

Brussels



If ever a city could claim split personality, it's Brussels. French versus Flemish, historic versus hip, bizarre versus boring. Full of contrasts, contradictions and intrigue, this is a multicultural equation that goes much deeper than just red tape and Eurocrats. An historic heirloom is closer to the mark. And in an age where so much is already discovered, Belgium's capital seduces as one of Western Europe's unknowns.

Brussels is a city of fine food, *café* culture, Art Nouveau architecture and the surreal. Pull up a chair and join laissez-faire locals who value the city's casual atmosphere. Watch money go down on swish Ave Louise or buy dried caterpillars just blocks away in Matonge, the capital's African quarter. Some of the world's most enduring images of surrealist art were created in the nondescript northern suburb of Jette. And the architecture ranges from monumental edifices such as the Grand Place to organic Art Nouveau façades and the EU's real-life Gotham City.

Constant among all this is the quality of everyday life – the shopping's great, the restaurants fab, the chocolate shops sublime and the pub scene extraordinary. For a long time Brussels didn't go out of its way to impress, but its stint as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2000 saw the city dusted and polished in a flurry that brought renewed life to historic buildings and decaying streets. A new spirit, just short of cockiness, emerged, flaming outside interest and inner-city regeneration. Nearly a decade on, Brussels is looking better than ever.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Kick Back** The Grand Place on a summer's evening (p69)
- **Jewel in the Crown** The capital's Art Nouveau gems (p92 & p93)
- **Art History** Old masters and surrealists at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (p83)
- **Popping Beers** Strange brews at the Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze (p90)
- **Bizarre Booty** Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika (p94)
- **Musical Views** Panoramas, instruments and Art Nouveau all wrapped up in the Musée des Instruments de Musique (p83)
- **Parades & Pageants** A festival for all seasons (p95)
- **Fashion Feast** Capitalising on fashion (p114)
- **Diner's Delight** From ancient *cafés* to minimalist marvels (p101)
- **Drinking Scene** Pubs by the thousands...and no two alike (p106)



■ POPULATION: 999,900

■ LANGUAGES: FRENCH & FLEMISH

HISTORY

Legend has it that St Géry, Bishop of Cambrai and Arras, built a chapel on one of the islands in the swampy Senne (Zenne) River in AD 695, although the name Bruocsella (from *bruoc*, marsh or swamp, and *sella*, dwelling) wasn't recorded until 966. In 979 Charles, Duke of Lorraine, built a fort on the St Géry island and moved from Cambrai to Bruocsella. A settlement developed and, protected by several defensive ramparts and gates, it evolved into an administrative and commercial hub. By 1100 Brussels had its first fortified wall.

In 1229 Henri I, Duke of Brabant, published the first Brussels charter, which guaranteed protection for citizens and private property, and established punishments for crimes. The dukes of Brabant controlled the region on and off for the next two centuries and their fortunes were aligned through marriage to the dukes of Burgundy. In 1482, upon the death of Mary of Burgundy, the Hapsburgs came to power. Emperor Charles V used Brussels as the capital of his vast kingdom and the city flourished under his patronage.

Charles V's successor, Philip II, ruled from Spain. Philip's fanatical Catholicism led to the Protestant's Iconoclastic Fury (see p24), which Philip quashed through the Spanish Inquisition. Among the thousands given death sentences at this time were Counts Egmont and Hoorn, vocal protesters against Spanish rule. They were executed on Brussels' Grand Place in front of the Maison du Roi.

In 1695 Louis XIV's French army under Marshal De Villerooy bombarded Brussels for two days in retaliation for Dutch and English attacks on French Channel ports. They destroyed 4000 houses and much of the Grand Place, although this was restored to its full glory within five years.

Austrian rule in the 18th century fostered urban development, with the construction of squares such as Place Royale and completion of the royal palace at Laeken (1784). Many of the Upper Town's architectural gems were built during this time.

The French Revolution inspired similar sentiments in Brussels and the Austrians were eventually forced out by the French. They held power until 1815 when Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo (p225) and Belgium and Luxembourg were incorporated into the newly formed United Kingdom of the Netherlands. This setup didn't last long;

THE BRUSSELS REGION

Brussels comprises 19 *communes*, collectively known as the Brussels Region (Brussels Gewest in Flemish, Région de Bruxelles in French). This region is the only area in Belgium to be officially bilingual and the *communes* often (but not always) have two names – thus you'll see signs for the *commune* of Elsene (as it's known in Flemish) and Ixelles (its French name). The same goes for the names of streets, train stations, public buildings, you name it. We've used French place/street names throughout this chapter.

Brussels residents revolted in 1830 (see boxed text, p110) and Belgium became an independent state with Brussels, at that time home to 100,000, as its capital.

The city grew enormously in both population and stature during the next century due largely to the expansionist policy of King Léopold II (see p96).

After WWII, Brussels developed unchecked, first becoming the headquarters of NATO and later the EU (p87). But it was its stint as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2000 that gave the city the push it needed. Neglected buildings and neighbourhoods were spruced up and a shift of consciousness gave birth to new spirit. This spirit was radically expressed in the 2001 local elections when the Bruxellois ousted the long-standing Liberals for a red-green coalition. While things have since mellowed politically, with the Socialists alone taking poll position in the 2006 election, culturally Brussels is still riding a high.

ORIENTATION

Most of Brussels is surrounded by the Ring, a motorway which provides easy central access. Another ring – the Petit (Small) Ring – encases the historic centre in a pentagon of boulevards that allows rapid transit.

Central Brussels is divided into two main areas – the Lower and Upper Towns. The **Lower Town** (Map p74) comprises the medieval core based around the imposing Grand Place, a former market square. This area is best explored on foot, its cobbled streets leading to popular quarters such as **Îlot Sacré**, **Ste Catherine**, **St Géry** and, to the south, the **Marolles** (Map pp76–7), an old working-class neighbourhood where some locals still speak Bruxellois, the

city's old dialect. Unbeknown to most visitors, the Senne River, on which the city grew up, still runs through this area but was covered over in the late 19th century for health reasons (cholera outbreaks and the like).

The **Upper Town** (Map pp72–3 & Map p74) has a vastly different atmosphere. It rises to the east and southeast of the Grand Place and was traditionally home of Belgium's French-speaking elite. Thus you'll find wide boulevards flanking monumental buildings such as the Palais Royal and the Palais de Justice, as well as the Belgian parliament and government headquarters, and some major museums and chic shopping precincts based around the Sablon and Ave Louise areas.

There's plenty to see within the Petit Ring, but Brussels extends much further. The modern **EU quarter** (Map p86) – signposted *Europese Instellingen/Institutions Européennes* – lies to the east and borders the vibrant **Ixelles** (Map pp76–7), which straddles Ave Louise. Ixelles and its neighbour, **St Gilles** (Map pp76–7), are known for their many Art Nouveau buildings, although the latter also has a down-at-heel quarter not far from Gare du Midi, the city's main international train station. Brussels' 30,000-strong Portuguese community is based around Place Flagey where the first immigrants settled in the 1960s. The renovated Flagey building, now an entertainment complex, has seriously boosted the area's nightlife. Also in Ixelles is **Matonge**, a lively quarter home to the capital's African community, and given its unofficial name from a square in the Congolese capital Kinshasa. South of Ixelles, the affluent commune of **Ucde** (Map pp70–1) flanks the Bois de la Cambre, a popular park that eventually joins the Forêt de Soignes.

North of the old city centre is a business district built around Blvd Émile Jacqmain and resembling a miniature Manhattan. Immediately west of here in **Molenbeek** (Map pp70–1) is the city's modern-day port, based along the Canal de Charleroi, which links Brussels with Charleroi to the south and Antwerp to the north. Until recently, this area of industrial decay held little appeal for visitors, but new urban developments like Tour & Taxis (p89) have put it on the map.

Further north, the canal separates the run-down immigrant neighbourhoods of **Schaerbeek** (Map pp70–1) and **St Josse** (Map pp72–3) from the affluent *commune* (suburb) of **Laeken** and the **Domaine Royal** (Map pp70–1), the main

residence of Belgium's royal family. Just north-west of here is Heysel, site of the infamous 1985 soccer stadium disaster and home to the Atomium, a space-age leftover from the 1958 World Fair.

Last, northwest of the centre are the little-visited communes of **Jette** (Map pp70–1) and **Koekelberg** (Map pp70–1), and to the southwest is **Anderlecht** (Map pp70–1), best known for its soccer team but also boasting an interesting museum and a not-to-be-missed eatery (see boxed text, p105).

Brussels has three main train stations: Gare du Nord, Gare Centrale and Gare du Midi. For details, see p115.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Anticyclone des Açores (Map p74; ☎ 02 217 52 46; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 34) Travel specialist.

Évasions 1 (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 49 56; Rue du Midi 89; ☎ 9.30am–6pm) Buys and sells all sorts of books. Expect floor-to-ceiling stacks.

FNAC (Map pp72–3; ☎ 02 209 22 11; City 2 shopping centre, Rue Neuve; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat) Department store with extensive literary selection, English-language books, travel guides and maps.

La Librairie de Rome (Map pp76–7; ☎ 02 511 79 37; Rue Jean Stas 16a; ☎ 8am–8pm Sun–Tue, to 9pm Wed–Sat) For international magazines and newspapers.

Nicola's Bookshop (Map pp76–7; ☎ 02 513 94 00; 106 Rue de Stassart; ☎ 11am–7pm Mon–Sat) Small English-language bookshop specialising in world literature.

Pêlé Mêle (Map pp72–3; ☎ 02 548 78 00; Blvd Maurice Lemonnier 55) Cavernous secondhand bookshop.

Sterling Books (Map p74; ☎ 02 223 62 23; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 38; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat, noon–6.30pm Sun) Comfy sofas, a kids' play area and helpful staff make this English-language bookshop a welcome respite.

Waterstones (Map p74; ☎ 02 219 27 08; Blvd Adolphe Max 71–75; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 11.30am–6pm Sun) Brussels' biggest English-language bookshop.

Emergency

Ambulance/Fire (☎ 100)

Police (☎ 101)

Internet Access

BXL (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 99 80; Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 46; ☎ noon–midnight; per hr €2) Groovy *café/alco* with an internet alcove.

Concepts Telecom (Map pp76–7; Gare du Midi; ☎ 9am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7.30pm Sat; per hr €4) Inside the main international train station.

BRUSSELS IN...

Two Days

Order a *petit noir* on the **Grand Place** (opposite), Brussels' gorgeous central square, before exploring nearby cobbled streets and the **Galleries St Hubert** (p112). Head to the Upper Town to take in old and modern masters at the **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts** (p83) before viewing the cityscape from the **Old England building** (p83). Ogle **chocolate shops** (p113) on the swish Place du Grand Sablon, followed by Art Nouveau at the **Musée Horta** (p87). At night head to **Rue des Bouchers** (p80), Brussels' famous restaurant street, before pub crawling around the **Lower Town** (p106).

Head out of the centre on day two to either the **Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika** (p94), one of Belgium's more bizarre outings, or the **Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze** (p90) for strange Brussels brews. Chill out in the afternoon with some shopping (p112) – first the **Rue Antoine Dansaert** quarter, then **Ave Louise**. Dine at one of many restaurants in or around Ixelles' **Rue St Boniface** (p104), and finish up with a drink at **Place Flagey** (p107), one of the city's trendiest locales.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then on your third day add a surrealist trip to the **Musée Magritte** (p89) or an Art Deco day at the **Musée David et Alice van Buuren** (p88). On day four delve into the city's comic-strip culture – choose either the **Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée** (p81) or trace the **Murals of Brussels** (p82) walk. There's no shortage of restaurants and pubs to finish up in.

Laundry

Salon Lavoir de la Chapelle (Map pp72-3; Rue Haute; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Old-fashioned, full-service laundrette.
Was-Salon Lavoir (Map pp72-3; Rue de Laeken 145; ☎ 7am-10pm) Self-service laundrette.

Left Luggage

Brussels National Airport Luggage lockers on Level 0 of the terminal.

Train stations Luggage lockers (€2.60 to €3.60 per 24 hours depending on the size of the locker, with a maximum of 72 hours) or left-luggage offices (€2.50 per article per day; open 5am or 6am to 9pm).

Libraries

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 219 19 80; Rue des Sables 20; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Thu, noon-6pm Fri & Sun, 10am-6pm Sat) Specialised comic-strip library. Small admission charge (€2) to access the reading room or study section.

Medical Services

Helpline (☎ 02 648 40 14) Twenty-four-hour assistance line run by Community Help Service. Can provide a list of English-speaking doctors, dentists and other health professionals.
Hôpital St Pierre (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 535 31 11, emergency 02 535 40 51; cnr Rue Haute & Rue de l'Abricotier; ☎ 24hr) Central hospital offering emergency assistance.

Money

ATMs and exchange facilities are found on and around the Grand Place, at Gare du Midi and Brussels National Airport.

Post

Post office Main post office (Map p74; Blvd Anspach 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat); Gare du Midi (Map pp76-7; Ave Fonsny 1E; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat); City 2 shopping centre (Map pp72-3; Rue Neuve; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Belgian Tourist Information Centre (Map p74; ☎ 02 504 03 90; www.visitflanders.com, www.belgique-tourisme.net; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 63; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat & Sun, to 1pm Sun Jan & Feb) Supplies national tourist information (as opposed to information on Brussels itself).

DISCOUNT CARDS

The **Brussels Card** (€30) is valid for three consecutive days and offers free entry to nearly all museums, free public transport and discounts in various restaurants, bars and shops. It's available at all participating museums, the tourist offices in Brussels, public transport agencies and some hotels.

WHAT STREET IS THIS?

First-time visitors to Brussels are often flabbergasted by its peculiarly long street names. Blue-and-white street-corner plaques proclaim titles like 'Petite Rue de la Violette Korte Violetstraat' or 'Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés Oud Korenhuis'. It's tricky recalling what street a great *café* is on when it's almost impossible to get your tongue around the name.

Street names become manageable when you remember it's two names in one – the French followed by the Flemish. Thus Petite Rue de la Violette is the French name followed by Korte Violetstraat, the Flemish. Note also that, in French, *rue* (street) comes at the start of the name whereas in Flemish *straat* is tacked on to the end.

Move on to Brussels' working-class Marolles and street names become even more vexed as three languages are used – French, Flemish and Bruxellois (the city's old dialect). Try wrapping your tongue around Rue Haute Hoogstraat Op d'Huugstroet (ie High Street).

Brussels International (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 89 40; www.brusselsinternational.be; Grand Place; ☎ 9am-6pm Easter-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Nov-Dec, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Jan-Easter) The city of Brussels' tourist office, located inside the town hall and usually crammed. Sells a couple of discount booklets or cards, such as the Brussels Card (see boxed text, opposite).

Brussels International – Tourism (Map pp76-7; Gare du Midi; ☎ 8am-8pm Sat-Thu, to 9pm Fri May-Sep, 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) For visitors arriving by Eurostar or Thalys.

Espace Wallonie-Bruxelles (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 725 52 75; arrivals hall Brussels National Airport; ☎ 8am-9pm;) Gives information on Brussels and Wallonia. For information on Flanders, you'll have to visit the Belgian Tourist Information Centre (opposite).

Travel Agencies

Airstop/Taxistop (Map p74; ☎ 070 22 22 92; www.taxistop.be; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 28) A travel agency that matches long-distance travellers and drivers headed for the same destination for a reasonable fee. Offers cheap charter flights and car transport (€3 per km) to other European cities.
Connections (Map p74; ☎ 02 550 01 30; www.connections.be; Rue du Midi 19) All-round travel agent.

SIGHTS

Grand Place

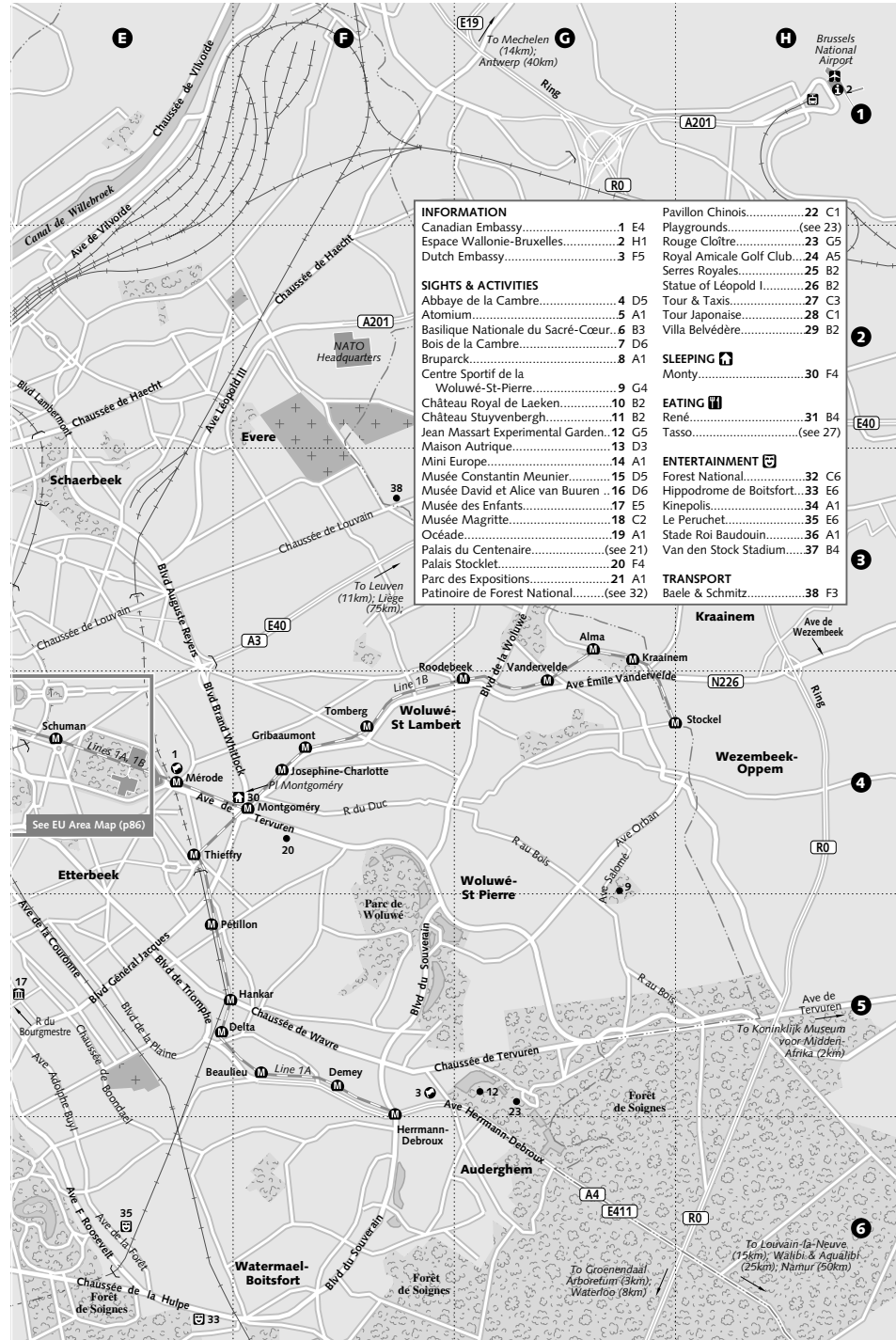
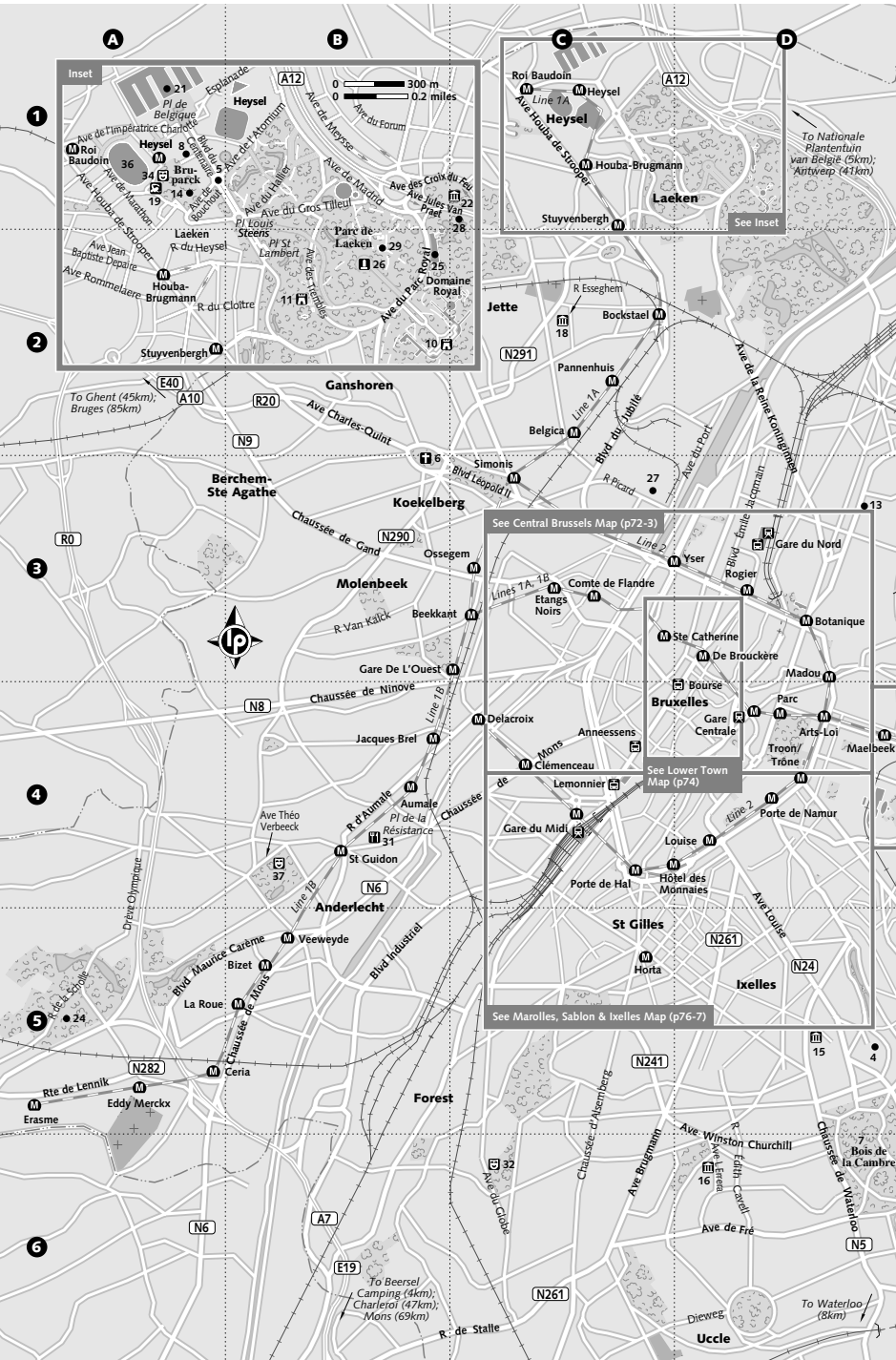
For one of Europe's finest urban views, head straight to Brussels' magnificent central square, **Grand Place** (Map p74; metro Gare Centrale or premetro Bourle). It boasts the country's best baroque guildhalls, the beautiful **Hôtel de Ville** (Town Hall), museums, pavement *cafés*, chocolate shops and intimate cellar restaurants – a combination that lures visitors in droves. Hidden at the very core of the old town, it's revealed as you enter from one of six narrow side alleys (Rue des Harengs is the best) – a discreet positioning that adds charm.

The square dates from the 12th century and rose on a site that was once marshland. By the early 15th century, Brussels was booming through the cloth trade and the patronage of the dukes of Burgundy. A prosperous market covered not only the Grand Place but also neighbouring streets, such as the beguilingly named Rue au Beurre (Butter St) and Rue des Bouchers (Butchers' St). The city's increasingly wealthy merchant guilds established headquarters – guildhalls – on the square. The construction of the **Hôtel de Ville** sealed the Grand Place's role as the hub of commercial, political and civic life. Medieval tournaments and public executions took place before high-spirited crowds.

In 1695 much of central Brussels, including the Grand Place, was bombarded for 36 hours under the orders of Louis XIV of France. The attack was designed to distract the allied forces of England and the Spanish Netherlands, with whom the French king was at war. Most of the guildhalls, as well as thousands of houses and many churches, were destroyed. Miraculously, the **Hôtel de Ville** survived the bombing, but nearly all the other buildings that you see on the Grand Place today are 17th-century replacements.

The Grand Place takes on different auras depending on the time of day and the season. In the morning the superb guildhalls at the southern end glint in the sun; at dusk the azure sky makes a vivid backdrop to the illuminated buildings. For three days in August (even years only), a carpet of flowers covers the whole square. At any time of the day or night, you'll find people milling about here, simply gazing up and absorbing its beauty.

(Continued on page 79)



INFORMATION	
Canadian Embassy.....	.1 E4
Espace Wallonie-Bruxelles.....	.2 H1
Dutch Embassy.....	.3 F5
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Abbaye de la Cambre.....	.4 D5
Atomium.....	.5 A1
Basilique Nationale du Sacré-Coeur.....	.6 B3
Bois de la Cambre.....	.7 D6
Bruparck.....	.8 A1
Centre Sportif de la Woluwé-St-Pierre.....	.9 G4
Château Royal de Laeken.....	.10 B2
Château Stuyvenbergh.....	.11 B2
Jean Massart Experimental Garden.....	.12 G5
Maison Autriche.....	.13 D3
Mini Europe.....	.14 A1
Musée Constantin Meunier.....	.15 D5
Musée David et Alice van Buuren.....	.16 D6
Musée des Enfants.....	.17 E5
Musée Magritte.....	.18 C2
Océade.....	.19 A1
Palais du Centenaire.....	(see 21)
Palais des Expositions.....	.20 F4
Pâtinoire de Forest National.....	(see 32)
Pavillon Chinois.....	.22 C1
Playgrounds.....	(see 23)
Rouge Cloître.....	.23 G5
Royal Amicale Golf Club.....	.24 A5
Serres Royales.....	.25 B2
Statue of Léopold I.....	.26 B2
Tour & Taxus.....	.27 C3
Tour Japonaise.....	.28 C1
Villa Belvédère.....	.29 B2
SLEEPING	
Monty.....	.30 F4
EATING	
René.....	.31 B4
Tasso.....	(see 27)
ENTERTAINMENT	
Forest National.....	.32 C6
Hippodrome de Boitsfort.....	.33 E6
Kinepolis.....	.34 A1
Le Peruchet.....	.35 E6
Stade Roi Baudouin.....	.36 A1
Van den Stock Stadium.....	.37 B4
TRANSPORT	
Bael & Schmitz.....	.38 F3

INFORMATION

- Amazona.....1 H3
- Australian Embassy.....2 H6
- FNAC.....(see 47)
- French Embassy.....3 H5
- Pôle Mêle.....4 C6
- Post Office.....(see 47)
- Salon Lavoir de la Chapelle.....5 E6
- USA Embassy.....6 H5
- Was-Salon Lavoir.....7 E3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Cathédrale des Sts Michel & Gudule.....8 F5
- Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée.....9 F4
- Cercle Royal de Billiard.....10 C6
- Colonne du Congrès.....11 G4
- Crosly Super Bowling.....12 E6
- Flanders Gate Squash Club.....13 C3
- Godefroid de Bouillon Statue.....14 F6
- Grand Magasin Wauquez.....(see 9)
- Halles de Schaarbeek.....15 H1
- Le Botanique.....16 G3
- Musée BELvue.....17 F6
- Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze.....18 B6
- Musée d'Art Ancien.....(see 21)
- Musée d'Art Moderne.....(see 21)
- Musée des Instruments de Musique.....19 F6
- Musée du Jouet.....20 G3
- Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts.....21 F6
- Old England Building.....(see 19)
- Palais Royal.....22 G6
- Playground.....23 G5

SLEEPING

- 2Go4.....24 E3
- Art Hotel Siru.....25 F2
- B&B Phileas Fogg.....26 H3
- Centre Vincent van Gogh.....27 H3
- Hooy Kaye Lodge.....28 D2
- Hôtel Astoria.....29 G4
- Hôtel du Congrès.....30 G4
- Hôtel George V.....31 C5
- Jacques Brel.....32 G3
- Les Auberges de Jeunesse.....(see 32)
- Sleep Well.....(see 33)

EATING

- Comme Chez Soi.....34 D6
- In 't Spinnekopke.....35 C4
- Metin.....36 H2
- Super GB.....(see 47)

DRINKING

- De Ullieme Hallucinatie.....37 H2
- La Fleur en Papier Doré.....38 D6
- Le Bier Circus.....39 G4

ENTERTAINMENT

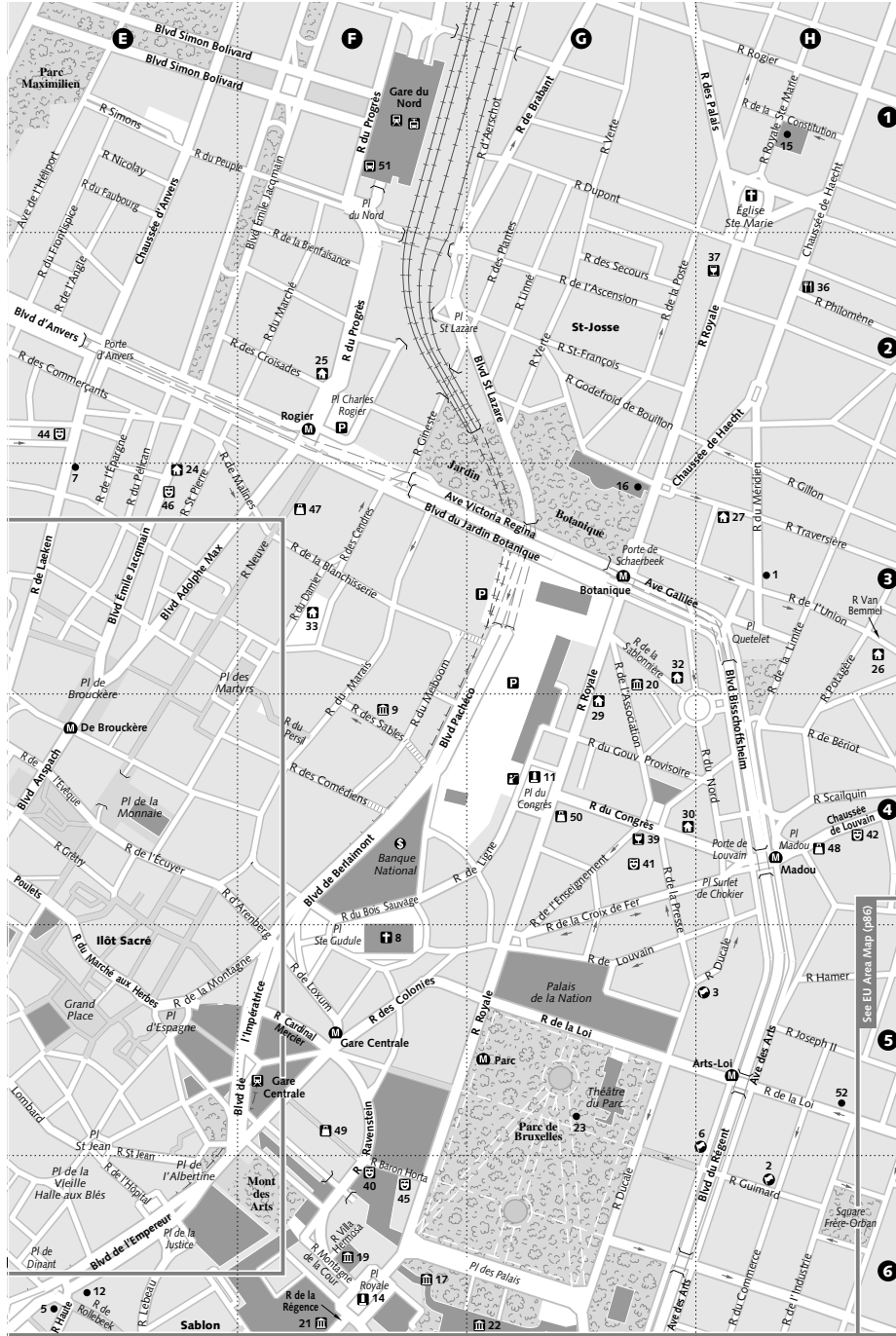
- Bozar.....40 F6
- Cirque Royal.....41 G4
- Dirty Dancing@Mirano.....42 H4
- Kaaitheater.....43 D1
- Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg.....44 E2
- Musée du Cinéma.....45 F6
- Théâtre National.....46 E3

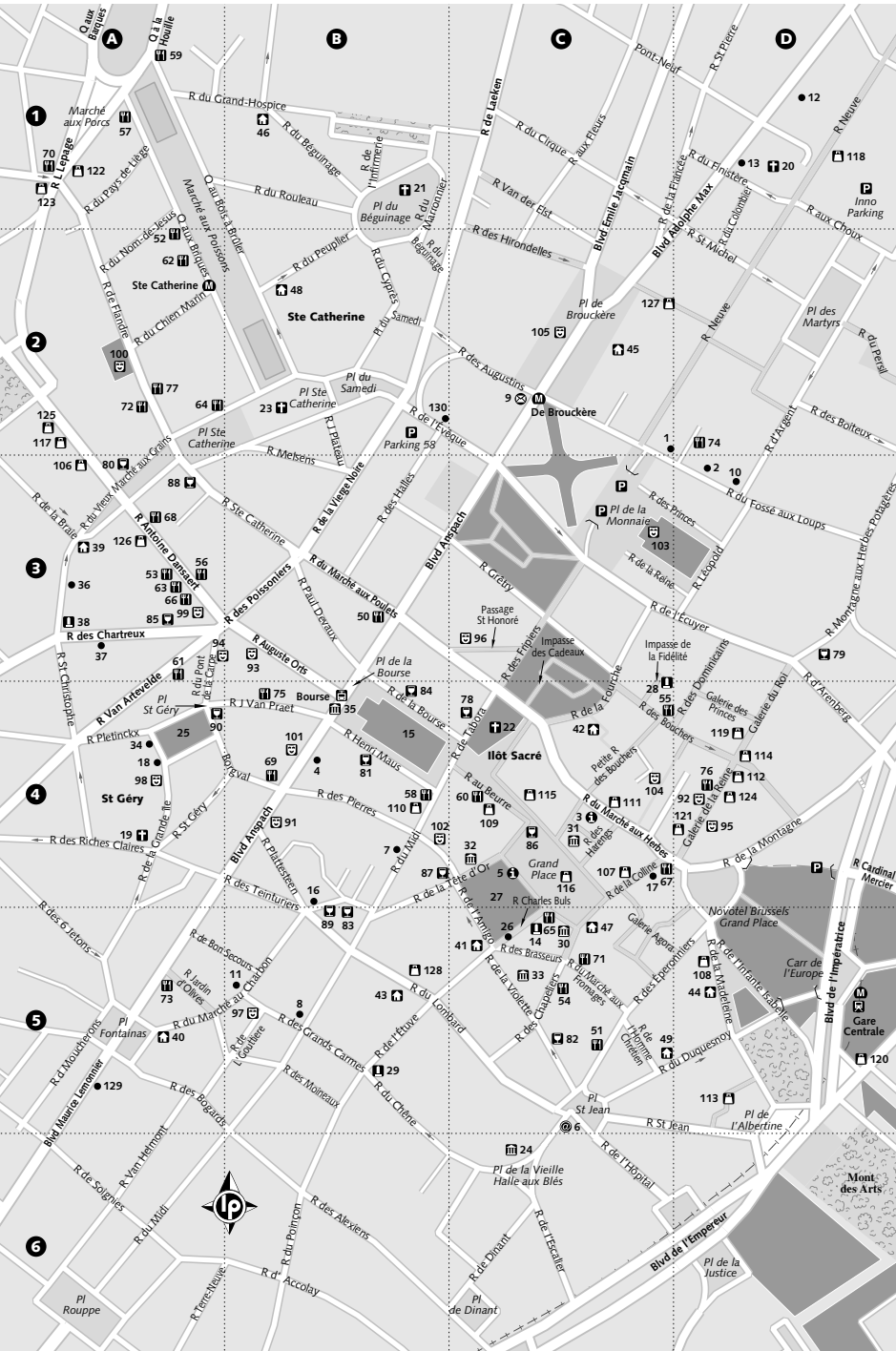
SHOPPING

- City 2 Shopping Centre.....47 H3
- DoD.....48 F4
- Galerie Ravenstein.....49 F5
- Mary's.....50 G4

TRANSPORT

- Eurolines.....51 F1
- Touring Club de Belgique.....52 H5





INFORMATION

- Accessible Travel Info Point.....(see 3)
- Airstop/Taxistop.....1 C2
- Anticyclone des Acores.....2 D3
- Belgian Tourist Information Centre.....3 C4
- Brüssel.....4 B4
- Brussels International.....5 C4
- BXL.....6 C5
- Connections.....7 B4
- Évasions 1.....8 B5
- Post Office.....9 C2
- Sterling Books.....10 D3
- Tels Quels.....11 B5
- Waterstones.....12 D1

- Hôtel La Légende.....43 B5
- Hôtel Le Dixseptième.....44 D5
- Hôtel Métropole.....45 C2
- Hôtel Noga.....46 B1
- Hôtel Saint Michel.....47 C5
- Hôtel Welcome.....48 B2
- Royal Winsor Hotel.....49 C5

EATING

- AD Delhaize.....50 B3
- Al Barmaki.....51 C5
- Bij den Boer.....52 A2
- Bonsoir Clara.....53 A3
- Brasserie de la Roue d'Or.....54 C5
- Chez Léon.....55 C4
- Comoco.....56 A3
- Comus & Gasterea.....57 A1
- Fritland.....58 B4
- GB Express.....59 A1
- GB Express.....60 C4
- Gourmet d'Asie.....61 A3
- Jacques.....62 A2
- Kasbah.....63 A3
- La Belle Maraîchère.....64 A2
- Le Maison du Cygne.....65 C5
- Le Pain Quotidien/Het Dagelijks Brood.....66 A3
- Panos.....67 C4
- Pataya.....68 A3
- Petite Boxeur.....69 B4
- Picnik.....70 A1
- Pita Places.....71 C5
- Pré Salé.....72 A2
- Rugantino.....73 A5
- Samourai.....74 D2
- Shamrock.....75 B4
- Taverne du Passage.....76 D4
- Viva M'Boma.....77 A2

- Brussels International.....5 C4
- BXL.....6 C5
- Connections.....7 B4
- Évasions 1.....8 B5
- Post Office.....9 C2
- Sterling Books.....10 D3
- Tels Quels.....11 B5
- Waterstones.....12 D1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- ARAU.....13 D1
- Art Nouveau Plaque.....14 C5
- Bourse.....15 B4
- Broussaille Mural.....16 B4
- Brussels City Tours.....17 C4
- Courtyard Entrance.....18 A4
- Église Notre Dame des Riches Claires.....19 A4
- Église Notre Dame du Finistère.....20 D1
- Église St Jean Baptiste au Béguinage.....21 B1
- Église St Nicolas.....22 C4
- Église Ste Catherine.....23 B2
- Fondation Jacques Brel.....24 C6
- Halles St Géry.....25 A4
- Horse Drawn Carriage.....26 C5
- Hôtel de Ville.....27 C4
- Jeanneke Pis.....28 C4
- Manneken Pis.....29 B5
- Musée de la Brasserie.....30 C5
- Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles.....31 C4
- Musée du Cacao et du Chocolat.....32 C4
- Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle.....33 C5
- Nero Mural.....34 A4
- Scientastic Museum.....35 B4
- Stained-Glass Windows.....36 A3
- Statue Everard 't Serclaes.....(see 14)
- Tower.....37 A3
- Zinneke.....38 A3

- Hôtel La Légende.....43 B5
- Hôtel Le Dixseptième.....44 D5
- Hôtel Métropole.....45 C2
- Hôtel Noga.....46 B1
- Hôtel Saint Michel.....47 C5
- Hôtel Welcome.....48 B2
- Royal Winsor Hotel.....49 C5

DRINKING

- À la Bécasse.....78 C4
- À la Mort Subite.....79 D3
- De Markten.....80 A3
- Falstaff.....81 B4
- Goupil le Fol.....82 C5
- Le Belga.....83 B5
- Le Ciro.....84 B4
- Le Greenwich.....85 A3
- Le Roy d'Espagne.....86 C4
- L'Homo Erectus.....87 B4
- Monk.....88 A3
- Rainbow House.....89 B5
- Toone.....(see 104)
- Zebra.....90 A4

- Brussels International.....5 C4
- BXL.....6 C5
- Connections.....7 B4
- Évasions 1.....8 B5
- Post Office.....9 C2
- Sterling Books.....10 D3
- Tels Quels.....11 B5
- Waterstones.....12 D1

SLEEPING

- Atlas.....39 A3
- Downtown-BXL.....40 A5
- Hôtel Amigo.....41 C5
- Hôtel Arlequin.....42 C4

- Brussels International.....5 C4
- BXL.....6 C5
- Connections.....7 B4
- Évasions 1.....8 B5
- Post Office.....9 C2
- Sterling Books.....10 D3
- Tels Quels.....11 B5
- Waterstones.....12 D1

ENTERTAINMENT

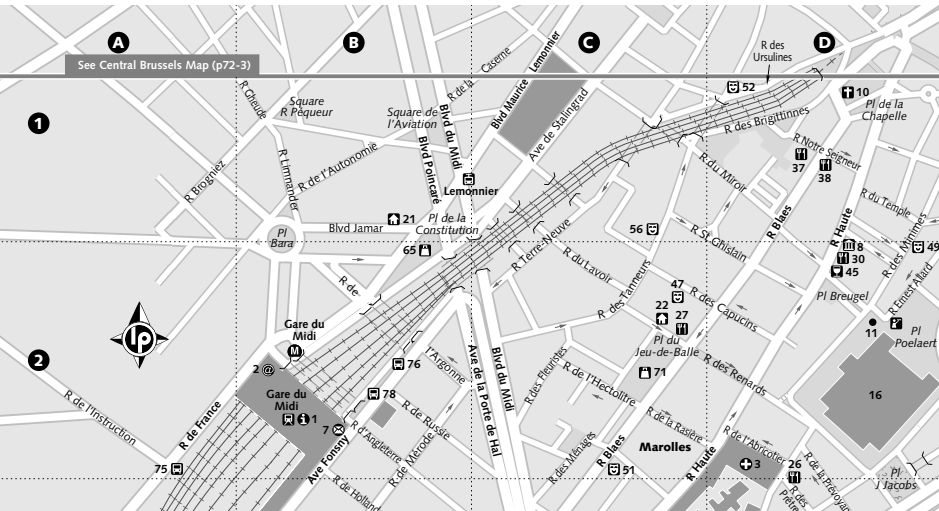
- Actor's Studio.....(see 42)
- Ancienne Belgique.....91 B4
- Arenberg Galleries.....92 D4
- Beursschouwburg.....93 B3
- Beursschouwburg Café.....(see 93)
- Bizon.....94 A3
- Brussels on Stage.....95 D4
- Caroline Music.....96 C3
- Chez Maman.....97 B5
- Dr Vinyl.....98 A4
- L'Archiduc.....99 A3
- Maison la Bellone.....100 A2
- Pathé Palace.....101 B4
- The Music Village.....102 B4
- Théâtre du Vaudeville.....(see 95)
- Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie/Koninklijke Muntchouwburg.....103 C3
- Théâtre Royal de Toone.....104 C4
- UGC De Brouckère Cinema.....105 C2

SHOPPING

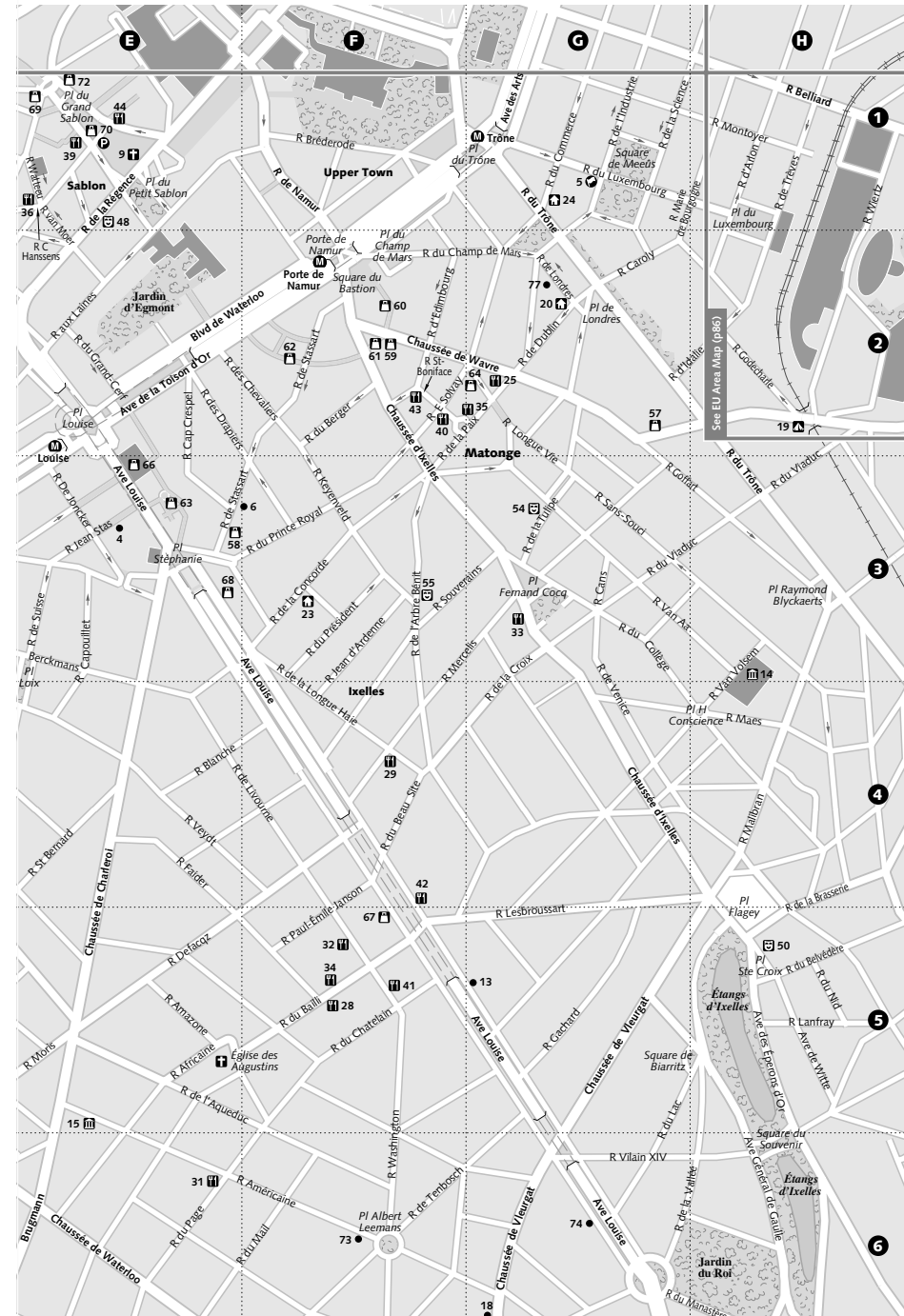
- Anнемie Verbeke.....106 A3
- Boutique Tintin.....107 C4
- Comé Port Royal.....108 D5
- Dandoy.....109 D4
- Darakan.....110 B4
- De Biertempel.....111 C4
- Delvaux.....112 D4
- Galerie Bortier.....113 D5
- Galeries St Hubert.....114 D4
- Galler.....115 C4
- Grand Place Flower Market.....116 C4
- Idiz Bogam.....117 A2
- Inno.....118 D1
- Kaat Tilley.....119 D4
- La Maison de la BD.....120 D5
- Manufacture Belge de Dentelles.....121 D4
- Marina Yee.....122 A1
- Martin Margiela.....123 A1
- Neuhaus.....124 D4
- Nicolas Woit.....125 A2
- Olivier Strelli.....126 A3
- Passage du Nord.....127 C2
- Planète Chocolat.....128 B5
- Stijl.....(see 117)

TRANSPORT

- Hertz.....129 A5
- STIB/MIVB Office.....130 B2



INFORMATION	
Brussels International – Tourism	1 B2
Concepts Telecom	2 B2
Hôpital St Pierre	3 D2
La Librairie de Rome	4 E3
New Zealand Embassy	5 G1
Nicola's Bookshop	6 F3
Post Office	7 B2
Rouge tomate	42 F4
Saint Boniface	43 F2
Wittamer	44 E1
DRINKING	
Brasserie Ploegmans	45 D2
Café Belga	(see 50)
Moeder Lambic	46 C5
ENTERTAINMENT	
Bazaar	47 C2
Conservatoire Royal de Musique	48 E1
Église de St Jean et St Etienne aux Minimes	49 D2
Flagey Building	50 H5
Fuse	51 C2
La Démence	(see 51)
Recyclart	52 D1
St Gilles Town Hall	53 C5
Sounds Jazz Club	54 G3
Studio 5	(see 50)
Styx	55 F3
Théâtre Les Tanneurs	56 C1
SHOPPING	
Beermania	57 G2
Boutique 114	58 E3
Exotic Food	59 F2
Galerie de la Porte de Namur	60 F2
Galerie d'Ixelles	61 F2
Galerias de la Toison d'Or	62 F2
Galerias Louise	63 E3
Gambala	64 G2
Gare du Midi market	65 B2
Inno	66 E3
Les Enfants d'Edouard	67 F5
Olivier Strelli	68 E3
Pierre Marcolini	69 E1
Place du Grand Sablon	70 F1
Antique Market	70 E1
La Quincaille	31 E6
La Tsampa	32 F5
L'Amour Fou	33 G3
Le Framboisier	34 F5
Le llème Élément	35 G2
Le Perroquet	36 E1
Le Variété	(see 50)
Les Petits Oignons	37 D1
L'Idiot du Village	38 D1
Lola	39 E1
L'Ultime Atome	40 F2
Notos	41 F5
Avis	73 F6
Budget	74 G6
Bus to Charleroi Airport	75 A2
Eurolines Bus Stop	76 B2
La Maison des Cyclistes	77 G2
STIB Branch Kiosk	(see 1)
TEC Bus W	78 B2



(Continued from page 69)

HÔTEL DE VILLE

The splendid Gothic-style **Hôtel de Ville** (Map p74) was the only building on the Grand Place to escape the 1695 French bombardment – ironic considering it was the target. It's a superb structure, with a creamy façade covered with stone reliefs of nobility and gargoyles, and an intricate 96m-high tower topped by a gilded statue of St Michel, the city's patron saint. The building is not symmetrical; the left-hand side was begun in 1402 but the right wing wasn't added until 1444 and is, due to space constraints, shorter. **Guided tours** (tours €3; ⏰ 3.30pm Tue & Wed Apr-Sep, 45 min) are possible; inquire at Brussels International (p69).

GUILDHALLS

The splendour of the Grand Place is due largely to its antique frame of guildhalls. Each merchant guild erected its own building, which is named (there were no street numbers back then) and adorned with gilded statues and elaborate symbols related to its trade. When the guildhalls were obliterated in the 1695 bombardment, the guilds rallied and rebuilt their headquarters in under five years, using stone (rather than partial timber as before) for the façades and adding fanciful baroque touches to the gables.

Some of the highlights:

Maison du Roi (King's House) Opposite the Hôtel de Ville, this dark, brooding building was never home to royalty, despite the name. These days it houses the Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles (right).

No 1: Maison des Boulangers (Bakers' House) Le Roy d'Espagne (p106), one of the square's most popular *cafés*, occupies this building, which belonged to the bakers' guild. The gilded bronze bust above the door represents their patron, St Aubert.

No 2: La Brouette (The Wheelbarrow) Faint gold wheelbarrows can still be seen above the door of this house, which was home to the grease-makers. The statue of St Gilles was added in 1912.

No 4: Le Sac (The Bag) This incredibly ornate building was the headquarters of the cabinet-makers.

No 5: La Louve (The She-Wolf) The archers' guild topped their building with a golden phoenix rising from the ashes to signify the rebirth of the Grand Place after the bombardment.

No 6: Le Cornet (The Horn) The boatmen's guild is easily identified by the stern-shaped gable.

No 7: Le Renard (The Fox) This house served the haberdashers.

No 8: L'Étoile (The Star) Across Rue Charles Buls from the Hôtel de Ville, this is the smallest building on the square. Everard 't Serclaes (see below), the city's hero and modern-day good luck charm, died here.

No 9: Le Cygne (The Swan) Adorned with a huge swan and built in classical style, this house originally served the butchers' guild. Nowadays it's home to the square's finest restaurant.

No 10: L'Arbre d'Or (The Golden Tree) Hops plants climbing columns hint at this building's former and current role as the brewers' headquarters.

Nos 26 & 27: Le Pigeon This guildhall belonged to the city's artists. Later, Victor Hugo lived here during his exile from France in 1852.

MUSÉE DE LA VILLE DE BRUXELLES

The **Brussels City Museum** (Map p74; ☎ 02 279 43 50; www.brucity.be; Maison du Roi, Grand Place; adult/concession €3/2.50; ⏰ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) provides a historical overview of the city through old maps, architectural relics, paintings and, displayed on the ground floor, Pieter Breugel the Elder's *Cortège de Noces* (Wedding Procession) of 1567. One room on the 3rd floor is devoted to the worldly wardrobe of Manneken Pis, though only a fraction of his 700-odd garments are displayed.

MUSÉE DE LA BRASSERIE

The **Brewery Museum** (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 49 87; www.beerparadise.be; Grand Place 10; admission €4; ⏰ 10am-5pm daily Easter-Nov, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Dec-Easter) occupies the basement of the brewers' guildhall, L'Arbre d'Or. The small museum aims to enlighten visitors on the modern world of brewing but, in two words, don't bother. If you want to see a real brewery, head to the Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze (p90).

South of Grand Place

RUE CHARLES BULS

Leading off the southern side of Grand Place is **Rue Charles Buls** (Map p74; metro Gare Centrale). It paves the way to Manneken Pis and, not surprisingly, is lined with lace and trinket shops. At the start of the street, in a small arcaded gallery, you'll find an 1899 gilded Art Nouveau plaque dedicated to the city by its appreciative artists. Next to it is a reclining statue of Everard 't Serclaes, a 14th-century hero who defended the city – rub his gleaming torso for good luck.

MUSÉE DU COSTUME ET DE LA DENTELLE

A stone's throw from the Grand Place, the **Costume and Lace Museum** (Map p74; ☎ 02 213 44 50; Rue de la Violette 12; metro Gare Centrale; admission €3;

THIS MAP
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

☞ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun) is Belgium's second-best lace exhibition (top honours goes to the Nationaal Vlas, Kant en Linnenmuseum in Kortrijk, p158). Read about Belgium's place in lace history in the boxed text, p138). Notice the sombre black attire once worn by women *en promenade* (out walking in public) and the more colourful lace gowns for women *en visite* (visiting someone's home). Note also the antique underwear, including an old *bustehouder* (bra). Pick up the English-language booklet before setting off.

MANNEKEN PIS

A national symbol and known throughout the world, **Manneken Pis** (Map p74; cnr Rue de l'Étuve & Rue du Chêne; metro Gare Centrale or premetro Bourse), a little boy cheerfully taking a leak into a pool, never fails to disappoint visitors despite its diminutive size. It's three blocks from the Grand Place.

The present-day bronze Manneken Pis was sculpted by Jérôme Duquesnoy in 1619, but a stone version – named Little Julian – stood here from the mid-14th century. The statue's origins are lost in legend: some say he's modelled on a boy who extinguished a fire, others say he was a nobleman's son. Whatever, the people of Brussels have adopted him as the symbol of their indomitable and irreverent spirit, and on occasion dress him up in one of his 700-odd costumes. Kitsch? Well, there's more – his little 'sister', Jeanneke Pis (opposite), squats in an alley on the north side of Grand Place, and Zinneke (p82), a mongrel dog with cocked leg, stands in St Géry.

FONDATION JACQUES BREL

The **Jacques Brel Foundation** (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 20 20; www.jacquesbrel.be; Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 11; metro Gare Centrale; adult/concession €5/3.50; ☞ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat) is an archive centre and museum dedicated to Brussels' raspy-voiced singer Jacques Brel (1929–78).

Brel rose to stardom in Paris in the 1950s for his passionate songs that have transcended a generation. The legendary *chansonnier* was a transient troubadour who performed with intensity. According to a member of the Fondation Jacques Brel: 'He sang like a boxer and usually lost a kilo during each performance'. Love, freedom, the spirit of revolt and the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie were his passions. His career started in 1952 in La Rose Noire, a Brussels cabaret. The following year he headed to Paris and mixed with songwrit-

ers and singers such as Édith Piaf. His first record was cut in 1955 and within two years he was an idol.

In the early 1960s Brel toured the USA and USSR and became known as the singer from France. He never denied his Belgian status – his songs often hark back to his flat, bleak homeland – but he cherished France, so much so that his first daughter is named France. He died of lung cancer in 1978 and is buried on one of the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia, near Paul Gauguin, the French painter.

MUSÉE DU CACAO ET DU CHOCOLAT

The **Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate** (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 20 48; Rue de la Tête d'Or 9; premetro Bourse; adult/concession/child €5/4/free; ☞ 10am-4.30pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun) is for chocolate die-hards. The admission cost entitles you to one chocolate-dipped biscuit, a wander through some mediocre exhibits and taste-testing at a praline-making demonstration.

North of Grand Place BOURSE

The **Belgian Stock Exchange** (Map p74; Place de la Bourse; premetro Bourse) occupies a grandiose neo-classical edifice from 1873. The cream façade is festooned with friezes and sculptures of exotic fruits, reclining nudes, lunging horses and a multitude of allegorical figures. One of the statues is by Rodin.

ÉGLISE ST NICOLAS

The **Church of St Nicolas** (Map p74; Rue au Beurre 1; premetro Bourse; ☞ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-7.30pm Sun) is a pint-sized edifice encrusted with shops and easily overlooked. Appropriately enough, it's dedicated to the patron saint of merchants. Almost as old as Brussels itself, it has been heavily restored through the centuries. The dark and sombre interior is noted for the unusual angle at which its three aisles were built.

GALERIES ST HUBERT

For details on Galeries St Hubert, see boxed text, p112.

RUE DES BOUCHERS

Leading off Galeries St Hubert in a lively little quarter known as **Îlot Sacré** is the famous **Rue des Bouchers** (Map p74; metro Gare Centrale or premetro Bourse). Whether you decide to eat at one of the many seafood restaurants here or not, this

pedestrianised cobbled street is a spectacle not to be missed. Both sides of the street are packed with tables for dining throughout the year – overhead heaters keep frostbite at bay in winter. Waiters entice diners with iced displays of marine delicacies and the odd novelty (expect dancing plastic fish). Many of the restaurants are not recommended but there are exceptions, including Chez Léon (p101).

JEANNEKE PIS

Manneken Pis' female counterpart is **Jeanneke Pis** (Map p74; Impasse de la Fidélité; metro Gare Centrale or premetro Bourse), just off Rue des Bouchers. This little girl, gleefully squatting, was erected in 1985 by Denis Adrien Debouvrie 'in honour of loyalty'. Loyalty to what we're not sure, but certainly there's no bond between her and the tourist office, whose official guidebook fails to acknowledge her existence.

CATHÉDRALE DES STS MICHEL & GUDULE

This twin-towered **cathedral** (Map pp72-3; www.cathedralemichel.be; Place Sainte-Gudule; metro Gare Centrale; admission free, crypt €1; ☞ 8am-6pm), named after Brussels' male and female patron saints, sits gleaming on the hillside to the north of Gare Centrale. The out-of-the-way location between the Lower and Upper Towns means it is often overlooked by visitors. In addition, poor city planning has left it marooned like an ancient island in the midst of modern development.

Begun in 1226, the cathedral took some 300 years to build and consequently reveals a blend of styles – from Romanesque through all the stages of Gothic and right up to Renaissance. The interior is light and airy but almost bereft of decoration due to plundering, first by Protestants in the 17th century and later by the French army. Stained-glass windows flood the nave with light and the enormous wooden pulpit, sculpted by Antwerp artist Hendrik Verbruggen, is worth inspecting – note Adam and Eve being driven out of Eden by fearsome skeletons. In the crypt are the remains of an 11th-century Romanesque chapel.

CENTRE BELGE DE LA BANDE DESSINÉE

The **Belgian Comic Strip Centre** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 219 19 80; www.comicscenter.net in Flemish & French; Rue des Sables 20; metro Rogier; adult/concession €6.20/5; ☞ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), about 800m northeast of the Grand Place, is not to be missed. Tour the country's rich, vibrant comic-strip culture, from its earliest beginnings to contemporary

favourites, all housed in a remarkable building, the **Grand Magasin Waucquez**. This former department store was created by Victor Horta in 1906 for the Waucquez family textile business. It's pure Art Nouveau: light, airy and full of glass and wrought iron. Despite standing empty for 16 years, it was spared from the demolition madness that stripped Brussels of many of its Art Nouveau showpieces.

For more on comics, see boxed texts, p39 and p82.

RUE NEUVE AREA

Rue Neuve (Map p74; premetro De Brouckère, metro Rogier) is a pedestrianised street that's wall-to-wall shoppers, especially on Saturday afternoons.

One of the few sights in this area is **Église Notre Dame du Finistère**, an 18th-century church that sits in vivid contrast to the modern mania around it. Nearby is the sombre **Place des Martyrs**, with its monument to the 467 who died in the 1830 revolution. Rejoin Rue du Neuve to meander through the **Passage du Nord**, an elegant 19th-century shopping arcade (see boxed text, p112).

Rue Neuve terminates at Place de la Monnaie, an ugly square that is home to Brussels' most prestigious cultural venue, the **Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie/Koninklijke Muntchouburg** (see p110).

St Géry & Ste Catherine

Neighbouring **St Géry** (Map p74; premetro Bourse) and **Ste Catherine** (Map p74; metro Ste Catherine) are prime downtown real estate. Colourful, trendy and full of restaurants, *cafés*, bars and fashion shops, these quarters lend the city an invigorating air.

Start exploring at Place St Géry, an engaging square surrounded by popular *cafés* and dominated by **Halles St Géry**, a renovated meat market that now hosts exhibitions. From a public courtyard off Place St Géry (go through the black steel gates next to the bistro La Lion St Géry), there's a view of **Église Notre Dame des Riches Claires**, an intriguing asymmetrical church. Nearby is the **Nero** mural, one of the city's many comic-strip murals (see boxed text, p82).

Head up Rue du Pont de la Carpe to Rue des Chartreux. Pause for a drink at **Le Greenwich** (p106), or proceed to the **clock repair shop** at No 42 where (weekdays only) you can push open the black door to reveal part of a 12th-century sandstone **tower**, one of 50 such

MURALS OF BRUSSELS

Brussels' Comic Strip Route is a series of giant comic murals and colourful statues that enliven alleys and main thoroughfares throughout the old city centre. Moseying past some of the murals is a great way to explore less-visited neighbourhoods and discover the city's nooks and crannies. Set aside three hours to trace the 6km circuit (detailed in a free brochure available from Brussels International, p69). Alternatively, just pick out a few. One not to miss is **Broussaille** (Map p74; Rue du Marché au Charbon; premetro Bourse), by Frank Pé. Painted in 1991, it was the city's first, depicting a young couple arm-in-arm discovering Brussels. The strip is located in Brussels' gay nightlife hub and, in the original version, it was difficult to tell whether the couple was straight or not. Gay establishments used the mural to promote the quarter until 1999 when the mural was repainted and the black-haired figure was given a more feminine hairstyle, earrings and (slightly) bigger breasts.

defensive towers that once stretched for 4km around the old city centre.

First there was **Manneken Pis**, then **Jeanneke Pis** and now **Zinneke** (nr Rue des Chartreux & Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains), a statue of a dog with its leg cocked. Designed by Flemish sculptor Tom Frantzen, Zinneke exemplifies Brussels' irreverent spirit and has given rise to one of the city's zaniest festivals (see p96).

An Art Nouveau gem is concealed nearby on Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains. Go through the black doors at number 36-40 to a small courtyard (this is private property but the owners do not mind if visitors peek inside – the doors are open 7am to 5pm weekdays) where two old **stained-glass windows** (Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains 36-40) are visible. One features a young woman in a white gown standing before a pond, the other a Chinese lady.

Rue Antoine Dansaert is the ruler-straight border between Ste Catherine and St Géry. Once a quiet street where farmers from Flanders bought hardware, it's now home to avant-garde fashion shops (see p114).

Cross the street to reach the 19th-century **Église Ste Catherine** (Church of St Catherine; Map p74; Place Ste Catherine; metro Ste Catherine; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun), the nominal heart of this quarter. Take a look at the 15th-century black statue of the Virgin and Child; Protestants hurled it into the Senne in 1744, but locals found it floating on a chunk of turf and fished it out.

Nearly by is the imposing façade of the **Église St Jean Baptiste au Béguinage** (Church of St Jean Baptiste au Béguinage; Map p74; Place du Béguinage; metro Ste Catherine; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun). Deemed by many to be Belgium's most beautiful, the church dates from the 17th century and was designed by Luc Fayd'Herbe, a student of Rubens, which explains its strong Flemish baroque style.

Marolles

Between Grand Place and Gare du Midi, in the shadow of the huge Palais de Justice, lies the **Marolles** (Map pp76-7). Once resolutely working-class, this quarter is fast shedding its proletarian past, as intimate restaurants and antique and interior design shops set up along the main streets, Rue Haute and Rue Blas. Tiny pockets, however, are still full of working-class kudos (see boxed text, opposite), and the quarter's best-known attraction, the **Place du Jeu-de-Balle flea market** (p115), is definitely worth a visit.

The **Église Notre Dame de la Chapelle** (Map pp76-7; Place de la Chapelle; metro Gare Centrale or premetro Anneessens; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7.30pm Sun) rises between the Marolles and the Sablon. Built in Romanesque Gothic style, it is Brussels' oldest church, founded in 1134. Inside, there's a chapel devoted to Pieter Breugel the Elder, who lived nearby.

The **Breugel House** (Map pp76-7; Rue Haute 132) occupies the house where Pieter Breugel the Elder lived and died (see boxed text, p84). The museum is only open by reservation – ask at Brussels International (p69).

A glass **elevator** connects the Marolles' Place Breugel with Place Poelaert in the Upper Town, offering a great way to move between the quarters plus a fab city view.

Place Royale

Brussels' Royal precinct is based around the busy **Place Royale** (Map pp72-3), immediately above Gare Centrale in the Upper Town. Use **Mont des Arts**'s open-air stairway, to reach here from Gare Centrale. At the centre of Place Royale stands a **statue of Godefroid de Bouillon**, an 11th-century crusader considered one of Belgium's ancient heroes. A new highlight in this area is the Magritte Museum, recently

BRUSSELS' DIALECT

In Bruxellois, the old dialect of Brussels, the word *architekt* is a first-degree insult. The word originated in the 19th century when architect Joseph Poelaert designed the massive Palais de Justice and, in so doing, forcibly evicted many inhabitants of the Marolles, one of the dialect's strongholds.

Bruxellois has its roots in both French and Flemish but, with few speakers left, the dialect is dying. The city's changing face is the reason behind the decline. The Marolles dates from the 17th century when workers moved here to be close to the Upper Town's building boom. It continued to be a bustling working-class quarter complete with factories set along the Senne River right up until the late 19th century when the river was covered. Many Marolles residents moved out and more have gone in recent times as the district is being bought up and gentrified. Only in the shops round Place du Jeu-de-Balle or at the counter of the few old pubs on Rue Haute are you likely to overhear some of the dialect's earthy expressions.

incorporated into the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (below).

MUSÉE DES INSTRUMENTS DE MUSIQUE & OLD ENGLAND BUILDING

Brussels' **Musical Instrument Museum** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 545 01 30; www.mim.fgov.be; Rue Montagne de la Cour 2; metro Gare Centrale or Parc, tram 92, 93 or 94; adult/concession €5/3.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 9.30am-8pm Thu, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) is another must. It boasts one of the world's biggest collections of instruments, all displayed in the Old England building, a former department store and Art Nouveau showpiece built in 1899 by Paul Saintenoy. The building's black façade is a swirl of wrought iron and arched windows. Although empty for many years, it miraculously escaped demolition and early this century metamorphosed into this fab museum. Don't miss a drink at the roof-top *café* – the terrace gives a superb city panorama.

MUSÉES ROYAUX DES BEAUX-ARTS

The **Royal Museums of Fine Arts** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 508 32 11; www.fine-arts-museum.be; Rue de la Régence 3; metro Gare Centrale or Parc, tram 92, 93 or 94; adult/concession €6/3, 1-5pm 1st Wed of month free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) combines the Musée d'Art Ancien, the adjoining Musée d'Art Moderne and the brand new Magritte Museum. It's Belgium's premier collection of ancient and modern art, and is not to be missed. It's particularly well endowed with works by Pieter Breugel the Elder and Rubens, though Belgian surrealist René Magritte currently holds pride of place. Part of the Musée Moderne reopened in 2007 as a museum devoted exclusively to this famous artist. The museum has the world's largest Magritte collection – some 150 paintings and drawings, including his famous *Secret Player*.

To view the collections chronologically, start with the **Musée d'Art Ancien**. Begin with the Flemish Primitives (see boxed text, p125), including works by Rogier Van der Weyden, Dirk Bouts, Hans Memling and Gerard David. Move onto Quinten Matsijs, whose paintings demonstrate a turning point in Flemish art as traditional realistic scenes were superseded by the more flamboyant Renaissance style imported from Italy.

The Breugel family, in particular Pieter Breugel the Elder (see boxed text, p84), comes along next. The mysterious *Fall of Icarus* is one of his most famous works, although *De Volkstelling* (The Census at Bethlehem, painted in 1566) is more typical of his distinctive peasant scenes. *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562) is characteristic of his gruesome religious allegories.

The champion of the 17th and 18th centuries is Rubens. Portraits and small, engaging sketches (such as *Studies of a Negro's Head*) contrast vividly with gigantic masterpieces, including the acclaimed *Ascent to Calvary* (c 1638). Jordaens, one of Rubens' contemporaries, is also well represented.

The **Musée d'Art Moderne** houses 19th- and 20th-century art and occupies a subterranean gallery that meanders for six levels below ground. Due to the opening of the new Magritte Museum here, some of the collection has been moved to the Dexia Art Centre in Rue de l'Écuyer. Whether here or there, earlier highlights to look out for include sculptures by Constantin Meunier, Ensor's macabre fighting skeletons, and many paintings by Paul Delvaux. Other national artists include Léon Spilliaert and Rik Wouters, both of whom belonged to the Fauve group of painters. The international scene is much less extensive but

THE BREUGEL FAMILY

The Breugels dominated Flemish art in the latter half of the tumultuous 16th century and early into the next. The family comprised Pieter Breugel the Elder and his sons Pieter the Younger and Jan. Art circles debate the spelling of their names (with or without and 'h', and so on) but, no matter how it's written, Breugel the Elder (c 1525–67) was undeniably the family's master. His work ranged from powerful landscapes to satirical allegories likened to those of Hieronymus Bosch. But it's for his quirky scenes of contemporary peasant life, woven around portentous religious events and myths, that he's best remembered. Many of his works were painted in a house on Rue Haute (Map pp76–7) in Brussels where he spent much of his life.

Breugel's first son, Pieter the Younger (1564–1638), largely copied his father's style but later earned the nickname 'Hell Breughel' for his preoccupation with scenes of damnation. Jan Breughel (1568–1625) spent most of his artistic life in Antwerp and was a colleague of Rubens. His sensitive paintings of landscapes and flowers led to his sobriquet, 'Velvet'.

The best place to see works by Breugel the Elder is Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. In Belgium, content yourself with the excellent collection of family works in Brussels' Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (p83).

look out for Francis Bacon's delightful *Le Pape aux Hiboux* (Pope with Owls).

North of Place Royale

PALAIS ROYAL & MUSÉE BELVUE

Overlooking the southern end of Parc de Bruxelles is the **Royal Palace** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 551 20 20; www.monarchy.be; Place des Palais; metro Parc, tram 92, 93 or 94; admission free; ☞ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun late Jul-early Sep). This 19th-century palace is a low, cream-toned building that commands little attention these days as it's no longer the royal residence. Since the death of Queen Astrid, wife of Léopold III, Belgium's monarchs have lived at Laeken (p88), although this palace is still their 'official' abode. The Palais Royal is open to visitors for a limited time in summer (usually late July to early September), when a largely Belgian crowd comes to gawk at its most controversial feature, a ceiling lined with green wings taken from millions of moths (where else but bizarre Belgium!). For more on the royal family, see boxed text, p91.

Attached to the palace's western end is the new **Musée BELvue** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 545 08 00; www.belvue.be; Place des Palais 7; metro Parc, tram 92, 93 or 94; adult/child €3/2; ☞ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, until 5pm Oct-May). An English-language audio-guide takes you through Belgium's history from independence. The museum's brochure claims 'there will be few secrets left about Belgium's past' following a visit here. Well, one subject that's still skirted is the genocide in the Congo during King Léopold II's rule (see p96). Just one out of 958 exhibits touches this subject – a newspaper clipping from the *New York*

American, published 10 December 1904, showing Congolese men and children with chopped off hands, and an article expressing outrage at the goings on.

PARC DE BRUXELLES

Brussels is well endowed with outlying forests and parklands, but in the inner city it's a different story. The largest central patch of greenery is the **Parc de Bruxelles** (Map pp72-3; metro Parc, tram 92, 93 or 94), an old, formal park flanked by the Palais Royal and the Palais de la Nation. Laid out under the dukes of Brabant, it's dotted with classical statues and framed by trees with mercilessly trellised branches. Lunchtime office workers, joggers and families with kids love it in summer.

COLONNE DU CONGRÈS

The **Congress Column** (Map pp72-3; Place du Congrès; metro Botanique or Madou, tram 92, 93 or 94) was erected in 1850 to commemorate the National Congress of 1831, which proclaimed the Belgian constitution. It was designed by Joseph Poelaert (better known for his massive Palais de Justice, opposite) and soars 25m high to be crowned by a statue of Léopold I. At its base burns the eternal flame, homage to the Belgians who died during the two world wars. Although the square is at a good elevation, the view from here is drab.

South of Place Royale

ÉGLISE NOTRE DAME AU SABLON

Flamboyant Gothic is the style of this large but gloomy **church** (Map pp76-7; Rue de la Régence 3b;

tram 92, 93 or 94; ☞ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun), located at the top end of the Sablon. It began as a chapel, built by the archers' guild in the 13th century, but was enlarged in the 15th century when pilgrims descended in droves to pay homage to a statue of the Madonna reputed to have healing powers. The statue has long since gone and the inside is now best noted for its 11 impressive stained-glass windows and the chapel of the local Tour et Taxis family, who founded Belgium's postal service.

PLACE DU PETIT SABLON

About 200m uphill from Place du Grand Sablon, this charming little **garden** (Map pp76-7; tram 92, 93 or 94) is framed by 48 bronze statuettes depicting the medieval guilds. At its heart is a monument to Counts Egmont and Hoorn, who were beheaded on the Grand Place in 1568 for defying Spanish rule.

PALAIS DE JUSTICE

Larger than St Peter's in Rome, this colossal **law court** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 508 64 10; Place Poelaert; metro Louise; admission free; ☞ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) was one of Léopold II's most stupendous projects. It was purposely sited on a hill above the working-class Marolles as a symbol of law and order. Its design, intended to evoke the temples of the Egyptian Pharaohs, is equally intimidating. The building was created by the architect Joseph Poelaert, who died during its construction in 1879; legend has it he was struck by illness brought on by witchcraft attributed to the many Marolles residents evicted to make way for the building.

The nearby **viewing platform** offers a vista of northern Brussels, and here too is the glass **elevator** that connects Place Poelaert with the Marolles' Place Breugel.

EU Quarter

The **EU district** (Map p86) is bordered by the Petit Ring to the west and Parc du Cinquantenaire to the east. By and large it's not an area for idle wandering but it does offer interesting sights, including museums, the Berlaymont and European Parliament buildings and Art Nouveau houses.

EU BUILDINGS

The most famous building is the four-winged **Berlaymont** (Map p86; Rue de la Loi 200; metro Schuman). Built in 1967, it was the European Commis-

sion's headquarters until 1991 when leaking asbestos forced its evacuation. It finally reopened in 2006, and is once again the area's landmark sight. New information panels dotted around the building give insight into the history of this neighbourhood and Brussels' international role, and are well worth browsing if you're in the area.

The distinctive domed **European Parliament** (Map p86; Rue Wiertz 43) sits next to Parc Léopold. Opened in 1998 by King Albert II, it's all steel and blue glass and is nicknamed 'Caprice des Dieux' (Whim of the Gods) after a French cheese. The European Parliament is the EU's legislative branch; elections are held every five years (next in 2010). It is the only EU institution that meets and debates in public. It's possible to sit in on a parliamentary session in the huge debating chamber (the hemicycle), or to tour the hemicycle when parliament's not meeting. Free **tours** (☞ tours 10am & 3pm Mon-Thu, 10am Fri), using multilingual headphones, start at the **visitor's centre** (Map p86; ☎ 02 284 34 57; Rue Wiertz 43), attached to the Paul-Henri Spaak section of the parliament.

The easiest way to get to the European Parliament from central Brussels is with bus 38 (direction Homborch; departs from next to Gare Centrale) to the stop De Meeus on Rue du Luxembourg (Map pp76–7). From this street there's a good view of the parliament's blue dome. Also visible are the remains of **Gare du Luxembourg** (Map p86; Place du Luxembourg), until recently the oldest train station in Belgium. Despite avid opposition, all but the façade of the old ticket hall has been demolished. Pass next to the façade and cross the concrete walkway to arrive at the Paul-Henri Spaak entrance (directly in front of you – go through the covered passageway); the visitor's centre is down to the left.

MUSÉE DES SCIENCES NATURELLES

The excellent **Museum of Natural Sciences** (Map p86; ☎ 02 627 42 38; www.naturalsciences.be; Rue Vautier 29; metro Trône or Maelbeek, bus 34 or 80; adult/concession €4/3; ☞ 9.30am-4.45pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) is undergoing renovation and expansion until late 2007. But even with some rooms closed, there's plenty to see. The museum's stars are the fossilised skeletons of nine iguanodons – two-legged, 10m-high dinosaurs that lived 135 million years ago – found in a coal mine in Bernissart, a village near Mons in Hainaut province, in 1878.

MUSÉE ANTOINE WIERTZ

Down the road from the Musée des Sciences Naturelles is the **Musée Antoine Wiertz** (Map p86; ☎ 02 648 17 18; Rue Vautier 62; metro Trône or Maelbeek, bus 34 or 80; admission free; ☞ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Fri, plus alternate weekends) – if you're into the shocking or nasty, it may appeal. Antoine Wiertz (1806–65) was a 19th-century Brussels artist bent on painting giant religious canvases depicting hell and other frenzied subjects. The building was Wiertz's home and studio and was also once the residence of the noted Flemish writer Hendrik Conscience.

PARC DU CINQUANTAIRE

Parc du Cinquantaire (Map p86; metro Schuman or Mérode) was built during Léopold II's reign. It's

best known for its cluster of museums – art, history, military and motor vehicles – and the massive **Arcade du Cinquantaire**, a triumphal arch built in 1880 to celebrate 50 years of Belgian independence. In summer, this area is put to good use with a popular drive-in cinema (p108).

Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Map p86; ☎ 02 741 72 11; www.kmkg-mrah.be in Flemish & French; Parc du Cinquantaire 10; metro Mérode; adult/concession €4/3, 1-5pm 1st Wed of month free; ☞ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) is chock-full of antiquities from around the world. All labelling is in French and Flemish but there is an English-language audio-guide.

Musée Royale de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire (Map p86; ☎ 02 737 78 11; www.klm-mra.be; Parc du Cinquantaire

3; metro Mérode; admission free; ☞ 9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Tue-Sun) boasts a staggering collection of all things military dating back to Belgian independence. Take the elevator to the top floor, where an outside balcony affords good city views.

As its name foretells, **Autoworld** (Map p86; ☎ 02 736 41 65; www.autoworld.be; Parc du Cinquantaire 11; metro Mérode; adult/concession €6/4.70; ☞ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) is one of Europe's biggest ensembles of vintage cars and other wheeled contraptions.

ART NOUVEAU HOUSES

The EU area is a treasure trove of Art Nouveau. For details on Maison St-Cyr, Hôtel Van Eetvelde and Maison Cauchie, the three most famous buildings, see 'Brussels' Art Nouveau Top 10' (p93).

Ixelles & St Gilles MUSÉE HORTA

A superb introduction to the late-19th-century Art Nouveau movement is the **Musée Horta** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 543 04 90; www.horta.be; Rue Américaine 25; tram 91 or 92; admission €5; ☞ 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun). It occupies two adjoining houses in St Gilles that Horta designed and built between 1898 and 1901 and is where he lived until 1919 (for more information, see boxed text, p88).

From the outside, the most noticeable thing is usually the queue of people waiting to get in. In typical Horta style it's the inside that tells the story. There are airy rooms radiating from an iron-laced staircase, mirrored walls, glorious timber panelling, intimate stained-glass inlays and even curly door handles.

Unfortunately, the splendour dims somewhat when it's too crowded – time your visit for a weekday. For details on other Art Nouveau treasures in this district, follow our walking tour (p92) and see boxed text, p93.

MUSÉE CONSTANTIN MEUNIER

The southern part of Ixelles is home to the intimate **Musée Constantin Meunier** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 648 44 49; Rue de l'Abbaye 59; tram 93 or 94; admission free; ☞ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Fri, plus alternate weekends). Constantin Meunier (1831–1905), a Brussels-born artist, is best known for his emotive sculptures fed by social realism. Larger-than-life bronzes depict working-class themes – muscular miners from Hainaut, dockworkers from Antwerp and men reaping fields. The museum occupies the town house where he lived and worked during his last years.

MUSÉE COMMUNAL D'IXELLES

The **Ixelles Museum** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 515 64 22; www.musee-ixelles.be in French; Rue Van Volsem 71; tram 81 or 82;

EU AREA

INFORMATION

European Parliament.....	9	A3
German Embassy.....	1	A2
Ireland Embassy.....	2	A3
Luxembourg Embassy.....	3	C1
UK Embassy.....	4	A2
Visitor's Centre.....	5	A3
Maison Antoine.....	17	B3
Rosticeria Fiorentina.....	18	C1
Café de l'Autobus.....	19	B3
James Joyce.....	20	B1
The Wild Geese.....	21	A1
Place Jourdan market.....	22	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Arcade du Cinquantaire.....	6	D2
Autoworld.....	7	D3
Berlaymont.....	8	B2
Musée des Sciences Naturelles.....	14	A3
Musée Royale de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire.....	15	D2
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.....	16	D3

EATING ☞

DRINKING ☞

SHOPPING ☞

THE EU IN BRUSSELS

The capital of Europe – that's Brussels' boast, thanks to the EU. The EU, an economic and political union, is made up of 25 countries stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean Sea. Ten new members – mainly Eastern European countries – joined in 2004, and negotiations are underway to admit Turkey. In 2007 the EU celebrated 50 years since the formation of the Treaty of Rome and the start of European institutions in Brussels.

As the capital of this union, Brussels has fared well. More and more multinationals and foreign companies are based here, and parts of the city are full of Eurocrats, lobbyists and journalists, all bent on working, manipulating, watching or reporting the political goings-on. The knock-on effect for service industries has been huge.

But there's also plenty of Eurosceptics who lament the EU's excesses (the European Parliament building cost US\$1.6 billion but its debating chamber is used for just a few weeks each year), and complain about high civil servant salaries and the bureaucracy size. There are also those who resent the demolition of Quartier Léopold, a residential suburb with distinctive town houses, that was wiped out to make way for the EU's real-life Gotham City.

The EU area (Map p86) lies east of central Brussels. The two main thoroughfares – Rue de la Loi and Rue Belliard – house ugly office blocks and bellow with traffic. As a visitor, there's not a great deal to see though there are landmarks to seek (p85).

Everywhere in Brussels – on car licence plates, T-shirts and umbrellas – you'll see a dark-blue flag featuring a circle of 12 five-pointed gold stars. It's the EU flag, originally designed for the Council of Europe in the 1950s and adopted by the European Commission in 1985.

For more on the EU, check out www.europa.eu.int.

HORTA'S CREATIONS

Of all the buildings Victor Horta (1861–1947) created in the short flowering of Art Nouveau, the Maison du Peuple (1896–99) was his most famous. It was designed to be an entertainment venue – a project based on socialist principles. Horta, like many of the architects of the Art Nouveau movement, was committed to creating works for the people rather than the bourgeoisie, although works for the latter paid his bread and butter.

The Maison du Peuple was built on Place Vandervelde, on a slope just below the Sablon. It was a daring glass-vaulted building full of Horta trademarks, particularly his love of creating transparent places in which light was free to play. But, like many buildings of its genre, it was eventually abandoned and in 1965, amid international criticism, torn down. Leftovers from the original have been used to construct the Grand Café Horta (p193) in Antwerp.

After the Maison, Horta turned his talent to his own house at Rue Américaine (now the Musée Horta, p87), and then to the Grand Magasin Waucquez (now the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée, p81). His exile in England and the USA during WWI marked a transition in styles – gone was the sensuous Art Nouveau and in its place stood the clean-cut functionalism of Art Deco. From 1922 to 1928 Horta designed the bold but severe Palais des Beaux-Arts – an innovative multipurpose entertainment centre that is still used today (see Bozar, p110). His last major work was the arguably ugly Gare Centrale.

adult/concession €6.20/5; ☎ 1-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) has a small but engaging collection of modern Belgian and French art. It covers most of the movements of the 19th and 20th centuries and features works by Magritte and Delvaux.

BOIS DE LA CAMBRE

This **forest** (Map pp70-1; tram 93 or 94), at the end of Ave Louise, separates Ixelles and Uccle and is named after the Abbaye de la Cambre, a former 12th-century convent. The park was established in 1862 and joins the much larger Forêt de Soignes (p117). It's immensely popular with couples, cyclists and families on weekends, and has lawns, *cafés*, a playground, roller-skating rink and artificial lake.

Uccle

The exquisite **Musée David et Alice van Buuren** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 343 48 51; www.museumvanbuuren.com; Ave L Errera 41; tram 23 or 90; adult/concession €10/5; ☎ 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon) is located in the former house of Dutch banker David van Buuren, a wealthy collector and patron of the arts who built this Art Deco showpiece in 1928.

Five rooms are open to the public and are crammed with ancient paintings, including a version of the *Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Breugel the Elder, as well as more modern works such as *Peeling Potatoes* by Vincent van Gogh. Sublime furnishings, stained glass and carpets are dotted throughout and the meticulous staff ensure plastic shoe-coverings are donned before entering.

St Josse & Schaerbeek

LE BOTANIQUE

On the edge of St Josse, **Le Botanique** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 79 35; Rue Royale 236; metro Botanique) is the cultural centre of Brussels' French-speaking community. The impressive neoclassical glass building from 1826 originally housed the city's botanical garden. These days it supports a solid programme of theatre, exhibitions and concerts.

HALLES DE SCHAERBEEK

The **Halles de Schaerbeek** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 21 07; www.halles.be in Flemish & French; Rue Royale Ste Marie 22; tram 92 or 93), a former food market, is just past Église Ste Marie in southern Schaerbeek. Built in 1901, it's a great example of industrial architecture and has been restored as a performing arts venue.

Laeken

DOMAINE ROYAL & PARC DE LAEKEN

The Domaine Royal (Royal Estate; Map pp70-1) is home to Belgium's ruling family. King Albert II and Queen Paola live in the Villa Belvédère; former Queen Fabiola (widow of King Baudouin) inhabits the Château Stuyvenbergh; and the heir-apparent Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde occupy the main building, the Château Royal de Laeken. All the chateaux are out of bounds to tourists, but you can visit the nearby Serres Royales, the Pavillon Chinois and the Tour Japonaise. For more on the royals, see boxed text, p91.

The enormous **Serres Royales** (Royal Greenhouses; Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 551 20 20; www.monarchy.be; Ave du Parc Royal 61; metro Bockstael then bus 53; admission €2; ☎ late Apr-early May) were built by Alphonse Balat (Horta's teacher) during Léopold II's reign. Fuchsias and all sorts of tropical species thrive inside, and Belgians queue en masse during the two weeks each year when the greenhouses are open to the public. Exact opening dates are available annually from January – check with Brussels International (p69).

Standing almost opposite each other on the edge of the Domaine Royal are the **Pavillon Chinois** and **Tour Japonaise** (Chinese Pavilion & Japanese Tower; Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 268 16 08; Ave Jules Van Praet 44; tram 23 or 52; admission €3, 1-4.45pm 1st Wed of month free; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Tue-Sun). Both are Léopold II leftovers, built after he saw similar at the 1890 Paris World Fair. The former is a gloriously glittering affair and houses an extensive collection of Chinese porcelain; the latter is used for temporary Japanese art exhibitions.

The **Parc de Laeken** starts opposite the Domaine Royal and stretches to the Atomium. Dotted with chestnut and magnolia trees, its focal point is Léopold I's statue, erected in 1880.

ATOMIUM & PARC DES EXPOSITIONS

The **Atomium** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 475 47 77; www.atomium.be; Square Atomium; metro Heysel; adult/concession/child €9/6/free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) is a space-age leftover from the 1958 World Fair. It was built by the powerful Belgian metal industry as a model of an iron molecule – enlarged 165 billion times. The 102m-high steel structure consists of nine balls linked by columns. When approached from central Brussels, it looms over houses in the nearby suburbs like an alien from a '60s Hollywood movie. Originally destined for demolition post-1958, it became a symbol of postwar progress and is now a city icon. Recent renovation saw it closed for a couple of years, but it reopened in 2006 with shiny new stainless steel spheres and updated displays inside. To get there head for Heysel metro station or, more scenically, take tram 81.

Up the road from the Atomium is **Parc des Expositions** (Map pp70-1; Place de Belgique), a trade fair complex built in the 1930s to commemorate a century of independence. The major building here is Palais du Centenaire, an Art Deco piece featuring terraced tiers capped by statues.

Jette, Koekelberg & Molenbeek MUSÉE MAGRITTE

A completely anonymous, suburban yellow-brick house: that's the façade of the **Musée Magritte** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 428 26 26; www.magritte-museum.be; Rue Essegem 135; metro Simonis then tram 19; adult/concession €6/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), and the façade that René Magritte, Belgium's most famous surrealist artist, showed the outside world. This museum in Jette occupies the house where Magritte and his wife Georgette lived from 1930 to 1954. Its appeal comes from its incredibly ordinary nature. It's odd to think the man responsible for some of the 20th century's most enduring images spent 24 years of his life in this bourgeois backstreet.

The museum opened in 1999 as the private initiative of a friend of the widow Magritte. With scandalously little support from the Belgian state, the curators assembled hundreds of original items – from Magritte's passport to paintings, photos, furniture and a pipe. Not everything's original – the piano in the salon is a copy – but there's more than enough to give an inkling into Magritte's private world. And fans will delight in discovering details of the house that Magritte faithfully reproduced in dozens of his famous paintings (many of which can be seen at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, p83). For more information, see boxed text, p90.

BASILIQUE NATIONALE DU SACRÉ-CŒUR

This mighty **basilica** (Map pp70-1; Parvis de la Basilique 1; metro Simonis then bus 87; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-2pm Oct-Apr) sits at the end of ruler-straight Blvd Léopold II in Koekelberg. It's the world's fifth-largest church and is also arguably the city's most ghoulish religious edifice, a discordant mix of neogothic and Art Deco with dull brown stonework, capped towers and a bulbous 90m-high dome (€3 to climb).

TOUR & TAXIS

The newly revamped **Tour & Taxis** complex (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 420 60 69; www.tourtaxis.be; Rue Picard 3; metro Yser) is the first stage of a massive transformation of Brussels' unloved canal quarter. These old warehouses and customs depots, now prime examples of the city's industrial heritage, were built at the start of last century by the Tour et Taxis family, founders of Belgium's postal service. Abandoned in the 1980s, the complex is now being developed into a new waterfront neighbourhood.

MR MAGRITTE

René Magritte (1898–1967) was one of the world's most prominent surrealist painters, blending ordinary images with those that could be conjured up only from the subconscious. His most famous motif, the man in the bowler hat whose face is hidden from view, exemplified surrealism's main premise: a rebellion against European rationalism, which had deteriorated into the horrors of WWI. That same bowler hat is now one of Belgium's international icons.

Born in Lessines north of Mons, Magritte spent most of his working life in Brussels. His interest in surrealism was sparked in 1922 after seeing a reproduction of Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Song of Love* (1914), featuring the unlikely combination of a classical bust and a rubber glove. For the next few years, Magritte became active in the Belgian surrealist movement and in 1926, with the support of a Brussels art gallery, he became a full-time painter. His paintings often confused space and time, as in *Time Transfixed* (1939) in which a steaming locomotive roars out of a living-room mantelpiece as if it is just leaving a tunnel.

In 1927 Magritte and his wife Georgette moved to Paris where he befriended several Parisian surrealists, including poets André Breton and Paul Éluard. The couple returned to Brussels three years later and moved into an ordinary house on an ordinary street in the ordinary Brussels suburb of Jette – Magritte's thoughts and paintings may have been surreal but he was at the same time conventional to the hilt. This house is now the Musée Magritte (p89). Magritte painted most of his famous works here – he set up his easel in the kitchen and painted wearing a three-piece business suit. The kitchen window offered a view of a postage-stamp garden and a brick wall; for Magritte it was a looking glass into another world.

The couple moved from Jette in 1954 to a villa in Schaerbeek. When Georgette died in 1987, the villa and all its furnishings were given to the Belgian state, which promptly offered it all up for public sale. It was a prime example of Belgium's indifference to its artistic heritage.

But amends are being made and, if you're keen to see a swathe of Magritte's artworks, check out the new Magritte Museum, which opened at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (p83) in 2007. Two *cafés* also offer nostalgic reminders: *La Fleur en Papier Doré* (p107) was a former surrealist haunt, and *Le Greenwich* (p106) was where Magritte hawked his paintings. Two excellent books to explore are *Magritte* by Suzi Gablik and *René Magritte* by AM Hammacher.

Exhibition centres, shops, restaurants and modern apartments are either on the drawing board, near completion or newly opened. Have a meal in the first restaurant to have opened here, *Tasso* (p106), to see what's going on.

Anderlecht

Anyone with even a vague interest in Belgian beers must not miss a visit to the excellent **Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze** (Brussels Gueuze Museum; Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 521 49 28; www.cantillon.be; Rue Gheude 56; premetro Lemonnier; adult/concession €3.50/3; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat). It's not so much a museum as a self-guided tour through the family-run Cantillon brewery, where the owners still proudly use traditional methods to make their strange lambic beers (p49). After a brief introduction, make your own way around the ancient complex before returning to sample a beer or two.

Seventy years ago, 50 family-run breweries in and around Brussels made lambics. Today Cantillon is Brussels' sole survivor, although a

handful of other breweries still operate in Lembeek and Beersel southwest of the capital.

ACTIVITIES
Billiards

For a sedate billiard hall, go no further than **Cercle Royal de Billiard** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 511 10 08; 3rd fl, Palais du Midi, Rue Rogier Van der Weyden 3; premetro Lemonnier; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon, 2pm-midnight Fri, 2-7pm Sat). Tables cost €3.50 per hour.

Bowling

The capital's largest bowling alley, housed in a '60s building on the edge of the Marolles, is **Crosly Super Bowling** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 512 08 74; Blvd de l'Empereur 36; metro Gare Centrale; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 2pm-2am Sat, 10am-1pm Sun). There are 20 lanes and a bar.

Chess

For a spot of chess, head to **Le Greenwich** (see p106) or, for something less smoky, **De Ultieme Hallucinatie** (p107).

A ROYAL READ

Belgium's monarchy has hit headlines plenty of times during their 175-or-so years on the throne. Léopold I kicked things off when crowned the first king on 21 July 1831 – the country's annual national day holiday commemorates this event. All was relatively peaceful until his son, Léopold II became king and set about exploiting the Congo (see boxed text, p96). Crisis followed crisis after that, first with the death of the next monarch, King Albert, in a rock climbing accident in 1934, and then a year later with the death of his daughter-in-law, Queen Astrid (mother of the present monarch, King Albert) in a car crash on the shores of Lake Lucerne. Astrid's husband, King Léopold III, was at the wheel at the time.

Léopold III's cosy relationship with Hitler during WWII backfired after the war, and public hostility forced him into exile. In 1950 the majority of Belgians voted in a referendum against his return and so his eldest son Baudouin took the reins. Baudouin's reign largely restored the institution of the monarchy, and he's credited with holding the country together during some difficult times, including its move to a federal state. After his sudden death in 1993, his younger brother, Albert, took over.

While Baudouin had remained childless, King Albert and Italian-born Queen Paola ascended the throne with three grown-up children and more. In 1999 the existence of a fourth child to Albert became public. Delphine Boël, born in 1968, was the outcome of a long affair between the then-prince and Belgian Baroness Sybille de Selys-Longchamps. The king has never publicly acknowledged this daughter, though he has hinted that his marriage went through difficult times. During celebrations as part of the country's 175th anniversary in 2005, Boël, an artist, was barred from attending an official event. Angry at the palace's snub, her mother went public for the first time, accusing the king of discrimination against his daughter.

The royalty again made headlines in 2006 when Crown Prince Philippe was attacked by the Flemish media for his apparent lack-lustre performance during an African trade mission. On top of that, there are always those ready to question his ability to be king. Newspaper hints that King Albert might soon abdicate to make way for Philippe have failed to materialise. And as for the future of the royals? While there are occasional calls for the king's powers to be reduced, the monarchy's survival is generally not questioned as it's widely seen as an essential – if expensive (€12 million per year to Belgian taxpayers) – ingredient in keeping Belgium together.

On a glossy level, recent pickings have been rich with two royal weddings – the first was heir-apparent Prince Philippe to Princess Mathilde, followed by Prince Philippe's younger brother Prince Laurent's marriage to Princess Claire – and a string of blue-blood births.

Golf

If you fancy a game of golf, there are several courses to be found in and around Brussels. The **Royal Amicale Golf Club** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 521 16 87; Rue de la Scholle; metro Eddy Merckx) in Anderlecht has 18 holes. Green fees cost €35/50 during the week/weekend.

Ice Skating

The **Marché aux Poissons** (the square around Ste Catherine metro station) converts to a *patinoire à glace* (ice-skating) rink in the last two weeks of December; Brussels International (p69) will have details.

The **Patinoire de Forest National** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 345 16 11; Ave du Globe 36; tram 18, bus 48; adult/child €5/4.50; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-4.30pm & 8-11pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) has an indoor rink. Skate hire is €2.50.

Squash & Tennis

On the edge of St Géry is **Flanders Gate Squash Club** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 512 98 23; Blvd Barthélémy 17; metro Comte de Flandre; ☎ noon-2pm & 4.30-11pm Mon-Fri). It has six courts and members/nonmembers pay €5.50/8 per half-hour or €45/68 for a five-hour card.

Centre Sportif de la Woluwé-St-Pierre (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 773 18 20; Ave Salomé 2; tram 39) is a huge sporting complex in Woluwé-St-Pierre with squash and tennis courts. Rates range from €4.50 to €6 per half-hour for squash and €11 per hour for tennis.

Swimming

Belgium isn't much of a swimming nation but those who are interested in unusual pools might want a dip at **Piscine Victor Boin** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 539 06 15; Rue de la Perche 38; premetro

Horta, tram 18 or 81; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 2-7pm Wed, 9am-6pm Sat) in St Gilles. This covered Art Deco pool has a *bain turc* (Turkish bath) at the rear, which is reserved for women on Tuesday and Friday; it's reserved for men Monday, Thursday and Saturday. A single pool ticket costs €2.

WALKING TOUR

Brussels' brief flirt with Art Nouveau furnished the capital with a prized collection of buildings. This walking tour takes in Art Nouveau gems in the adjoining neighbourhoods of Ixelles and St Gilles (Map pp76-7). It covers famous works as well as buildings by lesser-known architects.

The walk takes about two hours, not including time spent inside the few buildings that are open to the public. If you intend visiting the Musée Horta as part of this tour, note that it is open afternoons only, and closed on Monday.

The tour begins at Place Flagey near the Étangs d'Ixelles (Ixelles Ponds); to get there take tram 81 or 82 from Gare du Midi. Walk along the pond's western side then deviate off to reach **Rue du Lac 6 (1)**, one of 11 houses in this area designed by Ernest De Lune. It has a fantastically tall stained-glass window and a lovely 2nd-floor balcony.

WALK FACTS

Start Place Flagey
Finish Hôtel Hannon
Distance 3.2km
Duration About 2 hours

Rejoin the lake, and follow it to two groups of houses designed by Ernest Blérot. The first two, at **Ave Général de Gaulle 38 and 39 (2)**, have excessive wrought-iron railings. The other pair, at **Rue Vilain XIV 9 and 11 (3)**, are noted for their sgraffito and are signed and dated (1902) by Blérot. Blérot's own home stood between these two groups until it was torn down in the 1960s. A prolific builder with a great imagination, Blérot designed 60 houses all up, each different from the next.

Continue up Rue Vilain XIV, turn right into Ave Louise, and follow it northwards to Horta's **Hôtel Solvay (4)**; opposite). Cross Ave Louise to arrive at **Hôtel Tassel (5)** at Rue Paul-Émile Janson 6. Built in 1893, it was Horta's first true Art Nouveau house. Continue straight ahead to reach Albert Roosenboom's creation at **Rue Faidier 83 (6)**. It has simple Art Nouveau tones, including a beautiful, gilded sgraffito design at the top. Roosenboom also signed this house.

Now wander past two houses by Paul Hankar. The first, the large **Maison Camberlaini (7)**; Rue Defacqz 48) was being renovated at the time of writing. The second, **Maison Hankar (8)**; Rue Defacqz 71) was his own studio, built in 1893. Turn left into Rue Amazone, then round the corner to find **Rue Africaine 92 (9)**, designed by De Lestrée in 1903. It has creamy tones, harmonious lines and a big circular window, a favoured feature of many Art Nouveau houses. From here it's a short walk to the **Musée Horta (10)**; p87).

The final two houses on the walking tour are two (big) blocks south down Chaussée de Charleroi. The first of these abodes, **Les Hiboux**

(11; Ave Brugmann 55) has intimate owls adorning the façade. Right next door to it is one of the city's showpieces, Jules Brunfaut's **Hôtel Hannon (12)**; below).

From here, walk back to the tram stop Ma Campagne at the intersection of Chaussée de Charleroi and Chaussée de Waterloo to take tram 92 (direction Ste Marie) back to town. Alternatively, stay onboard until the tram reaches De Ultieme Hallucination (p107) in Schaerbeek, and have a drink in one of the city's most famous Art Nouveau *cafés*.

BRUSSELS FOR CHILDREN

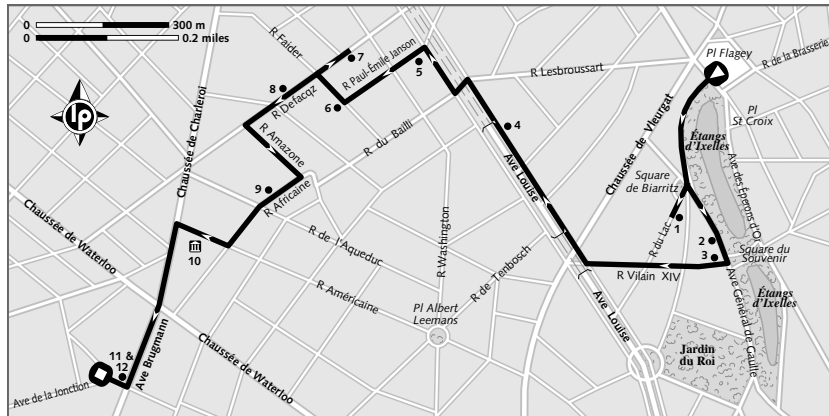
There's absolutely no reason for kids to utter the 'b'-word in Brussels. From puppets to parks and pools, this child-friendly city offers plenty.

Smack in town, the **Scientastic Museum** (Map p74; ☎ 02 732 13 36; www.scientastic.com; above premetro station Bourse; adult/concession €4.40/2.90; ☎ 2-5.30pm Sat & Sun, daily during school holidays) has interactive science-related pursuits for youngsters aged six and up. Don't be put off by the grim setting when arriving in the *premetro* station's concourse – inside it's great.

BRUSSELS' ART NOUVEAU TOP 10

Art Nouveau is Brussels' architectural jewel. Plenty of buildings can be visited (see www.brussels.artnouveau.be), but a handful is closed to the public except to those on ARAU tours (p95). The following (in alphabetical order) are Brussels' best:

- **De Ultieme Hallucination** (p107)
- **Falstaff** (p106)
- **Hôtel Hannon** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 538 42 20; Ave de la Jonction 1; tram 91 or 92; admission €2.50; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun) This lovely building, with its stone frieze and stained glass, was designed in 1902 by Jules Brunfaut. It's now the Contretype photography gallery and is one of the few Art Nouveau buildings readily accessible to the public.
- **Hôtel Solvay** (Map pp76-7; Ave Louise 224; tram 93 or 94) Horta designed this in 1894 at the age of 33 and it's considered one of his masterpieces. It was commissioned by the Solvay family (soft-drink manufacturers), who gave him free rein in matters of design and budget. It's open only to ARAU tours; if you can't time that, the hints of Art Nouveau visible on the outside are worth a look.
- **Hôtel Van Eetvelde** (Map p86; Ave Palmerston 2-4; metro Schuman) While the outside of this building is unusual, the interior is another Horta masterpiece (1895-1901). It was commissioned by Baron Van Eetvelde, Minister for the Congo at that time and the country's highest-paid civil servant. Exotic timbers stud the interior, and there's a central glass dome infused with African-inspired plant motifs. Admission is limited to ARAU tours.
- **Maison Autrique** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 215 66 00; www.autrique.be; Chaussée de Haecht 266; tram 92 or 93; admission €5; ☎ noon-6pm Wed-Sun) The Schaerbeek house that started it all. Horta's first building of note (1893) opened its doors to the public a couple of years ago. There's little luxury or extravagance, but many design elements hint at what's to come, and it's well worth viewing.
- **Maison Cauchie** (Map p86; ☎ 02 673 15 06; Rue des Francs 5; metro Mérode; admission €4; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-6pm 1st Sat & Sun of month) Built in 1905, this stunning house was the home of architect and painter Paul Cauchie (1875-1952), and its sgraffito façade, adorned with graceful female figures, is one of the most beautiful in Brussels. A petition saved the house from demolition in 1971 and since 1975 it has been a protected monument. Try timing a visit to meet the limited opening hours; if that's not possible, the façade alone definitely warrants a visit.
- **Maison St-Cyr** (Map p86; Square Ambiorix 11; metro Schuman) The haunting façade of this narrow building (up for sale in 2006 for €725,000) is an extravaganza of knotted and twisted ironwork. It was built in 1903 for the painter Léonard St-Cyr by Gustave Strauven (1878-1919), who worked as an apprentice to Horta and also built Art Nouveau houses in Schaerbeek.
- **Musée Horta** (p87)
- **Old England Building** (p83)



Le Peruchet (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 673 87 30; Ave de la Forêt 50, Ixelles; tram 32; admission €5.50; 🕒 3pm Wed, Sat & Sun, closed Jul & Aug) is one of several small private puppet theatres to survive in Brussels. It's aimed specifically at kids (as opposed to productions at Théâtre Royal de Toone, p111) in the two-to-eight age group. Occupying an old whitewashed stone farmhouse in the middle of modern Ixelles, the theatre is totally at odds with all around it, making it one of those Brussels experiences you won't forget. Go through thick curtains to discover a world of fables and fairytales, and an adjoining museum chock full of colourful characters. All productions are in French, but the set up is unique enough for kids of any language to enjoy.

Bruparck (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 474 83 77; www.bruparck.com in Flemish & French; Blvd du Centenaire 20; metro Heysel) is a theme park located near the Atomium. It incorporates the **Océade** (☎ 02 478 43 20; over/under 1.3m €14/11.20; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun), a subtropical water fun park that kids love, the giant **Kinopolis cinema** (p108), and **Mini Europe** (☎ 02 478 13 13; www.minieurope.com; adult/child €11.80/8.80; 🕒 9.30am-8pm). The latter displays miniature mock-ups of European highlights, like London's Big Ben and Venetian gondolas. Playgrounds, fairground rides and fast-food outlets are dotted throughout Bruparck.

Hanging to see the latest blockbuster? Drop the kids off at **Les Samedis du Cinéma**, a supervised kid's screening (€1.50) organised every Saturday morning at 9am by the **UGC De Brouckère cinema** (p108), and join other parents catching an adult film.

Musée des Enfants (Children's Museum; Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 640 01 07; www.museechildren.be; Rue du Bourgmeestre 15; tram 23 or 90; admission €6.70; 🕒 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri Jul, Wed & Sat May & Jun, Sun Sep-Apr) is basically a big old mansion that's morphed into an indoor playground. Kids (aged three to nine) can paint, plant a garden, explore a space capsule, bake biscuits and more. It's very popular, particularly on wet days.

Musée du Jouet (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 219 61 68; www.museedujouet.be; Rue de l'Association 24; metro Botanique or Madou; adult/child €4.50/3.50; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-6pm) is a newly renovated museum that explores the toys of yesteryear. It's full of stuff, but it's not 'Hands off!'.

The most central **playground** is in Parc de Bruxelles (p84). Ixelles' small **Parc Tenbosch** (Map pp76-7; Chaussée de Vleurgat; tram 93 or 94) has a fenced, sandy, dog-free play area for toddlers. The Rouge Cloître in the **Forêt de Soignes** (p117)

offers a playground suitable for kids up to about 12.

Several travelling circuses set up during autumn and into winter. All use animals. The Italian family-run **Florilegio** (www.florilegio.com) concentrates on acrobatics, and raises its big top annually at the **Hippodrome de Boitsfort** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 533 10 80; Chaussée de la Hulpe 51-53; tram 94).

Walibi & Aqualibi (Map p218; ☎ 010 42 17 17; Rue Joseph Dachamps, Wavre; adult/child €30/25; 🕒 10am-11pm Apr-Oct) combines a theme park and water park, located about 20km southeast of Brussels off the E411 to Namur. Roller coasters, wave makers and pools make this a big day out. Closing hours vary depending on the month, so phone for details.

Other attractions:

Atomium (p89) Kids love exploring this space-age leftover.

Autoworld (p87) For youngsters into cars.

Bois de la Cambre (p88) One of Brussels' favourite parks.

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (p81) Comicstrip museum.

Crosly Super Bowling (p90) Bowling alley located in the heart of town.

Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika (below) Africa museum.

Musée des Instruments de Musique (p83) Offers kids a playful approach to music.

Musée des Sciences Naturelles (p85) Great for rainy afternoons. Lots of interactive displays.

Baby-sitting organisations in Brussels:

Gezinsbond (☎ 02 507 89 66) Family-oriented organisation with centres throughout Flanders. Baby-sitters charge €2.50/3 per hour in the day/evening, or €15 for overnight service (see also p303).

ULB Job Service (☎ 02 650 21 71) Run by students at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. They will baby-sit at hotels or B&Bs, and charge €4 to €5.50 per hour (€8 after midnight). Book at least a day ahead.

BIZARRE BRUSSELS

The **Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika** (Royal Museum of Central Africa; ☎ 02 769 52 11; www.africamuseum.be; Leuvensesteenweg 13, Tervuren; tram 44; adult/concession €4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) is one of Belgium's most haunting sights. It's an easy half-day excursion from Brussels that won't be readily forgotten. Located on the edge of Tervuren, a Flemish-speaking town 14km east of Brussels, this museum houses the world's most impressive array of artefacts from Africa, much of which was plundered during King Léopold II's exploitation of the Congo in the 19th century (see p96).

Start by jumping on tram 44 from its terminus at Montgomery metro station. This old yellow tram runs all the way to Tervuren along a beautiful tree-lined track next to the wide Ave de Tervuren, passing opulent embassy villas, the ponds at Parc de Woluwé and, later, through the northern reaches of the leafy **Forêt des Soignes**. Sit on the right and keep a sharp eye out to view the **Palais Stocklet** (Map pp70-1; Ave de Tervuren 281; 🕒 not open to the public). This radical geometric building was designed by Josef Hoffman between 1906-11 and it's claimed to be the world's most complete example of Art Nouveau. Twenty minutes later tram 44 trundles to its Tervuren terminus, from where it's a few minutes walk down the main drag to Léopold's extravagance.

The museum houses a staggering collection of stuffed animals, bottled creatures and dead insects, not to mention an enormous 22m-long *pirogue* (canoe) crafted by the Lengola people, a Gallery of Remembrance commemorating the 1508 Belgians who never returned from the dark continent, plus masks, tools and woven baskets. It's formidable booty, and what's displayed is only a fraction of what's still locked in the museum's vaults.

But the permanent exhibition has long been regarded as an imperialistic showpiece, mirroring views from decades ago when it was established, but way off centre with current thinking. What happened in the Congo is simply not addressed. A new sign in the Gallery of Remembrance acknowledges 'there is no mention of the Congolese victims' and that 'the viewpoint is exclusively European'. But that's it. Since the beginning of this decade, museum director Guido Gryseels has been overhauling exhibits in preparation for the museum's 2010 centennial celebrations. It'll be interesting to see then whether the facts are faced.

Inside the museum, a small café serves meals (€7 to €15), snacks and drinks including African beer. Fanning out before the museum entrance is the pleasant **Park van Tervuren**, where walking paths meander past manicured lawns and into the forest.

TOURS

Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaine (ARAU; Map p74; ☎ 02 219 33 45; www.arau.org; Blvd Adolphe Max 55; metro De Brouckère), a heritage conservation group, was set up in 1969 by locals concerned at the destruction taking place around their ears. In 1975 it began running tours of the city's

architectural gems, and today offers a variety of theme tours to Art Nouveau buildings, Art Deco houses, the EU quarter, the Grand Place area and the Marolles. They're highly recommended, especially if you're keen to get into some of the private Art Nouveau showpieces (p93). There are usually only one or two tours per theme per month, so you may have to plan your visit. The cost is €15 for bus tours and €10 for walking tours (2½ hours). The Art Nouveau bus tours (three hours) are held at 10am on the second and fourth Sunday of the month (May to mid-September). Most tours depart from Place de Brouckère, and some tours are conducted in English. Brussels International (p69) has full details of ARAU's seasonal programme and will book tours.

Brussels City Tours (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 77 44; www.brussels-city-tours.com; Rue de la Colline 8) is the main bus-tour company, with 2¼-hour tours of all the major sights costing adult/concession/child €25/23/12.50. It also runs the cheaper **Visit Brussels Line** (adult/concession/child €16.50/14.5/8; 🕒 10am-5pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-3pm Sun-Fri Sep-Jun), hop-on hop-off double-decker buses that stop at 13 places including the Atomium, Place Royale and the EU's Rond Point Schuman. These buses leave Gare Centrale every half-hour. Tickets can be bought on the bus.

Horse-drawn carriages (Map p74; per carriage €18; 20 min) do circuits of the Lower Town starting from Rue Charles Buls, near Grand Place.

Cycle tours are offered by La Maison des Cyclistes (p116) and Centre Vincent van Gogh (p98).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

JANUARY & FEBRUARY

Foire des Antiquaires/Antiekbeurs The revamped **Tour & Taxis** (p89) customs depot is the new venue for this annual 10-day antique fair held in late January, which offers the best from antique dealers in Belgium and neighbouring countries.

Anima Brussels Animation Festival (www.awn.com) Twelve-day festival in late February premieres feature-length films and about 100 shorts produced in Belgium and elsewhere.

MARCH & APRIL

Ars Musica (www.arsmusica.be) Respected festival of contemporary classical music from mid-March to early April. Attracts a showcase of musicians to various venues.

Serres Royales (www.monarchy.be) The royal greenhouses (p89) at the Domaine Royal in Laeken are open to the public for 10 days from the end of April.

LÉOPOLD II & THE CONGO

In 1885, Belgium's King Léopold II personally acquired the Congo in Africa, an area almost 100 times the size of his homeland. Between then and 1908, when the Belgian state stripped the king of his possession, it is estimated up to 10 million Africans died because of starvation, overwork or murder carried out in Léopold's quest for rubber (tyres were developed in the mid-1890s), ivory and other commodities.

Congo army manuals from that time describe women and children kept hostage to force men to fulfil rubber quotas. To keep account of ammunition, troops had to bring back the severed right hand of those killed. While all this was going on, Léopold set up philanthropic fronts to 'protest' the slave trade.

A BBC TV documentary *White King, Red Rubber, Black Dead*, aired in Belgium in 2004, shone this period of history squarely into Belgian faces – and some didn't like what they saw. Outspoken foreign minister Louis Michel retaliated, saying it was biased and didn't take into account the social context of that time. Belgium's new history museum, BELvue (p84), which opened in 2005 to celebrate 175 years since independence, also doesn't acknowledge what happened.

It will be impossible to know for sure the number of people who died. On Léopold's orders, the Congo archives were destroyed. According to Adam Hochschild in his book *King Léopold's Ghost*, the furnaces in the Congo offices in Brussels burnt for over a week. But what is sure is that the booty from this barbarity was enormous. Brussels' landmarks – such as the Arcade du Cinquantenaire (p86) – were built on these proceeds. So too was the Koninklijk Museum voor Midden Afrika, set up as homage to Léopold. But two years before its completion in 1910, the Belgian government stripped the king of his personal fiefdom due to international criticism of the atrocities committed under his rule. He died the following year, and today his reputation is in tatters.

Brussels International Festival of Fantastic Film

(www.biff.org) The most popular get-together for European fans of cult fantasy, thriller and sci-fi movies. Runs for two weeks mid-March.

Artbrussels (www.artbrussels.be) Annual four-day contemporary art fair held in mid-April.

Les Nuits Botanique (www.botanique.be in Flemish & French) A week of rock, electro and pop in Le Botanique (p88) from late April.

MAY & JUNE

Zinneke Parade (www.zinneke.org) Biennial one-day multicultural parade in May (even years) that's designed to bridge social divides and to expose Brussels' zanier side. Unlike many of the capital's traditional events, this one has only been going since 2000 and is thoroughly contemporary.

Brussels 20km Run (www.20kmdbruxelles.be) Annual competition held in the streets of the capital on the last Sunday in May, attracting about 20,000 runners. Starts and ends at Parc du Cinquantenaire (p86).

Brussels Jazz Marathon (www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be) Three days of free, nonstop jazz concerts on stages all over the city. Big names sit alongside local newcomers, and special buses shuttle punters from one venue to the next. Last weekend of May.

Concours Musical International Reine Élisabeth de Belgique (www.concours-reine-elisabeth.be) The

Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition is one of Belgium's most prestigious classical music events. It began half a century ago and was inspired by the nation's former Queen Elisabeth, who was a violinist. Young talent from around the world is drawn to a month-long competition in May in three rotating categories (violin, piano and song).

KunstenFESTIVALdesArts (www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be) Big names – both local and international – in the worlds of music, dance, theatre and opera are showcased over the last three weeks in May. This is one of the few festivals where Brussels' French- and Flemish-speaking communities meet.

Couleur Café (www.couleurcafé.be) World-music event staged over three days during the last weekend in June. Huge marquees are set up at the newly revamped Tour & Taxis complex (p89).

Ommegang (www.ommegang.be) This medieval-style procession takes place in late June or early July. Ommegang (a 'walk around' in Flemish) dates back to the 14th century, when celebrations were held following the arrival in Brussels of a statue of the Virgin Mary brought by boat from Antwerp. By the 16th century the procession was presided over by royalty and was held to honour Charles V. It is now one of the capital's most famous events. The procession starts at the Place du Grand Sablon and ends in a dance at the illuminated Grand Place. Tickets for the finale need to be bought well in advance.

GAY & LESBIAN BRUSSELS

Brussels' gay and lesbian communities are small but thriving. The quarter is smack in the city centre, concentrated around Rue du Marché au Charbon, Rue des Pierres and Rue de la Fourche (all on Map p74).

Tels Quels (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 32 34; www.telsquels.be in French; Rue du Marché au Charbon 81; prémetro Anneessens; ☎ from 5pm Sun-Tue, Thu & Fri, from 2pm Wed & Sat) The main French-speaking gay/lesbian group in Belgium. It's home to a popular *café* and information centre, a good starting point for finding out what's on. It also runs a telephone helpline, Télégal (☎ 02 502 07 00; 8pm to midnight). *Tels Quels Magazine*, a monthly French-language magazine (€2.65), lists gay bars, restaurants and activities in Brussels and Wallonia.

Rainbow House (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 59 90; www.rainbowhouse.be in Flemish & French; Rue du Marché au Charbon 42; ☎ 6.30-10.30pm Wed-Sat) This bar/information centre is the newest kid on the block for gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Le Belgica (Map p74; www.lebelgica.be; Rue du Marché au Charbon 32; prémetro Bourse; ☎ 10pm-3am Thu-Sat, 7pm-3am Sun) Despite the unassuming façade, this is one of the city's oldest gay pubs. Attracts an international set and is a must when visiting the capital.

La Démence (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 97 89; www.lademence.be in French; Rue Blaes 208) Once a month, Fuse (p111) becomes a huge gay rave that attracts men from all over Belgium and from neighbouring countries. Check the website for dates.

L'Homme Erectus (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 74 93; Rue des Pierres 57; ☎ from noon Mon-Fri, from 4pm Sat & Sun) You'll easily recognise this place as soon as you see the evolution of man from ape graphically depicted on the front window. User-friendly opening hours mean it's one of the capital's most popular bars – relatively quiet during the day but crammed at night.

Chez Maman (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 86 96; www.chezmaman.be in French; Rue des Grands Carmes 12; ☎ from 10pm Thu-Sun) The capital's most beloved transvestite show.

Petite Boxeur (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 40 00; Borgval 3; mains €13-19.50; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Tiny candlelit restaurant that's great for a meal before a night out – the kitchen stays open 'til 12.30am and the cuisine is modern Belgian. Reservations essential Friday and Saturday.

Darakan (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 20 76; Rue du Midi 9) Tiny gay bookshop.

For gay-friendly accommodation in the heart of town, see **Downtown-BXL** (p98).

The **Festival du Film Gay & Lesbien de Bruxelles** (www.fglb.org in French) runs for 10 days in late January and is firmly established. **Belgian Gay & Lesbian Pride** (www.blgp.be) is held in Brussels on the first Saturday in May and the march ends with an all-night party.

JULY & AUGUST

Foire du Midi This huge, annual funfair is almost as old as Belgium itself – its 125th anniversary was celebrated in 2005. It runs from mid-July to mid-August on Blvd du Midi near Gare du Midi (Map pp76-7).

Mejboom (www.meyboom.be) The raising of the Maypole is a folkloric event held annually on 9 August. A procession of 'giants' winds down from the Sablon to the Grand Place where they plant a maypole.

Tapis des Fleurs (www.flowercarpet.be) Brussels' famous Floral Carpet takes over the Grand Place for five days in mid-August every two years in even years.

Ivo Van Damme Memorial (www.sport.be/memorial vandamme) This meet attracts a good serving of international athletes and is held in late August or early September at the Roi Baudouin stadium (p111) at Heysel. It's named after local athlete Ivo Van Damme (1954-76), whose promising career (two silver Olympic medals in 800m and 1500m in Montreal) was ended in a fatal car accident.

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER

Belgian Beer Weekend (www.visitbelgium.com/beer.htm) Brussels' Grand Place comes alive in early September with beer stalls where visitors can sample many of the nation's brews.

Comics Festival (www.comicsfestivalbelgium.com) St Gilles town hall (Map pp76-7) is the venue for this annual industry shindig held over a weekend in early October. Rub shoulders with the artists and writers behind some of Belgium's best-known comic characters.

Designers' Trail (see boxed text, p114)

Marché de Noël The Grand Place is the setting for a Christmas craft market held over a week in early December and featuring stalls from many EU countries.

SLEEPING

Start hunting around the Grand Place, an area rich with accommodation to suit all budgets. Breakfast is included in all prices, unless

otherwise stated. Most of Brussels' B&B accommodation is organised via **Bed & Brussels** (☎ 02 646 07 37; www.bnb-brussels.be).

Budget

Beersel Camping (☎ 02 331 05 61; campingbeersel@pandora.be; Steenweg op Ukkel 75, Beersel; adult/tent/car €3/2/1.50; ☹️ year-round) Small ground south of the Brussels region in Beersel. Tram 55 (direction Uccle) stops 3km away, from where you take bus UB (direction Halle) to Beersel.

Bruxelles Europe à Ciel Ouvert (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 640 79 67; Chaussée de Wavre 203; bus 34 or 80; ☹️ Jul & Aug) This summer-only camp site is for campers with tents (no caravans or campervans) who want to be relatively central.

Centre Vincent van Gogh (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 217 01 58; www.chab.be; Rue Traversière 8; metro Botanique; dm/s/d/q €13.50/28/42/66, bed sheets €4; ☹️) Forget this place if you've succumbed to middle-age spread – Brussels' most groovy hostel is strictly for 17-to-35ers. Run by a young, fun crew, it has laid-back vibes, a garden courtyard, bar and adjoining conservatory, laundry, kitchen and internet (€1 for 15 minutes). Rooms are clean but basic (some doubles have private bathrooms for no extra cost – ask when you book). In July and August, there are guided bike tours (€12, 3½ hours). ISIC cardholders get a 10% discount. It's located 1.2km uphill from Gare Centrale.

Sleep Well (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 50 50; www.sleepwell.be; Rue du Damier 23; metro Rogier; hostel dm/s/d/tr €19/28/50/66, hotel s/d/tr €39/57/80; ☹️) Big, bright, modern place one block from Rue Neuve, Brussels' main shopping thoroughfare. The hotel section has rooms with private bathroom facilities and no daytime lockout. In the hostel section, bathroom facilities are shared and the rooms can't be accessed between 11am and 3pm. It's all very polished but a tad sterile.

Jacques Brel (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 01 87; brussels.brel@laj.be; Rue de la Sablonnière 30; metro Madou; dm/s/d €17.60/33/50; ☹️) One of three HI-affiliated hostels in Brussels. This one's old and presentable. It's a 1km uphill walk from Gare Centrale.

2Go4 (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 219 30 19; www.2Go4.be; Blvd Émile Jacqmain 99; dm/s/d/q excl breakfast €21/43/59/99; ☹️) Brussels' newest hostel occupies a bright-red terrace house at the slightly sleazy end of town. The zany ground-floor furnishings calm down by the time you get upstairs. Two features to note include a chunk of old Atomium sheeting hanging above reception, and a small kitchen.

Midrange

Downtown-BXL (Map p74; ☎ 0475 29 07 21; www.downtownbxl.com; Rue du Marché au Charbon 118-120; prémetro Anneessens; r €60) Brussels' most central B&B occupies the last house on the capital's gay drag, and is superbly located for those wanting to dance the night away. Gay-friendly owner Theo Linder has decked the rooms in simple but interesting décor (choose the 'Marilyn' room for a round bed), and blends modern with touches of the old (the original staircase is a hoot with luggage). The extended continental breakfast is not a feast, but you won't leave hungry. All in all it's excellent value.

Hôtel Galia (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 502 42 43; www.hotelgalia.com; Place du Jeu-de-Balle 15; metro Porte de Hal, prémetro Lemonnier; s/d/tr €60/65/70; ☹️) The only frills in this well-maintained little place are the comic-strip embellishments. Overlooking Brussels' well-known bric-a-brac market square, it has well-sized clean rooms (tiny bathrooms) and is handy to nightlife.

Hôtel Rembrandt (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 71 39; www.hotel-rembrandt.be; Rue de la Concorde 42; metro Louise; s €45-65, d €70-90, ste from €75) Fantastic-value hotel,

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hooy Kaye Lodge (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 44 40; www.hooykayelodge.com; Quai aux Pierres de Taille 22; metro St Catherine or Yser; r €95-125) Corinne De Coninck is one of those B&B owners who loves what she does. And judging by her new B&B, it's not a passing fad. So leave behind the bright red-brick façade of this 17th-century merchant house to enter a calm and elegant B&B, where original authenticity is paramount. Unpolished steps and banisters lead up two or three flights to four rooms, each different in shape, size and layout. The common thread is tone – chocolate colours, antique furnishings, and ancient garments from Myanmar have been used throughout to adorn. Breakfast at a common table downstairs, then step outside onto a newly revamped street on the edge of bustling Ste Catherine. It's a fabulous address.

incongruously located near Ave Louise. All sorts of old ornaments, oil paintings and polished wooden furnishings adorn every available place. Outside it's just as twee, with a pale-pink façade and flower boxes. The rooms are crisp and well cared for, albeit a tad small. Note, reception closes at 9pm.

Hôtel George V (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 513 50 93; www.george5.com; Rue 't Kint 23; prémetro Anneessens; s/d/t/q €64/75/86/97) This family-run hotel on the edge of St Géry has prices that are a snip for this funky part of town. The rooms are ordinary but clean and presentable.

Chambres en Ville (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 92 90; www.chez.com/chambreenville; Rue de Londres 19; metro Trône; s/d €60/80, 1-night supplement per rm €15) With its ordinary façade on a poky backstreet just metres away from the EU's gleaming quarter, you'll arrive at this B&B and wonder what you're in for. Once inside, it's obvious. Run by quietly spoken graphic designer Philippe Guilmin, the town house has four large guest rooms, each individually named and subtly decorated. Choose from La Gustavienne, done out in the sober house-style of a Swedish king, or Le Levant, bathed in cinnamon and milk chocolate. Some rooms have double beds, others are twins. The wooden floors are scrubbed, the ceilings are high. It's lovely.

B&B Phileas Fogg (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 217 83 38; www.phileasfogg.be; Rue Van Bemmel 6; metro Madou; s/d/tr/f €75/85/100/120; ☹️) Exotic B&B in St Josse run by Karin Dhadamus, an exuberant mother, avid traveller and master of many languages. The four rooms are all different, decorated with artworks she's picked up on worldly travels, as well as local touches including a feather lamp designed in Antwerp. All rooms have private bathrooms, although two share a toilet. The Blue Room, with its kooky hand basin, low futon bed, off-set bathroom and tiny terrace overlooking the garden, is a favourite.

Hôtel Welcome (Map p74; ☎ 02 219 95 46; www.hotelwelcome.com; 1 Rue du Peuplier; metro St Catherine; s/d/ste €85/95/140; ☹️) Incredibly friendly little theme hotel in Ste Catherine that's been around for years. Rooms reflect Brussels' cosmopolitan nature – overnight in Bora Bora, Congo or Japan, to name a few. The busy décor is a bit ugly but the concept's good. Rooms range in size from 'eco' singles to the Egyptian suite with a king-size bed and view over tree-lined Marché aux Poissons. The breakfast room (originally a horse stable) features a delightful wall mosaic. Babies and dogs are welcome.

Hôtel Agenda Midi (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 520 00 10; www.hotel-agenda.com; Blvd Jamar 11; metro Gare du Midi; s/d/f €86/99/114) There's little to recommend the Gare du Midi area but, if you need to be close for travel reasons, this is the pick of the crop. Good biceps are needed to open the Fort Knox-style security gate. The modern rooms have rich earthy tones and kids are welcome.

Hôtel Saint Michel (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 64 79; www.hotelsaintmichel.be; Grand Place 11; metro Gare Centrale; s/d/tr €65/100/125, with view €133/133/156) Choice real estate this – the *only* hotel smack bang on Brussels' famous square. The royal entrance downgrades to ordinary rooms that are overpriced, but hey, outside your window is the Grand Place! Keep in mind that rooms at the front, though nicer, lighter and larger, are also much noisier, especially on summer nights when the square comes alive. Weekend discounts often available.

Hôtel Noga (Map p74; ☎ 02 218 67 63; www.noga-hotel.com; Rue du Béguinage 38; metro Ste Catherine; s/d/tr/q €85/105/130/155; ☹️) Another Ste Catherine gem. This well-equipped little hotel started in 1958 and mixes modern and old décors in a self-assured feast for the eyes. Rich colour schemes and a nautical theme are used throughout, with plenty of statues and paintings, antique and kitsch. The rooms are spacious, and overall it offers excellent facilities for a hotel of

WEEKEND DEALS

By and large, Brussels' accommodation scene is aimed squarely at Eurocrats and business travellers. Hotels catering to these visitors have boomed in recent decades, resulting in an ongoing price war among hotels and some good deals for tourists. At the weekend, when all the EU visitors and business people have evacuated, many hotels around the city drop their rates dramatically. There's no hard and fast rule regarding days discounts are offered – some hotels go for Friday and Saturday nights, others Saturday and Sunday, and some all three. Some top-end hotels charge extra for breakfast on weekdays, but throw in great buffet spreads on weekends. You'll find details of weekday and weekend rates in the hotel listings in this chapter.

Note that some midrange and top-end establishments also drop their rates during the summer holiday months (roughly from mid-July to mid-September). Again, it's well worth searching the internet and inquiring about possible discounts at this time.

this price, with a bar, separate billiard room, lounge and even bike hire (€10/13 half-/full-day). It's also child and baby friendly.

Hôtel Arlequin (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 16 15; www.arlequin.be; Rue de la Fourche 17; prémetro Bourse; s/d/tr from €110/130/210) Well hidden on a backstreet not far from the Grand Place, this hotel's 7th-floor breakfast room – with lovely rooftop views – is its outstanding feature. The rooms are white-washed and presentable, though décorwise blasé. A word of warning: don't be seduced by weekend discounts if you need to sleep before 3am – the basement party space goes boom boom until the small hours.

Monty (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 734 56 36; www.monty-hotel.be; Blvd Brand Whitlock 101; metro Montgomery; s/d €110/130, weekend €85; 📺) Bills itself as a 'small design hotel' but feels more like a bordello. Must be something to do with the blood-red décor. If you're into designers and atypical décor, and want to be out of the centre (EU vicinity), it'll do.

Other recommendations:

Hôtel La Légende (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 82 90; www.hotellallegende.com; Rue du Lombard 35; metro Gare Centrale; s/d/tr/f from €80/90/130/140; 📺) Well sited just two blocks from the Grand Place. The older (and cheaper) rooms are a tad small, but they're all modern and comfortable.

Hôtel du Congrès (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 217 18 90; www.hotelducongres.be; Rue du Congrès 42; metro Madou; s/d €100/115; 📺) Elegant hotel occupying four renovated town houses in the Upper Town towards Place Madou. Off-the-beaten-track location.

Atlas (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 60 06; www.atlas.be; Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains 30; prémetro Bourse, metro Ste Catherine; s/d/tr/f €110/125/155/175; 📺) Central hotel with kitchen; equipped, split-level duplex apartments good for families.

Top End

Hôtel Le Dixseptième (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 57 44; www.lédixseptieme.be; Rue de la Madeleine 25; metro Gare Centrale; s/d €120/200, ste €250-390; 📺) Discreet doesn't begin

to describe this exclusive hotel. Little more than a doorbell gives its location away, on an old street leading from the historic core to Gare Centrale. Ring the bell and wait for the door to open into this former 17th-century residence of the Spanish ambassador. The 24 rooms are sumptuously decorated and all unique. Each is named after a Belgian artist. The Breughel and Jordaens rooms are the most opulent in the hotel's ancient section; Magritte and Permeke are arguably the most special in the modern part (the studio rooms here come with kitchenette). In deliberate contrast to many of Brussels' top-enders, Le Dixseptième does not drop its rates on weekends. 'We're keeping it exclusive' is the motto.

Art Hotel Siru (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 203 35 80; www.comforhotelsiru.com; Place Charles Rogier 1; metro Rogier; s/d €200/225, weekend s & d €110; 📺) Close to the Gare du Nord railway station, this hotel is for those into modern Belgian art. Built in 1932 but done over in the 1990s, each of the 102 rooms features work by a contemporary Belgian artist – some pieces are mundane, others more nightmarish. Many of the rooms are small, and regular prices are grossly inflated; weekend deals are better value.

Hôtel Métropole (Map p74; ☎ 02 217 23 00; reservations 02 214 24 24; www.metropolehotel.com; Place de Brouckère 31; metro De Brouckère; s/d/ste €330/360/500, weekend from €115; 📺) Brussels' sumptuous, late-19th-century showpiece, owned by the Wielemans family since it opened in 1895. An opulent French Renaissance-style foyer with marble walls and coffered ceiling leads to an imperial reception hall backed by beautifully etched stained-glass windows. Unlike the lavish entrance, the elegant rooms are soberly furnished.

Hôtel Amigo (Map p74; ☎ 02 547 47 47; www.hotelamigo.com; Rue de l'Amigo 1-3; metro Gare Centrale; s/d weekday from €400/500, s/d weekend incl breakfast €215/280, ste from €700; 📺) Full of history and

celebrities, this 18th-century-style hotel rates amongst Brussels' best. Built in the 1950s on the site of a former prison just behind the Grand Place, it was purchased by Rocco Forte Hotels a few years back and totally refurbished. The result is a splendid mix of old and contemporary. The public rooms feature antique furnishings, 18th-century tapestries and centuries' old paving stones. Head upstairs to find smooth rooms. Breakfast costs €28. One room is fitted for travellers with disabilities.

Other recommendations:

Hôtel Stanhope (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 506 91 11; www.stanhope.be; Square du Meeûs 4; metro Trône; s/d weekday from €195/245, weekend incl breakfast from €120/140, ste €560; 📺) This English-style hotel offers excellent value close to the EU quarter. Breakfast costs €25.

Hôtel Astoria (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 227 05 05; www.softel.com; Rue Royale 103; metro Madou, tram 93 or 94; s/d weekday €240/340, weekend incl breakfast €125/135) Gearing up for its centennial celebration in 2009, the Astoria harks back to the exuberant era of Léopold II. Breakfast costs €25.

EATING

As the capital of a nation of foodies, Brussels is overly endowed with quality eateries. The city's cosmopolitan nature means there's no shortage of cuisines, be it Italian, Spanish, Turkish or Japanese. The essential Brussels experience, however, involves old-world restaurants where aproned waiters bustle across tiled floors and diners tuck into hearty Belgian cuisine in wood-panelled surroundings. Packed at both lunch and dinner, these places offer no-nonsense service where good food is the *raison d'être*. But don't make the mistake of thinking the scene's all yesteryear. Minimalism has swept Brussels, bringing exciting restaurants offering world cuisines and a certain snob value that was missing not long ago. For dining outside the normal times, brasseries and bistros await.

The cobbled streets around the Grand Place are the natural starting point, but it's well worth wandering further afield. Good for fish and seafood is Ste Catherine's fish-market area; go to the streets around Place St Géry for a small line-up of Asian eateries. The Marolles shelters the intimate and trendy, while Ixelles' Rue St Boniface offers a treat of cuisines.

Grand Place BUDGET

Fritland (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 06 27; Rue Henri Maus 49; prémetro Bourse; 📺 11am-1am) Thirty years old and still *the* downtown place for a cone of chips.

Panos (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 14 43; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 85; metro Gare Centrale) Chain bakery and sandwich shop doing *belegd broodje/sandwich garni* (half a filled baguette), slices of quiche and pizza.

Rugantino (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 21 95; Blvd Anspach 184; prémetro Anneessens; mains €8-16.50; 📺 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Little slice of Italy on one of the capital's busiest boulevards. Simple menu, great food and loud voices emanating from the kitchen.

Chez Léon (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 04 26; Rue des Bouchers 18; metro Gare Centrale; mains €13-20; 📺 noon-11pm) Long-time tourist favourite in the heart of Brussels' famous dining street, Rue des Bouchers. This rambling place occupies several gabled houses and offers fast service at any time of the day or night, substantial helpings of mussels and chips, and free meals for kids under 12. You'll find branches all over Belgium, and worldwide.

Other recommendations:

Pita Pick from the swarm of places along Rue du Marché aux Fromages (Map p74; metro Gare Centrale). Most are open from lunchtime until 6am and serve basic pitas from €3.50, a *brochette* (kebab) for €7.50 and vegetarian pitas. Eat in or take away.

GB Express (Map p74; Rue au Beurre 25; prémetro Bourse; 📺 8am-10pm) Little supermarket near the Grand Place.

Super GB (Map pp72-3; Rue Neuve; metro Rogier) Big supermarket in the basement of the City 2 shopping centre.

AD Delhaize (Map p74; cnr Rue du Marché aux Poulets & Blvd Anspach; prémetro Bourse; 📺 9am-8pm) Supermarket.

MIDRANGE

Brasserie de la Roue d'Or (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 25 54; Rue des Chapeliers 26; metro Gare Centrale; mains €15-28; 📺 noon-12.30am, closed Jul) The décor pays homage to the city's surrealist artists and the food is traditional and excellent – it's got locals well and truly hooked. Great for late-night dining.

Al Barmaki (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 08 34; Rue des Eperonniers 67; metro Gare Centrale; mains €18-28; 📺 dinner Mon-Sat) Hidden on a quiet backstreet, Al Barmaki has long been considered one of Brussels' best Middle Eastern eateries. And now, after more than three decades of faithful service to uncompromisingly authentic Lebanese food, it's made the Michelin guide. Expect cool Moorish décor, brusque service and succulent skewered lamb kebabs. Great for vegetarians too.

TOP END

Samourai (Map p74; ☎ 02 217 56 39; Rue du Fossé aux Loups 28; metro De Brouckère; mains €25-38; 📺 closed Sun lunch & Tue) Japanese restaurant tucked away inside a gallery on a busy downtown street.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Royal Windsor Hôtel (Map p74; ☎ 02 505 55 55; www.warwickhotels.com; Rue Duquesnoy 5; r €345-440; ste from €900; 📺) So fashion's your thing and you're here to shop. Why not take it a step further and really get to know some Belgian designers by sleeping with them – so to speak. Choose Nicolas Woit, Marina Yee or Kaat Tilley, for example, and ensconce yourself in a room fitted out by these well-known designers. The Royal Windsor has 12 so-called 'Fashion Rooms', ranging in décor from conventional to extreme or something in between.

The hotel itself is a bland, red-brick building, discreetly located on a quiet backstreet just a steeple's fall from the Grand Place. It looks like nothing from the outside. Inquire about weekend rates. Breakfast costs €25.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Taverne du Passage (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 37 31; Galerie de la Reine 30; metro Gare Centrale; mains €15-20; ☹️ noon-midnight, closed Wed & Thu Jun & Jul) Consistently keen service and faithful Belgian meals are the pivotal points of this Brussels institution. Located in the sublime Galeries St Hubert, it has been around since 1928 and stepping through the draped doorway is like zapping away a century. An all-male middle-aged crew strut their stuff in slightly crumpled penguin uniforms, serving ample portions of Belgian classics such as *moules-frites* (mussels and chips) and *waterzooi* (cream-based chicken or fish stew). With some daring, this could be the place to try *filet américain* (raw minced beef). No matter how busy it gets, the blokes are unfailingly friendly. In summer, tables line up in the gallery outside, and kids are always welcome.

The food's as authentic as it gets, and is highly regarded by the busloads of Japanese who turn up here.

La Maison du Cygne (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 82 44; Rue Charles Buls 2; metro Gare Centrale; mains €37-65; ☹️ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat; 🍷) This sophisticated restaurant occupies the 2nd-floor of an elaborate guildhall and offers a few tables with much-cherished views of the square. The French/Belgian cuisine changes with the season and is top-notch – the pigeon will even be carved at your table. For something less formal there's also the cheaper 1st-floor Ommegang brasserie.

St Géry & St Catherine BUDGET

Picnik (Map p74; ☎ 02 217 34 84; Rue de Flandre 109; metro Ste Catherine; soup €2-3, daily special €8, 3-course menu €9.50; ☹️ 11.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) One of the new breed of snack bars gathering steam in Brussels. This one's firmly Flemish, totally vegetarian, mostly organic and, for its size, incredibly baby friendly. An out-of-the-way location that's worth finding.

Gourmet d'Asie (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 13 57; Rue Van Artevelde 14; prémetro Bourse; mains €7-13; ☹️ lunch & dinner, closed Tue) One of two tiny Vietnamese take-away restaurants sitting side-by-side on a busy St Géry street. Choose from a huge assortment of authentic dishes including the house speciality, pig's ear.

Shamrock (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 49 89; Rue Jules Van Praet 27; prémetro Bourse; mains €7-15; ☹️ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Flashy neon lights and mediocre Asian cuisine is the trademark of this street. The exception is this oddly-named Indian restaurant (reincarnated from an Irish pub) where tandoori specialities are the go. Expect horrible décor and deliciously authentic food.

Pataya (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 30 57; Rue Antoine Dansaert 49; prémetro Bourse; mains €11-14; ☹️ lunch Tue-Fri, din-

ner Tue-Sun) Absolutely nondescript little Thai restaurant that fills up early and keeps diners rolling in until late (closes 11.30pm). The red, yellow and green curries are superb, and vegetarians will find plenty to choose from.

Cococomo (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 03 30; Rue Antoine Dansaert 19; prémetro Bourse; 3/6/9 pintxos €8.50/14/19; ☹️ lunch & dinner) Park your backside on a black bar stool and watch colour-coded *pintxos* (the Basque version of tapas) snake past on an 80m-long conveyor belt at this relatively new arrival to Happening Street. Choose blue for fish, green for veggies, red for pork, and so on. It's all very hip, understandably so for this part of town.

Kasbah (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 40 26; Rue Antoine Dansaert 20; prémetro Bourse; mains €12-18; ☹️ lunch & dinner; 🍷) Next door to Bonsoir Clara, this dark and intimate Moroccan restaurant, with its tell-tale oranges in the window, is a feast for the senses. The friendly and flamboyant owner does couscous, lamb *brochettes* and *tajines* (spicy meat-based stews), all at excellent prices. Reservations for Friday and Saturday nights are necessary.

Viva M'Boma (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 15 93; Rue de Flandre 17; metro Ste Catherine; mains €12-18; ☹️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Another cool, white-tiled Bruxellois bistro (an old butcher's shop) that has hit the spot with the food-crazy locals – must be the hand-cut *frites* (chips). Squeeze past the line-up ordering baguette sandwiches in the deli-style takeaway out front, and peer like Alice through the looking glass at a room full of foodies devouring hefty Belgian classics (including plenty of tripe). You may need a booking to join them in Wonderland.

Other recommendations:

Comus & Gasterea (Map p74; ☎ 02 223 43 66; Quai aux Briques 86; metro Ste Catherine; ☹️ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sun) Modern ice-cream parlour where everything's homemade, including the cones.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Pain Quotidien/Het Dagelijks Brood (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 23 61; Rue Antoine Dansaert 16; prémetro Bourse; sandwiches €6-8, salads €10-13; ☹️ 7.30am-7pm, to 6pm Sun) Spend any time in Belgium and you'll soon come across this local success story. Baker Alain Coumont started his first bakery and tearoom here on Rue Antoine Dansaert in 1990. Wholesome bread, sweet and savoury pies, salads, sandwiches, breakfast and lunch were (and still are) the staples. So what? The same as many other eateries, you might rightly say. But Le Pain Quotidien had one fundamental difference – a big wooden table sitting smack in the middle of its smoke-free surroundings. And it was that table that defined its success. Now with branches nation- and worldwide, Le Pain Quotidien's communal table is as popular as ever.

PS. It's not all wholesome – chocoholics should be warned that the *bombe au chocolat* (chocolate bomb) is a chocolate-mousse cake like no other.

GB Express (Map p74; Quai au Bois à Brûler 4; metro Ste Catherine; ☹️ 7am-8.30pm) Little supermarket in Ste Catherine.

MIDRANGE

Jacques (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 27 62; Quai aux Briques 44; metro Ste Catherine; mains €15-25, mussels €22; ☹️ lunch & dinner, closed Sun) It's rare to see Jacques anything but full. This down-to-earth restaurant, one of the city's oldest seafood establishments, has been around well over 60 years. It attracts an older, largely local crowd for lunch and a younger, more cosmopolitan set at night. For lobster ring a day in advance.

In 't Spinnekopke (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 511 86 95; Place du Jardin aux Fleurs 1; prémetro Bourse; mains €15-25; ☹️ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This long-time favourite with its odd name (In the Spider's Head) occupies a 17th-century whitewashed cottage on a newly revamped square. Dine outside in summer, or cosy up inside in winter and enjoy Brussels' specialities (in particular the cod or the assortment of meats cooked in beer-based sauces).

Bijden Boer (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 61 22; Quai aux Briques 60; metro Ste Catherine; mains €15-28; ☹️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A longtime seafood favourite with a no-fuss interior and newly revamped blue-tiled façade. Real Brussels experience.

Pré Salé (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 43 23; Rue de Flandre 20; metro Ste Catherine; mains €16-18; ☹️ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, closed mid-Jun–mid-Jul; 🍷) Local diner on a shabby backstreet that's become an institution with the locals. Looks a bit like a butcher's shop when you first enter – all white tiles, bright lights and big plates of spare ribs – but it's very infectious, particularly on Friday nights when you'll need to book a few weeks in advance to partake in the *soirée spectacle*, a vaudeville-style dinner show.

Bonsoir Clara (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 09 90; Rue Antoine Dansaert 18; prémetro Bourse; mains €17-25; ☹️ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) An enduring success story. The twin salons boast bold colours, subtle lighting and lots of metal and geometry. It struck a chord with locals years ago and continues to serve generous portions of modern European food, particularly Mediterranean flavours. Reserve in advance for weekend dinners.

TOP END

La Belle Maraichère (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 97 59; Place Ste Catherine 11a; metro Ste Catherine; mains €26-48, 4-course menu €33; ☹️ lunch & dinner Fri-Tue) This intimate family-run restaurant overlooking the church in Ste Catherine is well known for classic seafood dishes, nostalgic décor and crisp service. It's popular with businessmen at lunchtime, and a mixed clientele in the evenings.

Marolles

Brasserie La Clef d'Or (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 97 62; Place du Jeu-de-Balle 1; metro Porte de Hal, prémetro Lemonnier; snacks €3.50-8; ☹️ 5am-5pm Tue-Sun) Unassuming café that's been serving *soupe de la maison* (house soup) and a good *croque-monsieur* (grilled ham and cheese sandwich) to flea-market vendors for years. It's as unpretentious as they come. The unusual opening hours reflect the needs of the clientele.

Easy Tempo (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 513 54 40; Rue Haute 146; metro Louise, bus 27; pizza €7-11; ☹️ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Suave pizza joint in an old *boulangerie* (bakery) with a gorgeous ceramic-tiled wall that's now a protected monument. An ultrafriendly crew skim along the counter, topping pizzas with marinated aubergine, sun-dried tomatoes and artichokes.

Au Stekerlapatte (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 86 81; Rue des Prêtres 4; metro Hôtel des Monnaies; mains around €16;

☺ dinner Tue-Sun; ☺) The grungy façade hides a cavernous bistro where the approach is casual, the menu extensive and the portions large. Meat, fish and fowl – cooked in traditional Belgian ways – are the staples. Well hidden but definitely known.

Les Petits Oignons (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 512 47 38; Rue Notre Seigneur 13; metro Louise/bus 27; mains €18-25, 3-course lunch menu €18, 4-course dinner menu €28; ☺) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Firm Marolles favourite, 'The Little Onions' has been wooing all manner of diners for years with an outdated '70s ambience, hefty servings of Belgian and French cuisine, friendly service and, depending on the weather, a tranquil garden setting outback or a blazing log fire inside.

L'Idiot du Village (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 502 55 82; Rue Notre Seigneur 19; metro Louise, bus 27; mains €18-26; ☺) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) An address for those in the know, this fabulous little restaurant (not signposted) is hidden away behind a graffiti-covered shutter on a side street off Rue Blaes. Step down from street level to enter a slightly surreal world designed to feed all the senses, not just the stomach. The cuisine is eclectic, and the atmosphere intimate. Bookings are essential.

Comme Chez Soi (Map pp72-3; ☺ 02 512 29 21; Pl Rouppe 23; prémetro Anneessens; mains €40-60, 4-course menu from €67; ☺) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat; ☺) Ask any Bruxellois to name the city's finest restaurant and the answer, until very recently, was invariably CCS. For 27 straight years, this Brussels institution received three Michelin stars in the famed food guide, due largely to the innovative cuisine by master chef Pierre Wynants. The recent transition to new chef, Lionel Rigolet,

Wynants' son-in-law, saw the restaurant lose one star in 2006. A good bite out of your weekly wage can be sunk here on a main course alone, and reservations are still needed.

Sablon

Le Perroquet (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 512 99 22; Rue Watteuu 31; metro Porte de Namur; light meals €8-10; ☺) noon-1am) Lovely Art Nouveau *café* that stands out as a cheap eatery in this affluent part of town. Salads and stuffed pitas, including vegetarian options, are the mainstay, and the kitchen stays open 'til 1am. Stained glass, marble-topped tables and dark wood panelling lend it a smooth atmosphere.

Wittamer (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 512 37 42; Place du Grand Sablon 12-13; tram 92, 93 or 94; cakes €11, light meals €15-17; ☺) 9am-6pm Wed-Sun) Watching the Sablon's parade of fur coats, felt hats and well-fed poodles is best undertaken at this exclusive pâtisserie and tearoom. Terrace tables fan out towards the square in summer; in winter warm yourself in the 1st-floor tearoom.

Lola (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 514 24 60; Place du Grand Sablon 33; tram 92, 93 or 94; mains €16-28; ☺) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun; ☺) Lola's done its apprenticeship, and Brussels' designer set still loves it. Combines classic French and Italian cuisine with a modern minimalist interior and an atmosphere that simply pops and buzzes.

EU Quarter

Maison Antoine (Map p86; Place Jourdan; metro Schuman; ☺) 11.30am-1am, until 2am Fri & Sat) For decades, this little *friture* (chip shop) has attracted politicians, rock stars and locals alike for what used to be Brussels' best chips. In our opinion it's

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Can't choose where or what to eat? Then head straight to Ixelles' **Rue St Boniface**. This intimate little street, lorded over by the local church, is crammed with indoor/outdoor eateries of all persuasions.

One of the originals and still an all-round favourite for a casual meal is **L'Ultime Atome** (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 513 13 67; Rue St Boniface 14; metro Porte de Namur; mains €11-20; ☺) 11am-midnight). An eclectic crowd keeps this brasserie buzzing day and night (the kitchen is open nonstop from noon until midnight) and there's a wide range on offer including vegetarian fare and an inspiring beer menu.

Immediately opposite is **Le lième Élément** (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 502 00 28; Rue St Boniface 7; metro Porte de Namur; mains €10-20; ☺) lunch & dinner, closed Sat & lunch Sun), a modern minimalist Thai restaurant with a straightforward menu including soups.

Too trendy? Then try **Saint Boniface** (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 511 53 66; Rue St Boniface 9; metro Porte de Namur; mains €15-22; ☺) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri). Turn off your phone to enter this old-world restaurant where checked tablecloths, oil lamps and authentic dishes from France's Périgord region (ie foie gras, duck and Puy lentils) are the norm.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

René (Map pp70-1; ☺ 02 523 28 76; Place de la Résistance 14; metro St Guignon/tram 56; mains €12-20; ☺) lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Deep in the heart of Anderlecht, overlooking a tree-lined square and the local *gemeentehuis* (town hall), is arguably Brussels' most authentic family *friterie*-restaurant. It's the Dirk and Dorine Pionon show. He's the Dad, she's the Mum and together with their offspring and in-laws, they fry and re-ry the frites, prepare a succulent *filet américain* (ground at the last minute and, as all good *américain* should be, finished at the table), and dish up steaming cauldrons of mussels and other Belgian specialities to an appreciative local audience. Turn up here at lunchtime on Saturday, as the market vendors on the facing square pack up their wares, and you'll find it's full house – only the rickety green metal tables decorating the footpath are unoccupied. For that quintessential Belgian experience, and not a tourist in sight, this is as good as it gets.

no longer No 1, but still very much worth a detour if you're hungry and in the district.

Rosticeria Fiorentina (Map p86; ☺ 02 734 92 36; Rue Archimède 43; metro Schuman; pasta from €7.50, other mains €14-18; ☺) lunch & dinner, closed Sat) One of a handful of restaurants on this street catering squarely to Eurocrats. Hearty dishes served on paper tablecloths in family-style surroundings with Italian meals made by Mama.

Ixelles

L'Amour Fou (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 514 27 09; Chaussée d'Ixelles 185; bus 54 or 71; salads €9, pasta €9; ☺) 9am-2am) Head deep into Ixelles to find this simple bistro and long-time favoured late-night bite stop.

Archy's (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 511 50 52; Rue Longue Vie 20; metro Porte de Namur; mains €10-12; ☺) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sun) Tiny Latin-American restaurant in Matonge, Brussels' African quarter, that's been serving up specialities from California to Peru for more than 15 years. Join diners at one of just four tables on the pedestrianised street, or head inside to meet Archy himself.

La Tsampa (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 647 03 67; Rue de Livourne 109; tram 93 or 94; daily special €12; ☺) noon-2pm & 7-9.30pm Mon-Fri, closed Aug) Brussels' oldest and least compromising vegetarian restaurant. Enter via the organic delicatessen.

Le Variété (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 647 04 36; Place Ste Croix 4; tram 81; mains €15-20; ☺) lunch & dinner) One of the trendiest restaurants in Brussels. It occupies part of the restored Flagey building and is a great place for dinner premovie at Studio 5. Specialises in spit-roasts but there's plenty of other modern European fare and vegetarians have innovative choices. It's open until midnight; reservations are essential most evenings.

Notos (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 513 29 59; Rue de Livourne 154; tram 93 or 94; mains €17-24; ☺) lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Certainly Belgium's best Greek restaurant and arguably the best in Europe outside

Greece. No plate-smashing or faded posters of sun-soaked isles at this subtle little place. Instead the refined ambience is backed up by superb *nouvelle* Greek *cuisine*. The limited menu remembers vegetarians.

Rouge Tomato (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 647 70 44; Ave Louise 190; tram 93 or 94; mains €19-28; ☺) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Modern Mediterranean cuisine (with plenty for vegos) is served in two huge rooms on the ground floor of a 19th-century townhouse. In summer, a terrace shaded by old trees draws diners from afar. The décor's big but not busy, the overall tone's mellow but not insipid, and relaxed young staff keep it humming.

Other recommendations:

Le Framboisier (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 647 51 44; Rue du Bailli 35; tram 93 or 94; ☺) noon-11pm Tue-Sun) Imaginatively flavoured ice cream and sorbets made from Cantillon beers are the house specialities. Take away or, in summer, sit in the garden.

De la Vigne à l'Assiette (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 647 68 03; Rue de la Longue Haie 51; tram 93 or 94; mains €17-22, 2-course lunch menu €14, 3-/4-course dinner menu €21/35; ☺) lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) Sommelier Eddy Dandrimont matches good French cuisine and wine at this little corner restaurant on a quiet backstreet uphill from Ave Louise.

La Quincaillerie (Map pp76-7; ☺ 02 533 98 33; Rue du Page 45; tram 91 or 92; mains €17-27; ☺) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) The gleaming brass interior gives a clue to this brasserie's former life as an ironmonger's shop. It woos with seafood specialities.

Contact GB (Map pp76-7; Rue du Bailli 63; tram 93 or 94; ☺) 9am-7pm) Supermarket.

St Josse

Metin (Map pp72-3; ☺ 02 217 68 63; Chaussée de Haecht 94; bus 65; pide €4-7; ☺) 11am-11pm, closed Tue) One of many little Turkish restaurants strung along this street, this is a good spot for a bite after visiting nearby Maison Autrique (p93). They started in the mid '70s, about 15 years after the

first Turkish immigrants moved in, and continue to draw plenty of local diners. Start with an *iskembe corba* (tripe soup), followed by a boat-shaped *pide* (Turkish pizza), and wash it down with a glass of *ayran* (buttermilk).

Molenbeek & Anderlecht

Tasso (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 427 74 27; 86c Ave du Port, Molenbeek; metro Yser; mains from €17; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) Tasso opened in 2006 as one of the first attractions in the new Tour & Taxis complex (p89). The setting is awesome, but also intimate, and the food is a pleasing world mix.

For a memorable dining experience in Anderlecht, see boxed text, p105.

DRINKING

It's seductively easy to drink until you drop in Brussels. Nearly every street in the city centre has at least one atmospheric pub, *café* or bar. The Grand Place area is thick with options, from showy Art Nouveau places to old brown *cafés* that have contentedly buzzed for decades. St Géry is the Lower Town's hip hub, although to really nudge this scene head into Ixelles. The EU quarter is big on English and Irish pubs, and for a slice of beer heaven go to St Gilles.

Grand Place

Le Roy d'Espagne (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 08 07; Grand Place 1; metro Gare Centrale) Sit and sip (priced beers) the splendour of the Grand Place in this former guildhouse. And, yes, those are inflated dried pigs' bladders above your head.

Falstaff (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 87 89; Rue Henri Maus 17; prémetro Bourse) A century old and still popular with the fashionable young and eccentric old, this Art Nouveau *grand café*, designed by Horta-disciple Houbion, is an exotic world of mirrors, glass and fluidity. Ignore the location – this street has been screaming for attention for years.

À la Mort Subite (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 13 18; Rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères 7; metro Gare Centrale; ☎) A must. Long *café* with wood panelling, mirrored walls and brusque service. One of the country's many brews is named after it (the name means 'instant death' but the beer itself is not that strong). Nonsmokers can breathe relatively easily in the tiny nonsmoking section.

Goupil le Fol (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 13 96; Rue de la Violette 22; metro Gare Centrale; ☎ 9pm-5am) Bastion of French *chanteuse* and other crooners. You'll only hear the likes of Barbra Streisand, Édith

Piaf and Brussels' own Jacques Brel in this kooky little bar that's been around for years.

Le Ciro (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 13 95; Rue de la Bourse 18; prémetro Bourse) Stalwart sentinel of days gone by. This sumptuous *grand café* dates from 1886 and its opulent interior and aproned waiters attract coiffured mesdames with small dogs, and tourists galore. The house speciality is a half-and-half, a champagne/white wine mix (€2.75).

Fontainas Bar (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 31 12; Rue du Marché au Charbon 91; prémetro Anneessens) The grooviest kid on the nightlife block. Ripped black vinyl seats, '70s décor and cool sounds.

Thirty seconds from the Grand Place – at the end of easily missed alleys – are four old *cafés*. The best known is **Toone** (Map p74; ☎ noon-midnight) at the Théâtre Royal de Toone (p111). Another favourite of the four, **À la Bécasse** (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 00 06; Rue de Tabora 11; metro Gare Centrale), has one hall with long rows of tables and good-hearted revelry reminiscent of the days of Breugel. Go for a jug of draught lambic.

St Géry & Ste Catherine

Le Greenwich (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 41 67; Rue des Chartreux 7; prémetro Bourse) A den for chess-players or anyone who just likes hearing the pieces fall. This big, ancient *café* with wood panelling and mirrored walls is another Brussels must. Grandmasters such as Gary Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov have entered this hall, and even Magritte used to get thrashed here. The atmosphere is always thick with smoke and concentration, the lack of music makes it a pleasant spot to read the newspaper, and the beers are cheap.

De Marktten (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 66 04; Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains 5; metro Ste Catherine) Spacious modern *café* that's a popular Flemish pit stop for shoppers trawling the nearby Rue Dansaert boutiques. In fine weather, pull up a chair at one of its tables on the tree-lined square across the road.

Monk (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 08 80; Rue Ste Catherine 42; metro Ste Catherine) Contemporary-meets-old-brown-*café* in this 17th-century gabled house just metres from Place St Catherine. The two big rooms sport tiled floors, mirrored walls and brown tables and attract a hip clientele.

The coolest bars in Brussels have been established by local legend Fred Nicolay. The three on Place St Géry (Zebra, Mappa Mundo and Roi des Belges) were his first, and **Zebra** (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 09 01; Place St Géry 33; prémetro Bourse) is the original of the originals.

BRUSSELS' TOP PUBS

- À la Mort Subite (opposite) – brown *café*
- L'Archiduc (p109) – jazz heaven
- Goupil le Fol (opposite) – most eccentric
- Café Belga (right) – trend city
- Falstaff (opposite) – *fin-de-siècle*
- Le Greenwich (opposite) – chess mate
- De Ultieme Hallucinatie (right) – Art Nouveau
- Beermania (p113) – beer paradise 1
- Moeder Lambic (right) – beer paradise 2

All three share the same traits – uncomfortable wooden garden chairs, lax service and the hippest of clientele.

Marolles

La Fleur en Papier Doré (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 511 16 59; Rue des Alexiens 53; metro Anneessens) Another favourite of Magritte and his surrealist pals – the nicotine-stained walls of this tiny *café* are covered with their writings and scribbles. These days it draws a cross section of customers, from intellectuals to Eurocrats, young and old, dull or animated.

Brasserie Ploegmans (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 514 28 84; Rue Haute 148; metro Louise, bus 27) An endangered species. This bar is the local of old folk from the Marolles and has plenty of working-class kudos. It's one of only a couple of remaining family-owned pubs on this street and is generally full of smoke, a rich assortment of characters and Brussels dialect.

EU Quarter

Café de l'Autobus (Map p86; ☎ 02 230 63 16; Place Jourdan; metro Schuman) Old-timers' bar opposite Maison Antoine (p104), the city's most famous *friture*. The owners don't mind if you demolish a cone of *frites* while downing a beer or two. On Sunday it's a breather for vendors from the Place Jourdan food market.

The Wild Geese (Map p86; ☎ 02 230 19 90; Ave Livingstone 2; metro Maelbeek) Within staggering distance of Maelbeek metro station, Brussels' biggest Irish pub heaves with Eurocrats and their underlings on weekdays, and is deserted on weekends. A jazz quartet play here on the last Tuesday of the month (from 9pm), and there's dancing from 11pm Thursday to Saturday.

James Joyce (Map p86; ☎ 02 230 98 94; Rue Archimède 34; metro Schuman) The first Irish pub in Brussels. Sometimes rowdy, but it does have quieter moments and there's occasional live music.

Ixelles & St Gilles

Café Belga (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 640 35 08; Place Flagey 18; tram 81; ☎ 8am-2am Sun-Thu, 8am-3am Fri & Sat) Hippest of hip brasserie in a corner of the renovated Flagey liner. Spacious, split-level, Art Deco-style interior and ample outdoor area. Grab a terrace table fronting the ponds, ignore the noise from the nearby interminable roadworks, then settle back.

Moeder Lambic (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 539 14 19; Rue de Savoie 68; prémetro Horta; ☎ 4pm-4am) Home to the A to Z of Belgian beers. Dark, smoky brown *café* on a residential street and *the* place to sample every brew in the book. Chunky hand-hewn tables, tattered comic books and windows adorned with pink elephants and pissed monks make the décor. To be sure, it's at the top of every serious beer lover's crawl.

Two great brasseries for a drink in Ixelles are **L'Ultime Atome** (p104) and **L'Amour Fou** (p105).

Upper Town

Le Bier Circus (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 00 34; Rue de l'Enseignement 89; metro Madou; ☎ noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 6pm-midnight daily) Serious beer buffs should make this one of their first ports o' call. Several hundred brews and staff who know their stuff make it an excellent place to start investigations. The décor's hardly fuel for the imagination, but that's the beer's job anyway. As Belgian pubs go, this one has very limited opening hours, reflecting its odd location in an unloved part of town.

Schaerbeek

De Ultieme Hallucinatie (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 217 06 14; Rue Royale 31; metro Botanique, tram 92, 93 or 94; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Fri, 4pm-2am Sat) Famous Art Nouveau bar and restaurant to the north of town. Built in 1904 by Brussels architect Paul Hamesse, its painted, green façade hides a rich wrought-iron interior.

ENTERTAINMENT

The English-language magazine *Bulletin* has a 'What's On' guide with excellent coverage of cinema, contemporary and classical live music, theatre, dance, opera and the visual arts. Also check Wednesday's MAD supplement in *Le Soir*, the French-language monthly

Kiosque, and online at www.agenda.be (in Flemish and French).

Ticket agencies:

Brussels on Stage (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 57 45; www.arsene50.be in Flemish & French; Galerie de la Reine; metro Gare Centrale; 🕒 12.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat) Last-minute discounted tickets for big shows are sold at this ticket service inside Galeries St Hubert.

Caroline Music (Map p74; ☎ 02 217 07 31; Passage St Honoré 20; prémetro Bourse) Music shop and ticket agency for contemporary live gigs, festivals and club nights.

FNAC (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 275 11 15; City 2 shopping centre, Rue Neuve; metro Rogier; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Fri) Tickets for classical and contemporary events can be booked and bought here.

Cinemas

Film buffs will find Brussels a big draw, with everything from small art-house cinemas to multiplexes and even a Cinema Museum and drive-in (see below). Tickets range from €1 to €8. Some films are dubbed so to avoid watching your favourite actor lip-synching in French, check the coding on publicity boards or newspaper listings: 'VO' (original version), 'V fr' (French version), 'V angl' (English version) and 'st' (subtitles, called *sous-titrés* in French, *ondertiteld* in Flemish).

Actor's Studio (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 16 96; Petite Rue des Bouchers 16; prémetro Bourse; adult/child €6/5) Three-screen cinema with a handy location near the Grand Place. Intimate vibes, tiny bar and mixed programme of art-house flicks and mainstream reruns.

Arenberg Galeries (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 80 63; www.arenberg.be in Flemish & French; Galerie de la Reine 26; metro Gare Centrale) Remodelled Art Deco cinema located inside Galeries St Hubert. Foreign and

art films are the staples, and once a month there's a sneak preview. The latter is designed to gauge the audience's reaction to new films – viewers have no idea what's on offer and must rate it at the end. You can be lucky to score a hit although a lot are art-house films that will never see the light of day.

Kinepolis (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 474 26 00; Blvd du Centenaire 1; metro Heysel; adult/concession/child €8/7/6; 🕒) The multiplex that started the multiplexes rolling around the world. Some 24 screens (plus an IMAX theatre) with a capacity to seat 7000. Three auditoriums have wheelchair access.

Musée du Cinéma (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 507 83 70; Rue Baron Horta 9; metro Gare Centrale; admission €2.50; 🕒 from 5pm) One to make cinema buffs swoon. Two auditoria: silent movies with live piano accompaniment are screened in one every night of the year; the other is devoted to classic talkies shown in their original language. Up to seven films per night are screened, and it's worth arriving early to browse the museum's old projectors and cinema memorabilia. This all happens in a side wing of Bozar, however it's expected to be closed until late 2007 for extensive renovations. On reopening, check the *Bulletin* for nightly screenings.

Studio 5 (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 641 10 20; Place Ste Croix; tram 81; adult/under 26/child €6/4.20/3) Relatively new cinema and a hit with Brussels' movie-loving public. Part of the restored Flagey building near the Ixelles ponds, it has one auditorium with three screenings per night (last at 10.30pm) and a bimonthly programme based either on theme or director.

Styx (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 21 02; Rue de l'Arbre Bénit 72; bus 54 or 71; admission €5) The façade forewarns that it's seen better days but this tiny two-screen Ixelles cinema is still a fab spot to catch repeats, with midnight sessions on Friday and Saturday in summer.

UGC De Brouckère (Map p74; ☎ 0900 10 440; Place de Brouckère 38; metro De Brouckère; adult/child €7.90/6) This 12-screen multiplex opposite the swish Hôtel Métropole is the capital's *grande dame* – sip on a beer and relax in armchairs while watching the latest Hollywood offerings.

Pathé Palace (Map p74; Blvd Anspach 85; metro Bourse) Belgium's best-known movie directors, the Dardenne brothers (see p38), plan to reopen this old downtown cinema as a new art-house venue. Brussels International (p69) will know if it's up and running.

DANCE

Brussels boasts an impressive array of innovative dance companies and wonderful venues, such as La Monnaie (p110), Bozar (p110) and Théâtre Les Tanneurs (p112). Oddly enough, there's no classical ballet here – for that you'll have to go to Antwerp (p195).

The queen of Brussels' scene is Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, director of **Rosas** (www.rosas.be). This Flemish dance company strikes a winning balance between the traditional and the avant-garde. De Keersmaeker also launched **PARTS** (Performing Arts Research & Training Studios;

The other big name in the world of Belgian dance is **Charleroi/Danses** (p226). Performances are held at the company's home town of Charleroi, but also at its second home, **Raffinerie** (☎ 02 410 33 41; Rue de Manchester 21), in Molenbeek.

Others on the dance scene include the raw **Ultima Vez** (www.ultimavez.com), a company directed by controversial Wim Vandekeybus and big on stark, confrontational images, and **Michèle Noiret**, resident choreographer at Théâtre Les Tanneurs (p112), a tiny, much-loved theatre in the Marolles.

Live Music

ROCK

Ancienne Belgique (AB; Map p74; ☎ 02 548 24 00; www.abconcerts.be; Blvd Anspach 110; prémetro Bourse) AB is an excellent venue in the heart of the city. Its two auditoriums accommodate international and home-grown bands; one in two concerts here is Belgian.

Beursschouwburg (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 82 90; www.beursschouwburg.be in Flemish & French; Rue Auguste Orts 22; prémetro Bourse) This essential part of Brussels' live music scene is back after a few years of renovations. It showcases a diverse mix of contemporary music including rock, jazz, rap and disco.

Forest National (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 340 22 11; www.forestnational.be in Flemish & French; Ave du Globe 36; tram 81) The city's temple for large international gigs and local favourites.

Also see **Le Botanique** (p88) and **Halles de Schaerbeek** (p88).

JAZZ & BLUES

L'Archiduc (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 06 52; Rue Antoine Dansaert 6; prémetro Bourse; 🕒 4pm-late) Exclusive Art Deco bar built in the 1930s and located on one of the city's hippest streets. Once for those in-

the-know but now well and truly known. Saturday's concerts feature local line-ups (admission free) and Sundays bring in international talent (admission around €10).

The Music Village (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 13 45; Rue des Pierres 50; prémetro Bourse; 🕒 from 7.30pm Wed-Sat) Brussels' most polished jazz venue is housed in two 17th-century buildings a few streets back from the Grand Place. Theoretically it's members-only (annual membership €10), but nonmembers can enter by adding €2 to the nightly cover charge (€7.50 to €24). Wine and dine from 7.30pm, with concerts beginning at 8.30pm. The musos are squeezed onto a small podium that's visible from everywhere. Bookings are wise.

Sounds Jazz Club (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 92 50; Rue de la Tulipe 28; bus 54; admission free-€15; 🕒 8pm-4am Mon-Sat) Unassuming but immensely popular Ixelles venue with a small podium out back where local or visiting musicians play modern, big band or salsa six nights a week. You can grab a meal preconcert; acts start around 10pm.

Bizon (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 46 99; Rue du Pont de la Carpe 7; admission free; 🕒 6pm-late) Happening little grunge bar in St Géry where home-grown blues are belted out.

MOVIES UNDER THE ARCADE

With drive-in theatres a thing of the past, Brussels has re-invented the genre in the magnificent setting of **Arcade du Cinquantenaire** (p86) at Parc du Cinquantenaire. These highly successful summer-only drive-in screenings (all films in their original versions, with French and Flemish subtitles) are at 10.30pm (July) and 10pm (August) on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Tune your car's radio to 97.7 Mhz or, for those without wheels, pull up a chair and don headphones (included in entry price). Tickets are cheap – €15 per car or €1 for pedestrians.

REVOLUTIONARY PERFORMANCE

An opera performance at the La Monnaie in Brussels on 25 August 1830 started a revolution. That night marked the Brussels premiere of a new opera, *La Mouette de Portici* (The Dumb Girl of Portici), by French composer Daniel-François-Esprit Auber. The story, which centres on a 1647 Naples uprising against the Spanish, features large crowd scenes and dramatic effects.

But the opera was nothing compared with the encore that followed on Brussels' streets. Patriotic cries such as 'Far better to die than to live a wretched life in slavery and shame!' and 'Away with the yoke before which we tremble, away with the foreigner who laughs at our torment!' incited an instant rebellion, with the mainly bourgeois audience pouring into the streets to join workers already demonstrating outside the theatre against their Dutch rulers.

Together they stormed the Palais de Justice, chased out the Dutch troops and in a glorious crowning moment raised the flag of Brabant over Brussels' Hôtel de Ville (City Hall).

Belgian independence was recognised at the Conference of London in January 1831 and Léopold of Saxe-Coburg Gotha became Belgium's first king.

OPERA & CLASSICAL

Classical music buffs will find Brussels offers high quality and ample choice – check the *Bulletin's* 'What's On' supplement.

Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie/Koninklijke Munt-schouwburg (Map p74; ☎ 02 229 13 72; Place de la Monnaie; metro De Brouckère) Brussels' premier venue, better known as La Monnaie to French-speakers or De Munt to the Flemish. The revolution of 1830 was sparked during an opera performance here (see boxed text, above). Contemporary dance (see p109) and opera are the draws, the latter having an eclectic programme of classic remakes and modern productions. The season runs from September to June. To find out what's on, pick up the free quarterly *La Monnaie/De Munt Magazine*.

Bozar (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 507 82 15, bookings 02 507 82 00; Rue Ravenstein 23; metro Gare Centrale) Celebrated classical-music venue, recently given this snappy name after years as the Palais des Beaux Arts. Designed by Horta, it opened in 1928 and is home not only to the National Orchestra but also to the Philharmonic Society, which organises much of the capital's classical-music programme. The Henri Le Boeuf *salle* (hall) is considered to be one of the five best in the world for acoustic quality. Pick up the monthly *Bozar Magazine* to find out what's on.

Conservatoire Royal de Musique (Royal Music Conservatory; Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 04 27; Rue de la Régence 30; metro Louise) The city's other major classical music venue, although it's smaller than Bozar and hosts a more modest programme.

The **Concours Musical International Reine Élisabeth de Belgique** is one of the year's musical highlights – see p96 for details.

Many smaller venues worth noting:

Cathédrale des Sts Michel & Gudule (p81)

Cirque Royal (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 218 20 15; www.cirque-royal.org in Flemish & French; Rue de l'Enseignement 81; metro Madou) Converted indoor circus is now a venue for dance, operetta and classical and contemporary music.

Église de St Jean et St Étienne aux Minimes (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 93 84; Rue des Minimes 62; bus 27) Baroque church below the Palais de Justice is an immensely popular venue with a sizable programme.

Flagey (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 641 10 10; www.flagey.be; Place Flagey; tram 81) Ixelles' flagship has several concerts halls, including the large Studio 4.

Maison La Bellone (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 33 33; www.bellone.be in French; Rue de Flandre 46; metro Ste Catherine) The glass-vaulted courtyard of this 18th-century stunner is used for occasional concerts.

Théâtre du Vaudeville (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 57 45; Galerie de la Reine 13-15; metro Gare Centrale) This venue, inside Galeries St Hubert, is used for everything from cabarets to concerts.

Nightclubs

Brussels boasts that it invented European techno, and it's all largely thanks to one DJ and his Marolles club, Fuse (opposite). But club culture also goes way beyond the capital's leafy borders. Antwerp, Ghent, Liège and even little Lier are all within reach, so clubbing does not mean holing up in the capital. Look out for flyers posted around town or check out what's on at music shops like **Dr Vinyl** (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 73 44; Rue de la Grande Île 1; ☎ noon-7pm Mon, Tue, Fri & Sat, noon-8pm Wed & Thu) or **Caroline Music** (p108). Online there's www.noctis.be (in French; funk, electro, house and clubs) or www.netevents.be (in Flemish and French; nightlife information).

Fuse (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 97 89; www.fuse.be; Rue Blaes 208; metro Porte de Hal; admission €3-12; ☎ 11pm-7am Sat) The Marolles club that put Brussels firmly on the international circuit. It has been attracting international DJs for well over a decade and is still going strong. The man, DJ Pierre, still spins here. On any given Saturday night, Fuse crams up to 2000 movers onto its two dance floors for house and deep-house mixes. Once a month it also hosts La Démeince (p97).

Recyclart (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 502 57 34; www.recyclart.be; Gare de la Chapelle, Rue des Ursulines 25; prémetro Anneessens; admission free-€8) Located in the Marolles' disused Chapelle train station, Recyclart is an urban regeneration project based around club nights, a daytime *café* and workshops for unemployed youth. Club nights are listed on the website, and you can be sure what you'll hear is cutting edge. This is where Brussels' newest DJ talent is born, and the line-up is invariably inventive.

Beursschouwburg Café (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 82 90; www.beursschouwburg.be; Rue Auguste Orts 20-28; prémetro Bourse; admission free; ☎ 7.30pm-late Thu-Sun) Brussels' Flemish youth love the big bold bar at their newly renovated theatre/concert hall. While not strictly speaking a club, by the wee small hours when everyone's moving it serves the same purpose, and is handily located smack in the centre of town.

Dirty Dancing@Mirano (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 227 39 48; www.dirtydancing.be; Chaussée de Louvain; metro Madou; before midnight €5, midnight-4am €10; ☎ 10.30pm-6am Sat) Brussels' hottest new club has captured the hearts of many. Dress up to gain entry to the Mirano Continental and get set for a night of almost anything – pop, electro, house and even live rock at midnight.

Bazaar (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 511 26 00; Rue des Capucins 63; metro Porte de Hal; admission €8; ☎ 7.30pm-late Thu-Sat) Once you've eaten your fill in the extravagant upstairs restaurant, head to the basement club to catch rock, funk, soul and a little disco fever. The music won't necessarily set your feet or your imagination on fire, but you'll bump into plenty of other foreigners.

Sport

International attention rarely focuses on Brussels with its limited number of quality sporting venues. The national stadium, **Stade Roi Baudouin** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 479 36 54; Ave de Marathon 135; metro Heyssel) in Heyssel, is the main host, attracting cycling races, athletics meetings

and football matches. Brussels' most famous football team, RSC Anderlecht, plays at **Van den Stock Stadium** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 522 15 39; Ave Théo Verbeeck 2; metro St Guido) in Anderlecht. For more information on football, see p32. For details about cycling events, see p30.

The Ivo Van Damme Memorial (p97) and Brussels 20km Run (see p96) are two of the capital's biggest athletic events.

For details on sporting activities, see the Activities section (p90).

Theatre

Brussels' bilingual status means theatre gets divided along language lines. Both the Flemish and French theatrical communities have operated somewhat in limbo in recent times, awaiting the opening of sparkling new venues that promise to boost the local scene. Most local productions are in French or Flemish; however, touring international productions supplement the scene for English-speaking audiences. The season runs from September to June.

Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 210 11 12; www.kvs.be; Rue de Laeken 146; metro Yser) The Royal Flemish Theatre is better known by its acronym, KVS. The 2006 season saw it back in business in its beautifully restored neo-Renaissance building after five years in an old bottle factory. The theatre's original façade has been retained, but inside it's completely custom-made and, in bold Flemish style, it's captivating and confident. The KVS' new programming promises challenging, edge-of-your-seat theatre and dance, with the possibility of occasional English-language productions.

Théâtre National (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 203 41 55; www.theatrenational.be in French; Blvd Émile Jacqmain 111-115; metro Rogier) The French-speaking community's flashy new showpiece is a modern glass affair. For the last couple of years, the company played in a converted downtown cinema complex but it has wooed its loyal audience to its new home here at the northern end of town.

Théâtre Royal de Toone (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 71 37; www.toone.be; Petite Rue des Bouchers 21; metro Gare Centrale; €10; ☎ 8.30pm Thu-Sat) Whether you understand Bruxellois dialect or not, don't miss a performance at this famous marionette theatre. Eight generations of the Toone family have been staging puppet productions of works such as *The Three Musketeers*, *Faust* and *Hamlet* here for well over a century. The plays are mainly staged for adults, although children

enjoy the puppets and sets. Programmes are available from the *café* at the theatre.

Other theatres:

Kaaitheater (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 201 59 59; www.kaaitheater.be; Square Saintelette 20; metro Yser) Bastion of Flemish avant-garde theatre.

Théâtre Les Tanneurs (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 17 84; www.lestanneurs.be in French; Rue des Tanneurs 75; metro Porte de Hal) Marolles theatre known for its dynamic dance and drama.

SHOPPING

Brussels is home to Europe's first shopping arcade, the grand Galeries St Hubert (see boxed text, below). This gallery ensured the locals' early indoctrination into the art of shopping, and their love affair with browsing arm-in-arm past boutiques and tailored stores has not waned.

GREAT GALERIES

The **Galeries St Hubert** (Map p74; Rue du Marché aux Herbes; metro Gare Centrale), just one block from the Grand Place, is the *grande dame* of Brussels' many shopping galleries. This gorgeous arcade was a European first, opened in 1847 in a gala event by King Léopold I, and immediately a draw for the fashionable elite. At the time it housed not only fancy shops and glistening window displays, but also *cafés*, restaurants and entertainment venues – much the same as today. It comprises three connecting sections: Galerie du Roi, Galerie de la Reine and the smaller Galerie des Princes at the side. The arcades contain an eclectic mix of fashion, chocolate, book and music shops, as well as a cinema, theatre, restaurants and *cafés*. They're all wrapped up in a fine neoclassical setting – the vaulted glass roof allows the light to pour in while marble columns, statues and gleaming ironwork add the embellishments.

Such was the success that other galleries soon followed. JP Cluysenaer, St Hubert's designer, went to work on **Galerie Bortier** (Map p74; Rue de la Madeleine; metro Gare Centrale). It opened in 1848 and, although much smaller and less flamboyant than the original, it follows a similar style and is well worth a look, particularly if you're into secondhand books. The cavernous but rundown **Galerie Ravenstein** (Map pp72-3; Rue Ravenstein; metro Gare Centrale) connects Gare Centrale with the Upper Town. **Passage du Nord** (Map p74; Rue Neuve; metro De Brouckère) is another glass-vaulted affair, connecting the Lower Town's brash shopping thoroughfare, Rue Neuve, to Place de Brouckère.

It wasn't long before *galeries* reached the Upper Town, where **Galeries Louise** (Map pp76-7; Ave Louise; metro Louise) and **Galeries de la Toison d'Or** (Map pp76-7; Ave de la Toison d'Or; metro Porte de Namur) still beckon with clothing and jewellery shops, though architectural splendour is non-existent in these two networks.

The most interesting of the Upper Town arcades is the tiny **Galerie d'Ixelles** (Map pp76-7; Chaussée d'Ixelles; metro Porte de Namur) and its continuation, **Galerie de la Porte de Namur** (Map pp76-7). Although not far from Ave Louise, these two galleries are culturally a world away, located in the Matonge quarter, home to Brussels' Congolese community. Mainstays here include pint-sized shops selling African cloth, Kinshasa's latest CD imports and hairdressing salons with names like 'Dream Hair' or 'The New Image of Black Men'. To explore this scene further, head along Chaussée de Wavre where shops such as **Exotic Food** (Map pp76-7; Chaussée de Wavre 27; metro Porte de Namur) specialise in produce like Ngolo catfish from Guinea, little packages of leaf-wrapped cassava from Cameroon and even dried caterpillars. If you're into trying an African beer, stop off at **Gambela** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 502 00 14; Rue Longue Vie 7; metro Porte de Namur; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Sat), a local produce store where Primus, Tembo and Doppel beers line the shelves.

The capital has long been a centre for commerce and trade. The medieval guilds set up shop in their elaborate houses on the Grand Place from where they controlled the trades and crafts. Brussels' river, the Senne, once brought trade to the city, though this ended abruptly in 1870 when the river was covered over. Until then, fishing boats moored in the heart of Ste Catherine and a daily fish market took over what is now the concrete area around the Ste Catherine metro station.

Brussels divides quite neatly into shopping districts. The Grand Place and streets shooting off from it are lined with tourist shops hawking chocolate, beer, lace and EU merchandise. Go to Galeries St Hubert if you're after the same sort of items but sold in a setting of complete grandeur. The Place St Géry quarter, in particular Rue Antoine Dansaert, is the nerve

centre of design and urban cool – most of the city's avant-garde fashion shops are located here. The Sablon and the Marolles are for antiques and flea markets. Meanwhile, the Upper Town is home to Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton and home-grown designers, all lined up along either Ave Louise or Blvd de Waterloo.

Markets are a great way to discover the city and shop at the same time. Some 30 operate; we've highlighted the best.

Antiques

The Sablon (Map pp76-7) is the area for antiques, followed by the Marolles. The Sablon's many private galleries resemble miniature museums, with ancient artefacts from around the world as well as contemporary art. Start with the chic shops on Place du Grand Sablon (site of a weekly antique market – see p115), then follow your nose along Rue des Minimes and surrounding streets like Rue Charles Hanssens and Rue Watteu before descending (price tags drop accordingly) to the Marolles and the mix of retro/antiques/clothing shops that line Rue Haute and Rue Blaes. An antique bargain or two may also be possible among the jumble of stalls on Place du Jeu-de-Balle (see p115).

Beer

Beermania (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 17 88; www.beermania.be; Chaussée de Wavre 174; bus 95 or 96; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat Jan-Nov, daily Dec) Belgium's first specialist beer shop, now complete with a tasting *café*, is a great first or last stop. With some 400 brews to behold, it's an ideal place to get acquainted with key players and rare nectars. There's no menu or price list – just wander around and point to the one(s) you want. Most 330/250mL bottles cost €3/2.50. The exception is, of course, Westvleteren (p47) – if it's in stock, you'll be looking at a way overpriced €12. Before leaving Brussels, arrange a door-to-door delivery of your favourite brews to your home address, or buy a few bottles to plug up gaps in your suitcase. The shop also holds occasional beer-appreciation sessions.

De Biertempel (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 19 06; Rue du Marché aux Herbes 56; prémetro Bourse; ☎ 9.30am-7pm) Handy location and stocks 550 Belgian brews plus matching glasses and all manner of beer paraphernalia.

Biscuits

Dandoy (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 03 26; Rue au Beurre 31; metro Bourse) Belgium's spicy *speculaas* biscuits are

sold en masse from this exquisite little shop close to the Grand Place. *Pain à la grecque*, long loaves loaded with sugar nuggets, are another house speciality. It's worth a look for the window display alone.

Chocolate

Corné Port Royal (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 43 14; Rue de la Madeleine 9; metro Gare Centrale; ☎ 10am-8pm) First chocolate shop en route from Gare Centrale to the Grand Place and recommended if you can't hang out a minute longer. Friendly service, well priced (€35 per kg) and higher quality than bulk handlers such as Leonidas.

Galler (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 02 66; Rue au Beurre 44; ☎ 10am-9.30pm) A step up from chain shops such as Godiva and Neuhaus and the one to choose if orange livery is your thing. A reputation for innovative flavours and a handy location just off the Grand Place.

Mary's (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 217 45 00; Rue Royale 73; tram 92, 93 or 94; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) In some chocolate circles, it gets no better than this. Scrumptious pralines (filled chocolates) are sold from one exclusive boutique in the royal quarter of town. Supplies Belgium's royals, and George W has indulged here too.

Neuhaus (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 63 59; Galerie de la Reine 25; metro Gare Centrale) Stunning shop with stained-glass windows and sumptuous displays. Established in 1857 and is now a reasonably priced, national chain.

Pierre Marcolini (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 514 12 06; Place du Grand Sablon 39; tram 92, 93 or 04) Belgium's most expensive pralines (€58 per kg) are made by this relative newcomer to the chocolate scene. In the past few years Marcolini has taken the country, and major cities worldwide, by storm. He also broke the *ballotin* (praline box) mould, instead using low, flat chocolate boxes designed by Delvaux (of national handbag fame).

Planète Chocolat (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 07 55; Rue du Lombard 24; prémetro Bourse) Frank Duval is the force behind this innovative chocolate shop and tearoom where both the moulds and the chocolates are made on site. If you're after unusual shapes, head here. The tearoom, two doors along, does wicked hot chocolate drinks as well as a praline-making demonstration at 4pm each Saturday.

Wittamer (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 37 42; Place du Grand Sablon 6; tram 92, 93 or 94) Another fabulous Sablon address. Sister establishment to the nearby posh pâtisserie, and long-time maker of excellent pralines.

Comic Books

Boutique Tintin (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 51 52; Rue de la Colline 13; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Stocks every Tintin comic you've ever wanted and more.

Brïsel (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 35 52; Blvd Anspach 100; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-6.30pm Sun) Chic comic-book shop named after a book by one of Belgium's best-known contemporary comic artists, François Schuiten. Comics with English translations available.

Also recommended:

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (p80) Comic specialist.

La Maison de la BD (Map p74; ☎ 02 502 94 68; Blvd de l'Impératrice 1; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) Comic specialist.

Fashion

Annemie Verbeke (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 21 71; Rue Antoine Dansaert 64; premetro Bourse) Ypres-born designer with no formal training who has managed to juggle motherhood with a highly successful career designing women's clothing. Recently opened a new store in Antwerp, and is sold throughout Europe and in the US and Japan.

Kaat Tilley (Map p74; ☎ 02 514 07 63; Galerie du Roi 4; metro Gare Centrale) Women's wear – everyday, formal and bridal – and children's communion outfits are the staples of this Mechelen-born designer, with a flagship store in Paris. Located in Galeries St Hubert.

Idiz Bogam (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 10 32; Rue Antoine Dansaert 76; premetro Bourse) Cavernous store specialising in retro, vintage and global second-hand gear. Big on furs, hats and sequins, and with an unbeatable assortment of shoes.

Marina Yee (Map p74; ☎ 0496 33 58 70; Marché aux Porcs 3; metro Ste Catherine) New shop by the least known of the Antwerp Six (p197). Look for wisteria cladding at the revamped northern end of Ste Catherine.

Martin Margiela (Map p74; ☎ 02 223 75 20; Rue de Flandre 114; metro Ste Catherine) Belgian fashion icon and the unofficial seventh member of the Antwerp Six, Paris-based Margiela opened this whitewashed corner shop in Ste Catherine a few years ago. The little building is unmarked but easily recognised; ring the doorbell to gain entry. Collections include men's and women's clothes and accessories.

Nicolas Woit (Map p74; ☎ 02 503 48 32; Rue Antoine Dansaert 80; premetro Bourse) Woit opened here a decade ago and has flourished ever since. His trademark is handmade women's clothes using new and secondhand materials – retro fabrics and contemporary accessories.

Olivier Strelli (Upper Town (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 56 07; Ave Louise 72; metro Louise); Lower Town (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 09 42; Rue Antoine Dansaert 44; premetro Bourse) Known throughout the world for his men's and women's collections, Strelli is Belgium's most successful fashion label. Born in the Congo, he's a Jewish Belgian of Italian and Turkish roots who has been in the business for more than three decades. The Ave Louise boutique is his headquarters.

Stijl (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 03 13; Rue Antoine Dansaert 74; premetro Bourse) Home to top Belgian designers, including some of the Antwerp Six, it was this boutique that lead the pack into Rue Dansaert back in the mid '80s when the area was forlorn and forgotten. All the most up-to-the-minute designers are represented here including Xavier Delcour and Olivier Theyskens.

Other recommendations:

Boutique 114 (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 512 40 27; Rue de Stassart 114; metro Louise) Just off Ave Louise; handles designer cast-offs.

Delvaux (Map p74; ☎ 02 512 71 98; Galerie de la Reine 31; metro Gare Centrale) Delvaux is a household name in leather handbags and accessories in Belgium. Located in Galeries St Hubert.

DoD (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 219 80 42; Chaussée de Louvain 16; metro Madou) Designer fashions (mainly French) at dirt cheap prices is the motto of this series of warehouse-like stores that occupy much of this street – Dod Men is here at No 16, with women, junior, shoes etc just down the road.

Inno Lower Town (Map p74; ☎ 02 211 21 11; Rue Neuve 111; metro Rogier); Upper Town (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 513 84 94; Ave Louise 12; metro Louise) Belgium's only home-grown department store.

Les Enfants d'Édouard (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 640 42 45; Ave Louise 175; tram 93 or 94) Swish boutique for men's and women's designer hand-me-downs and end-of-line stocks.

Lace

Manufacture Belge de Dentelles (Map p74; ☎ 02 511 44 77; Galerie de la Reine 6-8; metro Gare Centrale) Brussels' oldest lace shop – now located inside Galeries St Hubert but in existence since 1810. An excellent stock of antique lace and a staff with a love affair for true lace. Also see boxed text, p138.

Markets

Gare du Midi (Map pp76-7; metro Gare du Midi; ☎ 6am-1pm Sun) Brussels' biggest general market is held next to the railway lines and has a distinctly North African and Mediterranean feel. Bulbous cheeses, strings of sausages and vendors announcing their wares are all part of it. A rich and colourful affair.

Place du Jeu-de-Balle flea market (Map pp76-7; Place du Jeu-de-Balle; metro Porte de Hal, premetro Lemonnier; ☎ 7am-2pm) The Marolles' famous secondhand market has been running almost every day since 1919. It's best at weekends (although prices are higher then). Genuine antiques are few but there's some great junk. Hagglng is expected.

Other recommendations:

Grand Place (Map p74; metro Gare Centrale; ☎ mornings Mon, Wed & Fri) Small flower market.

Place du Grand Sablon (Map pp76-7; tram 92, 93 or 94; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun; tram 92, 93 or 94) Weekly antique market.

Place Jourdan (Map p86; metro Schuman; ☎ 7am-2pm Sun) Food and clothes at this little suburban market.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Brussels National Airport (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 753 42 21, flight information 0900 70 000; www.brusselsairport.be; Zaventem), in times past referred to as Zaventem airport, is 14km northeast of Brussels. The compact terminal's Promenade floor (Level 4) includes shops and a cafeteria with a view of the runways. Level 3 is the departures hall,

where you'll find an information desk and free airport maps. The arrivals hall is on Level 2. Facilities here include a post office, ATM, car-rental agencies and tourist information counters. On the next floor down is the bus terminus (Level 0) and luggage storage lockers. The train station is on the lowest floor (Level -1). For airlines servicing Brussels, see p314. For details on getting to/from the airport, see p116.

Bus

Eurolines (Map pp72-3; ☎ 02 274 13 50; www.eurolines.be; Rue du Progrès 80; metro Gare du Nord) has its office at Gare du Nord, and most buses depart from here (though some also stop at Ave Fonsny near Gare du Midi; Map pp76-7). For more information on Eurolines services, see p317.

Destinations from Brussels include Amsterdam (one-way/return €18/30, 3¼ hours, six daily), Frankfurt (€34/55, 5¼ hours, one daily), London (€38/60, 8½ hours, six daily) and Paris (€25/40, 3¼ hours, nine daily).

Car & Motorcycle

Major car-rental companies have downtown premises, as well as offices at Gare du Midi and Brussels National Airport. Rentals from both the airport and Gare du Midi cost considerably more due to additional taxes.

Avis (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 537 12 80; Rue Américaine 145)

Baele & Schmitz (Map pp70-1; ☎ 02 762 60 27; Chaussée de Louvain) Rents 600cc motorbikes (€75/450 per day/week). Hefty deposits are required.

Budget (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 646 51 30; Ave Louise 327b)

Hertz (Map p74; ☎ 02 513 28 86; Blvd Maurice Lemonnier 8)

Train

Brussels' three main train stations are **Gare du Midi** (Map pp76-7; South Station), **Gare Centrale** (Map p74; Central Station), and **Gare du Nord** (Map pp72-3; North Station).

Gare du Midi is the main station for international connections: the Eurostar and Thalys fast trains stop here only. Most other international trains stop at both Gare du Nord and Gare du Midi, and some also stop at Gare Centrale. There are information offices at all three stations, open early morning to late evening. For all international and national inquiries call ☎ 02 555 25 55.

For information on train services between Belgium and neighbouring countries, including Eurostar and Thalys trains, see p316.

FASHION RIVAL

Antwerp may be the Belgian capital of avant-garde, but Brussels is closing the gap. With boutiques popping up everywhere and young designers from Brussels' fashion school, La Cambre, making it big in the last decade, the city is determined to come out of the big A's shadow. Brussels nominated 2006 as its Year of Fashion and Design, and it has established Modo Bruxellae (www.modobruuxellae.be), the capital's fashion champion. Modo is behind the Designers' Trail, a biennial fashion event (even years) which sees fashion shows, boutiques and animations taking over the capital's designer heartland, the Rue Antoine Dansaert quarter, for a weekend in late October.

New names to look out for amongst the city's creative talent are Olivier Theyskens (who designs for Rochas), Laetitia Crahay (Chanel and Delvaux) and José Enrique Ona Selfa (Loewe). Former La Cambre student, Xavier Delcour, has his own label – his designs are available at Stijl (above).

Brussels is well connected with other Belgian cities and Luxembourg City. Examples of connections include the following (prices are one-way second-class fares):

Destination	Fare (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency (per hr)
Antwerp	6	35	2
Bruges	11.80	60	2
Brussels National Airport	2.60	15	4
Charleroi	7.80	60	2
Ghent	7.40	40	2
Hasselt	10.70	75	2
Jemelle	14.10	100	1
Kortrijk	10.70	60	2
Leuven	4.30	20	1
Liège	12.40	65	2
Luxembourg City	28.60	180	1
Mechelen	3.70	15	2
Mons	7.80	45	2
Namur	7.40	60	2
Nivelles	4.70	40	1
Ostend	14.10	75	1
Tournai	10.70	60	2
Villers-la-Ville	5	60	1
Ypres	14.60	90	2

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The **Airport City Express** (☎ 02 528 28 28; one-way €2.80; 🕒 5.30am-12.20am) train runs between Brussels National Airport and the city's three main train stations (Gare du Nord, Gare Centrale and Gare du Midi). It runs every 15 minutes and the trip takes 15 to 25 minutes (depending on your station).

A taxi between the airport and central Brussels costs around €30. Taxis wait outside the airport arrivals hall. Official taxis have a yellow and blue plaque near the numberplate.

Bicycle

Cycling in central Brussels is not for the faint-hearted: intolerant drivers, slippery cobblestones and tram tracks are all potential hazards. That said, there are some bike lanes (usually painted red and marked with white lines) and paths (separated from the traffic), but these are mostly on the outskirts of town where there's a bit more room. Closer to town, the busy EU thoroughfare Rue de la Loi now has a dedicated cycle lane.

For bike hire contact ProVélo's **La Maison des Cyclistes** (Map pp76-7; ☎ 02 502 73 55; www.provelo.be; Rue de Londres 15; metro Porte de Namur; per hr/half-day/full day/weekend/week €4/11/13/24/72; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, also Sat Apr-Oct). Children's bikes and child seats are available, and they also run guided bike tours (April to October).

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in Brussels has its thrills – see boxed text, p323. The slightest hiccup on either ring road brings traffic to a halt, and Friday afternoons are notoriously congested. For information on road rules, see p322.

Parking poses the usual problems. Signs saying *betalend parkeren/stationnement payant* mean that it's paid street parking (usually 9am to 7pm Monday to Saturday).

Two central car parks:

Inno Parking (Map p74; Rue du Damier)

Parking 58 (Map p74; Rue de l'Évêque) Check out the great view from the 10th floor.

Public Transport

Brussels' efficient public transport system is operated by **Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles** (STIB in French, MIVB in Flemish) Main kiosk (Map p74; ☎ 02 515 20 00; Rue de l'Évêque 2; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat); Branch kiosk (Map pp76-7; Gare du Midi; 🕒 7.30-5.30 Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun). Metro, trams, *premetro* (trams that go underground for part of their journey) and buses make up the network. Public transport runs from about 6am to midnight, after which a nightbus network operates.

TICKETS & PASSES

Tickets are valid for one hour and are sold at metro stations, STIB/MIVB kiosks, newsagents and on buses and trams. The pricing system is simple – a single-journey ticket costs €1.50, five-/10-journey tickets cost €6.50/10.50 and a one-day pass for unlimited travel is €4. Children under six travel for free.

Tickets must be validated before travel in machines located at the entrance to metro platforms or inside buses and trams. Tickets without validation (random checks are made) incur fines of €55.

The city tourist office, Brussels International (p69), sells one-day passes as well as the Brussels Card.

METRO

Brussels' metro system opened in 1965. Metro stations are marked by signs with a white 'M'

on a blue background. There are three lines: Line 1A goes from Roi Baudouin station to Herrmann-Debroux; Line 1B runs from Erasme to Stockel; and Line 2 is a loop that joins Simonis with Delacroix, basically following the Petit Ring. There's a train roughly every 10 or 15 minutes.

Keep an eye out for artworks while in the metro and premetro stations. The following are highlights:

Bourse (Map p74) Paul Delvaux' *Nos vieux trams bruxellois* depicts old trams in the capital.

Horta (Map pp76-7) Relics from Horta's Maison du Peuple have been integrated into the station's foyer.

Porte de Hal (Map pp76-7) Comic-strip artist François Schuiten's wall compositions entitled *Le Passage Inconnu* (The Unknown Passage) merge old trams and futuristic vehicles in scenes mirrored in his best cartoons.

Stockel (Map pp70-1) Walls adorned with life-sized paintings of Tintin and pals.

TRAM, PREMETRO & BUS

There's no central transport hub for buses or trams which means working out where to jump on is akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Also, make sure you know in which direction you're heading. Many bus (and tram) routes start at one side of the city and finish on the other, it's possible to be on the right-numbered bus (or tram) but travelling in the wrong direction. Pick up the STIB/MIVB's free transport map to help find your way around.

Tram and bus stops have red-and-white signs. *Premetro* trams run mainly between Gare du Nord and Gare du Midi, travelling underneath the ruler-straight boulevard known consecutively as Adolphe Max/Ans-pach/Maurice Lemonnier.

Brussels' nightbus network expanded in 2007, with 20 nightbus lines now operating around the capital on Friday and Saturday nights until 3am. Most lines depart from Place de Brouckère, and single tickets cost €3.

Taxi

Taxis are metered, and cabbies have a reputation for aggressive driving and argumentative behaviour. Taxes and tips are officially included in the meter price so you should ignore requests for extra service charges.

Fares are calculated starting with a basic day/night rate of €2.40/4.30, plus €1.15/1.30 per kilometre within/outside the Brussels region. The waiting rate is €22 per hour. You'll

find taxis near all three central train stations as well as outside Hôtel Amigo (Map p74), near the Grand Place (Map p74) and at Place Stéphanie (Map pp76-7) on Ave Louise. Alternatively, call **Taxis Bleus** (☎ 02 268 00 00) or **Taxis Verts** (☎ 02 349 49 49).

AROUND BRUSSELS

Just out of Brussels in the province of Brabant-Wallon are Waterloo (see p224), Nivelles (see p223) and Villers-la-Ville (see p225), all ideal day-trip destinations. For information on the Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika at Tervuren, see p94.

FORÊT DE SOIGNES

This forest (Map pp70-1) southeast of Brussels is the largest patch of green in the capital's vicinity. It was originally part of a much greater oak forest that was progressively cut down during the 16th and 17th centuries. The oldest trees here today are beech, planted in the 18th century under the Austrian rulers.

The park is one of Belgium's most important state-owned forests and is home to wild boar and deer. It is popular throughout the year but particularly so in summer when the old trams operated by Brussels' Musée du Transport Urbain trundle through. The park includes two arboreta – Tervuren and Groenendaal – as well as the **Jean Massart Experimental Garden** (Map pp70-1) and the **Rouge Cloître** (Map pp70-1), a 14th-century abbey. A series of good **playgrounds** (Map pp70-1) are located near the latter.

There are various public transport options to the forest, depending on which part you wish to access. If you just want to get to any patch of green, take bus 95 from the **Bourse** (Map p74) in central Brussels.

NATIONALE PLANTENTUIN VAN BELGIË

Belgium's **National Botanic Garden** (☎ 02 260 09 20; www.botanicgarden.be; Domaine van Boechout, Meise; adult/concession €4/3; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar) is a 93-hectare park located in the village of Meise, 12km north of downtown Brussels. It's based around two lakes and the Kasteel van Boechout (Boechout Castle), which Léopold II gave to his sister, Princess Charlotte, after her castle at Tervuren burnt down in 1879.

The park boasts 18,000 plant species including orchids, carnivorous plants and the famous giant Amazonian water lilies. They are housed in the spectacular Plantenpaleis (Plant Palace), a series of 13 connecting greenhouses built in 1966.

Other highlights are the outdoor medicinal garden and, nearby, a small but stunning greenhouse shaped like a king's crown that

was built in 1864 by Balat (Horta's teacher and the architect responsible for the Serres Royales, p89). The 18th-century orangery has been converted into a *café* and shop.

To get to the park by car, take the A12 (direction Antwerp) to the Meise exit and follow the signs. By bus, take De Lijn bus 250 or 251 from Gare du Nord (Map pp72-3) to the Nationale Plantentuin van België stop.