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Art



Buzzing art scene

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The visual arts are well represented in Brussels with two large annual art fairs, BRAFA and Art Brussels, and numerous exciting satellite events. Also the many galleries and the smaller museums, often privately owned, provide a full programme throughout the year. For a long time the city lacked a museum of modern and contemporary art, but after years of fundraising and renovations, **MIMA** (the Millennium Iconoclast Museum of Art) finally opened its doors in April 2016, in a converted brewery along the Canal. MIMA's mission is to be the defining museum of contemporary art, by presenting

the most significant art of its time, and exploring a history of culture 2.0. The permanent collection holds works by artists like Daniel Johnston, Atelier Pica Pica, Barry McGee and Nicolas Karakatsanis, and the museum also hosts much talked-about temporary exhibitions. The founders of MIMA see art as a medium to bring people together, and they are praised for already having brought back a little hope back to the ill-reputed Molenbeek district.

www.mimamuseum.eu



A new life for industrial heritage

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More contemporary art works are to be admired at **Wiels**. This isn't a museum however, because there's no permanent collection; it's a centre for contemporary art where exhibitions are held of national and international artists: influential names like Helena Almeida, Luc Tuymans and Mike Kelley, but also the younger generation represented by Leigh Ledare or David Claerbout, among others. Wiels also has an artist-in-residence programme and organises lectures, meetings and workshops. The centre is housed in the beautifully restored **Blomme building**, named after the architect who designed it in

1930 for the Wielemans-Ceuppens brewery (354 Avenue Van Volxem). It is a rare example of modernistic industrial architecture in Belgium.
www.wiels.org

tip 

Café and bookshop

The Wiels café in the old brewing room, where three original brewing vats have been preserved, is an open area where you can discuss the exhibition you have just visited, meet friends for an organic breakfast or a healthy lunch, or read a newspaper while enjoying a cup of fairtrade coffee. The Wiels bookshop next to the café offers a fine selection of works on contemporary art, photography and architecture. You can also find exhibition catalogues, artists' editions and various magazines and fanzines.

Brussels

Ghent

Bruges

The Coast

Antwerp

Limburg

Liège

Namur

Charleroi & Mons

The Ardennes

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Brussels

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Art



tip
Sleeping in a bubble

In Erezée, you can have the ultimate ‘glamping’ experience in a unique tent. It looks very similar to a bubble, with a large translucent section so that you actually can sleep under the stars. The round tent has an original décor, designed as romantic sleeping accommodation for two people. The bathroom lies outside the bubble, some 15 metres away.
www.ardennes-etape.be



Along the River Ourthe

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The Durbuy and La-Roche-en-Ardenne region is one of the more popular areas in the Ardennes, particularly for those passionate about outdoor sports, for epicureans who enjoy a plentiful serving of local specialties, and for families. A popular destination is the Labyrinth of Durbuy-Barvaux, a gigantic corn labyrinth laid out in a different pattern every year. Also fascinating for both children and adults alike is a visit to Wéris, another of the most beautiful villages in the Walloon region, but above all home to a number of prehistoric dolmens (large oblong tombs) and menhirs. Still more impressive ancient beauty, although this time created by nature, can be admired in the Caves of Hotton. They became known as

‘the caves of a thousand and one nights’ due to the magical atmosphere and the amazing cave formations, as well as the range of colours of the rocks, from pure white through soft pink and orange to bright pink.

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Durbuy itself has a beautiful historic centre with medieval alleyways and a number of splendid buildings with charming façades. It’s a touristy but amazingly enjoyable town with attractive shops and appetizing restaurants that are open all year round and are run by friendly people.

www.labyrinth.be
www.weris-info.be
www.grottesdehotton.be

Hotels and restaurants we love

① **Au Sanglier des Ardennes**
Rue Comte Théodule
d’Ursel, Durbuy

www.sanglier-des-ardennes.be
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This hotel-restaurant is famous in Durbuy and far beyond, especially among people who have a taste for game. It is housed in a traditional natural-stone building, in a wonderful setting: from the dining rooms, you look out on a medieval castle and the River Ourthe flowing at the foot of the hotel. In the restaurant, you can expect gastronomic cuisine with local products to make your mouth water.

② **Le Cor de Chasse**
16-18 Rue des
Combattants, Wéris

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An exquisitely beautiful and high-quality hotel-restaurant in a castle farmstead dating from 1681. In the open kitchen, chef Mario Elias and his team prepare refined and contemporary cuisine, rewarded with a Michelin star and offering excellent value for money. The emphasis is on seasonal regional products. The family hotel offers nine rooms in various price categories, each with a modern design that blends in harmoniously with the character of the building.

③ **La Lisière**
Rue de la Forge, Durbuy

www.lalisiere.be
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This B&B with three rooms and a self-catering cottage benefits from the beautiful surroundings, but also from the passion of the owners, Bénédicte Burtin and Stéphane Cornet, who both love architecture and meeting people. Here, charm and authenticity go hand-in-hand with a sociable atmosphere, good taste and comfort.





Cultural hotspot

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Liège has undergone quite a change in recent years, holding on to the ambition to finish some prestigious architectural projects to boost the city's metamorphosis from a raw and industrial-feeling place to a fresh and interesting destination, ready to face the future. One of those projects is the new use of a former swimming pool, Les Bains de la Sauvenière. It was built in Art Deco ocean liner style around 1938 and was quite impressive at the time, with (among other things) a pool hall of 80 metres long and more than 10 metres high! And impressive it still is, now that it has been transformed into one of the most beautiful cultural spaces in the country. **La Cité Miroir** ('Mirror City' in English) is a place for education, debate and culture, with theatre, music, conferences and two permanent exhibitions, all against the backdrop of what's considered one of the most important examples of the architecture of the Interbellum. The turquoise tiled floor of the pool has been



preserved, as well as the tiled edges and the stairs. Below the former Olympic pool a 260-seat theatre was installed, with a roof made out of black tiles on what used to be the water level. That level is now an exhibition space.

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The Cité Miroir is the heart of the cultural hotspot of Liège, the Place Xavier Neujean. It's where you'll also find **Cinéma Sauvenière**, a cool, beautiful, alternative cinema housed in a quirky, contemporary building with four screens. The bar/brasserie with its courtyard terrace is the perfect place for a drink and serves as a cultural meeting point. Also on the Place Xavier Neujean you'll find a concert venue (Reflektor) and a bookshop (Livre aux Trésors).

www.citemiroir.be
www.grignoux.be
www.reflektor.be
www.livreauxtresors.be



Wallonia's music capital

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From grand opera to innovative hard rock in underground bars, Liège is the place to be for music lovers in Wallonia. There's the **Théâtre Royal** on Place de l'Opéra: a neo-classicist structure (built in 1820) with plush seats, a giant chandelier, gilded woodwork and ceiling paintings (dating back to 1903). It has not lost any of its 19th-century splendour, however, the building has kept up with modern times: following extensive renovation in 2012, the roof now features a giant, state-of-the-art cube, allowing large-scale operas to be staged.

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It takes a little longer to find the best rock and pop: for that, you will either have to go to small bars with young patrons, or to underground clubs like **Cupper** (Rue St Barthelemy) or **La Zone**. This is where you will experience those typical Liège dynamics that

have spawned successful alternative 'do it yourself' pop/rock bands like My Little Cheap Dictaphone or Malibu Stacy. Another place to be is **L'Escalier** (on Rue Saint-Jean-en-Isle 26), a nightclub-café-turned-concert venue, founded by Fabrice Lamproye in 1992. Lamproye is also the mastermind behind **Les Ardentes**. First held in 2006, this Liège pop/rock festival can boast A-list names like Pavement, 50 Cent, Patti Smith and Morrissey, as well as successful Belgian artists like dEUS, Trixie Whitley and Arno. The annual event takes place in the first half of July at Parc Astrid (Coronmeuse) and welcomes 60,000 festival-goers. Liège welcomes festival-goers that are into jazz as well by the way, namely during the annual international jazz festival in May.

www.operaliegbe.be
www.lesardentes.be
www.jazzliege.be

tip 

Théâtre de Liège

This theatre programs prestigious international productions and has quite an impressive modern repertoire of its own. It's housed in **L'Émulation**, a neo-classical building from 1939 which was transformed by architects Pierre Hebbelinck and Pierre de Wit in 2012. They used a lot of wood, concrete and glass to create a space of 7,800 square metres with a stripped-down but warm atmosphere.

www.theatredeliegbe.be



Hotel Julien

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Mouche Van Hool, founder of Hotel Julien at 24 Korte Nieuwstraat, transformed a 16th-century property into a luxurious boutique hotel with two Mediterranean patios and a spa in its vaulted basement. It is a small hotel with the intimate atmosphere of a B&B but offering full hotel service. Interior design has always been Mouche Van Hool's hobby. Thanks to her unique touch, Hotel Julien has become one of the most beautiful hotels in Antwerp with a trendy, creative and contemporary style, combining modern design furniture with a historical setting. On the walls are photos from the Antwerp gallery Fifty One (see p. 151). There is a roof terrace overlooking the cathedral. Hotel Julien was named the best hotel in Antwerp by TripAdvisor. www.hotel-julien.com

More hotels we love

① De Witte Lelie 16 Keizerstraat

www.dewittelelie.be

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Steven Spielberg, Madonna and Naomi Campbell are just a few of the celebrity guests who have chosen this beautiful and luxurious boutique hotel for their stay in Antwerp. It has 11 rooms situated in three 17th-century houses, and includes a 70-square-metres presidential suite featuring a fireplace with gold-leaf detailing.

② The Soul Apartments & Studios 14 & 15 Marnixplaats

www.soulsuites.com

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These luxurious apartments and studios in the trendy Zuid quarter are the ideal place to spend a few nights, or enjoy an extended stay. Designed in a modern eclectic style they offer complete comfort and privacy. The owner also runs an intimate hair spa and the café with healthy foods and drinks on the ground floor.

③ Maison Nationale 49 Nationalestraat

www.maisonnationale.be

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A sublime neoclassical townhouse with four suites located in the hip fashion quarter. The rooms are decorated in a pure minimalist style, with white brick walls, slate grey fabrics and little potted plants. You can go for breakfast in the café on the ground floor.

④ Kaai 11 11 Sint-Michielskaai

www.kaai11.be

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A stylish place to stay on the river with several apartments on different levels of an old town house. The rooms are furnished in a luxurious modern style, with small kitchens. The rooms at the front have sweeping views of the Scheldt.

⑤ Au lit Jérôme 129 Amerikalei

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A gorgeous B&B in a town house with lofty stucco ceilings, marble fireplaces and antique furniture. The friendly hosts have added to the charm with quirky touches like fireplaces filled with books, stuffed animals and old bathtubs. Breakfast is served in a room overlooking the garden.





BRUGES

Bruges is perhaps the 'brightest side of Belgium': a beautiful city, everyone would agree, with numerous shining examples of splendid medieval buildings, a wealth of historic art, luxury shops and a high quality of life for its inhabitants. Those who are interested in trendy, edgy boutiques, in hip design previews or in what is hot and happening in the art world might find it difficult to satisfy their appetite in Bruges. But those who love history, grandeur, peace and quiet, the finest chocolate, luxury and a hint of laid-back mellowness will fall in love with Belgium here. Certainly, visitors from relatively new countries will be amazed at what they see in Bruges, just by walking through the streets: the houses here are centuries old and

well preserved, and they stand on picturesque squares or on the banks of enchanting waterways, the canals. Some of the buildings are now museums where a treasure trove of historic art can be admired, such as the truly inimitable work of the Flemish Primitives. Other buildings house shops that, as a rule, represent quality and refinement in their particular sector (clothes, food, etc.), or extremely tasteful hotels and B&Bs. In addition, many Belgian top chefs choose Bruges as their base, where the sophisticated and well-to-do clientele that enjoys their culinary creations can be found. As a tourist, you will not be alone here, but in the narrow streets just beyond the centre, a delightful, tranquil peace prevails.

More buildings we love



① Boekentoren (Book Tower) 9 Rozier

www.boekentoren.be

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In 1933 architect Henry van de Velde proposed his design for this new university library. The 64-metre-high building in the shape of a Greek cross was built as a landmark on the highest point of the city. It's a modernist masterpiece which above all excels in its sobriety; only the impressive belvedere contains Art Deco decorations. The tower has continued to house the university library right up to the present and contains more than three million books, some 48 kilometres!

② Vooruit Arts Centre 23 Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat

vooruit.be

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This 'opera for the workmen' was designed with the prospect of the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent. It's a showpiece of the eclectic style, housing amongst other things a café, a restaurant, a library, a theatre and a ballroom. Displayed above the stage in gilt letters are the words 'Kunst veredelt' (Art refines). The Vooruit building is now an internationally reputed arts centre but, more importantly, it arguably has the best terrace in town where you can have a drink and grab a bite to eat in summer.



③ De Krook 1 Miriam Makebaplein

dekrook.be

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The design of the brand-new De Krook library building, by Coussée & Goris, is both beautiful and revolutionary. It resembles an inverted glass tower, with horizontally-layered steel beams on the outside. Actually, it is just one element in a comprehensive city renewal project, which also includes a complete makeover of the old Winter Circus building and the construction of two public squares and a summer terrace along the water. For a nice view of the new De Krook library and a delicious bowl of soup, we recommend lunch at Soeplusplus. Everyone loves this cool white soup bar. On sunny days, the outdoor terrace is also a great spot to sit and watch people passing by in the public square.

④ St Peter's Abbey 9 Sint-Pietersplein

sintpietersabdij.stad.gent

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The Sint-Pietersabdij used to house monks, but now organises exhibitions (often on photography) that are certainly worth visiting. The abbey has a lovely garden with a vineyard, a herb garden and an orchard, with here and there a ruin that adds an extra touch of charm to the whole.

