Fabulous flanders

Pickled in Gothic
Rick Steves visits picturesque Bruges

Calling All Chocoholics
Chocolates like you’ve never tried before

War and Peace in Flanders Fields
Keeping the memory alive

Your Antwerp Shopping Guide
Get all the insider addresses

In Praise of Belgian Fries
They’re just so finger-licking good!

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As a fashion designer
I am always in search
of old values in a new
world.

My challenge is to find
authenticity and to
translate tradition into
original, contemporary
designs.

I travel a lot but I wouldn’t trade the modest skyline
outside my window in the center of Flanders for the
world.

Every time I come home, it feels warm and welcoming
and it’s the perfect place to give you an open-minded
view on the rest of the world.

It’s then that you realize how good life really is here…

Flanders shares its cultural history and refreshing
philosophy with every visitor and pushes you to look
for new impressions and personal experiences.

In his famous song “The flat land”, Jacques Brel sings
about the sea, the sun and the storm, the open sky with
churches and cathedrals, the sailor and the girl, the
farmer and the maid, the fairs and Flanders Fields, about
youth and death, the countryside, the bourgeoisie…
but most of all love.

Here is where I find my inspiration, in a poem or a
painting, here is where I find the peace to create, in this
beautiful setting, here is where I find myself.

Tim Van Steenbergen
Best Belgian designer, ELLE Style Awards 2009
My three main interests in Brussels are art, architecture, and ale.

If you don’t know much about fine arts and don’t care, go anyway. A few hours will pique your interest, and teach you to see. Climb the Kunstberg, the Hill of Arts, for the Royal Museums of Fine Arts’ two rich collections. They cover five centuries, from the 15th to the present. Near them stands the newest museum dedicated to the surrealist Magritte. At the bottom of the hill is BOZAR (Beaux Arts), a place for temporary exhibits and concerts. You’ll want to go to the Musical Instruments Museum—an ornate art nouveau building with a rooftop restaurant—and the Belgian Centre for Comic Strip Art that honors the character Tintin and his originator Hergé.

The least promoted and most viewed museum is the metro. Over 60 works of art decorate the stations, paintings, walls of colorful tiles, bas-reliefs, statues. The metro will take you to all of them for the admission fee of a day pass.

As you stroll, things strange and wonderful catch your eyes: Art Nouveau buildings. Brussels is the birthplace of the style, fathered by Victor Horta, then nursed by many. A guided bus tour will take you to the districts—Ixelles and St. Gillis—richest in these beauties.

As any city of capital size, Brussels has distinct districts. One such is the Marolles, just under the monumental Palace of Justice. The name Rue des Tanneurs recalls its humble origins: tanners were banished to outside the town walls because of the stink of their workshops. Marolles has always been working class, a village by itself where the Brussels dialect—Brusselse Sproek or Marollien, that even Belgians have trouble understanding—has held out. Rue Haute and Rue Blaes have shoulder-to-shoulder second-hand shops with good stuff that you can’t bring back on the plane. However, Vossenplein has a daily flea market for portable treasures.

The third attraction is ale and beer. Germans may be the statistical champions in quantity but Belgians drink more kinds, over 400 brands. Three museums are dedicated to brewing. The Cantillon is a working artisanal brewery that produces traditional Belgian gueuze and lambiek. The Belgian Brewers’ Museum and the Schaarbeek Museum of Beer exhibit the tools of the trade, and visitors can taste the product.

The drinking places range from quiet neighborhood cafes to jazz pubs with international audiences, from simple taverns to the extravagant Art Nouveau Falstaff, and the gilded and mirrored Belle Epoque Cirio. In between are my two favorites: La Mort Subite that looks like an old railway station waiting room but has better atmosphere, and À La Bécasse that serves lambiek in traditional white and blue jugs as in the days of Breughel. It’s hard to get a bad meal here. A critic once said “if French cuisine is superb, Belgian is sublime.”

Before you leave, you must have a lunch of mussels and chips and/or Flemish fries (the French didn’t invent them) on the street, out of a paper cone, with mayonnaise. Don’t say good-bye—you’ll be back.

Is Brussels a walkable town? Yes, you can cross the center in 40 minutes. But the 15 walks in a guide book add up to 24 hours—I suggest three or five days. You don’t walk here, you mosey, stop after every few steps to take a closer look at something beautiful or curious.

Start on Europe’s finest square, the Grand’Place (Grote Markt). Do you see churches and royal palaces? No, they are the City Hall and guild halls in Gothic, Flemish Renaissance, Italian Baroque in a majestic jumble of turrets, statues, fluted columns and other ornaments.

Then think about what to see and feel here.

by George Pandi
The secret’s out. Brussels is a hot bed of à la mode design. European trendsetters and fashionistas from as far away as Japan would rather you didn’t know the truth. But, Brussels pulses with style. Avant garde and edgy, it bursts with chic designers that make Milan and Paris pale in comparison. Take a walk through the city’s well marked fashion districts and be wowed by ateliers that make the heart soar. From jewelers to milliners to stylists to furniture makers, the neighborhood shops are filled with one of a kind works of wearable, usable art. Resistance is futile.

Revered for centuries for its lace, cloth, and tapestry workshops, Brussels’ history set the tone that inspired today’s independent designers. Always a creative place, the city gave birth to Surrealism, Art Nouveau—even the comic book. So, it’s little wonder that invention and imagination continue to flourish here. With a cultural base of inhabitants as highly textured as the tapestries of yore, Brussels feeds creative impulses with its varied, myriad influences. Contemporary designers like Oliver Strelli and Thierry Rondenet draw from the diversity of the city. “We are inspired by the city’s multiplicity and open minded ways,” says Rondenet, whose label Own is sold from his Brussels-based boutique on Place du Jardin Aux Fleurs.

Find the nerve center of the city’s creative design, among the cobble-stoned streets of the Dansaert District, a gentrified area nestled between the Brussels Canal and the Saint-Géry district. Within a warren of winding streets, explore the ateliers and shops of both emerging and established designers, many of them graduates of La Cambre, Brussels own fashion school. Once the site of a 10th century fortified castle, built on a river that brought in the textile trade, the area’s now the lair of many notable designers. Enjoy Nicolas Woit’s boudoir chic, minimalist furniture by Xavier Lust, sophisticated little back dresses created by Azniv Afsar and regal hats conjured by Christophe Coppens—among legions of others.

Once inhabited by 12th century craftsmen, the Saint Jacques District, home to the Manneken Pis, now celebrates the modern arts. Shops here range from old bookstores to vintage clothing to music stores to sellers of high-style cooking objects. Designers showing here personify cool, trendy and cutting edge. Nearby, discover the Galeries Royales Saint Hubert, a covered passageway, roofed in glass, stung with an Italian Renaissance architectural influence. Born from the bones of 14th century shopping arcades, this marketplace was meant for strolling. Upscale, it still boasts its original inscribed motto “Omnibus Omnia”—or everything for everyone. Accordingly, find furniture shops, leather goods, bookstores, cafes, shoemakers and well established design royalty like Kaat Tilley, Delvaux and Mer du Nord.

It may take days to wander through every fashion district in town—but it’s worth it. In the Marollen, between rue Haute and rue Blaes, on the Place de Balle, find treasure in Brussels’ oldest flea market, held daily since 1870. On the bordering streets, enjoy a wealth of vintage shops, including independent vendors offering quirky items of all sorts. Antique lovers should not miss the Sablon, an elegant area also known for its chocolatiers, within walking distance from the Marollen.

Our advice? Take along an extra suitcase when you visit. You know you’ll need it.

Modo Bruxellae: everything you need to know about the Brussels fashion scene.
www.modobruxellae.be

Dansaert Street: the hunting ground for the hottest Belgian designers
www.shopinbrussels.be

Galeries St. Hubert: home of 54 luxury boutiques
http://www.galeries-saint-hubert.com

The Quartier Avenue Louise-Boulevard de Waterloo, Brussels’ answer to the Champs Elysees, boasts global brands and pricy Belgian designers. Not far away, the rue du Bailli-Place du Chatelain-Place Brugman District, is awash with Art Deco and Art Nouveau architecture. The popular Wednesday afternoon market brings locals and tourists alike in search of unique finds. Close to Mont des Arts-the Rue-de Namur-Matonge-Saint-Boniface, Flagey District delights with its street couture ambiance. Finally, the European-District-Cinquantenaire, home to the European Union, holds the Musee du Cinquantenaire, a decorative arts museum that goes beyond shopping to sum up the lively fashion and design history of Brussels.

Our advice? Take along an extra suitcase when you visit. You know you’ll need it.
In today’s challenging economic times, the idea of a journey to the romantic capitals of Europe—Paris and Venice—seems beyond reach for many couples.

But inveterate travelers know that the mother of a great trip is invention.

A short Atlantic hop to Belgium on one of the many discount airlines with routes to the EU capital city can stand-in for a trip to both Paris and Venice and be done in a long weekend, too.

In our sensual version of the Grand Tour, Brussels with its French cafes and continental ambiance pinch-hits for Paris and Bruges, the “Venice of the North,” with its canals and silent car-free cobbled streets offers the idyllic charm of its southern sister city—with none of the crowds.

Begin your journey in Brussels. In the time of Lautrec and Gauguin, young couples seeking privacy from family and friends would travel to the Belgian capital for intimate weekends in small pensions. For couples seeking a similarly seductive pied-a-terre, far from the typical tourist hotel, the Manos Premier Hotel is a refuge from the everyday world. The original 19th family home near the chic Av. Louise is now the site of what Condé Nast Traveler calls “one of the newest hot hotels in the world.”

Prior to your evening ensconced in silken sheets, spend a languorous afternoon in the city of Brussels (or Bruxelles if you want to practice your French), sampling the gustatory delights of Belgian chocolate at the trendy, new and aptly named artisanal boutique Passion Chocolat. (Note that Casanova proclaimed chocolate the most powerful aphrodisiac!!) Or share a steaming bowl of wine-laced mussels at the traditional café, Chez Leon - cheek-by-jowl to the glorious Grand’ Place. This self-proclaimed “temple of mussels and chips” has lured lovers for over 100 years. Cap off dinner with a fizzy glass of Belgian Raspberry or Cherry Lambic beer – for our money as refreshing as champagne and much more reasonable - at a café overlooking the Grand Place (or the Grote Markt as it is also known).

Then hop a train (the station is right in the center of town) for two days in what has always been the savvy travelers’ favorite alternative to Venice - Bruges.

Bruges’ marvelously intact medieval architecture and silent canals (much cleaner than the ones in Venice) are famed for their sensual, silent ambiance. Shops are festooned with Belgian tapestries and lace and couples can rent horse-drawn carriages to tour the town in a slow-paced promenade that will make you feel as if you’ve died and entered the pages of a Harlequin Romance heaven.

Take a canal tour for a real Venetian-style experience or stroll through Bruges’ many flowering gardens and green refuges - the Beguinage is an ancient convent open to visitors and still a working Benedictine residence. The silence is broken only by the occasional call of a swan - the bird of romance that mates for life.

Finally, check in for the night at one of Bruges’ many plush boutique hotels. The Pand Hotel, a Small Luxury Hotel property that has been called “the most romantic hotel in Belgium,” is a perfect haven for couples who’ve spent the day succumbing to Bruges’ lingering and dreamlike spell.
Calling all chocoholics

by Phyllis Meras

I have just returned from sampling Belgian chocolate in Flanders. I am several pounds heavier, but most contented. I have nibbled on traditional filled pralines, silky smooth truffles and tablets of chocolate.

I have tried the new style in chocolates as well. In Bruges, at The Chocolate Line, the pralines I ate sounded outrageous. One had a fried onion filling and another sun-dried tomato, olive and basil inside. A white chocolate praline had a center of oyster juice and boiled cream. But, to my surprise -the ingredients notwithstanding- the chocolates weren’t outrageous at all.

I also ate some of these “nouvelle vague” chocolates in Brussels. Those were thyme and cardamom-flavored at Zaabär. There, through a window, I could watch the chocolates being made. I saw the chocolate-making process again while I enjoyed salt and pepper-flavored chocolates at Laurent Gerbaud’s shop near the Central Railroad Station.

In Brussels’ stylish Sablon district, I browsed among antiques shops before I went to Pierre Marcolini. There I discovered that Earl Grey-flavored chocolate is delectable. I watched strawberries being hand-dipped in chocolate at Godiva and stopped in at Neuhaus, almost next door. At Wittamer’s I had a delectable ganache made with fresh cream and dark chocolate infused with raspberry. After an afternoon of sightseeing, in which I went to Gothic Notre Dame du Sablon to admire the 16th-century stained glass windows and to the new Magritte Museum filled with that Surrealist painter’s work, I was ready for something simple. I tried a new Magritte Museum filled with that Surrealist painter’s work, I was ready for something simple. I tried a chocolate-dipped lemon peel at President George W. Bush’s favorite chocolatier, Mary’s, founded in 1919.

The next day, I was off to Antwerp. There I stopped at the Diamond Museum, the Rubens House filled with his paintings, and the 16th-century Museum Plantin-Moretus, a leading publishing house of the Renaissance. It is an elegant old house with walls of gilded leather and displays wooden printing presses, wooden type and hand-tinted books of the period. By the time I got to Gunther Wattle’s chocolate café, I was ready for a cup of hot chocolate and a praline with ginger and lemon filling. I also smacked my lips over a traditional praline of ground toasted hazelnuts and caramelized sugar. Then at Goossens’, in business since 1956, I happily devoured a milk-chocolate hand, which is the symbol of Antwerp. It was filled with almond-paste and the liqueur Elixer d’Anvers. Another day, I had tea and chocolates at Del Rey, a café, patisserie and chocolate shop at Appelmannstraat 5.

Between Choco-Story and La Maison des Maîtres, I learned everything (well, a most everything) about chocolate. Now I know that it was in Belgium in 1912 that Jean Neuhaus Jr. created the praline- the filled chocolate. His wife, dismayed that her husband’s chocolates were being piled helter-skelter in a paper cone to be sold, invented the ballotin. It is the cardboard box in which chocolates can be neatly, safely laid in layers on paper.

Next, I took the train to Bruges where I explored its winding streets and crossed its canals. I visited not only the Chocolate Line that Dominique and Fabienne Persoone opened in 1992; I also went to Choco-Story, the Chocolate Museum in the 16th-century Huis ‘de Crone’ on St-Jansplein. There, in addition to learning chocolate lore; I, again, watched melted chocolate being poured into molds to make pralines. In summer, walking tours of Bruges’ 52 chocolate shops can be arranged. Then I set off for Ghent. There at Koestraat 42, Stephen van Hecke and his 74-year-old father, Florent, were busy making soft ganaches of boiled cream, butter, chocolate and tea which they let me sample. Delicious! At Lucas Van Hoorbeke’s, at St.Baafsplein, I had a ganache flavored with champagne.

Back in Brussels, I went to La Maison des Maîtres Chocolatiers Belges on the Grand’ Place to watch a video about chocolate. I was also invited, as are all visitors, to see what it feels like to pour melted chocolate into a mold myself.

I have found out that chocolate is good for almost everything that ails you. It is rich in vitamin E that helps prevent aging, and in flavonoids that are anti-oxidants. It is also rich in phosphorus, potas-sium and iron. And the tannic acid in chocolate (take out the sugar) even helps prevent tooth decay! I have learned that the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Indochina are the world’s leading cacao producers.

Chocolate can be fashioned into rabbits and eggs and Santa Claus, but in Belgium it is molded into every conceivable size and shape. At Burie Chocolatier in Antwerp, the palace of the Sheik of Dubai was constructed in miniature in chocolate – six feet by six feet.

But the best thing about Belgian chocolate, of course, is how delicious it is. In Belgium, they know all about that. Their per capita consumption of chocolate is 12 pounds a year!
Explore Flanders with Thalys!

Let Thalys introduce you to the richly cultural and beautiful Flanders region in Belgium, at the heart of Europe. Enjoy the delights and ease of a high speed rail service. Thalys brings together 19 major European cities and works alongside Belgium’s national rail network for a trip that will take you further.

Extend your visit to Bruges, Gent or Ostende, or take a trip to the vibrant city of Brussels and discover even more of Flanders. To make your travel even easier why not make the most of the “Any Belgian Station” fares? For a nominal fee, your Thalys international ticket can be used for a connecting train journey between any Belgian national station and Brussels-Midi, Antwerpen Berchem/ Antwerpen Centraal (Anvers) or Liège-Guillemins Thalys stations.

So make the most of your Thalys experience. Enjoy the fine sands of the Flemish coast or explore the sprawling natural parks of the Limburg area. With unrivaled hospitality, delicious cuisine and breathtaking architecture, Flanders is ideal for visitors.

With Thalys, Brussels is your ideal hub for visiting numerous European cities. The buzzing Belgian capital is a pleasant 22 minute journey from Paris (France), a route that enjoys up to 28 departures every day. You can travel between Cologne (Germany) and Brussels in just 1 hour 47 minutes with 6 departures a day. And Amsterdam (the Netherlands) is only 1 hour 53 minutes away with up to 10 departures a day.

For the optimum travel experience with Thalys, our special services in Comfort 1 class, such as free on-board WiFi access, meal service and daily newspapers in several languages, allow you to enjoy the advantages of a high-speed journey in absolute comfort.

Travel with Thalys. Discover Europe the easiest way in total comfort.

Information and booking: www.thalys.com

Savvy travelers have known about Matongé for years. Matongé is the vibrant African quarter of Brussels and its steamy all-night-long night life and African ambiance have made it a local legend.

Although wining and dining in Matongé is one of the best bargains in Brussels, its streets are a stone’s throw away from the well-heeled shops and hotels of the Av. Toisson d’Or and are as welcoming as any of the more traditional tourist areas. Getting to Matongé is easy. You walk from the city center across the Av. Toisson d’Or or you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop.

You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you walk from the city center across the Av. Toisson d’Or or you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. You’ll know you’ve arrived in le petit Congo when you take the Metro to the Porte de Namur/Ixelles stop. 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The best time to visit Matongé is on Fridays and Saturdays (especially Saturday night). Go on a late Friday afternoon, when locals are out in force, chatting with friends, drinking beer and African banana wine and listening to the Rhumba Rock of Papa Wembe or other African music stars in the Galerie d’Ixelles. This Congolese mini-mall at the top of the Chaussée de Wavre is still the social heart of Matongé. Inside are bars and beauty salons, informal beer cafes and boutiques where rich Congolese matrons fly all the way from Kinshasa to buy gold jewelry and the latest waxes (batiks).

Stroll down the Chaussée de Wavre and check out the sensual riot of colors and scents emanating from Matongé’s many other shops and boulangeries. When you get hungry, turn into the Café Tambours Sacres, Chez Doudou where an informal dinner of Moambe Fish or Chicken (meat in palm hearts sauce) and a Belgian beer will cost you all of 20 Euro. The Café Tambours Sacres is a local favorite: impromptu dancing around the bar, heady banana wine and occasional live drum music keeps it on the Congolese “A” list.

If you feel like a full-on evening out, try dinner and music at the L’Horloge du Sud. Owner, Ken N’oliaye often invites friends like Peter Gabriel Real World label band Afro-Celts drummer, N’faly Kouyate for all night African music jams. The audience mix of buttoned down EU officials and global music stars makes L’Horloge feel like a modern day version of Rick’s Bar in Casablanca.

Sunday morning hangovers can be repeated Matongé-style with 10:30 Mass at St. Boniface. The service in the frankincense-filled gothic cathedral is sung in French, Swahili and Lingala.
**Brussels Beyond Mussels**

After washing down your plate of moules frites (mussels and fries) with one of our local beers, those with a passion for food may want to venture out and discover the fantastic creative cuisine that Brussels has to offer. Be surprised by classical dishes such as shrimp croquettes and steak tartare or go for more adventurous options - cow udder carpaccio or speculoos (gingerbread) ice cream. Whatever your choice, you’ll experience an authentic slice of Brussels life.

### Midi Station
**Concept:** Antoine Pinto  
**Place Victor Horta, 26**  
**Next to the Midi Station**  
**1060 Bruxelles**  
**Phone:** 02 526 88 00  
**Open 7 days a week (closed on Sunday evening)**  
**Underground car park**  
**www.midi-station.eu**  

Those who arrive in Brussels by train won’t need to look far to find some excellent food and entertainment. Right next door to the Thalys and Eurostar terminals, the new concept restaurant Midi Station has recently opened its doors. This bustling brasserie offers a comfortable lounge area, cocktail bar, dance floor and places to relax or work. Stop by for a simple sandwich, sit down for a five course meal or try their signature seafood platter.

### Viva M’Boma
**Rue de Flandre 17**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**Phone:** 02 512 15 93

The name of the restaurant means ‘vive la grandmere’ (long live the grandmother) in the old Brussels dialect. Viva m’Boma is located in an old trape butcher’s shop (selling mainly offal) and serves up all the wonderful flavours of traditional Belgian cuisine. Speciality dishes include veal and lamb sweetbreads, kidneys cooked in a rich madeira sauce, and a hearty pot-au-feu stew. Make sure to have the speculoos ice cream, made from the famous Belgian gingerbread.

### Bon Bon
**Chef:** Christophe Hardiquest  
**Avenue des Carmélites 93**  
**1180 Brussels (Ukkol)**  
**Phone:** 02 346 66 15  
**www.bon-bon.be**

Christophe Hardiquest is without doubt one of the most talented chefs of his generation—and he has 2 Michelin stars to prove it! Bon-Bon, with an open kitchen, offers dishes primarily based on market products and is perhaps one of the best addresses in Brussels.

### Le chalet de la forêt
**Chef:** Pascal de Valkenier  
**Drève de Lorraine 43**  
**1180 Brussels (Ukkol)**  
**Phone:** 02 374 54 16  
**Fax:** 02 374 35 71  
**Closed Saturday and Sunday**  
**www.lechaletdeleforet.be**

In a charming location next to the forest, this one Michelin star restaurant combines traditional cooking with the freshest seasonal ingredients including wild game. That and one of the best terraces in Brussels combine to make Le chalet de la forêt a perennial favorite.

### Bij Den Boer
**Baksteenkaai 60**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**Phone:** 02 512 61 22  
**www.bijdenboer.com**  
**Chefs:** Marnic Malaise & Eric Beretta

Enjoy traditional Belgian cooking: shrimp croquettes, green eel, mussels, cod in Dutch sauce, in a place where, like Jacques Brel used to sing, it smells like mussels.

### Écailler du palais royal
**Chef:** Richard Hahn  
**Rue Bodenbroek 18**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**Phone:** 02 512 87 51  
**www.lecaillerdupalaisroyal.be**

Chef Richard Hahn is like a fish in the water here! The seafood platter is a pure delight and the entire menu is outstanding. A must: have lunch at the counter!

### Les Flâneries gourmandes
**Chef:** Alex Malaise  
**Rue Beckmans 2**  
**1060 Brussels (Saint-Gilles)**  
**Phone:** 02 537 32 20  
**www.restaurantesgourmandes.be**

Small neighborhood restaurant with affordable prices where chef Alex Malaise offers a menu that changes every two weeks! Enjoy quality wines from small producers paired with delicious cuisine.

### Café des spores
**Chef:** Nicolas Scheidt  
**Chaussée d’Alsemberg 103**  
**1060 Brussels (Saint-Gilles)**  
**Phone:** 02 534 13 03  
**www.cafedespores.be**

Newly arrived French chef Nicolas Scheidt offers a simple and tasty cuisine in this contemporary bistro that specializes in mushroom dishes!

### Le Vismet
**Chef:** Tom Decroos  
**Place Sainte-Catherine 23**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**Phone:** 02 218 85 45  
**Closed: Monday & Sunday**  

Trained by Michelin two star chef Yves Mattagne, Chef Tom Decroos’ restaurant has had a loyal following for many years. Savour creativity prepared dishes made with the freshest of ingredients.

### Brasserie Le Toucan
**Chefs:** Fabrice Rochetaux & Jean-Pierre Gascoin  
**Avenue Louis Lepoutre 1**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**www.toucanbrasserie.com**

Into people watching? This is the place to go in Brussels to see and be seen…recently awarded “best new restaurant” the location is a delight too—not to be missed!

### Friture René
**Chef:** Dirk Piolon  
**Place de la Résistance 14**  
**1070 Brussels (Anderlecht)**  
**Closed: Monday evening & Tuesday**  

As you enter the restaurant through the kitchen stop to admire chef Dirk Piolon preparing one of the numerous dishes that has secured his reputation as one of Brussels’ best chefs. Steak, mussels and fries, and steak tartare perfectly prepared are the specialties on offer here. Connoisseurs—we’re sure you will agree.

### La paix
**Chef:** David Martin  
**Rue Ropsy Chaudron 49**  
**1070 Brussels (Anderlecht)**  
**Phone:** 02 523 09 58  
**www.lapaix1892.com**

In a splendid open kitchen overlooking the beautiful large river, this one Michel star restaurant has a loyal following for many years. Savor creatively prepared dishes made with the freshest of ingredients.

### Brasserie Le Jaloa
**Chef:** Christophe Hardiquest  
**Place Sainte Catherine 5**  
**1000 Brussels**  
**Phone:** 02 513 92 62  
**www.jaloa.com**

Experience the contemporary food creations of young chef Gaetan Colin at Jaloa. This stylish restaurant features smart decor and attractive artwork. Be advised - there are not many seats - do book ahead if you want to have your coffee or a malt whisky in the Chesterfield Lounge.

### Brussels Life

*Covering the food and drink scene in Brussels, Belgium*
We are thrilled to land in the European Union capital. Our Brussels hotel is near the Grand' Place, a stunningly large medieval square lined with dungeons and dragons… that is what the children believe. It is late June so we are overwhelmed by the Ommegang, an annual historical pageant in which 3,000 citizen re-enactors entertain the long-gone King. We wander the crooked cobblestone old town lanes packed with restaurants and Belgian brewpubs looking for Chez Leon. While we wash down steaming bowls of mussels with a cherry beer, the kids devour crisp frites with mayonnaise and chocolate mousse.

Unable to sleep, we wander the car-free lanes till we find Manneken Pis, the famous wall fountain topped with a nude bronze boy happily peeing into a bowl. Together, we window-shop in the chocolate stores and pause in front of the remarkable comic murals that decorate Brussels’ major buildings. All ages love the larger-than-life cartoons, especially the three Tintin murals by Hergé. A discount Must of Brussels Card gets us into Mini-Europe, a dollhouse lover’s collection of the EU’s most famous buildings at Brupark. Before anyone can complain of the heat we are in our suits and on the waterslides at Oceade Aqua Park. Brussels’ many other children-welcoming attractions range from science museums to collections of toys, cars and military history.

After 2 days, we’re off to relax in the famous Flemish countryside known for its farm-to-table dining, medieval architecture and easy opportunities for fishing, horseback riding and tennis. We arrive in the picture-perfect village of Damme by bus, pick up rental bicycles and head out along the 14-kilometer-long Damse Vaart, Napoleon’s canal network. Passing cows and dikes, we raft the bikes across a canal to a farmhouse B&B. We settle in for a good night’s sleep – after a big chicken stew and pitchers of Duvel – before our big day in Bruges.

We biked early from Damme over the Bruges drawbridge and straight into hordes of camera-toting tourists like ourselves. A tourist office guide walks us through a true labyrinth of narrow cobblestone paths, leaving the main lanes to the horse-drawn caleche. It was much better than mom reading from a guidebook as we passed lace makers at work, ancient residences that had become cafes, several praline shops, and a Belgian Waffle stand where we loaded up on powdered sugar treats while awaiting a canal boat tour. Finally at sunset we could admire breathtakingly beautiful Bruges as the crowds receded to their tour buses. Our last night in Flanders was spent at Celebrations Brugge Anno 1468, a costumed, historical dinner theatre. With the pageantry of Brussels’ Ommegang (minus horses), a feast fit for kings served family style, in a stunning medieval church setting, it brought to mind the dreams we’d had about visiting Flanders and how the culture, countryside and cuisine had exceeded all expectations. What more can you ask from a family vacation?
Brussels has always had an uncanny ability to fuse unrelated things into a cohesive whole: the whiplash line of Art Nouveau with the venerable architecture of the Grand’ Place, the working town of burghers and bourgeoisie with a cosmopolitan city alive to the pulse of art and music, the languages of Dutch, French and German into a multi-lingual culture where opposites meet and mingle as one.

Perhaps that’s why the most famous surrealist of all time, René Magritte, was a Belgian who lived and worked in Brussels most of his life. The Magritte Museum, www.magrittemuseum.be, which debuted in 2009 on the city’s Place Royale pays tribute to this great surrealist. Built in collaboration with the Royal Museums of Fine Arts with a multi-million Euro price tag, it houses six floors of the largest and most comprehensive Magritte collection in the world.

Art lovers who come to Brussels to delve into Magritte’s fabulous realm that has “never been” can step outside beyond the museum into a living painting to find the real and surreal images of Brussels that inspired him his whole life long.

First stop is the Het Goudblommeke in Papier Café (www.goudblommekeinpapier.be) or La Fleur en Papier Doré Café in French. It was here in the 1930’s that Magritte and his colleagues came to drink good Belgian beers, smoke their iconic pipes and create their own unique brand of Belgian surrealism. Inside, the well worn tables, art-filled walls and surrealist manifestos painted by Magritte’s compatriots (“Everyone has the right to 24 hours of liberty a day.”) make you feel as if you’ve walked into a time warp back to the 1930s. It was at this pub in his early days as the father of popular Surrealism that Magritte had his first exposition of paintings and drawings. The Brussels government has protected this landmark cafe both inside and out as its status as a treasure trove of surrealist history. And as Magritte did all those years ago, you can still get great artisanal beers.

Next, visit the actual birthplace of Magritte’s vision—the artist’s home in the Brussels suburb of Jette, a short cab ride from the Brussels city center. Magritte lived here with his wife and model Georgette from 1930 to 1954 Here, in this modest row house, you’ll find original paintings, drawings and documents, but the real draw are the objects that inspired Magritte’s own “surreal” life. There’s a half-moon-shaped fire grill that appeared to the artist like a speeding train, the artists’ actual iconic bowler hats and the iron lamppost from his famous painting, “The Empire of Light.” When you step outside the house where the landmarked light post still stands, you are truly walking into a living version of a surrealist painting. All it takes is a little imagination and a surrealists’ sense of wonder to make the trip complete.
Bruges: Pickled In Gothic
by Rick Steves

With a smile, the shop owner handed me a pharoah’s head and two hedgehogs and said that her husband was busy downstairs finishing off another batch of chocolates. Happily sucking on a hedgehog, I walked out of the small chocolate shop with a $3, 100-gram assortment of Bruges’ best praline-filled chocolate delights.

Belgian chocolate is considered Europe’s finest. And in Bruges—an hour’s drive or train ride west of Brussels—locals boast that their chocolate is the best in Belgium. You’ll be tempted by display windows all over town. Godiva’s chocolate is thought to be the best big factory brand, but for quality and service, drop by one of the many family-run shops. Pray for cool weather. Chocolate shops close down when it’s hot.

With Renoir canals, pointy gilded architecture, and stay-awhile cafes, the marvelously preserved medieval town of Bruges is a delight. Where else can you bike along a canal, munch mussels, drink fine monk-made beer, see a Michelangelo, and savor heavenly chocolate, all within 300 yards of a bell tower that rings out “Don’t worry, be happy” jingles?

The town is Bruges (broozh) in French and English, and Brugge (broo-gah) in Flemish. Before it was French or Flemish, the name was a Viking word for “wharf” or “embarkment.” Right from the start, Bruges was a trading center. By the 14th century, Bruges had a population of 35,000 (in a league with London) and the most important cloth market in northern Europe. By the 18th century, silt clogged the harbor and killed the economy.

Like so many of Europe’s small-town wonders, Bruges is well-pickled because its economy went sour. But rediscovered by modern-day tourists, Bruges thrives. Bruges’ Market Square, ringed by great old gabled buildings and crowned by a leaning belfry, is the colorful heart of the city. This bell tower has towered over Market Square since 1300. Climb 366 steps to survey the town. Just before the top, peek into the carillon room. Be there on the quarter hour, when the 47 bells are played mechanically with the giant barrel and movable tabs. (Free concerts, with a live carillonneur, ring out several days a week.)

Within three blocks of the tower you’ll find a day’s worth of sights. The Basilica of the Holy Blood is famous for its relic of the blood of Christ, which, according to tradition, was brought to Bruges in 1150 after the Second Crusade. The City Hall has the oldest and most sumptuous Gothic hall in the Low Countries. The Gruuthuse Museum, a wealthy brewer’s home, is filled with everything from medieval bedpans to a guillotine. The church of Our Lady, standing as a memorial to the power and wealth of Bruges in its heyday, has a delicate Madonna and Child by Michelangelo said to be the only statue of his to leave Italy in his lifetime (bought with money made from Bruges’ lucrative cloth trade).

Touring the De Halve Maan brewery is a handy way to pay your respects to the favorite local beer: Brugse Zot. The happy gang at this working family brewery gives entertaining and informative tours. At De Halve Maan they remind their drinkers: “The components of the beer are vitally necessary and contribute to a well-balanced life pattern. Nerves, muscles, visual sentience, and a healthy skin are stimulated by these in a positive manner. For longevity and life-long equilibrium, drink Brugse Zot in moderation!”

Belgians are Europe’s beer experts, and this country boasts more than 400 types of beer. The potent local brews are, even to a Bud Lite kind of guy, obviously great beer. Trappist is the dark monk-made beer, and Dentergemse is made with coriander and orange peel. Those who don’t usually like beer enjoy the cherry-flavored Kriek and raspberry-flavored Frambozenbier. Each beer is served in its own uniquely shaped glass... and locals insist they get it right.

Walk off your beer buzz with a stroll through the begijnhof—a tranquil courtyard of wispy trees and frugal little homes. For reasons of war and testosterone, there were more women than men in the medieval Low Countries. The order of Beguines gave women (often single or widowed) a dignified place to live and work. The order died out, many Begijnhofs were taken over by towns for subsidized housing, but some, like this one, became homes for nuns. You’ll find begijnhofs all over Belgium and the Netherlands. Sitting on a bench, watching the sisters of the begijnhof pace this timeless courtyard deep in prayer, I find myself reviewing the memorable images and calories enjoyed during a day in Bruges.
Not since Orson Welles trod the winding, cobbledstoned streets of Vienna in *The Third Man* has a city made such an emotional impression in a film noir. “If the movie accomplished nothing else,” wrote film critic Roger Ebert, “it inspired in me an urgent desire to visit Bruges.” “In Bruges,” the Martin McDonagh film starring Colin Farrell, Brendon Gleeson and Ralph Fiennes has put this gem-like, medieval city on movie-lovers must-see maps. In the film, two Irish hit men hole out in a small hotel in Bruges while awaiting instructions on whom to hit from their boss in London who has sent them to enjoy the “fairy tale” ambiance that he remembers from his childhood.

“Magical,” was what Dublin-born actor Colin Farrell called the art-filled Flemish city. “It was lovely, it was a small town. It has an unexplored feel to it, like time has stood still.”

The cozy hotel where Farrell and Gleeson’s characters stay in the film is actually the boutique hotel and restaurant, the Bourgoensche Cruyce (www.bourgoenschecruyce.be) and although it seems beguilingly intimate in the film, it is actually quite plush. In real life the cast and crew quartered at De Tuilerieën, (www.hoteltuilerieen.com) a four-star hotel cradled in a magnificent 15th century noble residence, next to Bruges most beautiful canal “Den Dijver.”

Film-goers who have yet to explore Bruges will want to put these other locations on their map:

• The Bruges belfry and its challenging 366 narrow steps that play a pivotal role in the film (there’s a memorable scene in the film where a rotund American family insists they can make it up the stairs). Originally built in 1240, the belfry is in the center of Bruges and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

• Colin Farrell’s character Ray is haunted by the nightmarish Hieronymus Bosch painting of *The Last Judgment*, on permanent display in the Groeninge Museum also called The City Museum of Fine Arts. The museum is quartered in a modern building, from 1930 but the Groeninge’s collection includes a wealth of Flemish masterpieces from the 14th century onward.

• The Bosch-like set that provides the film’s cathartic ending was shot in the place along the Gruuthuse, beneath the tower of the Church of Our Lady. This ancient mansion, once owned by a prominent Bruges merchant is now home to the Gruuthusemuseum, the archeological city museum of Bruges.

• The playground where the characters joke about the “alcoves” ripe for hiding hitmen is the Koningin Astridpark (Queen Astrid Park). In 1851, the park was carved out of lands originally belonging to the Church and landscaped in the English style. Although the characters in the film plot nefarious doings here, the real park is a bucolic haven in the midst of one of the world’s most unique cities.

Follow in the Footsteps of Hollywood to Create Your Own Holiday “In Bruges”

by Gretchen Kelly

While the film’s characters used rather “colorful” language to describe Bruges, the filmmakers were considerably more gentile. “On visiting Bruges, you could see that it would be an additional character in the story; the city had such a heightened atmosphere and it’s so picturesque, whichever way you pointed a camera it was going to look extraordinary.”

Producer Graham Broadbent
In Praise of Belgian Fries

by Helen Studley

Among the many pleasures of visiting Flanders, is food. I fondly recall crevettes grises, the tiny gray shrimps from the North Sea, Dover sole over a bed of spinach, fish and chicken waterzooi, the classic soup-like stew of Flanders, carbonnade à la Flamande, the beef stew cooked with beer, braised Belgian endives and Flemish style Brussels sprouts, and my seasonal favorite: thick, white asparagus napped with melted butter and a chopped, hard boiled egg. Not to forget Belgian chocolate.

But it’s the fries that impress me most. Served with mussels, steak tartar, or roasted chicken, those fries do Belgian’s culinary heritage proud. The fries’ distinct flavor comes from the Bintje potato, a creamy, yellow-fleshed potato, similar to Yucon Gold or Russett. The potatoes are hand cut, irregularly shaped, and about 1/2 inch thick. What makes these fries so crisp on the outside and fluffy on the inside, is that they are fried twice. The first fry can be done in advance, but the second fry must be done à la minute.

To enjoy them at their freshest, it’s best to get them from a street vendor. Called fritkot, these small stands can be found in every village and town throughout the country. The steaming fries are served in a cone-sized paper bag. A plastic fork is usually offered. Aficionados, however, skip the fork and eat the fries with their hands. Luckily, the parchment paper absorbs much of the grease. The traditional topping for Belgian fries is mayonnaise, although most fritkots offer dozens of different sauces.

My favorite fritkot, with the most picturesque setting, is the one at the Markt, Bruges’s main square. Dominated by the 13th century Belfry tower, the Provincial court, the cloth hall and the post office, this was once the medieval heart of the city. Sightseeing horse drawn carriages rattled around the square; tourists follow their guide.

I get in line of the fritkot and wait my turn. Asked what topping I want, I proudly say “mayonnaise.” Balancing my fries in their paper cone, I sit at a park bench and slowly munch one fry after another. It’s a feast!

FRIES LINGO

• Matchstick fries are called allumettes (French for matchsticks)
• Extremely thin cut fries, a Belgian invention, are called steppegras (prairie grass)
• Big chunky fries are called luiwijvenfrieten, which translates as “lazy wives fries”
• Next to mayonnaise, popular sauces include: Andalouse, Samurai, Pickels, Stoofvlees sauce (Carbonnade à la Flamande)

www.visitflanders.us
Standing proudly in the center of the Groenplaats, Antwerp’s central square, is a larger-than-life bronze statue of the painter Peter Paul Rubens, the city’s favorite son. Rubens lords over Antwerp today, just as he did four hundred years ago, when his canvases of ancient heroes and swooning maidens made him the most admired artist in the world. Antwerp remains very much the city Rubens knew, a place of bustling avenues, winding lanes, and comfortably discreet charm.

Rubens remains an almost ubiquitous presence in Antwerp. The elegant home and workshop he built for himself is an attraction to visitors today, just as it was in his own time. It is, in fact, a pair of buildings, one Italian in style that Rubens designed himself, the other Flemish in character that he renovated, making the whole a representation of the two artistic traditions that inspired him. Out back is a formal garden where he could stroll with his family and conduct secret diplomatic talks without being overheard, for Rubens was not just a great painter, but also a diplomat and spy.

When Rubens was not entertaining himself, he often spent evenings at the homes of his distinguished friends. He was a frequent guest of Balthasar Moretus, a friend from childhood who became one of the most distinguished publishers in Europe. Rubens, a bibliophile, frequently designed title pages for him. Examples of those books, along with the actual presses on which they were printed, are to be found at the Plantin-Moretus Museum, a highlight of any visit to Antwerp.

The elegant home of Nicolaas Rockox, one of Antwerp’s town fathers and a longtime patron of Rubens, is also a de rigueur stop on any Rubens tour. From there, it is just a few short blocks to the Cathedral, where you will find two of his most famous paintings representing the raising and descent from the cross flanking the altar. Rubens devoted much of his life and energy to his home town, and left it two of the great masterworks of the Western tradition.
The Antwerp Fashion Map is developed for lifestyle and city trip tourists that enjoy a short stay in Antwerp but want to get to know the nicest insider shopping places. Belgian fashion, international fashion houses, trendy children stores, men’s fashion and vintage stores are covered within this shopping guide.

The Antwerp Fashion Map divides Antwerp in five fashion districts, each with its own identity and corresponding style of stores.

The “reader” of this booklet may be guided by the foreseen itinerary per district or can set up his own personal shopping route based on the offered shops divided in different categories.

The Antwerp Fashion Map can be purchased from the Tourist Office in Antwerp for 1.5 euro: Grote Markt 13, Antwerp.

Itinerary 1: Modenatie

The first itinerary explores the neighbourhood around the Modenatie that is known as "the heart of Belgian fashion" since Dries Van Noten opened his Modepaleis in the Nationalestraat. Ever since, different designers and stores that pursue an avant-garde profile have settled down here. The Kammenstraat, a side-street of the Nationalestraat, is the place to be for everyone looking for stores offering the latest streetwear collections.

Itinerary 2: The South

For several years, the South (Het Zuid) has been the most trendy district of Antwerp. In the museum district – on walking distance of the ModeNatie – you find numerous special restaurants, bars, galleries and design stores, vintage and antique shops, and alternative fashion. The Ann Demeulemeester store is also located in this area. The return route leads you through the Kloosterstraat, where fashion, second-hand and vintage stores happily rub shoulders.

Itinerary 3: Historic Centre

This third itinerary leads the visitor through the historic centre which is still dominated by the Cathedral of Our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal) and the art deco KBC Tower (Boerentoren). This area is situated between the Groenplaats and the Grote Markt.

Itinerary 4: Meir & Leien

The “Meir” is the most important commercial shopping street of Antwerp and houses large international clothing and shoe labels. This large street dominates the fourth route and for the last few years, the gloriously renovated Stadsfeestzaal Mall with its Champagne bar, gives the “Meir” an extra fine touch.

Itinerary 5: Wilde Zee & Quartier Latin

The citizens of Antwerp know the area around the Schuttershofstraat as the “Quartier Latin”. In this neighbourhood especially international luxury brands have settled down. The “Wilde Zee” is located in and around the Lombardenvest, where in the eighties the first Belgian designers were sold.

a Shopper’s Paradise

Antwerp
Flanders has a centuries-old connection to fashion. Back in the late Middle Ages, wool was imported from England, then woven into fine cloth in the Flemish cities and sold all over Europe, ushering in an industrial golden age.

In more modern times, Antwerp’s fashion school produced a group of avant-garde designers who made a big splash on the fashion scene in the 1980s and became known as the “Antwerp Six.”

With their success, the “Sixers”—Walter van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries van Noten, Dirk van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, and Marina Yee—established Antwerp as a place for innovative fashion design.

The buzz attracted talented fashion students from all over the world to study at the Antwerp Fashion Academy and also at La Cambre, Brussels’ fashion school.

Since then, several outstanding Belgian designers have emerged on the scene such as Raf Simons, Veronique Branquinho, Tim van Steenbergen (“Best Belgian Designer,” Elle Style Awards 2009), Kris van Assche (worked for YSL & Dior Homme before launching his own clothing line), and Annemie Verbeke (with shops in both Antwerp and Brussels).

These designers make very different fashion statements, but all combine impeccable, Belgium craftsmanship with inventive designs, creating clothes you might actually want to wear.

In the lovely fashion districts in both Antwerp and Brussels, shopping is a treat. It’s easy to find your way but, to get the most out of the experience, hire a personal shopper/style consultant to take you around. Not only are they knowledgeable about fashion, they know the best stores (and the shop managers); they even know some of the designers and can introduce you.

In Brussels, the shops of the established designers and the newcomers are in the delightful Dansaert district. As you stroll past beautiful buildings, cafés and art galleries, you’ll find boutiques for Martin Margiela (considered the 7th Sixer) and Annemie Verbeke as well as the cute Kat en Muis shop, children’s clothing by Belgian designers. But the best place to start is at Stijl on rue Antoine Dansaert. This store was the first to carry collections from all the new, hot Belgian designers.

In Antwerp, high-fashion boutiques are in the Sint-Andries neighborhood. The “Sixers” have remained true to their town with Dries van Noten’s flagship store, Modepaleis, and van Beirendonck’s shop, Walter. Pay homage at Louis, this store launched the careers of all of the Sixers. And, stop into Coccodrillo, it stocks the Antwerp designers’ hip footwear and has recently opened a separate men’s store across the street.

Since the 15th century, Antwerp has been known as an important diamond center, your wardrobe will not be complete without one!

Hard to believe but, before a diamond is cut and polished, it’s just a dull lump of rock. Antwerp is famous for turning ordinary stones into glittering gems—it’s said that the “Antwerp cut” gives the diamonds more sparkle. There are hundreds of shops in the diamond district near the beautifully-restored Central Station. It’s fun to window shop but prudent to purchase from an establishment that’s in Antwerp’s Diamond Jewelers Association. Have the stone set there or bring it home to your own jeweler.

To spot the next hot designers before anyone else, head to Belgium in early June. That’s when Antwerp’s Royal Academy and Brussels’ La Cambre hold fashion shows for their graduating classes. Don’t pack your bags, just bring empty suitcases!
Sliced by a web of canals and sprinkled with centuries-old step-gabled buildings and elaborately carved stone landmarks, Ghent has a historical aspect that attracts scores of visitors. Yet, this Flemish city has plenty more to offer than its heralded medieval quarter and signature skyline pierced by spires and turrets. Populated with a large university community, Ghent is infused with a youthful vibrancy that’s evident in the music, art and restaurant scenes. And, if you wander on foot (or pedal with the stylishly attired students on bicycle) beyond the main tourist haunts, you’ll be rewarded with a bevy of hidden delights that provide a sense of solitude amidst the hustle and bustle of this elegant and charming city.

A Fondness for Festivals
One would hardly confuse Ghent with Cannes or Sundance. Yet this historic city is home to the well-respected Ghent International Film Festival that’s held every October. Featuring primarily indie works, the festival uniquely focuses on musical scores, the only film festival in the world to do so.

For two weeks in July, the unlikeliest venue hosts the annual Ghent Jazz Festival: a behemoth medieval hospital dating to the 13th century, which has been transformed into De Bijloke Gent Music Centre. Originally part of a Cistercian Abbey, the elaborate oaken-ceilinged auditorium offers unmatched acoustics.

Immediately following the Jazz Festival, Ghent kicks off Europe’s largest street fest, Ghent Festivities. Really a series of free festivals, this lively event includes theater groups, puppet performances and electronic music.

Serene Surprises
Stroll through petite Muinkpark and you might have the place to yourself. (Well, except for the occasional duck or hen scampering about.) This placid green space that’s smack in the middle of a residential neighborhood sees mostly local residents, both human and feathered. With paths that meander over a quaint bridge and wind past a serene pond, this park is perfect for an afternoon picnic.

Another bucolic venue can be found at the Klein Begijnhof. Considered the best preserved of Ghent’s three beguinages that were founded to shelter a community of women in the 13th century, this UNESCO World Heritage site presents traditional gabled and tiled roofed houses set behind tall whitewashed walls that ring a verdant courtyard. Although the streets beyond the beguinage’s arched portal are plenty busy, once inside a sense of peace prevails as you sit along the leafy courtyard with its baroque church.

It’s hard to imagine a better site for botany classes than Ghent’s Lush Botanical Garden, which is part of the University. Walk along the myriad paths and you’re bound to find a clutch of students with notebooks in hand discussing plant biology with one of their professors. With most every specimen labeled with its Latin name, the Botanical Garden makes it easy to learn about plants. But it’s even easier to wander aimlessly and soak in the beauty of its azure-toned pond bordered with colorful blossoms, greenhouses growing bananas and cacao, and shaded forests with trees from as far away as Japan.

In the basement of St. Peter’s Abbey, after examining an exhibit displaying the artifacts of a monk’s life, as well as two crypts, the last thing you’d expect to find would be a garden oasis. But that’s exactly what awaits when you walk through a nondescript doorway on this lower level. The landscape sheltered behind the abbey walls is coated with a small vineyard, orchards, an herb garden, and clusters of blossoming flowers.

The Ultimate Treasure
Housed in the Gothic St. Bavo Cathedral, “The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,” probably the most influential of Flemish paintings, has had a rough life. Since the 1500s, it’s been repeatedly either hidden or snatched, most recently in 1934 when two of the 20 panels became the victim of theft. So, it’s no wonder that instead of hanging in the chapel for which it was intended, this masterpiece by Jan Van Eyck and his lesser known brother, Hubert -- minus a panel that still remains at large -- can now only be viewed from behind glass in a nearby cathedral room. But, thanks to funding from the Getty Foundation, visitors can watch white-gloved curators peering through microscopes as they clean this polyptych altarpiece that features a lamb, which symbolizes Jesus Christ’s ultimate sacrifice.
Love comes in many forms: family, friends, music, films, good books, scenic places, superb food and drink. These enliven and enrich our lives. Where would we be without them? It could be something as simple as sitting at a sidewalk café in the town of Leuven, sipping a Stella Artois with a good friend. Stella Artois is produced in Leuven by AB-Inbev, the largest brewery in the world.

The city center is heart stirring with its glorious historic buildings. Obviously, the most stunning is the 12th century Gothic city hall, ablaze with 236 statues of kings, dukes, counts, and saints, with romantic turrets sprouting from the roof. The town was founded in the 9th century on the Dijle River. Although in World War I and II the Germans destroyed a good part of the city, luckily the historic center with its magnificent sites was preserved.

Add to this the pleasures of the place itself. The Oude Markt, the ancient market place, offers dozens of cafes and bars—favorite sites for relaxing in the sun or in the shade of an umbrella with a Stella Artois, or one of the hundreds of other beer varieties made in Belgium.

A pleasant walk down narrow cobblestoned streets takes one to different sounds at the 13th century Groot Begijnhof, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The complex of brick buildings composes the largest Beguine convent in Belgium, although nowadays the university houses faculty and students here. The sounds heard here are romantic tunes played every half hour by the carillon.

There are still more layers to love about this welcoming town. Shoppers can pop into the boutiques on Bondgenotenlaan and other nearby streets. Leuven has some of the longest shopping streets; those usually found in a major city. Purchase famous chocolates Tartufo and Raet–Putseys for loved ones—including yourself.

Getting around town is a breeze. Take a walk in the evening to appreciate the details of the beautifully lit historic buildings. Leuven is lovely night and day. Cycling is also a favorite pastime and means of transportation; the city respects cyclists and rents bikes. Bus services are excellent, and frequent trains radiate in every direction.

Leuven is located in Flemish Brabant, Flanders, just 30-minutes east of Brussels by express trains, which run every half hour. So, let’s raise a glass of Stella Artois to Leuven.
Mechelen has a long history: the first evidence of settlements in the area have been traced back to around 500 B.C. The city sits on the River Dyle, and is considered the religious capital of Belgium, with the Archbishop residing here. Besides St. Rumbold’s, there is the Church of Our Lady, St. John’s, St. Catherine’s, the Church of Our Lady of Hanswijk, the former Jesuit church St. Peter and St. Paul’s, the Church of the Sacred Heart and the Beguines’ Church. You’ll see an ample display of intricate, local wood carvings in these houses of worship.

Another important city sight to see is the palace of Margaret of Austria of the Court of Savoy, the first Renaissance Building in the Low Countries. From here, Margaret of Austria, Lady Governor General of the Netherlands, promoted Humanism and the Renaissance. The palace itself is complex and ornate, and the lovely cobblestone courtyard footpaths are embellished with flowers and bushes; it’s a great place to relax on one of the benches provided.

Mechelen is called the city of carillons, as chimes in church towers originated in the Netherlands at the end of the 14th century. Carillonneur Jef Denyn, founder of the famous Royal Carillon School in 1922, sought financial help from Herbert Hoover, John D. Rockefeller and William Gorham Rice for this first-ever institution. It has since drawn international attention, training students from dozens of countries. A carillon museum adjoins the school at Frederik de Merodestraat 63.

Mechelen, 15 short miles north of Brussels, is an undiscovered Flemish gem that sparkles and shines with historic churches, more than 300 monuments and a multitude of friendly people. It’s worth a trip to uncover the fascinating highlights of this city of about 79,000 inhabitants.

Mechelen’s hospitable citizens are happy to show you their eight historic Catholic churches, their quaint cobblestone streets, and tell you that at one time there were more than 100 furniture and wood carving companies in town. Around the year 1500, more than 100 breweries called this city their home, as well. And you won’t want to leave Mechelen without trying their favorite lunch or dinner dish called the “Mechelen cuckoo.”

Once the capital of present-day Belgium and Holland, this unique city is dominated by the 316-foot-tall St. Rumbold’s Tower which offers breathtaking views from its new Sky Walk over the city, the port of Antwerp and even parts of Brussels. This soaring late-medieval landmark tower (with 514 steps to the top) was supposed to be built even higher if funds had been available. Two of the largest stained glass windows in Europe are in the cathedral, and free carillon concerts are offered here Monday evenings in the summer at 8:30 p.m.

A most unique and fascinating aspect of Flanders is its tapestry, and in Mechelen the art is taken to its highest level. De Wit Royal Manufacturers, located in an old abbey at Schoutetstraat 7, has been creating handwoven works of art employing techniques established hundreds of years ago. It is the only workshop in Flanders to retain this age-old tradition and offers a wide range of services such as weaving, conservation techniques and the purchase and sale of antique tapestries. De Wit has close ties to major museums and the most prestigious private collections.

Now for that special local Mechelen cuckoo. Many of the city’s restaurants serve the Mechelse koekoek or Mechelen cuckoo. The bird, a chicken breed with black-gray feathers, is a local delicacy and is served with fresh vegetables or with a Mechelen beer sauce and a large dish of round roasted potatoes. Be sure to enjoy this delicious meal while visiting!
On a recent trip to Flanders I realized I could have stayed a year and drunk a different Belgian beer every day, and I still would not have sampled them all. Beer was there before Belgium became a country, with brewing dating back to Roman times. The art of brewing was revived by monks during the Middle Ages. Abbey beers continued to flourish and were soon joined by commercial brewers. When brewers began to flavor their beers with spices from the East, beer-drinking became a way of life.

While following tradition, today’s brewers are going beyond the basics, producing beer that is as light as Champagne, as elegant as Burgundy, as complex as Port, and as sophisticated as Cognac. Some are intense bitter; others are sweet and dewy. Staying only for a limited time, I did my best to do them justice.

Friends introduced me to Falstaff, a turn-of-the-century tavern in Brussels designed by Victor Horta, Belgium’s master Art Nouveau architect. Nibbling crevettes grises, the tiny gray shrimp delicacy from the North Sea, we drank Hoegaarden Wit, a youthful wheat beer.

In the late afternoon I usually went to Au Roi d’Espagne, a popular café on Brussels’ Grand’ Place, the perfect place for people watching. I copied the locals and ordered Kriek Lambic, the sparkling cherry-flavored beer served in a Champagne glass. Each Belgian beer, I learned, is served in its traditional glass, a practice so ironclad that when ordering certain beers, such as Antwerp’s De Koninck, you just ask for a bolleke, the bowl-like glass in which it is served.

The small Roue d’Or brasserie serves traditional local fare: chicory salad with blanched bacon, rabbit stew, eel in green sauce, waterzooi, and steak tartare, called Americain. The Americain comes with frites, the twice fried potatoes, and in Belgium frites are served with mayonnaise. The waiter suggested Duvel, a pale colored beer with a frothy head. It seemed light but packed a mighty wallop. After all, Duvel means devil.

At the venerated Aux Armes de Bruxelles, I indulged in moules and frites, considered Belgium’s national dish. For once I abandoned beer in favor of Aisatian Riesling.

I had my most extensive beer dinner at the beer restaurant Den Dyver in Bruges. Surrounded by chandeliers, candles, and lace curtains, I studied the menu. Each dish came with a glass of beer with which it had been prepared. The choices were overwhelming. I decided on the breast of pigeon stuffed with wild mushrooms cooked with Kapittel. The Kapittel Blond was a bit too hoppy for my taste, but it paired well with the wild mushrooms.

Half way through the meal, the two young women on the next table struck up a conversation. They were college students from Antwerp here for the weekend.

“Would you like to try our Blanche de Bruges?” they asked. “It’s really amazing, particularly with the fish.”

In exchange I offered them a bit of my dessert, a creamy local cheese washed with honey. With it we drank Rodenbach, a garnet colored, almost Burgundy-type of beer that was to become my favorite.
Flanders is dedicated to preserving its historic architectural gems by often transforming them into modern accommodations to suit the most demanding of travelers. This juxtaposition is expressed as much in the variety of lodging as it is in its broad range of attractions. Accommodations range from fabulous five-star properties housed in former prisons, grand palaces, carriage houses and mansions to bed & breakfasts or chateaux, self-catering properties, apartments, townhouses, the options are limitless. Whatever your expectations are, you will find the comfort level that suits you best, be it a family-owned guesthouse, or a luxury hotel with fitness and business centers.

Just take a look at the newest properties to open in recent years and you’ll see why Brussels is one town that welcomes innovation. Rocco Forte’s Amigo Hotel is housed in a former prison just off the Grand’ Place and its legends are as fanciful as your views of nearby rooftops so that you could find yourself waking face to face to a friendly gargoyle. The Dominican, located off the Grand Place behind the La Monnaie theater, made a spectacular entrance during its first year as it was transformed from a 15th century Dominican abbey to a 150-room property in which all the rooms overlook a central courtyard while the high ceilings and cloister-style layout recall the abbey.

The last of the family-owned hotel chains, Manos, is an illustration of neo70’s decoration hidden behind the façade of a 19th century couple of mansion houses. Located a stone’s throw from Brussels’ Midi station and its Eurostar terminal, this amazing hotel was listed by Condé Nast Traveller Magazine as one of the newest hot hotels in the world. The 53-room White Hotel is located in the up-market shopping district around the avenue Louise with its trendy restaurants, a short walk from the place Flagey, the place du Chatelain and the place Stéphanie.

The 18-room Le Dix-Septième is a very rococo hotel ideally located for a romantic stay in Brussels. Just opened is the Maxhotel, which had a previous life as the three-star President Nord, but will live its new life as a no-star “chic and cheap” hotel.

All the big-brand hotel groups are represented in Flanders: Best Western, Starwood, Hilton, Marriott, Rezidor, Sheraton, SAS Radisson and Westin are but a few. Among the well-respected European hotel groups in evidence are Accor, the Carlton Hotel Collection, Choice Hotels, Ibis, InterContinental, Kempinski, Le Meridien, Mercure, Minotels, NH Hotels, and Romantik Hotels. Marketing organizations such as Leading Hotels of the World, Small Luxury Hotels of the World and Relais & Chateaux promote distinctive hotels in the U.S. and Europe.

Beyond Brussels are the fabulous cities of Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent. traveler chosen the Heritage Hotel Bruges last year as one of the ‘100 Best Luxury hotels on TripAdvisor. Likewise, the Kempinski Hotel Dukes’ Palace won the prestigious World Travel Awards in the category of Belgium’s Leading Business Hotel; and readers of Condé Nast Traveller, chose the Kempinski as a Hot Place to be!

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Ghent might as well be called a city of festivals given all the annual celebrations such as the boat show in winter and a floral show in spring each year. It too, vies for the title of being one of Europe’s most beautiful cities as it captures the flavor of medieval times. Modern properties such as the Ghent Marriott respect their locales as this hotel overlooks the Korenlei on the banks of the river Lys canal yet has brought a new design to the historic old building as its restaurant Korenhuis, evokes the atmosphere of a classic merchants house.

Bed & breakfasts and guesthouses are similar in style and can be found in cities, towns, villages and in the countryside throughout Flanders. Youth and family hotels also dot Flanders. Many rooms have baths and showers and generally rooms accommodate two to six people.

Whatever your choice of lodging, your chances of finding a memorable home-away-from-home in Flanders are infinite. Sleep well!
Antiquing in Flanders

A few wispy clouds are drifting across a pale blue sky as I begin perusing the Tongeren antiekmarkt about 8AM, many hours after flashlight-wielding early birds have snabbed their antique treasures from unloading dealers—some of the 400 dealers and thousands of antiquers who congregate here each Sunday. While Tongeren is one of Belgium’s premier antiquing destinations, Brussels, Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp also offer troves of antiquities in flea markets and antique shop districts.

Founded over 2,000 years ago by Julius Caesar to restrain the restive Gauls, Tongeren is Belgium’s oldest city. Aduatuca Tungrorum became a thriving walled Roman town, so it’s appropriate many dealers have snabbed their antique treasures from unloading dealers—some of the 400 dealers and thousands of antiquers who congregate here each Sunday. While Tongeren is one of Belgium’s premier antiquing destinations, Brussels, Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp also offer troves of antiquities in flea markets and antique shop districts.

By Douglas Wissing

The quality and value of the antiquities here makes the antiekmarkt a preferred destination for European and North American dealers and cognoscenti. As I poke through the booths along Leopoldwal, a trio of American women chirble with market enthusiasm: “It’s consistent,” says Lenore, holding a vintage top hat, “It’s open every Sunday, even Easter Sunday.”

Antiquing in Tongeren is a stroll into the heart of human vagary, an almost dumbfounding diversity of styles and tastes. There are French rococo beds that the Sun King would have craved, carved and polished Belgian Louis-Phillipe furniture for the bourgeois in all us, folk-painted Alpine cabinets, Meissen figurines, austere Bauhaus objects, deftly painted Jugendstil and Gouda vases, sleek Art Deco and mid-century collectables; crockery, clocks, china, crystal and silver, enough kitsch and visual clangor to cause momentary vertigo. Flemish paintings with the craquelé of age stand chockablock with a provenanced Picasso print, Indonesian batik hangings, drawings of hundred genres, advertising ephemera and paintings of oiled, muscular men. Architectural salvage, tools, old hardware, vintage jewelry, clothes and cloth, insect collections, stuffed animals, a menagerie of cast-iron animals, including a peeing Schnauzer. With the Dutch border just a few miles away, diminutive yard-art windmills dot the market. There’s antique sporting goods; a collection of 200 Swiss army knives; African carvings; scuffed leather luggage encrusted with 20s-era steamer-line and resort decals; enough candelabras and chandeliers to light a thousand romance novels; gilded baroque mirrors to reflect endless assignations.

In the center of Brussels, the chic Sablon District is the beating heart of the Belgian antique trade. Anchored by the hilltop Gothic-style Notre Dame du Sablon cathedral, the neighborhood began as a 17th-century haven for wealthy nobility. Sablon’s cathedral square and winding streets are lined with ancient architecture housing an extraordinary array of chic boutiques and antique shops with objects that range from archeological and tribal to medieval and renaissance to early 20th century and modernist. On Saturday from 10am to 5pm and on Sunday morning, the Place du Grand Sablon, just below the cathedral, is the place for antiques offered by vendors under striped canvas canopies. Other antique haunts include the flea market at the Place du Jeu de Balle on rue Blaes (7 AM to 2 PM daily) and warehouses of antiques along the rue des Minimes, rue Haute and rue Blaes, all famed for their unpredictable diversity. The highlight of the Belgian antiquing year is the Brussels Antiques and Fine Arts Fair, held in late January. The oldest annual event of its type in the world, the fair hosts 130 of the world’s top dealers, offering everything from Old Masters to contemporary art; ancient archeological finds to modernist classics; rare books and vintage comics. Where else can you spend millions on a Tintin cartoon?

Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp also have their antique attractions. In Bruges, Vlooiemarkt flea market is held all day Saturday, and the town is renowned for its antique shops. Nearby Knokke-Heist hosts the annual Art Nocturne Knokke arts-and-antiques fair during early August evenings. The Ghent Rommelmarkt is open Saturdays and Sundays from 7 AM to 1 PM, and the antique market around St. Jacob’s church bustles on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings. The Ghent antique shops are centered on Onderbergen, Koornlei, Kraanlei and Steendam streets. In Antwerp, the shops in the Kloosterstraat offer a wide range of brocante, from clawfoot bath tubs to 20th century design (open Wednesdays through Sundays). The antique market at Lijnwaadmarkt is open on Saturdays from 9 AM to 5 PM from Easter to October. The Antwerp antique shops are clustered on Schuttershofstraat, Leopoldstraat and Sint-Salvatorkerkhof.
Many visitors come to Ypres to visit the First World War battlefields and cemeteries in the beautiful surrounding countryside and to pay their respects at the magnificent Menin Gate monument in town. The haunting Last Post is sounded here each night at 8 pm to honour the memory of fallen soldiers.

The town was in the centre of brutal war between 1914 and 1918 and was essentially destroyed. The trenches ran from north to south in an arc around Ypres, and no fewer than five major bloody battles were fought here (including the Battle of Passchendaele), and introduced the use of terrifying chlorine and mustard gases. About half a million people from many countries died during four years of war, and millions returned home wounded.

The memory of the Battle of Passchendaele, a particularly vicious and senseless exercise that left 500,000 casualties in 100 days for a gain of territory of only five miles, is kept alive in the Memorial Museum Passchendaele. It’s a good starting point for a visit to the old battlefields.

It is just down the road from Tyne Cot Cemetery, among the most visited of the cemeteries in the area. It is the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world with nearly 12,000 graves. The wall at the back contains the names of 34,957 missing soldiers who fell after 15 August 1917.

Two of the best-known First World War sites in the Ypres Salient are the Yorkshire Trench & Dugout, a restored trench used by the British, and Essex Farm Cemetery, where Canadian army doctor John McCrae wrote his famous poem. “In Flanders Fields the poppies blow between the crosses row on row that mark our place,” he wrote. The Flanders’ poppy is still worn on Remembrance Days around the world as a symbol of the terrible sacrifice that will never be forgotten.

A must-see is the In Flanders Field Museum, located on the first floor of the impressive Cloth Hall on the Market Square in Ypres. Its interactive exhibits take you back to the Great War and you can experience the deadly conflict through the eyes of a nurse, a soldier or a citizen of Ypres. It is an exceptional museum. And although it is an often-emotional experience, ultimately it is one of hope and resurrection as Ypres and the world rise like a phoenix from the ashes of war.

After the war was over, the inhabitants of Ypres returned to rebuild their homes, their city and their lives. To this day, the constant reminders of war are forever part of Ypres.

War and peace in Ypres

by Cathy Stapells

Other events in and around Ypres

- The Cat’s Parade and Cat’s Festival are held every three years on the second Sunday of May (the next is in 2012). This event finds its roots in the age-old custom of killing cats as a means to renounce evil. During the Middle Ages, live cats were thrown to their death from the belfry tower of the Cloth Hall. The last time this was practiced was in 1817, but since then it has evolved into a more lively and fun celebration.

- The Cat Parade features Snoezepoezen (Cuddly Kitties), parade floats and groups, a Cat Queen, and the giant cats Cieper and Minneke Poes.

- Hop fields are dotted around the landscape. Beer aficionados can visit a hop grower in Poperinge and learn where beer comes from. Or visitors can sample one of the local specialties with hop shoots.
Today in Flanders you will find chefs gravitating towards a healthier fare with fresh, seasonal, regional ingredients that are pleasing to many palettes. To experience this new cuisine one only needs to step in to Patrick Devos Restaurant in the heart of Bruges, a city known for its gastronomic excellence. Set in a historic mansion dating back to the 1300’s, the interior of this Gothic structure is an exquisite and surprising showing of Art Nouveau and Art Deco in the salons, a rarity in Belgium as is Devos himself.

Devos, known for his inventiveness with his dishes, works with a local organic farmer that raises vegetables for him that are special to the region from hop sprouts and asparagus to truffles, morel mushrooms and morel. “For our meat products, we work mainly with duck, pigeon, veal, lamb and various game in the wild season.” Devos, who was raised in the coastal regions, also takes great advantage of the abundance of fresh fish and favors a light execution.

In 2006 he obtained the diploma of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust. He is more than well versed in his wines and has a celebrated and twice awarded wine cellar of mainly New World wines in the catacombs of the building. Together with his sommelier they plan perfect and meticulous pairings with the menu, leading with the wine first. “The harmony between wine and the dish is very important to us.”

Cut the eggplants into four slices. Drizzle with olive oil then add a sprinkle of garlic, thyme and bay leaf. Bake this in the oven for a half hour at 275 °F. Then remove the flesh from the eggplant and chop it up. Peel the tomatoes and cut them into cubes. Shred the shallot, finely cut the basil and add to the tomato and season with salt, pepper and olive oil. Fry the sea bass in olive oil until it’s crisp. Serve with nut salad and shavings of Parmesan cheese.

**Suggested wine pairing with meal:**

**Vouvray Sec - Haut Lieu – 2007 - Huet – Loire – France**

The Belgian cuisine has long been likened to the French due to its close proximity and influence. The French influence has certainly played a part, yet the Belgian cuisine has its own distinct dishes and traditions from the simple to the sublime. One can hardly go to Flanders without having mussels, pommes frites, chocolates, waffles and of course Belgian beer.

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Freeze the cod briefly until it’s hard. Cut into very fine slices and dress them on the board. Heat the oil lightly with basil, then mix. Peel the tomatoes and cut them into fine pieces. Mix with basil olive oil and dress the fish. Sprinkle this oil richly on to the cod.

Sprinkle the finely grated cheese on the fish and season with salt and pepper.

Leave the cheese under the broiler for 1 minute until it is melted and the fish is slightly cooked. Cut the radishes into strips and dress them together with the capers onto the fish. Steam the green vegetables al dente. Warm them in soy cream with finely chopped herbs and season with salt and pepper.

**Suggested wine pairing with meal:**

**Riesling - 2007- Sybille Kuntz - Mosel - Germany**

A teacher and mentor himself today, he references his respected mentors from Chef Patrick Van Landschoot of then Chalut and later Barcadère. “The restaurant Chalut was really my dada, with all the edible fish prepared in a very sophisticated way.” Mr. Willy Slawinsky of Apicius in Ghent, “He was a large kitchen genius. It was the first time I came in contact with many luxury products such as truffle, morel, lobster and caviar.” Their influence continues today.

On the menu, which changes seasonally, you may find Saint-Jacques Scallops cooked in cocoa butter sauce, oxtail and truffle, mashed Jerusalem artichoke for a starter or Wood Pigeon with black salsify, carrots and turnips, red beet sauce, red wine sauce, toasted bread with a mousse of duck liver as your main. The dishes are never simple, yet always sublime.

If you’d like to try your hand at his dishes pop in for a cooking class. His wit, warmth and layers of lessons are perfectly paired with the unrivaled ambience. The wine in their garden and the meal that follows in the Louis XVI parlor is simply exquisite. If you can’t make it to Bruges any time soon you can practice with these dishes at home. Bon Appétit!

**Chef Patrick Devos**

**Tickles Your Taste Buds**

by Karen Loftus

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To start – Carpaccio of Cod and a Radish Salad

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<tr>
<td>Cod</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capers</td>
<td>1 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radishes</td>
<td>2.5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiitakes</td>
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**Main Course – Baked Sea Bass with Eggplant Caviar served with Nut Salad**

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<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>6 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>.5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>.5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thyme</td>
<td>.7 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Leaf</td>
<td>.5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallot</td>
<td>1 oz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Garlic     | 3 oz     |\n
Cut the eggplants into four slices. Drizzle with olive oil then add a sprinkle of garlic, thyme and bay leaf. Bake this in the oven for a half hour at 275 °F. Then remove the flesh from the eggplant and chop it up. Steam the green vegetables al dente. Warm them in soy cream with finely chopped herbs and season with salt and pepper.

**Suggested wine pairing with meal:**

**Vouvray Sec - Haut Lieu – 2007 - Huet – Loire – France**

**Suggested wine pairing with meal:**

**Vouvray Sec - Haut Lieu – 2007 - Huet – Loire – France**
Act Like A Local!

Tired of chocolates, waffles, good old Manneken Pis and the cathedrals? Then the USE-IT Maps for Young Travellers might be your thing. They are made by young people, with a mix of bars, secondhand shops, and the best old-fashioned fries shack. In short: it’s where the locals would go. We made a selection of some of the USE-IT specials in every town.

Download the entire maps in easy-to-print size: www.use-it.be

ANTWERP

Fashion Street
The Nationalestraat is known as the designer clothes street, home of the flagship stores of famous Antwerp designer Dries Van Noten and the MoMu, Antwerp’s Fashion Museum. Make sure to check out some of the younger Belgian designers like Pieter Pieters or Tim Van Steenbergen at Sien as well. The youngest talent is in the smaller streets around the Nationalestraat. You can easily get around here for hours, hopping from shop to shop.

The Sharks Of Justice
You can hardly miss the new Palace of Justice courthouse: you see the dramatic sail-like roofs from far away. It was built in 2006. The architect, Richard Rogers, was inspired by a butterfly, but most Antwerpians call this strange building “Snowwhite’s six dwarves”, “the sharks”, “the devil’s horns”, “the porcupine”, “the reversed bulliant table” or “bag of fries”.

Pigeon Bar
De Quilles (The pigeons) is not a bar, it’s an institution. It’s been here since 1967 and all that time the actors from the theatre next door have come here after opening nights. The urn on the chimney is if it’s the actor’s father or former owner. It’s glued to the chimney, because otherwise clients would be dancing around with it. Do like the other guests and have a bacon sandwich (€ 3) or a pekelharing (pickled herring, € 3.50 very Antwerpian) with your Bollenke beer.

Soup+Dish = € 6,50
Youngsters who have trouble finding a job, learn how to cook and how to serve in a professional way at LA CUISINE. A daily soup + meal costs € 8,50. For that little money, it’s OK if our local Jamie Oliveres spill some soup, but usually everything is picture perfect.

Dancing Pigs (Vegan) For Lunch
Lombardia’s a complete madhouse! Pink plush pigs dance at the windows and you can drink a Pulp Fiction (juice) with a Beasty Boy (bread). Have a Rabbit ice (vanilla and carrot, vegan-guaranteed) to finish off. Their spicy gingerbread is legendary. Even Mobby is a fan.

BRUGES

Meet Willy
No, this house is not a building-site: the metal scaffolding is a permanent artwork that drives local politicians crazy. This beautiful house used to belong to the mayor of Bruges, but now Willy Retsin is the king of his own castle. Ring the bell and maybe he’ll let you into his world of candlelight and Latin letters. After a few rum cocktails you can kindly ask Willy about the carnival paintings and family portraits in the bar and in the rest of the family mansion. Timing is very important though: Luciferscent has strict opening hours and if it’s full, it’s full. Show some respect to one of the last hidden pearls in Bruges.

There Can Be Only One
You visit De Garre for only one reason: to drink a Garre. It’s a heavy beer and they only sell it here. To find De Garre, you must enter Bruges’ grooviest-looking alley. We shall say this only once: have a Garre at De Garre in the Garre! € 3 for a Garre.

Romantic Garden
It’s a place to bring your darling. Don’t be afraid to ring the bell, one of the nuns living here at Hof Blandelin will come and open the door for you. Behind this door lies a beautiful medieval garden, that used to be the property of the rich and famous Italian family De Medici in the 15th century. The museum is open by appointment only, but really, it’s the garden that you want to see.

Take A Deep Breath
Check the Horse Fountain. Have you noticed that the animals carry bags for their droppings? People used to think this was hilarious, but now we’re just happy that there are no horse droppings on the street.

Discipline And Respect!
Angela, the 92-year-old monument, owns the oldest and definitely the most authentic candy-shop in Bruges. She’s been dealing sweets to innocent children since 1950. We call her Omaatje (little granny). Watch out with your sticky fingers, because Omaatje knows all the thieves’ tricks. She doesn’t like to get nervous either, hence the signs in the shop that say “discipline and respect!”.

BRUSSELS

The Bridge
Go stand on the bridge over the canal and face café WALVIS: you are now looking towards one of the trendiest and most expensive shopping streets of Brussels. Turn around: this is the start of the Moroccan neighbourhood of Molenbeek. Most people stay on ‘their’ side of the canal, as if the city gate that used to stand here 200 years ago still separates the city from the rest of the world. On the Molenbeek side, butchers don’t sell pork but lamb sausages per kilo, and the bars serve more mint tea than beer. The best day to discover the area is Thursday when there is a great market next to the church.

Piss Against a Church
In Italy or Poland, you might end up in jail if you would pee against the church, but we installed a public urinal at Saint-Catherine’s to “take a leak”. Welcome to Belgium!

Meeting Point
Everybody meets on the stairs of the Stock Exchange. We don’t care that these stairs are always dirty and spicy with spilled wine. So have a seat and get to know the locals (but watch your stuff). The stairs also serve as a speaker’s corner for every protest march through Brussels: against the war, for animal rights, anything. By the way, every corner you see here has a couple of good bars, from Irish pubs to artsy student cafés or a latino bar.

GHENT

Too Many Colors
The interior decorator of Pink Flamingo’s is insane – there’s just too many colours. This barbiedoll bar is totally kitsch, with funky music and a Ghettoish in-crowd. ‘The Pink’ is always full, but especially a good choice on Monday when most other bars in the center are closed. Spaghetti till midnight.

Turkish Pizza
Some say it’s Gökten, some say it’s Gök, some say Gök and then every student has his favourite but you can never go wrong with any of the cheap pizzerias in the Sleeppstraat. The menus are full-color, and what you see is what you get (you’ll pay around € 7,50 for a meal and the typical salty ayran drink). This street is the heart of Turkish Ghent, with a noisy soundtrack of jingling trays, yelling children and pimped-up BMW’s. It’s always alive except in July and August, because then many go on a holiday to Turkey, usually to their grandparents’ birthplace Emirdag. It is from this small city that almost all the first Turkish immigrants came in the 1980s, to work in the rough textile industry of Ghent.

The Ghent Feeling
For a real Ghent feeling, come to the Marinaun terrace, sit on the chairs (because the tables are always full) and have a Roomer. This sweet appetizer drink with little floating elderflowers was invented by two brothers from Ghent, and it’s still hard to find it anywhere outside of the city. The sun comes around 2PM.

Candy For Eyes And Ears
Liv and Sofie from Snoop are no simple shopkeepers but ‘costumiers’, and they’re as funky as their clientele. Dresses come in sun-flash yellow, lime green, barbie pink, icy blue. The style is fifties or sixties, but always with a modern touch. Rose-earrings for € 5. In the meantime, your bored boyfriend can check the alternative cd and vinyl stack in De Schaara a few doors down.

Cheapest Sandwich
Only € 1 (yes, one euro) for a simple cheese sandwich at butcher Hooihaar. And this right in the historical centre!

Graffiti Street
Nobody knows the name ‘Werregarenstraat’ as it is called nowadays, but everybody says ‘grijfstraatje’. The paint in this little alley is always fresh, and so are the dog turds, so better watch your ground as well. Get spray cans at City Kings / Tokyo around the corner in Hoogpoort 11 starting at € 3.00.

www.visitflanders.be

www.visitflanders.be
Forget about interior design: all a barkeeper suddenly starts to sing along in a deep voice. He’s completely harmless and, you must admit, the guy has some talent. Set up around 1846, D’hanekoer has been a classic in Mechelen for ages. This bar is the absolute number one for many (somewhat older) locals. They usually come here in the afternoon to read the newspaper and enjoy a Trappist beer. At night the place turns into a smoky and crowded pub where pleasant old barflies meet. Pre-war tile floor, creaky chairs and nostalgic Golden Oldies: that’s all you need to get an idea of how it must have been in the sixties.

Rainbow + Rubens
Three reasons to go to the old gothic church Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Over-De-Dijlekerk. 1) On a sunny day, around 4 o’clock, the strangely modern coloured windows create a lightshow that makes you feel like you’re walking through a rainbow. 2) ‘The Miraculous Draught of Fishes’, a unique painting by Pieter Paul Rubens. 3) There’s a carillon here as well. If you’re lucky, a student of the Carillon school is rehearsing. And if you’re really lucky, it’s a talented student.

Beer Bread
Best remedy for a hangover on a Sunday morning? A solid breakfast with… beer bread. Bakkervrij Matthijs sells it like crazy. But you might have to stand in a waiting line for half an hour, which is really hard with a hangover.

Getting There and Away
Airport
Brussels South Charleroi Airport (CRL) 11 miles
Brussels International Airport (BRU) 14 miles

Railway
To travel from Brussels to Sint-Maartensdal: 35 minutes.
To travel from Brussels to Mechelen: 10 minutes.

Road
To travel from Brussels to Sint-Maartensdal: 10 minutes.
To travel from Brussels to Mechelen: 11 minutes.

Practical Info
• Brussels Card

Getting Around
Distances of Cities from Brussels
Antwerp . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 116 miles
Bruges . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 68 miles
Gent . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 27 miles
Leuven . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 11 miles
Mechelen . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 16 miles

Driving
A valid US driver’s license is accepted for stays of less than 90 days. A minimum of 25 years of age is required by major car rental companies. Driving is on the right hand side of the road.

Domestic Train Travel
Trains run daily from 5 am until 12 pm. National and international trains are available at all major train stations in Belgium. Travel is valid only for dates shown on the ticket. Special rates for children and senior citizens apply.

Electricity
A.C. 220 volts using round 2-pin plugs.

City Tourist Office Websites
Brussels www.brusselsinternational.be
Antwerp www.visitantwerp.be
Bruges www.brugge.be
Gent www.gent.be
Leuven www.leuven.be
Mechelen www.inenuitmechelen.be

Tourist Cards
Tourist cards, giving you access to museums and/or places of interest can be purchased at the Tourist Offices. The following cities have a tourist card:
• Brussels Card
• Bruges City Card
• Antwerp Museum Card
• Ghent Museum Pass
Sight-Seeing Tours
Book via city tourist offices or your concierge in the hotel. In Brussels there is also a hop-on hop-off bus.

Tips And Taxes
Tips and taxes are automatically included in the price; however in cafés, restaurants and hotels, an additional gratuity is welcome for exceptional service.

Banking Hours
Banks are open Monday through Friday, 9:00am - 4:00pm and are closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. Some banks close for an hour during lunch.

Credit Cards & Atm
All major cards are accepted (Visa, American Express, Diners Club and Eurocard) as well as Traveller’s Checks. ATM machines are available in all major cities.

Climate & Clothing
With 4 distinct seasons, Belgium is seldom too hot nor too cold. Summer temperatures range from 54° to 72°F and winter temperatures range from 32° to 43°F. In summer bring lightweight, comfortable clothing, and a sweater or a jacket for the evening. During the winter bring warm clothes, and it is always a good idea to pack an umbrella and a rain coat.

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They say “leave your mark on this world.” While you’re busy doing that, don’t forget to let the world leave its mark on you.

250 cities. 40 countries.
“The first time I saw Brussels’ spectacular Grand’Place my jaw dropped. Walking through there is like traveling back in time. The square is one of the grandest places I’ve ever laid my eyes upon.”

John E. DiScala, US-based travel expert and Editor-in-Chief of JohnnyJet.com