolivarplaats) from Gemeentestraat, next to Koningin Astridplein, to its terminus to get there.

### 'T SCHIPPERSKWARTIER

Marking the start of the sailors' quarter, or 't Schipperskwartier, is **St Pauluskerk** (St Paul's Church; Map pp176-7; Veemarkt; admission free; ☎ 2-5pm May-Sep). The proud, white Gothic church was built for the Dominicans and dates from 1517. It suffered over the years due to fires, the latest in 1968 when locals rallied to save the art treasures inside. The baroque interior is resplendent with a stunning procession of wooden confessionals and carvings, altars, a (partly) ancient organ and marble embellishments, as well as paintings by the 17th-century masters and lesser artists.

Antwerp's **red-light district** (Map pp176-7) is Belgium's largest, but it's small fry compared with neighbouring Amsterdam. It is based between St Paulusplaats and Verversrui and includes the appropriately named Oude Manstraat (Old Man St). Much of the quarter has a dog-eared feel, and the fanfare and crass consumerism that makes its counterpart in the Netherlands so famous is noticeably absent here.

### 'T EILANDJE

Due to open in 2008, the purpose-built multi-storey **Museum aan de Stroom** (MAS; Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 206 09 40; www.museumaandestroom.be; Hanze Stedenplaats) is located between two docks – Bonapartedok and Willemdok – in the flourishing 't Eilandje district. Architecturally it's expected to be a big draw, designed like a modern spiral tower with a panorama platform offering city views. It will bring together exhibits of the city's history from its earliest beginnings to recent times, which means some existing museums – like the Scheepvaartmuseum – will lose all or some of their content.

Another museum in the pipeline for this district is the **Red Star Line Museum**. It will tell the story of the three-million Europeans who immigrated via Antwerp to the US and Canada. Ask the tourist office (p179) for up-to-date details on both museums.

### ZURENBORG

This area, about 2km southeast of Centraal Station, is famed for the eclectic architecture found in a handful of streets. The showcase is **Cogels-Osylei** (Map pp174-5), a bazaar of all possible house styles. Here the city's affluent citizens went wild a century ago, creating competing and highly contrasting façades ranging in style from Art Nouveau and Flemish baroque to

neoclassical and neo-Renaissance. Roofs and towers spiked with onion tops or witches' hats, wrought-iron balconies, bay windows, slate tiles, stained glass and mosaics...you name it, this street's got it. Most of the buildings were constructed between 1894 and 1914 and involved many architects. In the 1960s the houses faced demolition but were saved thanks to protests by artists and hippies.

The area's focal point is the small roundabout on Cogels-Osylei, which is flanked by the **Witte Paleizen** (White Palaces; Map pp174-5), grand façades resembling chateaux in France's Loire Valley. Three exquisite Art Nouveau examples along Cogels-Osylei are the **Huize Zonnebloem** (Sunflower House; Map pp174-5; 50 Cogels-Osylei), built by Jules Hofman in 1900, **De Morgenster** (The Morning Star; Map pp174-5; 55 Cogels-Osylei) and **Quinten Matsys** (Map pp174-5; 80 Cogels-Osylei), both built in 1904.

More nearby Art Nouveau swirls and mosaic façades include **Les Mouettes** (Waterloostraat 39), built in 1905. Mosaics are at their best at **De Vier Seizoenen** (The Four Seasons; Map pp174-5; cnr Waterloostraat & Generaal Van Merlenstraat), designed in 1899 by the architect Vascount. The **Euterpia** (Map pp174-5; Generaal Capiaumontstraat 2), from 1906, follows Greek neoclassical lines – the door handle even resembles an Olympic torch. The **Twaalf Duivels** (Map pp174-5; Transvaalstraat 59 & 61), built in 1896 by Jules Hofman, has a timber façade that gives way to 12 wooden devils that leer at passers-by.

Zurenberg is easily reached by tram 11 (direction Eksterlaar), which runs right along Cogels-Osylei.

### GREATER ANTWERP

Some 4km south of the city centre is a large, landscaped park known as the **Openlucht-museum voor Beeldhouwkunst Middelheim** (Middelheim Open-Air Sculpture Museum; Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 828 13 50; Middelheimlaan 61; admission free; ☎ 10am-9pm Jun & Jul, 10am-8pm May & Aug, 10am-7pm Apr & Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar, closed Mon). It contains more than 300 works by sculptors, including notable nationals (Rik Wouters) and influential internationals (Auguste Rodin and Henry Moore). To get there take bus 17 (direction Wilrijk Universitair Ziekenhuis) from in front of Centraal Station, get off at Beukenlaan and walk 500m east.

### Walking Tour

This walk takes in the Grote Markt to the so-called Quartier Latin, a huddle of pedestrianised shopping streets close to the Meir. If you don't linger too long or get sidetracked, it'll take one

to 1½ hours (allow at least another 20 minutes if you cross under the river to the Linkeroever).

The **Grote Markt** (1; p179) is the obvious starting point. From here, head down Suiker-rui towards the river, noting Constantin Meunier's proud 19th-century bronze **statue** (2) entitled *Bag Bearer*, paying tribute to the city's dock workers.

At the waterfront is **Steenplein** (3), a tree-lined square home to the city's oldest building, **Het Steen** (4). This castle, dating from 1200, has been much restored; it is also a vestige of the 9th-century fortifications that once stood here. The Steen is now home to the **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum** (4; p180), marked by a statue of the mischievous Lange Wapper, a tall folkloric figure who is little more than a Peeping Tom.

On both sides of Steenplein are raised promenades known as *wandelterrassen*, built three-quarters of a century ago alongside the city's main dock so that townsfolk could view the exotic cargoes coming in from the Congo. The promenades are still immensely popular on weekends, and from **Zuidterras** (5), the south promenade, there is a great skyline view plus an essential **café pitstop** (6; p193).

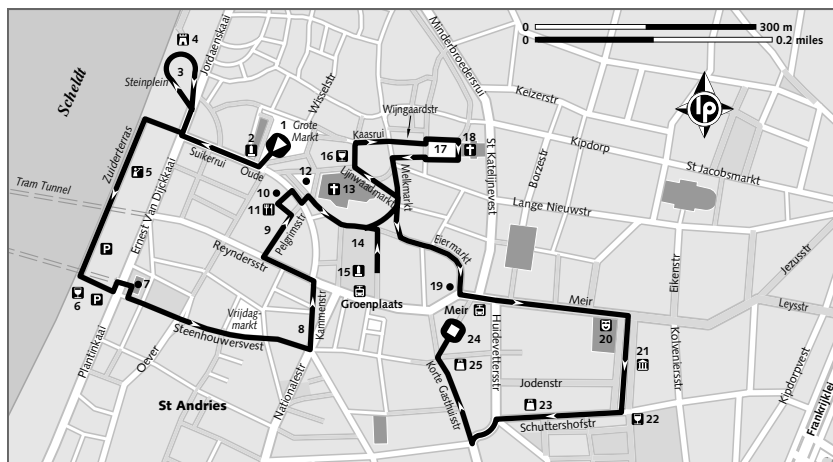
Wander the full length of the *Zuidterras* then descend to St Jansvliet, a small tree-lined square best known as the entrance to the **St Annatunnel** (7). This 572m-long pedestrian tunnel, built in the 1930s, links the city centre with the Linkeroever, or Left Bank, from where there's an excellent waterfront panorama.

Back at St Jansvliet, take Steenhouwersvest all the way to Nationalestraat, the heart of the **St Andries** (8) mode quarter. From this five-way, any street will deposit you at fashion outlets (p196). Continue north along Kammenstraat, turn left into Reyndersstraat and then right into **Pelgrimsstraat** (9), where an overpowering view of the cathedral spire awaits.

Just around the corner is the entrance to **Vlaeykengang** (10), one of the few 16th-century alleys that have survived in Antwerp. Originally these tiny streets were the domain of the city's most impoverished citizens (in this case cobblers); today Vlaeykengang is synonymous with one of the most expensive restaurants in town **Sir Anthony Van Dyck** (11; p191).

The picturesque **Handsoenmarkt** (12) is a tiny square that takes its name from the glove market that once thrived here. It's lined with gabled houses and terrace *cafés* (pub/bar), all dwarfed by the majestic **Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal** (13; p179). In a corner stands a well





### WALK FACTS

**Start** Grote Markt

**Finish** Quartier Latin

**Distance** 2km

**Duration** About 1½ hours

with wrought-iron work attributed to a 16th-century painter Quinten Matsijs. So the story goes, Matsijs (from a blacksmith family) became an artist simply to marry the daughter of a painter as, in those days, marriage between families of different guilds didn't occur.

Pass along the cobbled street on the southern side of the cathedral (named 't Waaigat by locals) to view **Groenplaats (14)**. This square was the town's graveyard until the 18th century. A much-photographed **statue of Rubens (15)**, built in 1840, commands centre stage; popular terrace *cafés* flank the northern side.

Continue around the base of the cathedral and follow Lijnwaadmarkt to '**t Elfde Gebod (16)**, p193), an ivy-clad *café* that's worth a peak for its astounding interior. Turn right along Kaasruï, cross the tram tracks and follow cobbled Wijngaardstraat to the secluded square **Hendrik Conscienceplein (17)**. Arguably the most handsome square in the city, it is named after the revered 19th-century Flemish writer Hendrik Conscience, whose statue graces the square. More commanding is the stunning façade of **St Carolus-Borromeuskerk (18)**, p180).

Join Melmarkt and follow it along to Eiermarkt, which curves around at the base of the

**Torengbouw (19)**. This stocky Art Deco building, completed in 1932, was Europe's first skyscraper. However, it's better known by its nickname 'Boerentoren' (Farmers' Tower), a snide reference to its blunt appearance.

The Torengbouw marks the western end of the pedestrianised Meir, the city's stately main artery and shopper's hive. Gilded, allegorical statues top many of the classical and rococo-style buildings that line this thoroughfare. Look out for the **Koninklijk Paleis (20)**, a palatial building used at various times by Napoleon and the Belgian royal family.

Just off the Meir is the prestigious **Rubenshuis (21)**, p181) and nearby the **Grand Café Horta (22)**, p193). Wander west now along Schuttershofstraat, one of the city's most vaunted shopping streets, and with plenty of euros to spare stop at Belgium's best shoe shop, **Cocodrillo (23)**, p196). Round the corner into Korte Gasthuisstraat and the start of the pedestrianised **Quartier Latin (24)**, a huddle of small streets where shopping is on everyone's list. Don't miss the window display at discreet **Burie (25)**, p196), a top-class chocolate boutique.

### Antwerp for Children

Kids love **Antwerp Zoo (p182)**, and many enjoy **Flandria boat trips** (opposite), walking through **St Annatunnel (p185)** underneath the Scheldt or riding the **Peerdentram** (opposite).

**Aquatopia (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 205 07 40; www.aquatopia.be; adult/child €12/8; ☎ 10am-6pm)**, inside the Astrid Park Plaza Hotel near Centraal Station, is a watery hit. Newly revamped, it's now one

of the most interactive and realistic marine theme parks in Europe. Let multilingual Fibu the octopus guide the kids.

The **playground (Map pp176-7)** at the northern corner of Stadspark is good for littlies.

Remember, too, that **Technopolis (p204)** and **Planckendael animal park (p205)** are within easy striking distance just outside Mechelen.

### Tours

**Diamond Bus (☎ 0478 48 28 20; adult/concession/child €11/10/6; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Jul-Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-May)** Hop-on hop-off double-decker bus that runs continuously around the city.

**Flandria (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 31 00; www.flandria.boat.com; Steenplein; adult/concession €7.50/6; ☎ Easter-Oct) One for boaties.** The 50-minute Scheldt excursion departs from Steenplein and affords great views of the city skyline. The 2½-hour harbour cruise (adult/concession €12/6) departs from *kaai* (quay) No 14 (Map pp174-5) in 't Eilandje, 1km north of the Grote Markt, daily at 2.30pm from May to September and 2.30pm Friday to Sunday in October.

**Peerdentram (Grote Markt; tour €5; ☎ from noon Apr-Oct)** Old-fashioned coach drawn by two stocky Brabant horses. Does a 40-minute tour of the old city centre, departing hourly from the Grote Markt.

**Rent A Bike (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 290 49 62; www.antwerpikes.be; Lijnwaadmarkt 6; tour €16.50; ☎ 9am-6pm)** This bike-rental company also runs good two-hour guided tours around town.

### Festivals & Events

For details on summer music parties, see boxed text (p194).

**Beerpassie Weekend (www.beerpassie.com)** Late June sees Antwerp extol the virtues of Belgian beer. In 2006, 35 brewers set up, and visitors could taste 156 beers – €2 for a 20mL *proefglas* (tasting glass).

**Sfinks Festival (www.sfinks.be)** This four-day world-music celebration is held in Boechout, near Antwerp, at the end of July.

**Jazz Middelheim (www.jazzmiddelheim.be)** Biennial (in odd years), week-long jazz festival in the second week of August, held in Park Den Brandt (Map pp174-5) in Antwerp. One of the city's biggest shindigs.

### Sleeping

Antwerp's scene is on the up. Designer B&Bs have taken off in recent times as locals convert homes into cutting-edge accommodation to keep abreast with the city's image. Check out what's on offer at **Gilde der Antwerpse Gastenkamers (www.gastenkamersantwerpen.be)**. A new, ecofriendly HI hostel will open in 2009 in the city's heart. And hotels offering hefty weekend reductions

mean great last-minute deals for visitors (book via the internet or tourist office).

### BUDGET

**Camping De Molen (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 219 81 79; Thonetlaan; camp sites per adult/car/tent €2/1/2.50; ☎ Apr-Sep)** One of two camping grounds in the city. This one is pleasantly sited on the Linkeroever (Left Bank) of the Scheldt River; take bus 81 or 82 (direction Linkeroever).

**Hostel Op Sinjoorke (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 02 73; www.vjh.be; Eric Sasselaan 2; dm/s/d €14.50/29/42; ☎ closed Dec; ☎ )** Run-of-the-mill HI-affiliated hostel nearly 3km south of the city centre. To get there take tram 2 (direction Hoboken). A new hostel, with an inner garden, rooftop terrace and much better location, is due to open on Bogaardeplein in early 2009.

**Den Heksenketel (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 71 64; www.heksenketel.org in Flemish; Pelgrimstraat 22; dm €19)** The only cheap accommodation in the city's heart and located on a street with an unbeatable cathedral view. Three simple but fresh dorms are situated above a small folk-music club (concerts Monday, jam sessions Thursday). Take *premetro* (a tram that runs underground for part of its journey) tram 2 or 15 to Groenplaats.

### MIDRANGE

**Internationaal Zeemanshuis (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 227 54 33; www.zeemanshuis.be; Falconuri 21; s/d from €39/61; ☎ )** Large hotel originally built for visiting seamen. This efficiently run complex with polished rooms welcomes women and land-lubbers these days, too.

**B&B Emperor's 48 (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 288 73 37; www.emperors48.com; Keizerstraat 48; s/d €45/65, apt €130; ☎ ☎ )** Well-located B&B halfway between Centraal Station and the Grote Markt sporting two rooms plus a self-contained apartment. If you're here with a handful of friends, book the whole place. The furnishings are sober but stylish, and the owner's a respected photographer.

**Hotel Scheldezicht (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 66 02; www.hotelscheldezicht.be; St Jansvliet 2; s/d/tr from €45/65/85; ☎ )** Old-style hotel, well sited on a tree-lined square close to the river in the old city centre. The spacious rooms have private shower cubicles, but the toilets are shared. Breakfast is taken in a quaint room loaded with old paintings and B&W photos. Rooms with a view of the square are €5 dearer.

**Big Sleep (Map pp176-7; ☎ 0474 84 95 65; www.intro04.be/thebigsleep; Kromme Elleboogstraat 4; s/d/t/q €45/65/85/100)** Appropriately named B&B that

## GAY & LESBIAN ANTWERP

Antwerp's gay and lesbian scene is small, discreet and vibrant. Unlike Brussels, there's no focal point – bars, *cafés* (pub/bar) and clubs are dotted around town, and the city hosts one of the biggest gay nightclubs in this corner of Europe.

**Den Draak** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 288 00 84; www.hetrozehuis.be in Flemish; Draakplaats 1; 🕒 3pm-midnight Tue-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) *Café* and community centre, also known as Het Roze Huis (the Pink House), for Antwerp's gay and lesbian community. It's located in the Zurenborg (take tram 11 direction Eksterlaar).

**Atthis** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 216 37 37; www.atthis.be in Flemish; Geuzenstraat 27; 🕒 from 8.30pm Fri & Sat) Meeting place and bar for Belgium's longest-running lesbian group. Celebrates 30 years in 2008.

**Café Hessenhuis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 13 56; Falconrui 53; 🕒 10am-late) Popular *café* in the old Hessenhuis building, an historic 16th-century warehouse that was rediscovered by a group of artists in the 1950s and given a total makeover. The *café's* cool, modern interior attracts a trendy mixed clientele during the day, but evenings tend to be exclusively for gay men.

**Popi Café** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 238 15 30; Plantinkaai 12; 🕒 from noon) Big stylish *café-brasserie* near the river and popular with a gay/mixed bunch. Serves light meals (€9 to €14).

**Chez Fred** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 257 1471; Kloosterstraat 83; mains €15) Little resto-bar with an outside terrace good for watching the *brocante* (bric-a-brac) shoppers.

**Red & Blue** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 213 05 55; www.redandblue.be; Lange Schipperskapelstraat 11; 🕒 11pm-7am Sat) Bills itself as 'the biggest gay disco in Benelux' (that is, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). True or not, it's the city's hottest gay (only) nightclub and certainly draws punters from kilometres around. On Friday night it draws a mixed crowd to the sounds of house, techno, rap and soul.

**Boots** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 34 83; Van Aerdtsstraat 22; 🕒 10.30pm-late Fri & Sat) Has the distinction of being the country's most disreputable nightclub, with rooms devoted to fulfilling almost every imaginable sexual fantasy.

**Boekhandel 't Verschil** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 08 04; Minderbroedersrui 33; 🕒 noon-6pm Wed-Sun) Gay and lesbian bookshop plus a *café*.

**B&B 2000** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 234 12 10; http://guestrooms.happygays.be; Van Boendalestraat 8; s/d €30/42; 🗺) A rainbow flag flying from the top floor announces B&B 2000 to those in search of this poky backstreet. The friendly owners, Luc and Steven, and their big dog Jack have four rooms with shared bathroom in this whitewashed townhouse. The rooms are small and ordinary, reflecting the price.

occupies part of a mustard-toned family home close to the river in the *brocante* (bric-a-brac) quarter. A grey-grill door opens to a huge ground-floor bedroom that stretches from a whitewashed breakfast salon and lounge area to a wood-decked courtyard. Another smaller room for guests is located upstairs.

**Aan de Leien B&B** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 288 66 95; tony.vandepitte@telenet.be; Britselei 49 bte 6; s/d €55/62, penthouse €100; 🗺) This is one of the most sought-after addresses in Antwerp – take the lift to the 6th floor of an ugly apartment block and you'll soon see why. This B&B offers two small rooms and a penthouse suite – it's the latter you're after. Oodles of private space ends with a panoramic terrace specially designed for sipping sundowners. Located just over 1km from Centraal Station – take tram 8 from Berchem train station or bus 23 from Centraal Station.

**Floatel Diamond Princess** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 227 08 15; www.diamondprincess.be; Bonapartedok; s/d/st €57/77/139; 🗺) Former 1952 Norwegian passenger ship that's been transformed into a hotel complete with piano bar and disco. It's moored in a dock in 't Eilandje, right next to the new MAS museum. Though hard to believe, there are 52 cabins on board: all pretty small but pleasantly decorated. The most unusual is the suite – it tries hard to be romantic but the bed would defeat even Simenon.

**Ibis Antwerpen Centrum** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 88 30; www.ibishotel.com; Meistraat 39; s/d from €79/82; 🗺) Modern chain hotel (Accor group) that offers standard facilities and a central location. Handy to Rubenshuis and the fashion quarter, though the immediate area is nondescript and the view of Het Paleis theatre ghastly. It's particularly interesting for late risers or those into dancing until dawn – the buffet

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Bed, Bad & Brood** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 248 15 39; www.bbantwerp.com; Justitiestraat 43; s/d/f €50/60/85, minimum 2 nights; 🗺) 'Bed, Bath & Bread' is the city's best B&B deal. The friendly couple running it have offered midrange quality at bottom-end prices for years. The grand Art Deco townhouse has an impressive entrance – wrought-iron door and marble staircase – but things become less imposing as you reach the 1st floor. Here creaking wooden floors, old-fashioned furnishings and spacious rooms are the salient features. Ask for the Victoria & Vicky room (with it's quaint side shoot) if you're travelling with kids or a baby. A healthy buffet breakfast is served in a pleasant communal room.

BB&B is a 25-minute walk to the Grote Markt or easily accessed by public transport. To get there take tram 12 or 24 from Koningin Astridplein next to Centraal Station.

breakfast (€10) goes from 6.30am to 10am after which coffee and croissants are offered until noon.

**B&B Le Patio** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 76 61; www.lepatio.be; Pelgrimstraat 8; r €90; 🗺) Step up to the door of Le Patio and swoon at the unbeatable cathedral view. Located smack in the very heart of the city on a pedestrianised street brimming with restaurants and *cafés*, this friendly place has three modern rooms – blue, red or yellow – all built around a small inner courtyard. And, unusual for Belgium, the only stairs you'll climb are those to the old beamed breakfast room with its big communal table, located on the 1st floor.

**Patine** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 257 09 19; www.wijnbistropatine.be; Leopold de Waelstraat 1; r €100) Fabulous B&B address, located at the epicentre of 't Zuid, above one of the quarter's best-known eateries (see p192). Just one spacious 1st-floor room is available, offering simple, white décor with a corner living area overlooking the heart of hip. A great address for families (double bed plus sofa bed plus kitchenette) or those into a room with a view.

**B&B Siddhartha** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 97 44; www.bazarbar.be in Flemish; Steenhouwersvest 18; d/tr/f €122/162/212) There's nothing understated about Siddhartha. Awaken senses as you climb two flights to a world of colour and vitality – romantic fuchsia for the main room, apple green for the adjoining twin. The immediately likeable owner, Els Ongenae, has similar flair. She runs the Asian gift shop on the ground floor, and has decorated her B&B with wares from the shop. It's conveniently located in the fashion quarter and, for those with a car, Els provides a free parking card for the nearby car park.

**Slapenanzo** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 216 27 85; www.slapenanzo.be; Karel Rogierstraat 20; r from €130; 🗺) New designer hotel that's simply got the sexiest feel. It occupies two adjoining century-old

townhouses on a quiet street near 't Zuid's Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Step inside to a world of virginal white, backed by walls decorated with suggestive art and faux-fur throws over the beds. By the time you read this 15 rooms should be up and running, all with monochrome colours – black, white or mocha – some with marble baths and open fires, plus a cellar spa and sauna. And it has all been done by one friendly couple with a flair for cutting-edge cool. Tram 8 from Groenplaats stops nearby.

Also recommended:

**Hotel Antigone** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 66 77; www.antigonehotel.be; Jordaenskaai 11-12; s/d/tr €85/95/115; 🗺) Waterfront hotel, close to 't Schipperskwartier, that's popular with a clubbing crowd. The sugary-sweet baroque reception contrasts with '70s rooms – pink fans and green bedspreads.

**Aandekeizer B&B** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 225 22 96; www.aandekeizer.be; Keizerstraat 62; s/d €92/100; 🗺) Old-world charm and fabulous hosts are the watchword at this central B&B located on a quiet backstreet.

## TOP END

**Hotel 't Sandt** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 93 90; www.hotel-sandt.be; Zand 17; s/d from €135/150; 🗺) Classy classified hotel down by the Scheldt that was once a customs house and later a soap factory. The rooms are a tasteful marriage of modern and old, and some on the top floor have charming beamed ceilings. There are also some duplexes.

**Hotel Rubens** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 222 48 48; www.hotelrubensantwerp.be; Oude Beurs 29; s/d Mon-Fri €160/188, r front/back Sat & Sun €150/170; 🗺) Old-fashioned hotel with 36 rooms, just a stone's throw from the Grote Markt. The mellow-toned rooms have floral prints and classical furniture.

**B&B Charles Rogier XI** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 0475 29 99 89; www.charlesrogierxi.be; Karel Rogierstraat 11; d €180; 🗺)

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Hotel Julien** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 229 06 00; www.hotel-julien.com; Korte Nieuwstraat 24; r from €165; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) New and very discreet design hotel, and a dream come true for former interior designer Mouch Van Hul. Mouch has renovated two historic houses on a ragged unloved little street right in the city's heart. The 11 contemporary rooms exude her love of understated elegance and subtle style. The approach is intimate and informal, and highly romantic. Choose an outback 'Patio' room, situated around a green courtyard, for real seclusion. Closest metro is Meir, or take tram 10 (direction Melkmarkt) from Gemeentestraat next to Koningin Astridplein.

Urked by modern minimalism? Then step into a world away from current reality... a place where beds were high, phones didn't exist and an afternoon snooze on a daybed was mandatory. This 't Zuid townhouse has three rooms – English (1st floor), Scottish (2nd floor) and French (3rd floor) – all loaded with antiques, heavy fabrics and floral designs. Sunken baths, handmade linen, red wine, a Belgian chocolate before bed and a fine breakfast are other enticements. Oh, and if you're not into stuffed foxes and pheasants, ask for the French room (it's also the only room that's air-conditioned). Tram 8 from Groenplaats stops nearby.

**De Witte Lelie** (The White Lily; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 19 66; www.dewittelie.be; Keizerstraat 16-18; s/d €195/265, ste from €275; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Push the gold button and wait to be ushered into this gorgeous hotel. Occupying three renovated 16th-century mansions built around a central courtyard on a quiet backstreet not far from the Grote Markt, it has just 10 luxurious rooms, individually furnished with an outstanding mix of modern and antique. The blend of white décor, polished wooden floors and exposed oak beams creates an atmosphere of peace and calm. Breakfast is taken in the big open kitchen on the ground floor. There's no bar, but that's hardly a problem in Antwerp. Babies (cot €10) and children (prices vary depending on age) are welcome; reservations wise.

**Eating**

Foodies love Antwerp. Dining out is a favourite local pastime, resulting in a staggering number of restaurants. The old city centre is well

endowed with eateries in all price categories: Suikerrui is the street for mussels, Grote Pieter Potstraat has funky *cafés* and bistros, Pelgrimstraat is popular with tourists and the cobbled streets around Hendrik Conscienceplein are dotted with intimate restaurants. In between all of these are quiet side streets and cobbled lanes where restaurants of all descriptions thrive. Outside the old city centre there's also plenty on offer: 't Zuid has an ever-increasing line-up of trend-setting establishments, 't Eilandje calls with monumental restaurants and St Andries allures with food alongside fashion. Visit **Out in Antwerp** (www.outinantwerp.be in Flemish) for the latest on dining.

**QUICK EATS**

**Soep & Soup** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 707 28 05; Kammenstraat 89; small/large bowl €4.25/5.50; ☒ ☒ 11am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) At this buzzing soup bar in trendy St Andries, five pots of soup, all made with fresh ingredients, simmer away. Vegos can ask to hold the meatballs.

**Het Dagelijks Brood** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 76 13; Steenhouwersvest 48; light meals €5-9; ☒ ☒ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun) This bakery/tearoom, located in the heart of St Andries, is part of a successful chain (see p103). The house speciality is *boterhammen* (slices of bread with exotic toppings), but there's also a good range of soups and salads.

Also recommended:

**Frituur No 1** (Map pp176-7; Hoogstraat 1) Makes the city's finest *frites* (fries). Close to the Grote Markt.

**La Cuisine** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 42 71; St Pieter & Paulusstraat 7; mains €6-7.50, 3-course menu €7.50; ☒ ☒ noon-2.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) The cheapest eatery in town is run by youth learning the trade.

**RESTAURANTS****Old City Centre**

**Façade** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 59 31; Hendrik Conscienceplein 18; mains €9-18; ☒ ☒ 11am-10.30pm) Unpretentious little restaurant that occupies two quaint houses on one of the most delightful public squares in Antwerp. Comprises two rooms plus a tiny mezzanine and an outdoor terrace. The French-Belgian cuisine is well priced and beautifully presented – the *scampis in look* (garlic prawns) are divine. Love the modern touches around the bar, and the gorgeous lamps suspended from the old timber ceiling.

**Berlin** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 227 11 01; Kleine Markt 1-3; dagschotel €9, mains €12-17; ☒ ☒ 7.30am-1am Mon-Wed, 10am-3am Fri-Sun) Spacious brasserie underneath

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Lombardia** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 68 19; Lombardenvest 78; light meals €4-8; ☒ ☒ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) A legendary health-food shop and *café* located at the heart of the pedestrianised Quartier Latin shopping district. It's run by a hip crew, the décor's way out and the food's all *bio* (organic). Sells a bit of everything, has English-language newspapers, snappy service and a few tables for diners (plus a huge summer terrace under a shady tree). *Bio* milkshakes – either beastie or vegan – go for €6, fresh juices are €4.50, and there's a range of salads, vegetable pies and sandwiches. The sign above the counter asks that customers 'Do not spit' – now that's health conscious.

the police tower in St Andries, with bold design features and black and tan décor. Attracts an eclectic crowd from jeans-minded teens to the old lady who lives round the corner. Simple honest bistro fare is served, including homemade shrimp croquettes. Great place to drop in for a drink, snack or meal.

**Bourla & Mares** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 16 32; Kelderstraat 3; mains €16-25; ☒ ☒ 11am-1am Mon-Sat) Excellent bistro-restaurant on a pedestrianised backstreet in the shadow of the Bourlaschouwburg. Ultramodern with a touch of antique and Art Nouveau. The cuisine is predominantly Italian with a seafood slant. Pop in any time – the kitchen is open from noon to midnight.

**Hungry Henrietta** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 29 28; Lombardenvest 19; mains €17-21, ☒ ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Three different locations in 35 years have done nothing to deter the fans. The strong stark décor – all black – contrasts with the light Flemish cuisine. The *dagschotel* (dish of the day; €13) is well priced.

**Pottenbrug** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 51 47; Minderbroedersrui 38; mains €17-27; ☒ ☒ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Old bistro that has changed little over the years and still gets rave reviews. Tables close together, antique posters and a terrace in summer.

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Walrus** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 39 93; Jan van Beersstraat 2; mains €11-16; ☒ ☒ from noon) Modern atmospheric *eetcafé* (eating *café*) at the southern end of 't Zuid, in an area ripe to take off. Its out-of-the-way location means few tourists come here – this is local central. Sit on the terrace to see the sails of the controversial new Justitiepleis, or dine inside on dishes any Belgian Mum would be proud to serve. Very kid friendly, too. To get here take tram 12 (direction Bolivarplaats) from Gemeentestraat near Koningin Astridplein.

**De Kleine Zavel** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 96 91; Stooftstraat 2; mains €20-27; ☒ ☒ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner daily) *Gezellig* (cosy, convivial atmosphere) bistro-style décor and an informal atmosphere belie this restaurant's standing as one of the most sought-after and reliable eateries in the whole country. Fusion cooking with an accent on fish and Mediterranean flavours are the go. For wine lovers there's an extensive world list, and those into beer will find old wooden crates incorporated into the rustic décor. Parking is handy on the nearby quays.

**Sir Anthony Van Dyck** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 61 70; Oude Koornmarkt 16; mains €24-32, 4-course menu €44; ☒ ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Named after a local baroque artist, this is one of the city's finest restaurants, with innovative Flemish cuisine and a secretive location in the Vlaeyckensgang, a tiny, cobbled 16th-century alley. Inside the décor is modern but calm. Booking is necessary.

**Het Nieuwe Palinghuis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 74 45; St Jansvliet 14; mains €25-32; ☒ ☒ lunch Wed-Sun; ☒ ☒) Seafood restaurant well known for its attentive service and seasonal food. Mussels go for around €25.

Also recommended:

**Eethuisje De Stoempot** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 36 86; Vlasmarkt 12; mains €7.50-15; ☒ ☒ dinner Thu-Mon) Granny would feel right at home in this place. Big portions of *stoemp* (mashed potatoes) are slapped onto plates and paired with a *boerenworst* (sausage) or a *spiegelei* (fried egg).

**De Peerdestal** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 95 03; Wijn-gaardstraat 8; mains €15-22; ☒ ☒ lunch & dinner) One of many restaurants in this atmospheric cobblestone quarter. This one caters to tourists keen to sample the house speciality – horse (*paard* in Flemish). A *fillet van paard* costs €21, while a regular horse steak is a bit cheaper.

**'t Zuid**

**L'Entrepot du Congo** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 0475 52 82 15; Vlaamsekaai 42; snacks €3-5, mains €8-12; ☒ ☒ 7.30am-2am Sun-Thu, 7.30am-4am Fri & Sat) The first bistro to open in 't Zuid and it still pulls the locals. Occupies a renovated stone warehouse and is

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Gin Fish** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 32 07; Haarstraat 9; 4-course menu excl/incl wine €60/75; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sat; 🍷) Didier Garnich knew it was risky closing his seafood restaurant De Matelote and relinquishing its Michelin star. But he longed for the pre-Michelin days, when an open kitchen allowed him to laugh with the people whose meals he was preparing, and there was no mandate to slavishly follow classic formulas. So he took the gamble and opened Gin Fish. Same address, same attention to quality, same devotion to fish... only this time he's doing it his way. There's no exhaustive seafood menu, as out-of-season fish is not an option. Instead, only the freshest catch is cooked, and only one menu-of-the-day is offered: two entrées, a main and dessert. Each evening has three sittings – 6pm, 8.30pm and 10pm. And for pre- or post-dinner drinks, hit the cosy lounge next door. Bookings are essential.

noticeably less pretentious than other eateries in this area. Drinks are reasonably priced and the bistro-style food – sandwiches, pasta dishes, steaks and salads – is a cut above the average. The kitchen closes at 10.30pm.

**Patine** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 257 09 19; Leopold de Waelstraat 1; mains €7-11; 🍷 8am-1am Mon-Fri, 9am-2am Sat & Sun) Give minimalism the flick in this bohemian little wine bar-restaurant-tearoom that also doubles as a B&B (see p189). The décor is warm and soothing, the clientele's a mix of everyone (including poodles), and the cuisine is light and healthy – salad, quiche and pasta dishes.

**El Pintxo's** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 237 06 00; Riemstraat 49; lunch/dinner menu €10/20; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Antwerp's first *pintxo* (the Basque version of *tapas*) bar has a cool, sober interior lorded over by a big red bull. The *pintxos variados* dinner menu (€20) includes five cold and four warm servings – great for satisfying those who want to test the lot.

**Dansing Chocola** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 237 19 05; Kloosterstraat 159; mains €11-15; 🍷 10am-1.30am) Another *eetcafé* (*café* serving food) but this time things are decidedly old fashioned. Excellent spot for a simple Belgian bite before or after trawling the nearby *brocante* shops on Kloosterstraat and Oever. The kitchen closes at 10pm.

**Soeki** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 75 05; Volkstraat 21; assortment of *tapas* plus glass of champagne €15-25; 🍷 dinner Wed-Sun) Tiny *tapas* and champagne bar that seduces passers-by with smooth velvet décor, multinational *tapas* and champagne by the glass.

### Centraal Station Quarter

**Faites Simple** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 64 67; Quellinstraat 30; mains €10-15; 🍷 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Organic vegetables, hormone-free meat and artisanal products are the mainstay of this

stylish (mainly) vegetarian restaurant. The interior is an arty blend of glass, light and Art Nouveau. In summer the garden terrace at the back makes a welcome respite in this busy part of town.

**Lamalo** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 213 22 00; Appelmansstraat 21; mains €20-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Thu & Sun; 🍷) For many years this kosher Mediterranean restaurant was one of the area's best-kept secrets. Relocation and an image (and price) hike means it's now well known outside this quarter. The cuisine is from Israel, Lebanon and Morocco. The plate of 10 assorted *meze* (€20 for two people) is excellent. Décor-wise it's warm but suffers no nonsense.

### 't Eilandje

**Het Pomphuis** (☎ 03 770 86 25; Siberiastraat; mains €21-25; 🍷 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Monumental restaurant-brasserie-bar that occupies an old pump house located on a spit way to the north of the old city centre in the surreal world of Antwerp's mammoth harbour. Inside it's one big glassy space, overseen by eclectic architectural features, including Art Nouveau elements. Enter and come face-to-face with a 7m deep pit where the pumps once turned. The restaurant does Belgian and world cuisine, and the service is friendly and attentive. If you're without a car, a taxi's a must.

### SELF-CATERING

**Delhaize** (Map pp176-7; Nationalestraat 52) Supermarket in St Andries.

**Super GB** (Map pp176-7; Groenplaats; 🍷 8.30am-8pm) Supermarket in the basement of the Grand Bazar shopping centre.

**Vogelmarkt** (Map pp176-7; Theaterplein; 🍷 6am-3pm Sat & Sun) Antwerp's principal food market takes over the huge square behind Het Paleis theatre every weekend. Saturday is the big day.

### Drinking

The only thing better in Antwerp than eating is drinking. Small convivial pubs, converted warehouses and grand *cafés* abound. Excellent terrace *cafés* for soaking up the city's atmosphere are scattered around Handschoenmarkt, Groenplaats, Hendrik Conscienceplein and Wapper.

**Zuiderterras** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 234 12 75; Ernest van Dijkstraal 37; 🍷 9am-midnight) Modern landmark *café*-restaurant located at the southern end of the riverside promenade. Designed by the city's eminent contemporary architect, bOb (sic) Van Reeth, it mixes black, white and metal, and the enormous plate-glass windows provide superb river views. In summer a terrace fans out onto the walkway and it makes a superb place to while away an hour or two watching Antwerpenaars wandering the quayside.

**Den Engel** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 12 52; Grote Markt 3; 🍷 9am-late) Located in a guildhall and one of the city's oldest watering holes. A reasonable number of tourists dilute the locals – join them in downing a *bolleke* (little bowl) of De Koninck (The King), the city's favourite ale.

**Grand Café Horta** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 28 15; Hopland 2; 🍷 9am-9pm Tue-Sun) Much vaunted *café*-restaurant that incorporates iron girders salvaged from Victor Horta's ill-fated *Maison du Peuple* (see boxed text, p88). It's a good place to sip an *Élixir d'Anvers*, a saccharin-sweet, bright-yellow liqueur made in Antwerp since 1863 and reputed to aid digestion – Louis Pasteur even awarded it a diploma in 1887.

**De Vagant** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 15 38; Reyndersstraat 21; 🍷 noon-late) Those into *jenever* (Belgian gin)

should make a beeline here. More than 200 *jenever* are served in this humble *café*. The house cocktail – a potent mix of white and lemon *jenever* plus a few other liqueurs and fruit juice (€4.50) – is worth trying.

**'t Elfde Gebod** (The 11th Commandment; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 36 11; Torfbrug 10; 🍷 noon-late) A real tourist trap (i.e. expensive beers), but worth a look for its angel-adorned interior.

**Bierhuis Kulminator** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 45 38; Vlemingkveld 32; 🍷 from 8pm Mon, from 11am Tue-Fri, from 5pm Sat) The place to sink a host of Belgian beers. It has been around for years and boasts 700 types of beer, many of them stacked up behind the counter. Don't bother deciphering the beer list – just point.

**Bar Tabac** (Map pp174-5; www.bartabac.be; Waalsekaai 43; 🍷 8pm-7am Wed-Sun) Tiny bar that looks like it was plucked from a village in rural France and plonked in 't Zuid. The odd thing is it has been going for years and is always packed. The décor's no more than a faded Michelin map and two old cigarette vending machines, plus a hotchpotch of old metal tables and chairs. In summer there's a terrace section for relaxing on crusty cinema seats; in winter everyone's jammed inside. 'Drunk Wednesdays' see beers going for €1 and a DJ spinning tracks.

**Mogador** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 238 71 60; Graaf van Egmontstraat 57; 🍷 6pm-3am Wed-Sun) It's back to black in this champagne bar in 't Zuid – a real gossip den for the bold and beautiful.

### Entertainment

Antwerp's entertainment scene lacks nothing. Several free entertainment guides list what's happening, but the most concise for non-Flemish speakers is *Week Up*. It's available from the tourist office and many *cafés*.

Tickets for concert, opera, theatre and dance performances can be bought from two locations:

**FNAC** (Map pp176-7; ☎ ticket office 0900 006 00; Groenplaats; 🍷 10am-6.15pm) Inside the Grand Bazar shopping centre.

**Prospekta** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 203 95 86; Grote Markt 13; 🍷 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat) Shares a guildhall with the tourist office.

### CINEMAS

**Cartoons** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 96 32; Kaasstraat 4-6) The place to get away from general release Hollywood pulp. Art-house movies and quality foreign films are screened in its three auditoriums. Tickets are discounted on Monday.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Oud Arsenaal** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 97 54; Pijpelinstraat 4; 🍷 7.30am-7.30pm Fri-Wed) Catch it while it lasts. This is one of the city's most congenial brown *cafés*, located on a pedestrianised street opposite the Grand Café Horta, in an area that has undergone massive regeneration in recent times. Popular with stallholders from the weekend Vogelmarkt and elderly locals during the week, it will be interesting to see if a pint-sized pub like this can hold out against the fashion nudge. Beers are among the cheapest in town (just €2.50 for a Duvel) and it's one of the few everyday pubs in Belgium to stock Westvleteren Trappist beer (see p47).

**Roma** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 235 04 90; Turnhoutsebaan 286) Antwerp's last old cinema and concert hall. It dates from 1928, and in the '70s was a popular venue for international artists – AC/DC, Lou Reed and James Brown all played here. Recently returned to life thanks to determined community effort, it now screens a varied line-up of off-beat films, Hollywood hits and kids' matinees. It's located east of Centraal Station in Borgerhout, a suburb that's chiefly home to Moroccan immigrants, and is rarely visited by tourists. Tram 10 or 24 stops out the front.

Also recommended:

**Fotomuseum** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 242 93 00; www.fotomuseum.be; Waalsekaai 47) Golden oldies screened nightly.

**Metropolis** (☎ 0900 005 55; Groenendaallaan 394) Twenty-four-screen monstrosity way to the north of the city. Take bus 720 from Franklin Rooseveltplaats.

**UGC** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 0900 104 40; Van Ertbornstraat 17) Seventeen-screen cinema complex near Centraal Station.

## LIVE MUSIC

**Café Hopper** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 248 49 33; Leopold De Waelstraat 2) One of the city's most popular jazz venues, located in 't Zuid. There's usually live sessions on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday. It's small, so come early if you want to get your foot in the door. Admission costs around €8 for established acts.

**Buster** (Map pp176-7; www.busterpodium.be; Kaasruil 1; ☎ 8pm-late) Little place, just off the Grote

Markt, that stages live concerts on Tuesday (mainly jazz and rock'n'roll; admission €7 to €10) as well as jam sessions (Thursday from 8pm; free admission) when anyone can take to the podium.

**Crossroads Café** (Map pp174-5; www.crossroadscafe.be; Mechelsesteenweg 8; admission €2.50-10) The city's chief exponent of the blues, this unpretentious *café* features regular live concerts (from 5pm to 8pm most Sundays) by local or visiting bands. There's also a free concert at 8pm most Mondays. It's about 1km from the Grote Markt; tram 7 (direction Mortsel) stops at the front.

**De Muze** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 01 26; Melkmarkt 15; ☎ noon-4am) In the early '70s this was the meeting place for the city's free-thinking youth. The radical edge is gone, but it's still an immensely popular *café* spanning three floors with an Escher-like interior and a bastion of live jazz (from 10pm Monday to Saturday).

## NIGHTCLUBS

Antwerp's club scene begins with smooth lounges featuring in-house DJs and ends with high-octane house parties. The scene melds permanent with one-off in a mix that holds both mainstream and alternative. Trance and experimental electronica are big – check out **Noctis** (www.noctis.com) to track down clubs, one-off parties or festivals. Alternatively, pick up fliers at **Fish & Chips** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 227 08 24; Kammenstraat 36-38) and see boxed text (below).

**Café d'Anvers** (Map pp176-7; www.café-d-anvers.com; Verversruil 15; ☎ 11pm-7.30am Fri & Sat) Well over a

decade old and still going strong, this legendary club does funk and house, disco and soul in a refurbished church in the city's red-light district. Many of Belgium's top DJs started here, and more are breeding. Every Friday night in July and August the club puts on Free Vibes, free dance nights featuring new, resident and visiting DJs.

**Café Local** (Map pp174-5; www.cafélocal.be; Waalsekaai 25; ☎ from 10pm Tue-Sat) A long-time favourite, in 't Zuid, Café Local was once known for its techno parties but these days it prefers the sounds of salsa and global grooves.

**Kaaiman** (Map pp174-5; www.kaaiman.be; Napelsstraat 57; ☎ 10pm-late Fri & Sat) Alternative types flock to this small club occupying a converted red-brick garage in 't Eilandje. Music is eclectic with a lean to house and drum'n'bass.

**Pier 19** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 288 78 61; Brouwersvliet 19; ☎ midnight-5am Thu-Sat) Small cellar club on the edge of 't Eilandje that's done out in pristine white with a glass bar and laid-back lounge music. Attracts a 25 to 40ish crowd.

**Space** (Map pp176-7; Frankrijklei 53; ☎ 6am-2pm Mon, Tue & Sat, 8am-6am Sun) Down near Centraal Station, this is the after-club club. Dancing starts when the streetlights go out.

In 't Zuid, check out Luikstraat for the line-up of lounges/clubs/restaurants that are forever reincarnating here – at last count **Stereo Sushi** (Map pp174-5; Luikstraat 6) was leading the pack.

For details on Red & Blue, see boxed text (p188) and for La Rocca, see p201.

## SPORT

Antwerp traditionally had two top competing football clubs, Antwerp and Beerschot. Both are now so degraded that Beerschot amalgamated with a suburban soccer club to become Germinal Beerschot and Antwerp kicks along on its own. You'd have to be mad keen to bother with a game here.

## THEATRE, DANCE & OPERA

**deSingel** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 248 28 28; www.desingel.be; Desguinlei 25) This is the city's chief venue for classical music, international theatre and modern dance. It has two concert halls, and a highly innovative programme is offered throughout the year.

**Bourlaschouwburg** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 224 88 44; Komedieplaats 18) Beautiful old theatre with a rounded façade topped by statues of nine muses, composers and writers. Built in the 1830s for the city's French-speaking elite by architect Pierre

Bourla, it eventually fell into disuse and was on the brink of demolition only a decade or so ago. It's now home to Het Toneelhuis theatre company. This company also commonly plays at a second venue, Studio Tokio (Map pp174-5) on Museumstraat in 't Zuid.

**Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 234 34 38; www.koninklijkballetvanvlaanderen.be; Westkaai 16) The Royal Flanders Ballet, founded in 1960, is the nation's only classical dance company. It moved to 't Eilandje in the late 1990s, and its impressive home – a purpose-built palatial grey building – harmonises perfectly with the area's maritime architecture. The ballet performs both here and at the Vlaamse Opera.

**Vlaamse Opera** (Flemish Opera House; Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 66 85; Frankrijklei 3) A stunning building and a fitting place to hear a performance by the highly regarded Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera (Royal Flemish Opera). Built in 1907, the building's majestic façade is unfortunately diminished by the mirrored monstrosity built next to it in the 1960s. Still, the marbled interior is sumptuous and the quality of the performances superb. Tickets generally cost €10 to €60.

**Zuiderpershuis** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 248 01 00; www.zuiderpershuis.be; Waalsekaai 14) This cultural centre in 't Zuid specialises in music, dance, theatre and workshops from non-Western cultures. An impressive calendar of events includes at least three artists or groups performing weekly. Tickets generally cost €10 to €20. There's also a popular *café* attached to the venue.

**Koningin Elisabethzaal** (Queen Elisabeth Concert Hall; Map pp176-7; ☎ 0900 260 00; Koningin Astridplein 23-24) Classical music concert hall located next to Centraal Station. Flanders' philharmonic orchestra, De Filharmonie (www.defilharmonie.be), plays here.

**Het Paleis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 248 28 28; Theaterplein 1) This venue is an ugly cement eyesore built in 1980 and commonly called the Bunker.

## Shopping

Antwerp has something for every shopper – gourmet chocolates, world-class diamonds, quality antiques, high-profile designers and streets lined with *brocante* shops. The pedestrianised Meir is first cab off the rank for most people – after Centraal Station's diamond shops. For more intimate shopping, head to the small cluster of streets on either side of Huidevettersstraat. This so-called Quartier Latin is home to some of the city's most

## PARTY ON

Antwerp rocks. The city lives on party time, with nightclubs (above) that have produced some of the country's most revered DJs, and a host of parties that see summer out with a bang.

One of the best known is **Antwerp is Burning** (www.antwerpisburning.be). It takes over a huge field on the Linkeroever, converting the left bank of the river into a one-night party bash in early September. Half a dozen clubs band together, and more than 30 artists beat out hard dance, trance, techno, house and drum'n'bass until well into the next day.

A week later there's **Laundry Day** (www.laundryday.be). Smack in the heart of Antwerp's St Adriaens fashion district, this party with an unlikely name sees seven stages set up on and around Vrijdagmarkt and Oudaan, with 50 DJs pulsing throughout the day and into the night.

**Illusion** (www.illusion.be), a trance odyssey, takes over Antwerp's Sportpaleis (Map pp174-5) for one full night in late September. This party is legendary.

Throughout the year check out **Partyguide** (www.partyguide.be); it's in Flemish but it's easy enough to get the gist of the party agenda.

A good way to taste the scene before even hitting Antwerp is to catch *Anyway the Wind Blows*. This 2003 film was the directorial debut of dEUS front man, Tom Barman. It follows 32 hours in the lives of eight interconnected characters, set against the backdrop of Barman's hometown, Antwerp. The eight all end up at a party one summer night. The music's great.

exclusive shops; Schuttersstraat and Korte Gasthuisstraat are the best places to start.

### ANTIQUES

Antwerp deservedly has a fine reputation for antique shops. Steenhouwersvest, Schuttershofstraat, Komedielaats and Leopoldstraat are the streets to go hunting. Also visit the Vrijdagmarkt (see p198).

### BEER & Jenever

**Den Dorstvegel** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 0485 50 48 80; Oude Vaartplaats 12; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) Excellent beer shop.

**De Vagant Slijterij** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 15 38; Reyndersstraat; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat) A shop selling strong alcohol is called a *slijterij* in Flemish. This shop sells more than 200 types of *jenever*, and is across the street from a pub that's similarly obsessed.

### BROCANTE

*Brocante* (bric-a-brac) traders have taken over Kloosterstraat and Oever (south of St Jansvliet; Map pp176-7). For more options, see Markets (p198).

### CHOCOLATES & SWEETS

**Burie** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 36 88; Korte Gasthuisstraat 3) Famous artisan *chocolaterie*. For years this little shop has been known for the intricate marzipan and chocolate sculptures displayed in the window. Those after diamond-shaped chocolates or *Antwerpse handjes* (see boxed text, p180) will find them here.

**Del Rey** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 29 37; Appelmansstraat 5-9) A top-rate chocolate shop, located on the edge of the diamond district near Centraal Station. A mouth-watering assortment of pralines (filled chocolates), exquisite pastries and biscuits beckon from sumptuous displays. Sampling is done at the neighbouring degustation salon, where an espresso, plus one praline and a biscuit, costs €4.15.

**Pierre Marcolini** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 50 01; Huidevettersstraat 38-40) Join the queues at this Belgian high flier (for more information, see p113).

**Goossens** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 07 91; Korte Gasthuisstraat 31) One of the city's best bakeries. It's teensy, so you'll probably have to join the queue on the street. Try its rye-and-raisin bread (€2.25) or a *sukkerbrood* (sugar bread).

**Philip's Biscuits** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 26 60; Korte Gasthuisstraat 11) Exclusive biscuit shop specialis-

ing in *speculaas* (cinnamon-flavoured biscuits) and *peperkoek* (honey cake).

**Temmerman** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 227 03 90; Schuttershofstraat 13; ☎ Tue-Sat) Sweet shop with a tiny café.

### FASHION & ACCESSORIES

The heart of Antwerp's fashion quarter is St Andries. Head to Nationalestraat, Lombardenvest, Huidevettersstraat and Schuttershofstraat for designer gear; Kammenstraat has streetwear stuff. The tourist office publishes a booklet *Antwerp Fashion Walk* (€3) containing five self-guided tours of the area and a rundown on many of the designers. Also see boxed text, opposite.

The following shops open from around 11am to 6pm, and all are closed Sunday.

**Ann Demeulemeester** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 216 01 33; Verlatstraat 38) Demeulemeester's shop in 't Zuid stocks her complete line of men's and women's clothing. Despite occasional bursts of colour, her collections are usually monochrome based.

**Annie Verbeke** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 35 60; Nationalestraat 76) Highly successful Ypres-born designer who sells internationally. She opened this shop in 2005.

**Cocodrillo** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 20 93; Schuttershofstraat 9a) No-frills shoe boutique that's an institution in Antwerp. Stocks big-name internationals as well as all the local designers, including Branquinho and Van Noten. A word of warning: Saturday afternoon's crowds make browsing hard.

**Episode** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 234 34 14; Steenhouwersvest 34a) Vintage clothes with bottom-line prices deck out this cavernous shop.

**Fish & Chips** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 227 08 24; Kammenstraat 36-38) The place to collide with youth culture. This department-sized store woos the young with retro labels and urban scrawl. Go for a fresh fruit and veg juice at the upstairs bar, or groove to the sounds of the in-store DJs.

**Labels Inc** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 60 56; Aalmoezenstraat 4) End-of-line designer wear – including pieces by Belgium's big names – are sold in this famous little backstreet boutique at prices that won't send you bankrupt.

**Louis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 98 72; Lombardenstraat 4) Great introduction to various Belgian players, with collections by Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela, Jurgi Persoons, Véronique Branquinho and Raf Simons.

### AT THE CUTTING EDGE

Mention Belgium in the right circles and the immediate word association will be 'fashion'. Designers from Antwerp have been avant-garde leaders since 1987 when a handful of graduates from the city's Royal Academy of Fine Arts loaded a truck with designs and sped over to a showing in London. Their ideas were collectively daring, provocative and extreme, but markedly different from each other. They were soon labelled the 'Antwerp Six' – Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee – and, thanks largely to them, Belgian fashion has never looked back.

With designers from Brussels now picking up the slack (see boxed text, p114), Belgium's fashion industry is worth millions. But despite big turnovers, many of the nation's designers have remained independent of large fashion houses, preferring to call the shots themselves. Belgian designers also have a strong sense of place – instead of reaping rewards by moving to Paris or Milan, five of the Antwerp Six set up in their home town and three still live there.

Belgium is often regarded as one of fashion's intellectual breeding grounds. What happens here is done relatively quietly, without red carpet or fanfare – like so much in this modest little country – but the ideas of the country's designers are keenly watched by fashion houses the world over.

The best known of the Antwerp Six is the bald and bearded Walter Van Beirendonck – he has designed outfits for rock supergroup U2 and is definitely wild and futuristic. His fashions are a favourite among the clubbing crowd, merging clubwear with post-modern ideas about everything from bio-technology to aliens. But he also recently surprised the fashion world with a childrenswear collection for high-street chain JBC that has branches across Belgium and Luxembourg. Van Beirendonck's latest collections are on show at his shop, Walter (p198). Here, too, you'll find soft women's wear designed by Dirk Van Saene and other selected friends.

Ann Demeulemeester's designs are timeless, often crafted in black. Her shop (opposite) in 't Zuid in Antwerp is the best place to explore her creations. Dries Van Noten is the group's commercial leader. His colourful bohemian clothes are sold in more than 500 shops around the world, but buyers love his Antwerp flagship, Het Modepaleis (below). Dirk Bikkemberg left Antwerp for Germany and his designs can now only be found at Verso (below) in Antwerp or L'Héroïne (p138) in Bruges. In 2006 Bikkemberg launched the Bix – the first professional football boot to be designed by a fashion house. Made from kangaroo leather, a pair sells for a cool €320. Marina Yee is the least known of the Six and, until recently, her creations were hard to find. But since opening a store in Brussels' designer heartland (p114) she's now much more accessible. The group's unofficial seventh member is Martin Margiela, who graduated from the Royal Academy in 1980 and set up in Paris soon after. Margiela's clothes are conceptual with subtle details. He uses the body as an exhibition space, turning old clothes inside out to make something unique and producing works that are part fashion, part art. He, too, has a shop in Brussels (p114).

The talent hasn't ended there. The Royal Academy continues to spawn designers who have made names for themselves – Raf Simons, Véronique Branquinho, Bernhard Willhelm and Jurgi Peersons are a few. To see some of these names head to the shop that first waved Belgian fashion to the world, Louis (opposite).

If fashion's your passion, time a visit for early September when a 10-day event known as Vitrine takes over the city; for details see **Modenatie** ([www.modenatie.com](http://www.modenatie.com)). And there's no shortage of shops handling designer gear.

**Het Modepaleis** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 470 25 10; Nationalestraat 16) Headquarters and shop of Dries Van Noten, located in a distinct, 19th-century, domed building in the heart of St Andries.

**Véronique Branquinho** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 66 16; Nationalestraat 73) One of the newer set of Antwerp designers, but already a part of the international scene. She's known for her clas-

sic tailoring skills, and opened this, her flagship store, a few years back.

**Verso** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 226 92 92; Lange Gasthuisstraat 11) Fantastic location – an old bank building with a gorgeous stained-glass cupola – for this large boutique, which specialises in Italian designers, although there are also a few French names and one Belgian (Dirk Bikkembergs). Women's and men's

collections, cosmetics and accessories, plus a hip *café*.

**Walter** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 213 26 44; St Antoniusstraat 12) This former garage on a quiet backstreet looks more like an exhibition space than somewhere to buy clothes. Van Beirendonck's styles sit mighty comfortable here.

Also recommended:

**Delvaux** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 02 47; Komedieplaats 17) Belgian leather handbags plus accessories.

**Nico Taeymans** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 82 18; Korte Gasthuisstraat 23) Noted Antwerp jewellery designer.

**Olivier Strelli** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 231 81 41; Hopland 6) Fashions by Belgium's most accessible designer.

**Pardaf** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 232 60 40; Gemeentestraat 8) Huge townhouse full of secondhand clothes for women and men.

## DIAMONDS

Diamond and gold traders line up inside the newly expanded Centraal Station, as well as in showrooms along nearby Pelikaanstraat, Hoveniersstraat, Vestingstraat and Appelmansstraat.

**Diamondland** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 229 29 90; Appelmansstraat 33a; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, also 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct) Watch workers cutting diamonds and ogle the huge range of stones for sale. For more information on the history of diamond trading in Antwerp, see boxed text (p183).

## MARKETS

**Vrijdagmarkt** (Map pp176-7; Vrijdagmarkt; ☎ 6-11am Fri) The city's oldest antique flea market has been operating on this square every Friday morning since the 16th century. Everything is sold by auction, with sales going down in fast guttural Flemish. Feel free to throw in an English bid if you see an irresistible antique – the dealers will readily accept it.

**Rommelmarkt** (Map pp176-7; St Jansvliet; ☎ 7am-3pm Sun) Weekly *brocante* market on a small square close to the river.

For details on the city's main food market, Vogelmarkt, see p192.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Four kilometres southeast of the city centre in the suburb of Deurne, **Antwerp airport** (☎ 03 285 65 00; www.antwerpairport.be) services a very limited number of flights to London City, as well as to Liverpool and Manchester via London City.

## BUS

The arrival and departure point for **Eurolines** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 233 86 62; www.eurolines.be; Van Straelenstraat 8) buses is from this office near Franklin Rooseveltplaats. For information on services, see p317.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car-rental companies in Antwerp include **Budget** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 0800 155 55; Noorderlaan 32), which also has an office at **Antwerp airport** (☎ 03 213 79 60), and **Avis** (Map pp174-5; ☎ 03 218 94 96; Plantin-Moretuslei 62).

## TRAIN

Antwerp's main train station, **Centraal Station** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 204 20 40), is about 1.5km from the old city centre; another station, Berchem, is 2km southeast of Centraal Station. For details on Centraal Station, see p182.

National connections from Antwerp include IC trains every half-hour to Brussels (€6.10, 35 minutes), Ghent (€7.80, 45 minutes) and Mechelen (€3.20, 15 minutes), and hourly trains to Bruges (€12.40, 70 minutes), Hasselt (€9.50, 65 minutes), Leuven (€6, 45 minutes) and Lier (€2.30, 15 minutes).

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Bus 16 connects Antwerp airport with Quellinstraat (20 minutes), two blocks west of Centraal Station. Taxis cost about €10 one way.

## BICYCLE

Antwerp is cycle friendly. Motorists are used to throngs of cyclists and, although there aren't heaps of cycle paths, the city can be safely navigated by bike. Be aware of trams and their slippery tracks, and ensure you double lock your bike as theft is common.

In summer bikes can be hired from **Rent A Bike** (Map pp176-7; ☎ 03 290 49 62; www.antwerpbikes.be in Flemish & French; Lijnwaadmarkt 6; ☎ 9am-6pm), a new outfit barnacled to the side of the cathedral, from €6/8.50 per half-/full day. Note, full-day rental here means 24 hours.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

A great place to park is on the covered riverside quay (in the Zuiderterras hangar) near the city centre. The northern section is for paid parking but the southern end (and all the open-air parking next to it) is free. The entrance is opposite Fortuinstraat. There's also free parking

in 't Zuid on the Gedempte Zuiderdokken, the square between Vlaamsekaai and Waalsekaai. From here, it's a 15- to 20-minute walk to the Grote Markt. Alternatively buses 6 and 34 go to Steenplein near the Grote Markt, and bus 23 runs to Franklin Rooseveltplaats.

The easiest central parking garage to access is the 24-hour underground car park at Groenplaats.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

A good network of buses, trams and a *premetro* (a tram that runs underground for part of its journey) is run by **De Lijn** (☎ 070 220 200; www.delijn.be in Flemish). Free public transport maps covering the city centre are available from De Lijn ticket and information kiosks – the most useful are located at the *premetro* stations Diamant (below Centraal Station), Groenplaats and on Franklin Rooseveltplaats (all on Map pp176-7). These kiosks are generally open 8am to 4pm weekdays (also 9am to noon Saturday at Groenplaats).

Both *stad* (city) and *streek* (regional) buses leave from one of the city's main bus hubs, Franklin Rooseveltplaats and Koningin Astridplein. Make sure you know in which direction you're heading. As many bus (and tram) routes start at one side of the city and finish on the other, it's possible to be on the right-numbered bus (or tram) but travelling in the wrong direction.

The tram network is well established with routes as far out as Hoboken, Deurne and Mortsel.

The tiny, two-line *premetro* simply consists of above-ground trams that dive underground. Handy *premetro* trams include 2, 3, 5 and 15, which run underground along the main drag – Diamant (under Centraal Station) to Groenplaats – before continuing under the Scheldt River to surface on the Linkeroever.

The same tickets can be used for buses, trams and *premetro*. A single ticket (valid for one hour) bought at De Lijn's information office costs €1.20 (or €1.50 on the bus), a *dagpas* (day ticket) is €5 (€6 on the bus) and a 10-journey *lijnkaart* (network card) is €8 (€10 on the bus). Public transport generally runs from about 6am to midnight. There's also a *nachtlijn* (night bus) service on weekends.

## TAXI

Taxis wait at Groenplaats, outside Centraal Station and on Koningin Astridplein. Otherwise

call **Antwerp Taxi** (☎ 03 238 38 38). An extra €2.50 is added to fares between 10pm and 6am.

## AROUND ANTWERP

Pick up any tourist map of Antwerp and a few small blue patches in the northwest corner will indicate **Antwerp port**. Believe us – these areas are just the tip of the iceberg. Likewise, stand on the riverside Zuiderterras promenade in Antwerp and the cranes you can see in the distance are just the beginning of the world's fourth-largest port.

It wasn't all that long ago when the city's port did cover a relatively small area. But massive transformation of the surrounding farmlands and polders in the 20th century, including the annihilation of whole villages, has seen the port grow from a prosperous medieval harbour based around waterways (now filled in) in the heart of the old city centre to a giant that stretches to the Dutch border.

Napoleon initiated this expansion with the creation of two huge docks – Bonapartedok and Willemdok. These docks are now the focus of 't Eilandje district – it's between them that the new MAS museum is being built. Towards the end of the 19th century, the nearby Kattendijkdok was constructed and from there the port has soared. In 2005 King Albert II opened the port's latest expansion, Deurganckdok, doubling the port's holding capacity to 12 million containers.

Tours through the port are surreal – a maze of cranes and loading yards, docks and warehouses, railway lines and industrial estates, the latter belonging to petroleum refineries, car-assembly plants and petrochemical industries. More picturesque is the polder village of **Lillo**, one of the lucky survivors and home to a little museum devoted to life before the great transformation.

Without your own car, the best way to explore this area is on a Flandria boat trip (see p187).

## LIER

pop 32,800

The small town of Lier, or Pallieterstad as it's also known, sits 17km southeast of Antwerp near the confluence of two rivers – the Grote and Kleine Nete. Its nickname comes from *Pallieter*, a jovial character invented by local writer Felix Timmermans. The people of Lier also have a less-charming nickname – see boxed text (p215).



Lier is a tranquil and typically Flemish provincial town. It was founded in the 8th century as a place of worship for St Gummarus, a nobleman from King Pepin's court in France who settled and eventually died here in 775. The town has a smattering of interesting – and unique – sights, making it a popular day trip from Antwerp, or a charming little place to hole up for a night.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 800 05 05; www.lier.be; Grote Markt 57; ☹ 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm, Mon–Fri only Nov–Mar) is in the heart of town, in the basement of the town hall.

### Sights

Central Lier is dominated by the **Grote Markt**, at the heart of which sits its refined **stadhuis** and adjoining turreted, 14th-century **belfort** (belfry), whose carillon chimes melodiously every quarter of an hour.

Close by is the town's most famous sight – the **Zimmertoren** (☎ 03 800 03 95; Zimmerplein; adult/child €2/1; ☹ 9am–noon & 1–6pm Apr–Sep, 9am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm Oct–Mar). This former 14th-century tower, once part of the town's ramparts, was converted into the *Centenary Clock* in 1930 by a prosperous local Lodewijk Zimmer. The marvellous time-piece contains a central dial surrounded by 12 smaller dials each conveying bits of information, such as the ages of the moon and the signs of the zodiac. Hang around for the hour if you want to see the side figures donging the bells. In the pavilion next door is Zimmer's studio and another of his works – the astronomical *Wonder Clock* that featured at World Fairs in Brussels in 1935 and New York in 1939.

Go along Schapekoppenstraat (Sheep Heads St) to the monumental portal announcing the entrance to the **begijnhof**, a charming cluster of cottages founded in the 13th century. Most of the houses, as well as **St Margarethakerk** at the heart of the community, date from the 17th century.

From Zimmertoren, cross the river at Zimmerplein to reach the **Timmermans-Opsumerhuis** (☎ 03 800 05 55; Netelanaan 6; admission €1; ☹ 10am–noon & 1–5pm Tue–Sun). This museum is devoted to local 19th- and 20th-century writers and artists, particularly writer Felix Timmermans (1886–1947), artist Isidoor Opsomer (1878–1967) and sculptor Lodewijk Van Boeckel (1857–1944).

The creamy-toned **St Gummaruskerk** (Kardinaal Mercierplein; admission €1.25; ☹ 10am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Sat) was gradually built from the late 14th to early 16th century. The elegant tower is

a mix of Gothic and baroque, topped by a rococo cupola (the tower was rebuilt in the 18th century after being struck by lightning). The church's most important treasures are its 16th-century stained-glass windows, which are among Belgium's oldest.

To explore Lier's central waterways, hop on board a former eel-fishing **boat**. Forty-minute trips (€2.50/1.50 per adult/child) depart from the quay at the *begijnhof's* back entrance at 2.30pm and 3.30pm on Saturday, and 2pm to 6pm on Sunday from May to October.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hof van Aragon** (☎ 03 491 08 00; www.hofvanaragon.be in Flemish; Mosdijk 1–6; s/d from €60/70; ☹) Those into old-world style will find this well-established hotel-restaurant the pick of Lier's accommodation scene. It's flanked by the peaceful river and has spacious rooms.

**Hotel Florent** (☎ 03 491 03 10; www.hotelflorent.be in Flemish; Florent Van Cauwenberghstraat 45; s/d €70/90) Relatively new, but very discreet, corner hotel that offers modern rooms with rich colour schemes and spacious bathrooms.

**Zuster Agnes** (☎ 03 288 94 73; Schapenkoppenstraat 16; mains €14–18; ☹ from 10am) At the rear of the *begijnhof*, Sister Agnes is a modern wok brasserie and well-hidden local favourite offering intimate interior dining or outdoor tables overlooking the town's mascot – those sheep.

**De Oude Komeet** (☎ 03 488 21 56; Florent Van Cauwenberghstraat 18; mains €14–20; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) Likable *eetkafee* with organic produce and a good range of wholesome vegetarian meals. There's also a garden terrace.

**Cuistot** (☎ 03 488 46 56; Antwerpsestraat 146; mains €20–29; ☹ Thu–Mon) Located in a big townhouse at the end of one of the main shopping streets, this modern restaurant does a very limited range of dishes marrying world flavours. The chef learnt his stuff at Villa Lorraine, one of Brussels' top restaurants, and he's impressed the locals.

**De Werf** (☎ 03 480 71 90; Werf 17; mains €20–30, three-course menu €33; ☹ lunch Tue–Fri, dinner Tue–Sat) A great restaurant serving excellent French/Flemish cuisine. Very cosy – just 10 tables – with attentive service.

For a sweet treat try a *Liers vlaaike* sold in any bakery. These fat little tarts are a mix of syrup, cinnamon and flour, and have been made in Lier since the 18th century.

For self-caterers, there's an **AD Delhaize** (Eikelstraat 26) supermarket with entrances on Grote Markt and Eikelstraat.

### Entertainment

Lier's biggest music event is the **Jazzkroegentocht** (www.lier.be), a night of unremitting live jazz held in *cafés* around town in early November.

Lively student bars and cheap pitta/*shwarma* (doner kebab) places coexist on Eikelstraat and Zimmerplein.

**Café St Gummarus** (☎ 03 489 05 15; Timmermansplein 2; ☹ 2pm–2am Tue–Sun) Small bar on a square next to the river. It attracts an arty crowd and is a good place to try the local Lierse Caves, a guezue-style lambic beer.

**La Rocca** (www.larocca.be; Antwerpsesteenweg 384; ☹ from 11.30pm Fri–Sun) Legendary nightclub celebrating its second decade in 2008. Its close proximity to Antwerp (just 17km away) means it's regularly frequented by Antwerpenaars.

**Mister 100** (☎ 03 489 11 16; Grote Markt 28; ☹ 11am–9pm Tue–Sun) Huge billiard salon set up by Raymond Ceulemans, Belgium's world billiard champion. It's now run by his son, Kurt, and attracts billiard buffs from afar. All kinds of games are available, including billiards (€4/5 per hour per small/large table) and pool/snooker (€6/7 per hour).

### Getting There & Away

Lier is well connected on the regional train circuit. The **train station** (☎ 03 229 55 03) and adjoining **bus station** (☎ 070 22 02 00) are 1km northeast of the Grote Markt. Trains run every half-hour to Antwerp (€2.30, 15 minutes), Diest (€5.70, 30 minutes), via Aarschot to Leuven (€5.70, 45 minutes) and to Mechelen (€2.60, 20 minutes). Bus 55 goes to Mechelen.

### MECHELEN

pop 77,000

Mechelen (Malines in French, Mechlin in English) sits equidistant between Antwerp and Brussels – or just 20km from either – and is completely overshadowed by both. Like Ghent, it has long been bypassed by tourists doing the hop between the bigger, better-known Flemish cities. But recent revamping means it's now ringing its own bell and, considering the town is home to the country's heaviest carillon, the call is being heard far and wide. Newly pedestrianised areas and a new generation of B&Bs, hotels and fashionable shops are drawing visitors and locals alike. But even with this influx, the town is never uncomfortably crowded on weekends. For an authentic taste of Flanders minus any tourist hype, Mechelen's a must.

### History

The town's history is surprisingly rich. Converted to Christianity by 8th-century evangelist St Rombout, Mechelen went on to become the country's religious capital and is home of the primate (archbishop) of the Catholic church.

In 1473 Charles the Bold chose Mechelen as his administrative base and the town became the thriving capital of the Burgundian Low Countries. Although Charles was killed in battle in France four years later, his widow, Margaret of York, decided to make Mechelen her permanent residence. In 1506 her step-granddaughter Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Maximilian I, was appointed governor and her glamorous court became one of the most famous of its day. Science, literature and the arts thrived, and many elaborate buildings, including a palace (now used as a courthouse), were constructed. A statue in her memory now stands at the edge of the Grote Markt. When Margaret died in 1530, the capital was moved to Brussels and Mechelen never regained the spotlight.

### Information

**ATM** (Grote Markt 27) Attached to the KBC Bank.  
**In&Uit Mechelen** (☎ 070 22 28 00; www.ineuitmechelen.be; Hallestraat 2; ☹ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4.30pm Sat & Sun Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–3.30pm Sat & Sun Oct–Mar) Tourist office newly located just off the corner of the pedestrianised Grote Markt.

### Sights

It's impossible to miss **St Romboutskathedraal** (Grote Markt; admission free). This robust cathedral features a gigantic, 97m-high tower that was completed in the middle of the 16th century and in fine weather can be seen from Brussels. It's due to this tower that the residents of Mechelen are nicknamed *Maneblussers* (see boxed text, p215). It's possible to climb the tower (514 steps; €5) at certain times; the tourist office has details.

The cathedral is topped by the country's heaviest **carillon** – appropriately enough considering Mechelen boasts the world's most prestigious school of campanology (bell-ringing), and students come from far and wide to learn the art. The carillon master is Jo Haazen, and he plays the 49 bells (that date from the 15th to 18th centuries) for an hour-long concert at 8.30pm on Monday from June to mid-September.

For its size, Mechelen is overly endowed with churches – testimony to the town's rich religious

history. Some, including the white sandstone **St Janskerk** (Klapgat), can only be visited by prior arrangement (ask at the tourist office).

Spplayed in front of the stadhuis is a **statue of Op-Sinjoorke**, the town's mascot, being hurled into the air from a blanket. The real mascot, a wooden dummy carved in 1647, is kept in **Museum Hof van Busleyden** (☎ 015 29 40 30; Frederik De Merodestraat 65; adult/child €2/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), the town's municipal museum. It occupies a high-Gothic-style mansion built during Margaret of Austria's rule and is full of historical bits and pieces, including bells, paintings and furniture.

Tapestry lovers must tour **De Wit Royal Manufacturers** (☎ 0475 52 29 05; www.dewit.be; Schoutestraat 7; adult/child €6/2). This well-established work-

shop is one of the few places in Belgium where you can see contemporary tapestries being woven and antique ones from all over the world being repaired. There's a 1½-hour tour at 10.30am on Saturday.

The **Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet** (Jewish Museum of Deportation & Resistance; ☎ 015 29 06 60; www.cicb.be; Goswin de Stassartstraat 153; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu, 10am-1pm Fri) is housed in a former Nazi deportation centre. It movingly tells the Belgian chapter of Jewish persecution in WWII (see boxed text, opposite) and chronicles the resistance movement that sprang up. The museum is best toured with a guide – phone an hour or two ahead to arrange an English-speaking tour.

Trainspotters must time a visit to **De Mijlpaal** (☎ 015 41 65 68; Leuvensesteenweg 30; admission €2.50;

☎ 2-6pm Sat May-Sep), an essential railway museum on the outskirts of town. It tracks back in time to when Continental Europe's first train journeyed from Brussels to Mechelen.

The **Speelgoedmuseum** (Toy Museum; ☎ 015 55 70 75; Nekkerstraat 21; adult/child €5.50/3.80; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is chock-full of games and toys, including a 17m-long train table complete with working engines and a model replica of the battle of Waterloo. In parts it's dark and old fashioned but the collection is impressive.

Check with the tourist office to find out what's on at the new **Lamot Heritage Centre** (☎ 015 29 49 10; www.lamot-erfgoedcentrum.be in Flemish; Van Beethovenstraat 8; admission free). This place is a first in Flanders, looking not only at history but where Flemish society is bound. Visitors are welcome.

## Festivals & Events

Mechelen's biggest annual shindig is the **Hanswijkprocessie** (Procession of Our Lady) in which thousands dress up in medieval-style garb and parade through the town at 3pm on the last Sunday in May.

## Sleeping

**De Zandpoort** (☎ 015 27 85 39; www.mechelen-hostel.com; Zandpoortvest 70; dm/s/d €16.6/29/45; ☎ ) Modern, spic-and-span youth hostel next to the railway lines.

**B&B Buggenhout** (☎ 015 20 97 21; fran.ronny@skynet.be; Straatje zonder Einde 3; small studio s/d €40/50, large studio €50/60) Family home with a separate holiday cottage tucked away at the back of the garden. It contains two cosy, impeccable studios, both with cooking facilities.

**B&B Dusk till Dawn** (☎ 015 41 28 16; www.duskilldawn.be; Onze Lieve Vrouwestraat 81; Dusk €100, Dawn €130; ☎ ) Turn the age-old grey handle to ring the bell at this delightful B&B, which occupies a big grey building directly opposite the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady). Inside awaits a muted world of subtle colours and discerning décor. It's impossible not to sleep well in an environment like this. Children and babies welcome. Bus 4 from the train station stops out the front.

**Hotel Vê** (☎ 0479 49 66 82; www.hotelve.com; Vismarkt 14; s/d €128/154; ☎ ) Located in a former fish-smoking factory (there's not a whiff to remind overnighters of its former occupation), this is Mechelen's most spunky new address, opened to rave reviews in 2006. Its 36 rooms – all done in sombre brown, grey or beige – range from cosy (the cheapest) to luxe. Its discreet location on the Vismarkt in the heart of the town's riverside nightlife area is another big plus.

**Novotel** (☎ 015 40 49 50; www.novotel.com; Van Beethovenstraat 1; r €159; ☎ ) Brand-new hotel in a modern nondescript grey-brick building smack bang in the town's newly revitalised riverside quarter.

## Eating

Mechelen is right in the heart of Belgium's asparagus-growing belt and the 22cm-long 'fat white' from here are considered by gourmets to be the best – smooth, juicy and soft. The season runs from about mid-April to late June and during this time restaurants put *asperges* high on their menus. Another home-grown speciality is *witloof* (chicory), often presented as a soup or gratin.

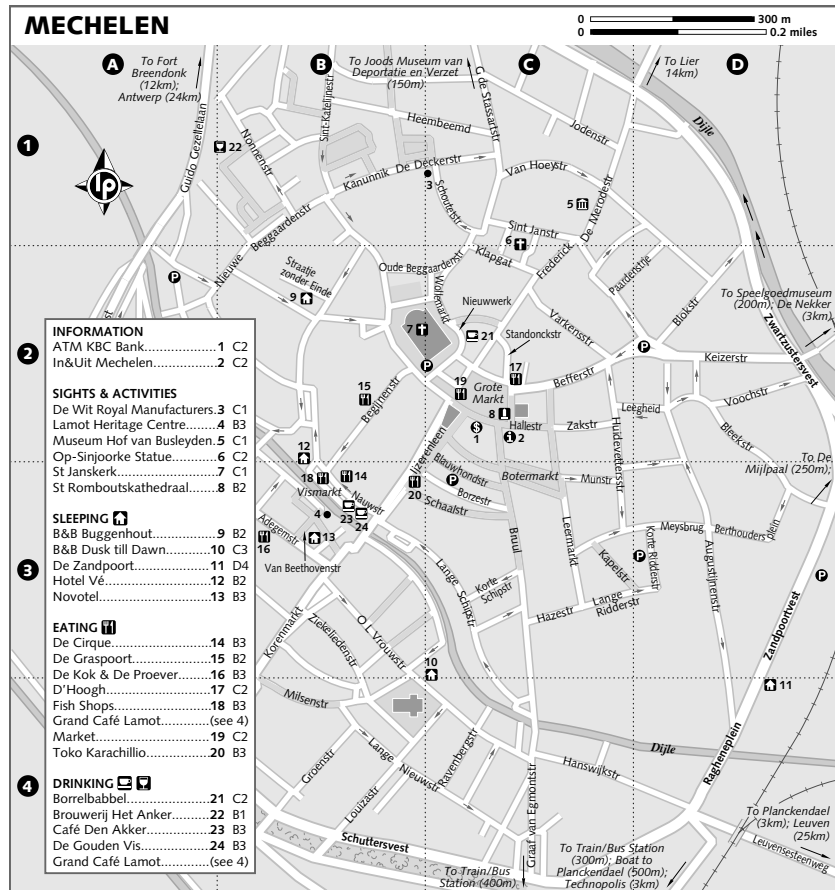
## HOLOCAUST IN BELGIUM

About 57,000 Jews were living in Belgium (mainly in Brussels and Antwerp) on 27 May 1942, the date when Jews were forced to start wearing a yellow Star of David as identification. Many had sought refuge here after the outbreak of WWII and Nazi persecution in their home countries of Germany, Austria and Poland.

In the summer of '42 the Nazis called for volunteers for labour camps in the east; many Jews boarded trains in the hope of safety, only to be transported to death camps, such as Auschwitz. These camps were designed specifically to rid Europe of people considered undesirable according to racist Nazi doctrine.

Over the next two years, 25,000 Jews were sent from the Nazi deportation centre in Mechelen; 15,000 of them were gassed upon arrival at the camps and only 1400 returned. None of the Jewish children deported survived, although several thousand children hidden by the Resistance in Belgium made it through the war.

Belgium's small Roma (gypsy) population suffered similarly, with about 500 of the country's 600 Roma deported to their deaths.



**Toko Karachillio** (☎ 015 34 60 12; Ulzerenleen 35; focaccia €7-9, pasta €12-16; ☎ Mon-Sat) Since opening a few years back, Toko has remained one of the toasts of the town. Light and trendy, with a prime terrace location, it attracts a chatty mix for its quick, playful and contemporary cooking. There's also a lounge bar on the 1st floor.

**De Graspoot** (☎ 015 21 97 10; Begijnestraat 28; mains €10-18; ☎ from 11.30am Mon-Sat, from 3pm Sun) This rustic place fills up quickly. It's tucked away at the end of an alley, but is well known by locals for its seafood and vegetarian meals.

**De Kok & De Proever** (☎ 015 34 60 02; Adegemstraat 43; mains €15-23, menus from €27; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Its romantic interior, with creamy-toned décor, candles and lanterns, hides behind a 17th-century façade. The cuisine fuses French/Belgian classics, including recipes with local beer-based sauces. It's owned by the same chef as Toko Karachillio, but on a more serious note.

**Grand Café Lamot** (☎ 015 20 95 30; Van Beethovenstraat 8; mains €15-18; ☎ from 9am) Newest kid on the riverfront, and a big yahoo at that. This brasserie, attached to the recently renovated Lamot Heritage Centre, was part of a former brewery and the big brass brewing cauldron is still there for all to see. Wok, veggie and Belgian fare make up the sizable menu.

**D'Hoogh** (☎ 015 21 75 53; Grote Markt 19; mains €29-46, four-course menu €48; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Requires formal attire (yep, ties for the guys) if you want to blend in with the well-heeled locals at this Michelin-starred restaurant. Seasonal produce and hormone-free meats are the mainstay of the Flemish cuisine.

Also recommended:

**De Cirque** (☎ 015 20 77 80; Vismarkt 8; mains €14-18; ☎ Mon-Sat) Bistro, almost devoid of décor, serving well-priced pasta dishes, snacks and homemade *frites*. The terrace overlooks the new Lamot Heritage Centre.

**Fish shops** (Vismarkt) For self-caterers.

**Market** (Grote Markt; ☎ Sat) Fresh produce; held during the morning.

## Drinking

The revitalised riverside quarter based around Vismarkt and Van Beethovenstraat is the city's chief nightlife zone. **De Gouden Vis** (☎ 015 20 72 06; Nauwstraat 7) is a happening *café* that draws an eclectic late-night crowd. Note the pure Art Nouveau window. Almost next door is the equally pleasant **Café Den Akker** (☎ 015 33 10 78; Vismarkt 11). Cross the river to reach **Grand Café Lamot** (☎ 015 20 95 30; Van Beethovenstraat 8; ☎ from 9am).

**Borrelbabbel** (☎ 015 27 36 89; Nieuwwerk 2; ☎ from 5pm Thu-Mon) It's generally standing room only at Mechelen's smallest pub, shoehorned into a corner of a lovely square behind the cathedral. It's the place in town for a shot of *jenever* and also good for any local beer.

**Brouwerij Het Anker** (☎ 015 20 38 80; Guido Gezellelaan 49) Mechelen's local brewery is located in the heart of town and has a rambling brasserie serving the brewery's four beers. Blusser (5.4%) is a standard lager, Mechelschen Bruyren (6%) is the brewery's oldest with a recipe dating to 1421, Triple Toison d'Or (7%) is a blond beer spiced with herbs, and Gouden Carolus (7.5%) is dark with a rich flavour of caramelised malt and hops. The family-owned establishment brews once a week but visits are open only to groups of 25 or more.

## Getting There & Around

Mechelen's **train station** (☎ 02 528 28 28) and adjoining **bus station** (☎ 070 22 02 20) are 1.25km south of the Grote Markt – just head straight up Hendrik Consciencestraat or jump on bus 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 7. There are IC trains every half-hour to Antwerp (€3.20, 15 minutes) and Brussels (€3.70, 15 minutes).

Bikes can only be rented from **De Nekker** (☎ 015 55 70 05; Nekkerspoel-Borch 19; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9.30pm Sat & Sun), a provincial sports/recreation centre 3km from town. Bike rental costs €8 per day.

## AROUND MECHELEN Technopolis

The **Technopolis** (☎ 015 34 20 01; www.technopolis.be; Technologielaan; adult/concession/child €9/8/6.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) sets out to amaze through educational but fun interactive experiences. It opened in 2000 and has been a runaway hit among school kids and families ever since. It's designed for ages six to 96 (although toddlers love it, too) and includes several hundred permanent exhibits – from wind and water play to invisible or hair-raising feats. Try to time your visit when it's not overrun with screaming kids (it's worth ringing to find out how many schools are booked in that day), and allow two to three hours.

The centre is about 3km from Mechelen train station – take bus 282 or 283 (every 30 minutes, less frequent on weekends). If you're coming by train, it's worth inquiring about a B-Dagtrip (see boxed text, p324). By car, it's halfway between Brussels and Antwerp, just

off the E19 motorway (take the Mechelen-Zuid exit – it's well signposted).

## Planckendael

This much-loved 40-hectare **animal park** (☎ 015 41 49 21; www.planckendael.be; Leuvensesteenweg 582; adult/child €16/11; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul-Aug, 10am-6pm May-Jun & Sep, 10am-5.30pm Mar-Apr & Oct, 10am-4.45pm Jan-Feb & Nov-Dec) is located about 3km southeast of Mechelen. Exhibits include bonobo (dwarf chimpanzee from central Africa) and koalas, among a host of other critters. Many of the enclosures are innovative but others, particularly the bird cages, are depressingly small. The park has a respected breeding programme and koala births always make national news.

Planckendael can be reached by **boat** (☎ 015 43 22 65), along the Leuven-Dijle Kanaal, which depart every 30 minutes from Hanswijkvaart 13 (at the Como Bridge behind Mechelen train station). Boats (€5/4.50 per adult/child, 25 minutes one way) leave daily from July to August, and on Saturday and Sunday from April to June and September. Alternatively, take bus 284 or 285 (€0.60, every 30 minutes) from Mechelen bus station.

## Fort Breendonk

About 12km west of Mechelen is **Breendonk Fort** (☎ 03 886 75 25; www.breendonk.be; Brandstraat 57, Willebroek; adult/child €6/5; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, last visit 4.30pm), built in 1906 as an outlying defence post for Antwerp. In WWII it was converted into a Nazi concentration and deportation camp. Political prisoners were held here and, of the 3456 prisoners who passed through, less than half survived. The torture room, cells and dark dank corridors have all been preserved, and a section of the fort has been turned into a museum. Even in summer, this place chills to the bone.

The fort is just off the A12 highway linking Antwerp-Brussels and is well signposted. Without your own vehicle, access is more difficult – from Mechelen take the train to Willebroek (€2.30, 10 minutes), from where it's a 20-minute walk.

## LEUVEN

pop 89,800

Picturesque, intimate and lively... Leuven is yet another fabulous Flemish city, and again it's just a hop, skip or jump from Brussels (25km). Leuven (Louvain in French) is the chief town of the province of Vlaams-Brabant. It's an ancient capital – the home of the Dukes of Brabant

since 1200 – and in medieval times an important cloth trading centre. Today it boasts one of Belgium's most ornate town halls and is Flanders' oldest university town (see boxed text, p208). Some 25,000 students – more than a quarter of the town's population – zoom around by pushbike here, giving the city an upbeat, creative air. Leuven is also Belgium's beer capital, home to the internationally known red-label Stella Artois.

## Orientation & Information

Central Leuven is easily covered on foot. Its heart is the Grote Markt and immediately behind it the Oude Markt, which transforms into one enormous open-air terrace for socialising and drinking in fine weather.

**Barak Telecom** (Tiensestraat 24; per hr €1.50; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) Internet access.

**Café Apero** (☎ 016 22 37 76; Oude Markt 52; ☎ 11am-11pm) Has one terminal, with free access, otherwise a normal pub.

**In&Uit Leuven** (☎ 016 20 30 20; www.inenuitleuven.be; Naamsestraat 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct) Tourist office newly relocated around the side of the stadhuis.

**Post office** (☎ 016 22 30 51; Jan Stasstraat)

## Sights

Leuven suffered heavy damage in both world wars and the city centre has relatively few remains of early times. That said, it's still as pretty as a picture, and the buildings that survived are well worth seeing.

Leuven's main sight is the 15th-century **stadhuis** (town hall; Grote Markt; ☎ tours at 11am & 3pm Mon-Fri, 3pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 3pm daily Oct-Mar). This flamboyant late-Gothic structure resembles an overblown wedding cake full of terraced turrets, delicate statues, fancy stonework and colourful flags. The 236 statues represent prominent locals throughout the ages – scholars, artists and nobility – but were added as an afterthought in the mid-19th century. Incredibly, the stadhuis survived relatively unscathed during the wars (although a bomb, which failed to explode, scoured part of the façade). There's not all that much to see inside; most notable are the few sculptures by Constantin Meunier (see p87). More of Meunier's work is located in Minderbroedersvest, where he had a workshop, and there's another statue, Pater Damiaan, in Brusselsestraat.

The other main edifice is **St Pieterskerk** (St Peter's Church; Grote Markt; free admission; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat,

2-5pm Sun, closed Mon mid-Oct–mid-Mar), another late-Gothic structure. Construction started in 1425, the same year that the university was founded, but the church never reached full throttle as unstable subsoil forced the builders to abandon a 170m-high tower. Inside, highlights include an elaborately carved stone rood screen and an equally impressive wooden baroque pulpit. However, it's the church's **treasury** (adult/student €5/2.50 incl entry to the Museum Van der Kelen-Mertens) that most people come to see. It boasts two triptychs by Flemish Primitive artist Dirk Bouts (c 1415–75), who spent much of his life in Leuven. The *Martyrdom of St Erasmus* records the gory death of the patron saint of mariners, while *Het Laatste Avondmaal* (The Last Supper) shows the purple-clad Christ surrounded by his disciples in a typical Flemish dining hall. Bouts painted this between 1464–67 and it is considered to be one of the period's masterpieces, mixing the Biblical theme with contemporary Gothic architecture. Strictly controlled paintings with rich, broad landscapes and static, unmoving figures were his passion. The panels have a lively history: they were sold off several times and ended up in Germany; they

were returned to Leuven after WWI as part of the war reparations package; and they were carted off again during WWII and saw the war out in a salt mine.

Behind the town hall is the 14th-century **Lakenhal** (Naamestraat) where cloth was traded centuries ago. It's now used as the official headquarters of the university.

The **Museum Van der Kelen-Mertens** (☎ 016 22 69 06; Savoyestraat 6) holds, among other things, a vast collection of religious art from the 15th to 18th centuries. The museum is closed until 2009 due to major expansion and renovation. Until then a representative sample of its collection will tour temporary sites around town – ask the tourist office for the current location.

The cobblestoned **Groot Begijnhof**, a Unesco World Heritage site, is secured behind large walls near the Dijle River to the south of the city centre. It was founded by the Beguines in 1232, though most of the houses date from the 17th century when around 300 Beguines still lived here. The restored, somewhat sober houses are now a university residential quarter. Visit the church, **St Jan de Doperkerk** (☎ 130-

4.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep), whose Gothic façade hides an elaborate baroque interior.

The imposing **Universiteitsbibliotheek** (University Reference Library; ☎ 016 32 46 60; Monseigneur La-deuzeplein 21) was rebuilt in Flemish Renaissance style after a fire raged through it during WWI. Rebuilt from the charity of 400 American universities, it again burnt down in WWII and was rebuilt yet again. The tower rising in the rear breaks the façade's symmetry and houses a carillon.

## Festivals & Events

**Werchter** (www.rockwerchter.be) Together with Glastonbury (England) and Roskilde (Denmark), this is one of Europe's biggest 'field' rock festivals. Takes over paddocks in Werchter north of Leuven for four days over the first weekend of July. **BeLeuvenNissen** (www.beleuvennissen.be) Free concerts – jazz, folk and tropical music – are staged on the first four Fridays in July at diverse locations around Leuven. **Klapstukfestival** (www.stuk.be) Month-long international contemporary dance festival from mid-October.

## Sleeping

**Jeugdherberg De Blauwput** (☎ 016 63 90 62; www.vjh.be; Martelarenlaan 11a; dm/s/d €19.60/24/48; ☎ ☎ ☎) Modern HI-hostel with spunky décor and good vibes, a one-minute walk behind the train station. No room has more than six beds, and there are showers and toilets inside each room. There's a good bar, courtyard, internet access (per hr €2) and a conscious effort to be green (composting and recycling).

**B&B De Werf** (☎ 016 23 73 14; www.dewerf-leuven.be; Hogeschoolplein 5; s/d €30/45; ☎ ☎) Three rooms located above a rustic café (right) overlooking a charming tree-lined square and with a handy central location. It's more like a cheap hotel than a B&B. Breakfast (€5) is taken downstairs in the café.

**Hotel Professor** (☎ 016 20 14 14; fax 016 29 14 16; Naamestraat 20; s/d €65/80) Above a corner cocktail bar in the city centre, this nondescript hotel has just

eight simple rooms (No 5 is the biggest). Take heart on arrival – the rooms are nicer than the mundane ground-floor bar would suggest.

**Theaterhotel** (☎ 016 22 28 19; www.theaterhotel.be; Bondgenotenlaan 20; s/d Mon-Thu €129/149, Fri-Sun €89/109; ☎ ☎) Just skipping distance from the Grote Markt, this discreet hotel offers huge bathrooms, small beds and soothing décor, and it's child friendly (free cots and highchairs).

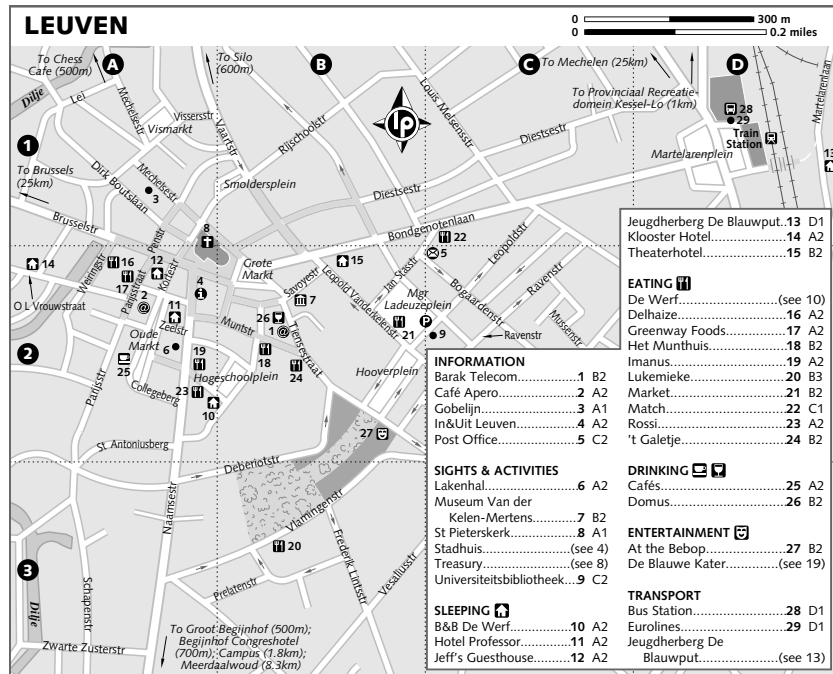
**Klooster Hotel** (☎ 016 21 31 41; www.kloosterhotel.com; Onze Lieve Vrouwstraat 22; r Mon-Thu from €205, Fri-Sun from €155; ☎ ☎ ☎) Hidden on a small cobbled street in the old city centre, this relatively new hotel is Leuven's most atmospheric address. It occupies an historic building that did time as a cloister; the last nun left in 1999. It opened as a four-star hotel in 2003, and maintains serenity and ties to its earlier life with understated furnishings and subtle details. Book room No 7 to live like Mother Superior.

## Eating

Take to pedestrianised Parijsstraat or Muntstraat, or the area around the stadhuis, for wall-to-wall eateries – everything from gastronomic to student fare rubs shoulders and nonchalantly complements each other. Further afield you'll find local favourites.

**De Werf** (☎ 016 23 73 14; Hogeschoolplein 5; snacks €4, mains €9-13) All-time student favourite, with a big terrace occupying a quiet tree-lined square on one of the town's backstreets. Pull off a serviette from a kitchen roll, drink out of pink plastic tumblers and try to get your lips around one of the house specialities, wraps. The service is not fast, but no-one minds – chill out looking at the wacky décor.

**Lukemieke** (☎ 016 22 97 05; Vlamingenstraat 55; mains €9; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-8.30pm Mon-Fri) Casual, friendly vegetarian eatery that has been around for donkey's years and still draws locals to its out-of-the-way location. A *dagschotel* goes



## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Jeff's Guesthouse** (☎ 016 23 87 80; www.jeffsguesthouse.be; Kortestraat 2; d without bathroom €80, d with bathroom & view €90, ste €95; ☎) 'Simple but beautiful' – that's the motto at this guesthouse, hidden above an *oliveria* (shop selling olive-oil based products) just metres from the Grote Markt. It's shoes off to enter the six rooms, each named after a woman and where linen sheets sprayed with lavender awaken the senses. Spacious and free of clutter, the pervading theme is Mediterranean – sand-coloured walls with Venetian stucco and a Moroccan lounge with lanterns and rugs. Breakfast (€8, brunch €25) is taken on big tables in a room lit by stained glass at the rear of the shop. All in all it's a gem.

## THE KUL

Within a century of being founded in 1425, the Katholieke Universiteit van Leuven (KUL) had become one of Europe's most highly regarded universities. It attracted famous academics and freethinkers, such as the cartographer Mercator, Renaissance scholar Desiderius Erasmus and the father of anatomy, Andreas Vesalius.

Its history, however, has been far from smooth, with disputes arising over both religion and language. In response to suppression by French and Dutch rulers during the 18th and 19th centuries, the university became a bastion of Flemish Catholicism and these days is still at the heart of Flemish thinking.

Language issues came to a head in the late 1960s when Flemish students protested over the absence of lectures in their mother tongue, eventually forcing their French-speaking counterparts to set up a new Francophone university at the town of Louvain-la-Neuve, southeast of Brussels. In one of those typically Belgian scenarios, the university then split its reference library in two – the KUL kept everything from A to L, and Louvain-la-Neuve took M to Z!

for €9, the child's *peuterschool* costs €5. The garden terrace, with its trellised grapevines, is great in summer.

**Greenway Foods** (☎ 016 30 97 35; Parijsstraat 12; mains €7) Bright green décor immediately tells you this place is vegetarian – *bio* (organic) burgers, soups, pasta dishes and noodles are the mainstays. It's smack on one of the city's main restaurant strips, and is also great for kids and babies.

**Rossi** (☎ 016 62 48 48; Standonckstraat 2; antipasti €7.50-12.50, secondi €16; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Ten tables, no décor, sacks of onions waiting to be put away and garlic wafting from the kitchen. This little Italian eatery is hugely popular, great value and as authentic as they come. The gent who runs it is a gem.

**Het Munthuis** (☎ 016 29 29 41; Muntstraat 20; mains €17-20; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Wed & lunch Sat) One of the classiest acts on this intimate restaurant-lined street. Italian/Belgian cuisine is the go.

**Chess Cafe** (☎ 016 22 28 88; Fonteinstreet 1a; mains €18; ☎ closed lunch Sat) The table reserved for chess players at the back of this buzzing wok eatery provided the restaurant's name. It's located in an old grain silo in a semi-industrial and somewhat unloved part of town, about 1km from the Grote Markt. *Wok à volonté* for €18 – pick your ingredients from the self-service buffet bar and watch the team sizzle and spice your meal with beer-laced sauces.

Also recommended:

**Imanus** (☎ 016 29 10 82; Naamsestraat 17; sandwich €2.50-4.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) Best sandwich bar in town.

**'t Galetje** (☎ 016 29 22 24; Tiensestraat 44) The place to join summer ice-cream queues.

**Match** (Bondgenotenlaan 50) Supermarket.

**Delhaize** (Wieringstraat 31) Supermarket.

**Market** (Monseigneur Ladeuzeplein; ☎ Fri) Sells fresh produce; held during the morning.

## Drinking & Entertainment

You'd be forgiven for mistaking central Leuven for the world's biggest bar. The Oude Markt literally hums with terrace *cafés* where students hang out until the wee small hours. And we're not talking lager louts here – these are young people having a good but respectful time, and it's certainly not a threatening environment. Belgian students, it seems, have already learnt the national art of socialising with a long beer or two.

**Domus** (☎ 016 20 14 49; Tiensestraat 8; ☎ Tue-Sun) Old-fashioned ale house attached to a rambling brewery where several tasty beers are brewed – try the *Nostra Domus* (amber beer with 5.8% alcohol and a light, smoky taste) or *ConDomus* (5% alcohol and bitter flavour).

**At the Bebop** (☎ 016 20 86 04; www.atthebebop.be; Tiensestraat 82) Popular atmospheric jazz *café* with occasional live gigs.

**De Blauwe Kater** (☎ 016 20 80 90; Hallengang 1) Well-hidden little pub, in an alley off Naamsestraat. Has jazz and blues performances on most Monday nights.

**Silo** (www.silo.be; Vaartkom 39; ☎ Fri & Sat) High-tech club that rates highly among Belgian clubbers, down by a canal in a former industrial building.

## Shopping

**Gobelijn** (☎ 016 23 55 86; Mechelsestraat 35) Cartoon shop tucked away on a backstreet. It sports a solid line-up of Belgian and international cartoons.

## Getting There & Around

Leuven's modern **train station** (☎ 016 21 21 21) is 800m east of the Grote Markt. There are frequent connections to Brussels (€4.30, 30 minutes), Mechelen (€3.70, 15 minutes), Antwerp (€6, 45 minutes), Diest (€4.30, 30 minutes), Lier (€5.70, 45 minutes) and Liège (€9, 50 minutes). There's also now a direct line to Brussels airport (€3, 15 minutes).

**Eurolines** (www.eurolines.be) buses and **De Lijn** (☎ 016 31 37 37) local buses depart from the big new red bus station to the right as you exit the train station; there's also an information office here. Buses 1 and 2 shuttle to the Grote Markt. A *dagkaart* (day card) can be bought from the info kiosk (€5/1.5 per adult/child) or on the bus (€6/2).

Bikes can be rented from **Jeugdherberg De Blauwput** (☎ 016 63 90 62; www.vjh.be; Martelarenlaan 11a; ☎ 8am-10pm) for €10 per day (deposit €150).

## AROUND LEUVEN

### Meerdaalwoud

Brussels has the *Fôret de Soignes* at its doorstep, Leuven has the **Meerdaalwoud**. This deciduous and conifer forest covers about 50 sq km to the south of Leuven and offers pleasant walking and cycling paths. Take the TEC bus 18 (direction Jodoigne).

### Provinciaal Recreatiedomein Kessel-Lo

This 100-hectare **recreational park** (☎ 016 25 13 92; Holsbeeksesteenweg 55; ☎ 9am-7pm) is east of Leuven and is one of the biggest playgrounds for kids in Belgium. The playground is free, but admission is charged for other attractions, such as the rowboats, the heated swimming pool and the mini-cars. From Leuven, take bus 2 or the train to Kessel-Lo, from where it's a 15-minute walk.

### DIEST

pop 22,500

The ancient town of Diest has been saved from mediocrity thanks to its *begijnhof*, one of the best-preserved examples in Belgium, together with its association with the House of Orange-Nassau. Princes from this ruling Dutch family were the lords of Diest from 1499 to 1794 – Philip, the eldest son of William the Silent, is buried in the church here.

Diest sits just south of the Demer River in a rural corner of Vlaams-Brabant. As small towns go, it's decidedly pleasant and the people particularly good humoured – they'd

have to be with the nickname they bear (see boxed text, p215).

## Information

**Main tourist office** (☎ 013 35 32 74; www.tourisme.diest.be; Grote Markt 1; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mar-Sep, closed Sun Oct-Feb) In the basement of the stadhuis.

**Tourist office** (Kerkstraat 21; ☎ 2-5pm Jul-Aug, 2-5.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov, Sun only mid-Nov-Mar) At the *begijnhof*.

## Sights & Activities

Smack on the Grote Markt is the 18th-century **stadhuis**, home to the main tourist office and, in the adjoining vaulted cellars, the **Stedelijk Museum** (☎ 013 35 32 70; Grote Markt 1; admission €1.50, combination ticket for Stedelijk Museum plus Religious Art Museum €2; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mar-Sep, closed Sun Oct-Feb). Small but rich, this museum houses artefacts from the days of Orange-Nassau as well as a wealth of religious relics. Note the 15th-century painting *Het Laatste Ordeel*, believed to be a work of Gerard Brunen, the town's best-known artist. Also worth seeking out are the two *Besloten Hofkens* (literally, private gardens). Created by the Beguines, these are large, glass-covered wooden frames containing religious bits and pieces and hung on the wall as decoration. Only a few still exist in Belgium.

Dominating the Grote Markt is **St Sulpitiuskerk**, a huge church, built from a distinct rusty-brown iron-sandstone cut from the Hageland hills. Constructed between 1321 and 1533, it replaced an older Romanesque church. It houses the tomb of Prince Philip, exotically carved *koorgestoelte* (choir stalls) and the **Museum voor Religieuze Kunst** (Religious Art Museum; admission €1.25; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun Jul-Aug, Sun only mid-May-mid-Sep), whose pride is a mon-structure embedded with 220 diamonds.

The **St Katharinabegijnhof** is at the far end of Begijnenstraat, a 10-minute walk from the Grote Markt. A splendid baroque portal marks the *begijnhof*'s main entrance. Founded in 1252, some of the well-preserved buildings date to this time. About 300 Beguines lived here in the Middle Ages, though now it's home to ordinary folk and a few artists. Its aura is charmingly authentic and most of the houses still display religious statues in the alcove above the door – a means of identification at a time when street numbering didn't exist. For more, see boxed text, p129.

If you're travelling with kids, head to **Provinciedomein Halve Maan** (☎ 013 31 15 28; Leopoldvest

**WORTH A TRIP**

**Scherpenheuvel** is to Belgium what Lourdes is to France. Pilgrims come to this tiny town from all over the country, particularly in May, to pray for healing miracles and to pay homage to a tiny, elaborately dressed statue of the Virgin Mary, enshrined in an enormous domed baroque **basilica** (☎ 7am-7pm May-Sep) built in the early 17th century. The origins of this place extend much further back...a solitary oak tree, the centre of pagan worship, originally topped the hill and in the 14th century a wooden statue of the virgin was attached.

Today the scene at the top of the hill is reminiscent of a sacred shrine in India – little huts outside the basilica glow with burning candles and colourful street stalls festooned with all manner of religious trinkets vie for the euros of visiting pilgrims. Such sights may be a dime a dozen in India, but it's a one off in Belgium. It's especially busy on weekends.

The basilica is about 6km west of Diest. The hourly bus 35 from Diest to Aarschot passes Scherpenheuvel (15 minutes).

48; admission May–mid-Sep €3, Oct-Apr free; ☎ 9am-9pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Mar). This recreational park covers a large area immediately east of the town's main ring road, and includes a big pool, a white-sand beach, waterways topped with swan-shaped boats and a playground. It's a bit of an institution in Diest, having been around since the days of B&W photos.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**B&B Tonet** (☎ 013 31 14 39; marthe.tonet@pandora.be; Schaffensesteenweg 55; s/d/tr €35/50/75) Three bright, zany rooms, all completely different, with shared bathroom facilities. Run by an extremely welcoming woman, and great value to boot.

**Hotel De Fransche Croon** (☎ 013 31 45 40; www.defranschecroon.be; Leuvensestraat 26; s/d/tr €75/95/115; ☎) Two blocks from the Grote Markt, this friendly and efficient hotel-restaurant is a stylish rabbit warren of rooms. They come in a variety of colour schemes, from neutral tones to busy florals. The buffet breakfast is excellent. Attached to the hotel is the popular and folksy Herman's Eetcafé, serving well-priced local fare and Diest's main beer, Gildenbier.

**The Lodge** (☎ 013 35 09 35; www.lodge-hotels.be; Refugiestraat 23; s/d €85/120, ste from €110/155; ☎ ☎) Best address in town. This charming hotel occupies a small, restored castle. There are 20 rooms, all with different colour schemes and décor, including beautiful old furnishings. Some of the beds are a bit narrow, but that's the only gripe. Well located on a quiet backstreet in the heart of town. Bikes can be rented for €7 per day. Kids and babies are welcome.

**La Bas** (☎ 013 32 30 32; Koning Albertstraat 11; mains €10; ☎ until 6pm Tue-Sun) Ultramodern café with a strong emphasis on light healthy cuisine –

juices, soups and yummy fresh-baked breads. Located about 100m from the church on the road to the *begijnhof* – you can't miss the striking red-and-black décor.

**Gasthof 1618** (☎ 013 33 32 40; Kerkstraat 8; snacks €3-6, mains €11-13) This is the only eatery in the *begijnhof* and is often full to bursting with coach loads of elderly tourists. The Middle Ages ambience is its draw, although it also bakes a seasonal, tasty *Diestse cruydtcoek* (€3.75), a pancake made from a herb known locally as *boerenwormkruid* (tansy). Particularly enticing on a cold winter's day.

**Market** (Kaai; ☎ Wed) Located behind the town hall, this food market is held during the morning.

**Getting There & Away**

Diest is on the railway line between Lier (€5.30, 30 minutes) and Hasselt (€3.10, 15 minutes). The train station is about 1.25km north of the Grote Markt. To get there, turn left out of the station building, veer right (crossing the Demer) then continue down Statiestraat, which leads to Demerstraat and eventually the Grote Markt.

**HASSELL**

pop 69,100

The capital of Limburg province, Hasselt is well and truly off the foreign tourist track. This modern town acts as the workaday centre for the agricultural lands surrounding it – the soils here are well suited to fruit growing, and apple and cherry orchards burst into a mass of delicate white-and-pink blossoms in spring. It's also the unofficial *jenever* capital of Belgium, and the town celebrates the white spirit with a two-day festival every October.

On a daily level, Hasselt's user-friendly town centre, bristling with shops and restaurants, is firmly entwined in the day-trip circuit for shopaholic, food-mad Flemish. And if you're travelling with kids, it's well worth detouring here to explore the open-air museum of Bokrijk (see p212).

**Orientation & Information**

Hasselt sits just south of the Albertkanaal and is circled by a one-way ring road. As always the bull's-eye is the Grote Markt, but don't expect architectural grandeur – this place pulses with people and terrace *cafés*, but that's all.

**Huis van het Kind** (House of the Child; ☎ 011 21 14 17; Maastrichterstraat 65; ☎ 1-6pm Wed, 10am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm in school holidays) Day-care centre for children from 2½ to 12 years. The only such centre in Belgium that can be easily accessed by visitors travelling with kids.

**In&Uit Hasselt** (☎ 011 23 95 40; www.hasselt.be; Lombaardstraat 3; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, closed Sun Nov-Mar) Newly revamped tourist office next to the stadhuis.

**Sights**

A must see is the **Nationaal Jenevermuseum** (National Gin Museum; ☎ 011 23 98 60; www.jenevermuseum.be; Witte Nonnenstraat 19; adult/concession €3/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Jul & Aug, closed Mon rest of the year, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Hasselt has been at the centre of the *jenever* industry since the 17th century and this beautifully restored 19th-century distillery houses a comprehensive and well-presented museum on the history of *jenever* and its distilling process, as well as produces 1000 bottles of *jenever* annually. At the end of your visit, pop in to the museum's café for a free shot of the '*jenever* of the week'. It's also a good place to buy, with one of the country's best *jenever* selections, all at normal retail prices.

The importance of *jenever* to Hasselt is symbolised by the **Borrelmanneke** (St Jozefstraat) fountain. Here, a little guy lying on a cow pours liquid from a leaking barrel to a gang of delighted pigs. During the *jenever* festival in October, the fountain spurts *jenever* rather than water, and the little man is presented with an article of clothing (Manneken Pis revisited, see p80) from the visiting *jenever* brotherhood.

**Het Stadsms** (☎ 011 23 98 90; Guido Gezellestraat 2; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, from 1pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) exhibits decorative arts and religious relics, all linked with the history of the town.

The **Stedelijk Beiaardmuseum** (☎ 011 24 10 70; Fruitmarkt; adult/concession €1.50/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun Jul-Aug) is

a carillon museum in the tower of St Quintinskathedraal, the town's main cathedral.

Fashion followers shouldn't miss the **Mode-museum** (☎ 011 23 96 21; Gasthuisstraat 11; adult/concession €3/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). This museum occupies part of a former abbey and has been tastefully renovated to allow (partial) illumination by natural light. The permanent display features fashion from the 18th century onwards, but more riveting are the many temporary exhibitions.

Like Brussels, Hasselt has been spruced up with huge **murals** of popular comic-strip characters, such as Suske & Wiske, Nero, Lucky Luke and Jommeke. You'll find them dotted around town.

About 1.5km east of the town centre is the **Japanese Tuin** (☎ 011 23 52 00; Gouverneur Verwilghensingel; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct). Hasselt and its sister city, Itami, got together to establish this picturesque Japanese garden, the largest in Europe. From the train station, take free bus H3 (direction Trichterheide).

Kids already familiar with Plopsaland (see p148) will be thrilled to know Hasselt has a new indoor version, appropriately titled **Plopsa Indoor** (☎ 011 29 30 40; www.plopsaland.be; Gouverneur Verwilghensingel 70; admission over/under 1m €14/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun, daily in school holidays). It's opposite the Japanese Tuin, 1.5km east of the town centre on the outer ring road – from the train station, take free bus H3 (direction Trichterheide).

**Festivals & Events**

Hasselt gets into two days of serious *jenever* drinking on the third weekend in October for the **Hasseltse Jeneverfeesten**. Events include a waiters' race and distillery tours and, for a few short hours, free *jenever* pours forth from the town's Borrelmanneke statue (see left).

**Sleeping**

The dearth of overnight visitors is reflected in Hasselt's lacklustre hotel scene.

**B&B Emily's Place** (☎ 011 82 12 50; www.emilysplace.be; Kneuterweg 5, Zonhoven; s/d €40/56; ☎) With your own transport, this is one of the most characterful accommodation options in the area. Just one spacious room is on offer in this delightful family home, 8km from Hasselt and close to the Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum. Depending on the weather, breakfast is taken either at the family's dining table or on the terrace and, in true Limburg style, it's a feast.

**Guesthouse Kattegatt** (☎ 011 21 44 21; www.kattegatt.be; Congostraat 9; s/d €41/77; 🍷) Well located just outside the inner ring road – a five-minute walk from the town centre – this little B&B/brasserie has four pleasant, modern and spacious rooms, all individually styled and each with a kitchenette with microwave.

**Hassotel** (☎ 011 23 06 55; www.hassotel.be; St Jozefsstraat 10; s/d from €70/93; 🍷 🍷) Modern but unremarkable, this hotel is centrally located and has a nondescript restaurant. Inquire about weekend discounts. Children and babies are welcome.

**Hotel Portmans** (☎ 011 26 32 80; www.walputsteeg.com; Minderbroederstraat 12; s/d/tr from €80/85/90; 🍷 🍷) Friendly and efficient establishment in the heart of town, with just 14 rooms built around an atrium.

**Radisson SAS** (☎ 011 77 00 00; www.hasselt.radissonsas.com; Torenpolein 8; s/d Mon–Thu from €130/145, Fri–Sun r from €89; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This new top-ender occupies the only twin towers on Hasselt's skyline and is impossible to miss.

## Eating

Hasselt has a reputation for townfolk who enjoy the art of good eating...and that's in a nation of good eaters. Wander along Ridderstraat to see an enormous mural entitled *Hasselt Stad voor Lekkerbekken*, which graphically highlights the locals' love of dining. Zuivelmarkt and Fruitmarkt, two streets lined with restaurants and hip brasseries, are good places to start hunting, but there are plenty of backstreet options as well.

**t Pandje** (☎ 011 22 38 37; Paardsdemerstraat 3; 🍷 10am–6.30pm Tue–Sat) Decorator's shop and tearoom, and *the place* to try a Hasselt *speculaas*. These cinnamon-flavoured biscuits are devoured nationally; however, they supposedly originated in Hasselt where the fat, chewy versions are still baked and sold.

**Blue Olive** (☎ 011 72 72 70; Zuivelmarkt 22; bistro mains €14–21) Big, hip bistro-bar with lampshades that have to be seen to be believed. Serves a good selection of pasta dishes, salads and typical bistro cuisine, and has an impressive wine list.

**De Goei Goesting** (☎ 011 32 52 82; Zuivelmarkt 18; mains €17–26; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Generally regarded as Hasselt's best restaurant and newly relocated to the dining heart of town. Belgian cuisine spiced with Mediterranean influences is prepared in an open kitchen and makes for delectable dining.

Also recommended:

**Panos** (☎ 011 22 22 59; Maastrichterstraat 22) Good for a quick croissant or takeaway sandwich.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Bouchon** (☎ 011 23 45 74; Fruitmarkt 24; mains €21–26; 🍷 closed Tue & lunch Sun) One of many restaurants in the pedestrianised quarter next to the church. No ee-in-green-sauce to be seen here – this is inventive Flemish cuisine at its best, taken either on a pleasant shaded terrace or in the seductively dark and inviting interior.

**Market** (Kolonel Dusartplein; 🍷 Tue & Fri) Food market; held during the morning.

## Getting There & Around

Hasselt is on two main railway lines and has convenient links in all directions. The **train station** (☎ 011 29 60 00) is about 1km west of the town centre. Local connections include to Tongeren (€3.70, 20 minutes), Leuven (€6.70, 50 minutes) and Diest (€3.10, 15 minutes), or there are IC trains further afield to Brussels (€10.70, 1¼ hours), Antwerp (€9.50, 65 minutes) and Liège (€6.70, 55 minutes).

Like Mons in Wallonia, Hasselt has free city buses. Many buses circle the town on the one-way ring of boulevards that encompass the old centre; these buses are marked Boulevardpendel (or 'BP'). Other buses, marked Centrumpendel (or 'CP'), cross through the old centre, running between the bus/train station and the Grote Markt every 10 minutes.

Local bus information can be obtained from **De Lijn** (☎ 070 220 220), which has a kiosk to the left as you exit the train station.

Free bikes are available from what's called the **Stadswachten** (City Watch; 🍷 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) behind the old stadhuis.

## AROUND HASSELT

### Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum

One of Europe's largest open-air museums, the **Bokrijk Openluchtmuseum** (☎ 011 26 53 00; www.bokrijk.be; adult/concession/child €10/8.50/5 Jul, Aug & Sep, €5/4.50/2.50 Mon–Sat Apr–Jun & Sep; 🍷 10am–6pm Apr–Sep) is a nostalgic and enjoyable look at Flanders' past. It's spaced over 60 hectares and contains over 100 old buildings from several areas – the Kempen (east of Antwerp), Haspengouw (in Limburg), and the provinces of Oost-Vlaanderen and West-Vlaanderen – as well as old townhouses from Antwerp. The buildings – village churches, an ancient *herberg* (pub), farmhouses and windmills – are all originals,

dismantled and reassembled here since 1958 when the museum was established. Local people dressed in traditional garb are employed to tend veggie gardens and bake bread, evoking yesteryear's village life.

The museum, situated 7km northeast of Hasselt, is surrounded by forest that forms part of a larger public domain. Within the forest is a splendid **arboretum**, where pink and white magnolias burst into colour in early spring. Next to the museum's main entrance is Belgium's biggest open-air kids' **playground** (*speeltuin* in Flemish). Both the arboretum and the playground are free to enter.

A small green **train** (adult/child €2.50/1.50; 🍷 daily Jul & Aug, Sun only rest of year) shuttles through the museum and past the arboretum and playground. Another way to move around is by **horse-drawn cart** (per 20min adult/child €3/2).

Bokrijk has two entrances: the main gate is to the north and is marked by the Kasteel Bokrijk, a 19th-century mansion; the southern entrance is the first you come to when arriving either by car or public transport from Hasselt. If you've got your own transport, it's best to head to the main entrance (follow the signs 'Kasteel & Museum'), where you can get an overview of the museum via a seven-minute aerial film (screened in English). Also use this entrance if you're travelling with kids as the playground is next door.

Using public transport, the easiest way to get there is by bus 1 from Hasselt train station. They depart hourly (Monday to Saturday) and take 20 minutes. On Sunday take the Genk-bound train (10 minutes, hourly), which stops 500m from the southern entrance. By car, take the N75 (direction Genk) and then the N726 (follow the signs 'Park Midden-Limburg').

## TONGEREN

pop 29,500

The town of Tongeren laps at Belgium's linguistic divide. It sits roughly equidistant between Flemish-speaking Hasselt and the Walloon city of Liège, and is the last major settlement before the frontier with the Netherlands. Together with Tournai in Hainaut it has the honour of being Belgium's oldest town but, unlike Tournai, Tongeren has lots to show for it. Its Gallo-Roman museum is the finest in Belgium.

When this area was invaded by Roman troops in 54 BC, the original locals (known as the Eburones) successfully ambushed the

Romans under the leadership of Ambiorix, a local chieftain commemorated by a statue in the town centre. The following year Caesar's troops fought back and conquered the area, which then became known as Aduatuca Tungrorum. Within a hundred years it was a thriving settlement on the road to Germany and was protected by enormous stone ramparts, some of which remain. This was the first of three walls to surround the town. Despite these walls, subsequent centuries saw invasions by the Franks, Normans and, in the 17th century, the French armies of Louis XIV who set much of the town ablaze.

Tongeren's rich history is one of its present-day drawing cards; the other is the weekly antique market that attracts buyers from far and wide.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 012 39 02 55; www.tongeren.be in Flemish; Stadhuisplein 9; 🍷 8.30am–5pm Jul–Aug, 8.30am–noon & 1–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun Sep–Easter, 8.30am–noon & 1–5pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm Sat & Sun Easter–Sep) is in the town centre.

## Sights & Activities

Overshadowing the Grote Markt is the elegant **Onze Lieve Vrouwebasiliek** (Basilica of Our Lady; 🍷 10am–noon & 1.30–5pm). A church has stood on this site for at least 1200 years, possibly longer. Historians believe a place of worship existed here as early as the 4th century and that it was the first church north of the Alps to be dedicated to the Virgin. Due to its rich history, the basilica is now the subject of a decade-long excavation project, expected to finish in 2009. Tourists have been well accommodated during this lengthy process and only a part of the basilica is ever off limits at any one time. As for the basilica itself, little of its 11th-century origins are visible; most of what you see today is from the 14th to 16th centuries. The church's most prized possession is Our Lady of Tongeren, a delicate walnut statue of the Virgin and Child from 1479 that is kept in a glass case and is paraded through the streets during the Kroningsfeesten (see p215). Other treasures to keep an eye out for are the 16th-century Antwerp-made retable (screen) depicting scenes from the Virgin's life and, in the **Schatkamer** (Treasury; adult/concession/child €2.50/2/0.50; 🍷 closed 8am–noon Mon), a pious 11th-century Head of Christ.



Immediately outside the basilica is a small open-air **archaeological site** containing the foundations of medieval buildings and a section of the 4th-century second Roman wall that once encircled the town. Walk through the site to see how towns have been layered like lasagne throughout history.

Smack in the heart of town, the **Gallo-Roman Museum** (☎ 012 67 03 32; www.galloromeinsmuseum.be; Kienenstraat 15; adult/concession/child/family €5/4/2/10; ☞ noon-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) displays findings from the town's Gallo-Roman and Merovingian periods. Closed for renovation and expansion until early 2008, if the previous exhibits are anything to go by, it's bound to be impressive.

Tongeren's **antique and brocante market** is billed as the Benelux's biggest. It has been going for nearly 30 years and today attracts hundreds of traders who take over Veemarkt (and most of Maastrichterstraat and Leopoldwal) every Sunday morning from about 5am – be here early if you're seriously hunting antiques. Much of the antique trade goes on in the sprinkling of permanent shops dotted around this area – the tourist office's free

booklet *A Round of Antiques* details many of these outlets (mostly open Wednesday to Sunday).

Tongeren's **begijnhof** is no longer an enclosed affair and is largely overshadowed in this part of Flanders by the superbly preserved *begijnhof* at Diest. Still, it's a pretty part of town and well worth a wander. There's also a rustic little tavern here that makes a great pitstop (Herberg De Pelgrim, p216).

Tongeren's new **Het Land van Ooit** (Once Upon A Time Land; www.landvanooit.be), just to the northwest of town, will be open by the time you read this. It's a clone of the highly successful Land Van Ooit in the Netherlands but, in keeping with local history, this one takes visitors back into Roman times. Kids will love it – expect lots of fancy dress, make-believe and role playing. The tourist office will have full opening hours and details.

Those travelling with young kids will delight at the **Stadspark de Motten** (Kastanjewal) at the southern end of town, a five-minute walk from the Grote Markt. This huge, extremely well-equipped playground is free; there are also go-carts, minigolf and boats. Parents can

have time out at the terrace *café* next to the climbing frames.

## Festivals & Events

The **Kroningsfeesten** (Coronation Celebration; www.kroningsfeesten.be) celebrates the town's historic religious status – Tongeren is believed to be the first place of worship of the Virgin Mary north of the Alps – and takes place just once every seven years (next on 5 to 12 July 2009). During the last event, 600,000 people lined the streets to watch the venerated 15th-century statue of the Virgin and scores of participants clad in medieval-style garb parade through town. Due to the event's popularity, the procession is performed on four days.

## Sleeping

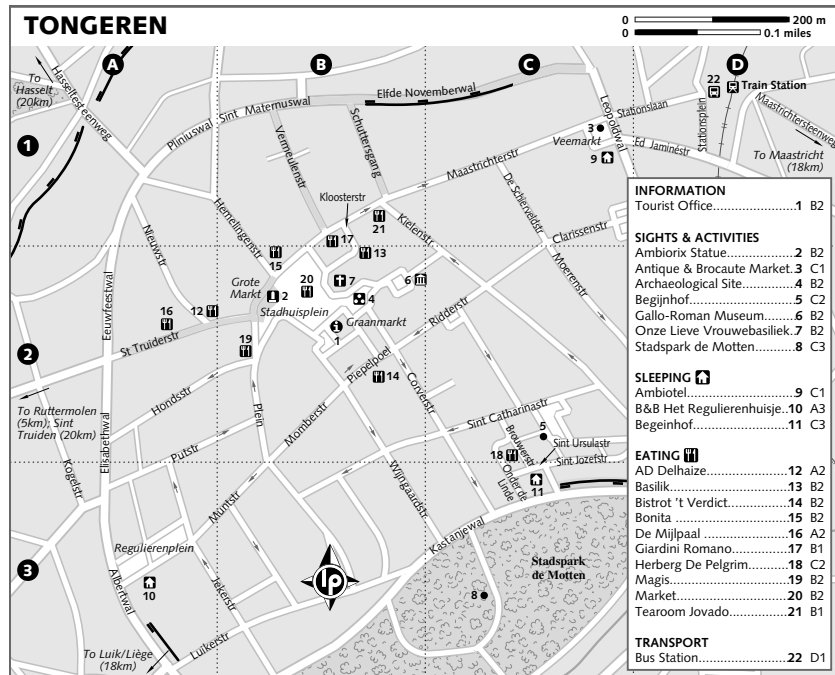
**Begeinhof** (☎ 012 39 13 70; www.vjh.be; St Ursulastraat 1; dm per person €16.60; ☞) A modern youth hostel in an antique frame. It's pleasantly sited in the heart of the *begijnhof*, about 900m from the train station, and has good rooms (maximum six beds). The hostel's colourful *café* is fine for a snack.

**B&B Het Regulierenhuisje** (☎ 012 23 76 62; Regulierenplein 30; s/tw €35/60; ☞) Two clean simple

rooms, each with bathroom, are located on the 1st and 2nd floors of the house next door to the owners. Babies and children are welcome. It's about a three-minute walk from the Grote Markt and, for families, is wonderfully handy to Stadspark De Motten. There's a shed for securing bikes at night.

**Ambiotel** (☎ 012 26 29 50; www.ambiotel.be; Veemarkt 2; s/d/tr Sun-Fri €75/100/125, Sat €85/110/135; ☞) An unremarkable address, located dead centre in the antique area and charging accordingly.

**Ruttermolen** (☎ 012 24 16 24; www.ruttermolen.be; Ruttermolenstraat 20; studio per night €90, per weekend 2/4/6 persons €170/185/220, per week €295/310/370; ☞) With a car, this B&B is a fabulous address, especially for travelling families. It's a part of an old mill located alongside the River Jeker and the welcoming family who run it have converted the old stables into three modern self-contained studios. There's a large above-ground pool for summer, and plans are afoot for an all-weather indoor pool in what was once a bakery. It's 5km from Tongeren – follow the signs to Borgworm for 4km, then turn left (direction Rutten), from where it's 1km along this road, on the right.



## ALL IN JEST

Belgians are good at laughing at themselves, and the Flemish language is full of derisive expressions that hark back to the days of Breugel or beyond. Where else in the world, for example, would you find 'cobblestones' referred to as *kinderkopkes* – literally 'the heads of little children'?

Maneblossers is the popular name for the citizens of Mechelen. It comes from a local legend in which a 17th-century reveller had one-too-many at the pub and then thought the tower of St Romboutskathedraal, the city's cathedral, was on fire. He raised the alarm and townsfolk rallied to put out the blaze. It soon became apparent that the 'fire' was simply the light of the moon casting an unusual reddish glow around the tower. Hence their nickname Maneblossers, or 'Extinguishers of the Moon'.

The people of Ghent are known as the Stropdragers because Emperor Charles V humiliated the rebellious townsfolk by forcing them to wear a *strop* (noose) around their neck.

Antwerp folk are sometimes referred to as Sinjoren, which comes from the Spanish *señor* ('Sir'), and originated during the 16th century when Spain ruled the region. So the story goes, the people of Antwerp were gentrified enough to receive this accolade.

But not all the nicknames are so endearing or complimentary. The people of Lier are known as the Schapekoppen, or 'Sheepheads', due to their reputation for being stupid, and there's even a street in Lier named Schapekoppenstraat. Similarly, those from Poperinghe in West Flanders are nicknamed Keikoppen, or 'Pigheads'.

From here the names go downhill fast. The citizens of Diest are the Mosterdshijters ('Mustard Shitters'), while Tongeren inhabitants have what must be the nation's worst appellation – the Schoepschijters, or 'Shovel Shitters'.

Hardly surprisingly, the origins of these last two seem lost in time – at least none of the locals we asked knew how the names came about but, true to character, they had a good chuckle when the subject was raised.

## Eating

**Tearoom Jovado** (☎ 012 23 43 40; Maastrichterstraat 35; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon) Old-fashioned café known for its freshly ground coffee and calorific cakes. Stock up on pralines from Neuhaus next door before settling in.

**Giardini Romano** (☎ 012 23 04 85; Maastrichterstraat 17; pizza €7.50-9, mains €10-21; ☎) Long-established Italian restaurant with a pretty gaudy interior but superb fresh homemade pasta. Kids are most welcome.

**Herberg De Pelgrim** (☎ 012 23 83 22; Brouwerstraat 9; mains €9-17; ☎ Wed-Sun) Snuggled into the *begijnhof* quarter, this is a great spot for a light meal or snack. The building dates from 1632 and is disgustingly quaint. It's well priced, and offers salads (€7 to €9), pasta dishes (€7 to €12) and Flemish staples.

**Basilik** (☎ 012 21 33 24; Kloosterstraat 2; mains €11-21) Big buzzing split-level brasserie hidden away in a tiny lane next to the basilica. Locals love the mocha tones and wood feel. Great for a snack or meal at any time.

**Bistrot 't Verdict** (☎ 012 26 42 24; Piepelpoel 3; mains €15-20; ☎ lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Wed-Mon) Backstreet bistro with subtle décor and a limited range of excellent Belgian dishes. It's popular with the locals and comes highly recommended.

**Magis** (☎ 012 74 34 64; Grote Markt 31; mains €25; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) Small corner restaurant just down from the Ambiorix statue that does excellent Belgian/French cuisine. The décor's subtle, the staff friendly and the location superb. There's also a tiny terrace in fine weather.

**De Mijlpaal** (☎ 012 26 42 77; St Truiderstraat 25; 3-course lunch menu €38, dinner menus €38-51; ☎ Fri-Wed) One of the first restaurants to bring 'modern' to Tongeren. Features strong colours, inventive Belgian cuisine (vegetarians aren't forgotten) and a chef, Jan Menten, who knows his stuff (he worked for two years in Brussels' *Comme Chez Soi*, Belgium's most famous restaurant).

Also recommended:

**AD Delhaize** (Sint Truiderstraat 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Supermarket.

**Bonita** (☎ 012 23 31 22; Hemelingenstraat 9-11; snacks €2.50-4; ☎ Tue-Sun) The place for a *baguette* sandwich, panini, pancake or ice-cream; dine in or take away.

**Market** (Grote Markt; ☎ Thu) Held during the morning.

## Getting There & Around

Hourly trains depart from Tongeren's **train station** (☎ 02 528 28 28) for Hasselt (€3.70, 20

minutes), Liège (€3.80, 30 minutes) and Sint Truiden (via Hasselt; €5.70, 45 minutes). **De Lijn** (☎ 070 220 220) buses depart from the bus station, located next to the train station – bus 23A goes direct to Sint Truiden (€2.50, 35 minutes).

Free **bikes** (☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep) are available from the tourist office (deposit €10). Bikes can be reserved in advance. A few have baby seats, but there are no children's bikes.

## ZOUTLEEUW

### pop 7900

The sleepy Brabant village of Zoutleeuw, 7km west of Sint Truiden, sits on the edge of the Hageland wine-producing region. Once a prosperous medieval cloth-making centre, it fell into decline along with that industry in the 15th century. It's now best known for the rich art collection housed in the turreted **St Leonarduskerk** (admission €1.50; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-Sep), a huge Gothic structure that seems overblown in its present-day context at the heart of such a small village. St Leonarduskerk was the only significant church in the country to escape untouched during the religious wars and invasions that swept this part of Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries, and its interior is adorned with many medieval art treasures.

Opposite the church is the **tourist office** (☎ 011 78 12 88; www.zoutleeuw.be in Flemish; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-4pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Fri Oct-Mar), a good place to buy some of the local Hageland wine.

The best bet for overnighters is **Hofter Wallen** (☎ 011 78 03 43; Stationstraat 44; r per person €34). This B&B occupies part of a restored farmhouse with a beautiful rose garden and is situated alongside the 16th-century fortification walls.

For a bite or a slurp head to the local favourite, **De Cleynae Taefel** (☎ 011 78 43 43; Prins Leopold-plaats 4; snacks €4-10; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 8am-9.30pm Sat & Sun). This cheery little place churns out waffles, sandwiches and pancakes. More substantial fare can be had at **Pannenhuis** (☎ 011 78 50 02; Grote Markt 25; mains €12-20; ☎ closed Tue evening Jun-Aug), a whitewashed restaurant serving typical Flemish food.

To get to Zoutleeuw, take bus 25 from Sint Truiden (direction Tienen; 20 minutes, every two hours). For details on getting to Sint Truiden, see left.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'