

Inspiring ART MUSEUMS

1 VERBEKE FOUNDATION

Westakker 2
Kemzeke
East Flanders
+32 (0)3 789 22 07
verbeke
foundation.com

Here is one of the strangest spots in Belgium. It looks like a junk yard next to a motorway, out in the middle of nowhere. But this unexpected location is home to one of the most astonishing private art collections in Europe.

It's not easy to find, even with the best map. You have to look out for the McDonald's sign poking above the trees. Then you might spot a small sign pointing to the Verbeke Foundation. Turn off the road here and look for a parking space among the rusting cranes and heaps of wood.

Geert Verbeke used to run a road haulage business on this site. He turned the place over to art in the summer of 2007. It has slowly evolved into a rambling, overgrown collection with strange rusting sculptures hidden among the trees and odd art creations stored in an enormous glass greenhouse. Verbeke has acquired some striking art works over the years, including a giant vase by Andrea Branzi that once stood in the courtyard of the Ghent Design Museum, a group of realistic horse sculptures by Ronald de Winter and a collection of Theo Jansen's curious moving creatures called *Strandbeesten*.

Visitors receive a little map to navigate around the site, which lists more than 60 works dotted around the wilderness. Some are so well hidden almost no one ever finds them, like Ryan Mendoza's *The White*

House, an abandoned Detroit building in a remote clearing in the woods.

The collection also includes the vast *Archive for the Future* by the Dutch artist Jacobus Kloppenburg, which occupies a warren of little rooms inside 13 stacked shipping containers. Most of Kloppenburg's works were destroyed by Amsterdam city council when it removed 52.000 kilos of art from his house in 13 containers. Here you can see all that remains. The Verbeke foundation provides space where artists can work on temporary projects while living in a small farmhouse. It also has a restaurant with a terrace, an artificial lake and two art installations where you can spend the night.



1 VERBEKE FOUNDATION



FORT NAPOLEON

HISTORY

<i>Forgotten HISTORY</i>	60
<i>Haunting WAR CEMETERIES</i>	65
<i>Lost BATTLEFIELDS</i>	68
<i>Enigmatic MONUMENTS</i>	70
<i>Remarkable RUINS</i>	73
<i>UNDERGROUND places</i>	77

Striking STATIONS

84 ANTWERP DAM STATION

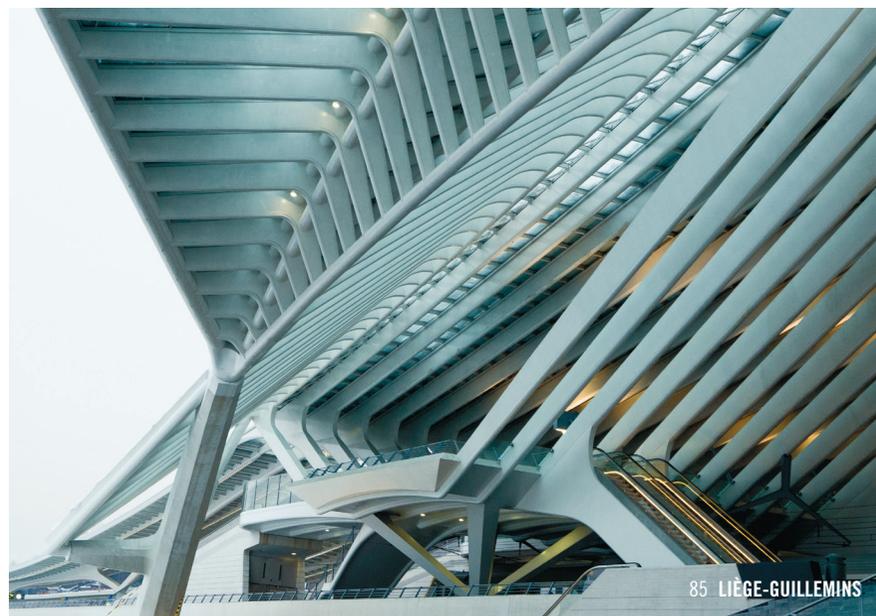
Damplein
Antwerp

You might not think Antwerpen-Dam looks different from any other Belgian station. Located near Park Spoor Noord, it's a typical Flemish Renaissance brick building standing alongside a railway viaduct. But an exhibition of old photographs in the tunnel under the viaduct tells an astonishing story. They reveal the entire station was moved 36 metres in 1907 to make space for a new railway line. The work was done using an ingenious system of mechanical jacks and rails. The company in charge of this exceptional engineering project hoped it could sell the technology elsewhere, but the concept never took off, leaving Dam station as a unique experiment.

85 LIÈGE-GUILLEMINS

Place des
Guillemins 2
Liège

Liège was until recently an old industrial city few tourists would dream of visiting. But the city began to change in 2009 with the opening of a sleek new station designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. It's an astonishing futuristic building with a swooping steel and glass canopy poised above the tracks like a gigantic wave. Now it is worth travelling to Liège just to admire the architecture. Start at the top level, high above the trains, where you can admire a neighbourhood slowly emerging from urban decline. Then go down to the ground floor where cafes and ticket offices occupy

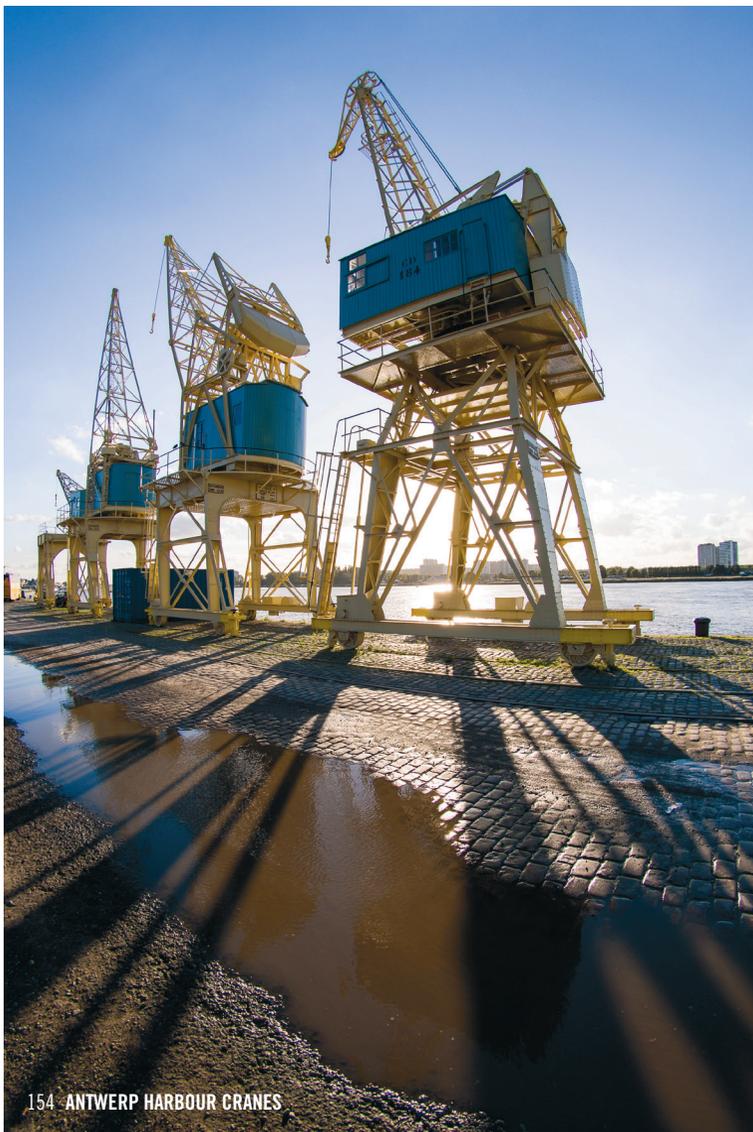


curious round glass pods. The station neighbourhood is still far from finished, but one day you will be able to walk into town along a magnificent waterfront promenade.

86 DE HAAN TRAM STATION

Nieuwe Rijksweg 1
De Haan
West Flanders

The tram pulls up in De Haan next to a beautiful art nouveau station built in 1888. It was designed by the Brussels architect G. Dhaeyer in a fanciful style with steep overhanging eaves, elegant carved wood and the French name Coq-sur-Mer in decorative letters. A sign recalls that Albert Einstein stepped off the tram here in 1933 at the start of his exile at the coast.



154 ANTWERP HARBOUR CRANES

154 **ANTWERP
HARBOUR CRANES**

**Rijnkaai,
near Hangar 27
Antwerp
havenkranen.be**

Wander north along the Antwerp waterfront and you eventually reach a row of 17 abandoned harbour cranes. These giant machines were once used to unload cargo from ships in Antwerp harbour. They are now preserved by the MAS museum as examples of industrial technology. The oldest is a wooden crane from 1907. The more modern electric crane with the number 400 KA was built in 1950, while 410 KD dates from 1961.

155 **TRAIN WORLD**

**GARE DE SCHAERBEEK
Place Princesse
Élisabeth 5
Schaerbeek
Brussels
+32 (0)2 224 74 69
trainworld.be**

The spectacular train museum opened in 2016 in a renovated railway station in the Brussels suburb of Schaerbeek. The dramatic interior was conceived by Belgian comic strip artist François Schuiten, while the ominous background music was composed by Bruno Letort. You can climb on board a steam locomotive, peer inside a luxury sleeping car and inspect nostalgic railway officials' uniforms.

156 **ZIMMER CLOCK**

**Zimmerplein 18
Lier
Antwerp
+32 (0)3 800 03 95
zimmertoren.be**

The little town of Lier contains three extraordinary clocks constructed in the 1930s by the local watchmaker and amateur astronomer Louis Zimmer. He began by building a beautiful astronomical clock on the outside wall of an abandoned tower from the 14th century. It features two globes decorated in blue and gold and ten clock faces with signs of the zodiac, tides in Lier, phases of the moon, days of the month, months of the year and other arcane facts. Zimmer went on to design a Wonder Clock which he exhibited at New York's World Fair in 1935. Described by the New York Museum of Science

Unknown URBAN TRAILS

197 LES COTEAUX DE LA CITADELLE

TRAILS BEGIN AT:

Impasse des Ursulines, off Montagne de Bueren

Liège
visitezliege.be

Most visitors to Liège never discover the orchards and meadows above the city. Once planted with vines, this steeply sloping landscape still has old fruit trees, grazing sheep and a few goats. But it's not too easy to find. You need to follow the marked trails around the citadel known as *les coteaux de la citadelle*. The easiest route to the top is the long flight of steps called Montagne de Bueren. But there is a more intriguing and less well-known route you can take. It begins in the Impasse des Ursulines, to the left of the Montagne. This leads to a beautiful cluster of old buildings in Maasland Renaissance style. Some belonged to a 17th-century Béguinage, while others were constructed in the 1960s. You now climb up the slopes following a series of narrow lanes and stone steps. Sometimes you come to a dead end and have to try a different route. But eventually you will reach a gate leading into a wood known as the Bois des Mineurs. Here you are high above the old town looking down on the rooftops and spires. Several other ways to reach the top are even harder to find. One route passes through the courtyard of an old town house behind the law courts at Rue du Palais 60. Another trail begins with a staircase built inside a modern house at Rue Pierreuse 38. You can find all five different trails marked on the Sentiers des Coteaux map available at the tourist office.

198 DIJLEPAD

Access from Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat (lanes next to numbers 115 and 143) Mechelen Antwerp
mechelen.be

A new wooden walkway along the River Dijle in Mechelen takes you past old waterfront houses, overgrown gardens and hidden squares. The walk is particularly romantic at night when the route is lit by thousands of tiny spotlights.

You can begin on the Zoutwerf, a former harbour with an impressive Renaissance house once owned by the guild of fishermen. Or you can dive into one of the narrow lanes running down to the water from Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat.

The trail follows a wooden walkway along a stretch of water once accessible only by boat. It ends at the Lamot cultural centre, where a bridge takes you across to the old fish market square. Near here is an old brown cafe called De Gouden Vis, which has a tiny hidden terrace at the back overlooking the water.



198 DIJLEPAD

228 **GODSHUIS
SINT-JOZEF**

**Nieuwe
Gentweg 24-32
Bruges
West Flanders**

Look out for the open door on the Nieuwe Gentweg in Bruges. It leads into an unexpected garden where crocuses push through the soil in early spring. One of 44 almshouses dotted around the city, Godshuis Sint-Jozef was built in the 17th century as a home for the poor. Hidden from the street by high white-washed walls, the gardens are planted with ancient trees, rose beds and low box hedges.

229 **PLANTIN-MORETUS
GARDEN**

**Vrijdagmarkt 22
Antwerp
+32 (0)3 221 14 50
[museumplantin
moretus.be](http://museumplantin-moretus.be)**

Here is a beautiful baroque garden hidden within the walls of the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp. Created in 1639 by the printer Balthasar Moretus, it is modelled on an Italian formal garden. A small garden was added behind the museum shop in 2002. Designed by the Belgian landscape gardening firm Wirtz International, it is a simple design with brick paving, clipped trees and an undulating hedge.



Romantic PARKS

230 **HOF TER SAKSEN**

**Haasdonkbaan 101
Beveren
East Flanders
+32 (0)473 27 60 85
hortus-ter-saksen.be**

The curious 19th-century Hof ter Saksen is surrounded by beautiful rambling grounds planted with ancient trees. The house was occupied by the German military in the First World War, and remained a ruin until just a few years ago. It has now been carefully restored, along with the former stables and orangery. You can wander in the herb garden, get lost in the arboretum or follow a meandering boardwalk through a small nature reserve. There is also a cobbled road leading to an orchard with grazing sheep and more than seventy varieties of fruit trees, while the former orangery has been turned into a summer cafe serving local beers.

231 **SINT-PIETERSABDIJ**

**Sint-Pietersplein 12
Ghent
East Flanders
[sintpieters
abdijgent.be](http://sintpietersabdijgent.be)**

A secret park lies hidden behind the Sint-Pietersabdij (St Peter's Abbey) in Ghent. Entered by an old coach gate, this romantic spot dates back to the 9th century when the sloping land above the River Scheldt was terraced to create a vineyard. The site was restored in 1983 and replanted with fruit trees, vines and rare quinces. It is popular with students, but you sometimes have the place all to yourself.

Classic BELGIAN FOOD

296 MUSSELS

OESTERPUT

Wenduinse-
steenweg 16

Blankenberge

West Flanders

+32 (0)50 41 10 35

oesterput.com

No booking. Nothing fancy. Just perfect seafood. The Devriendt family runs a huge wooden restaurant on the Blankenberge quayside that resembles a New England clam shack. It is very basic, but they serve some of the best seafood on the coast, including dripping wet oysters, little whelks extracted from their shell with a pin and lobsters kept in large bubbling tanks.

297 STOOFFVEES

NÜETNIGENOUGH

Rue du Lombard 25

Brussels

nuetnigenough.be

Stoofvlees, or *Carbonades à la Flamande*, is the ultimate Belgian comfort food. This thick Flemish beef stew is slowly simmered in dark Belgian beer to create a rich, sweet flavour. It is normally brought to your table in a small iron casserole pot, along with a side serving of proper Belgian fries. You can find stoofvlees (sometimes called *stoverij*) in most traditional Belgian brasseries such as Nüetnigenough in the heart of Brussels.

298 ZWEZERIK

CIRO'S

Amerikalei 6

Antwerp

+32 (0)3 238 11 47

ciros.be

Ciro's is a classic Belgian restaurant dating from 1962. The wood-panelled interior has hardly changed since it opened and the menu lists old Belgian favourites, like the mysterious *zwezerik* (lamb or veal sweetbread). But you can also order Irish rib steak served with pepper sauce and a portion of frites.



298 ZWEZERIK

299 SHRIMP CROQUETTES

LES BRASSERIES

GEORGES

Avenue Winston

Churchill 259

Uccle

Brussels

+32 (0)2 347 21 00

brasseriesgeorges.be

The *croquette de crevette*, or *garnaalkroket*, is a classic Belgian dish. It is composed of a crispy croquette filled with tiny North Sea shrimps cooked in a creamy sauce. In the best restaurants, the croquettes are served with deep-fried parsley and a slice of lemon. Head to the lively Les Brasseries Georges on the edge of the Brussels woods to try their excellent version.



351 1898 THE POST

349 RECOUR

**Guido Gezelle-
straat 7**

Poperinge

West Flanders

+32 (0)57 33 57 25

pegasusrecour.be

This family-owned hotel occupies a former tobacco factory in Poperinge. It has a relaxed, warm feel with a spacious lounge decorated in a comfortable country house style by interior designer Pieter Porters. The eight guest rooms are furnished with big wooden beds, polished desks and retro baths, while the seven new rooms in the annex have interiors by contemporary designers.

350 THE DOMINICAN

Rue Léopold 9

Brussels

+32 (0)2 203 08 08

thedominican.be

Located in a former monastery, the Dominican is a sophisticated Brussels hotel with an interior designed by the Amsterdam firm FG stijl. It strikes a soothing note in the city centre with its airy cloister, rich fabrics and countless orchids. The hotel bar is a gorgeous place to meet friends with its high ceilings, chandeliers and comfy armchairs.

351 1898 THE POST

Graslei 16

Ghent

East Flanders

+32 (0)9 391 53 79

1898thepost.com

This striking boutique hotel opened in 2017 on the upper floors of the former central post office in Ghent. The 38 rooms are decorated in a warm style evoking the building's late 19th-century architecture, with high ceilings and antique furniture. Located in the heart of Ghent, the hotel offers its guests some of the best views in the city and has a stylish cocktail bar that could soon be the most fashionable hangout in town.