

**BIZARRE
BELGIUM**

KAREN
FRANÇOIS

BIZARRE BELGIUM

KAMIEL
DE BRUYNE

50 PLACES FOR A WEIRD DAY OUT



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& LAMBERIGTS

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INTRODUCTION

BELGIUM, BELGIUM, BELGIUM!

Not the biggest, but definitely a country full of classic traditions: beer, chips, potholes on motorways, and waving napkins at weddings during *Les Lacs du Connemara*.

Besides these classics, Belgium also offers a parallel universe where you can eat paella with Dracula, meet the mother of all sansevierias, and slide out of King Kong's breasts. This book is not your typical travel guide that tells you where to get the best waffle; it's a collection of the most absurd, surprising, and even downright insane places Belgium has to offer. Because nothing screams 'Belgium' more than line dancing to Pitbull's *Fireball* in a cowboy village on a Sunday afternoon, spotting the world's biggest cigar, and stopping for even more light relief at a book toilet along the way.

So put on your best hiking boots (or slippers, we're not judging) and start doing some stretches to get you warmed up for a trip around embarrassing statues, some 'world's largest' attractions, and above all: places you didn't even know you wanted to visit. Whether you're a true road tripper, a lover of weird things, or just looking for an excuse to have a good laugh, this book is for you.

Have fun and send us a postcard!
Kamiel, Karen & Clémentine

 This book may cause serious side effects: spontaneous road trips, stomach ache-inducing laughter, small nightmares, but most likely, a completely topsy-turvy view of Belgium.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The entries in this book are presented in a random order, but you can find an overview of all the places on the map on the following page.

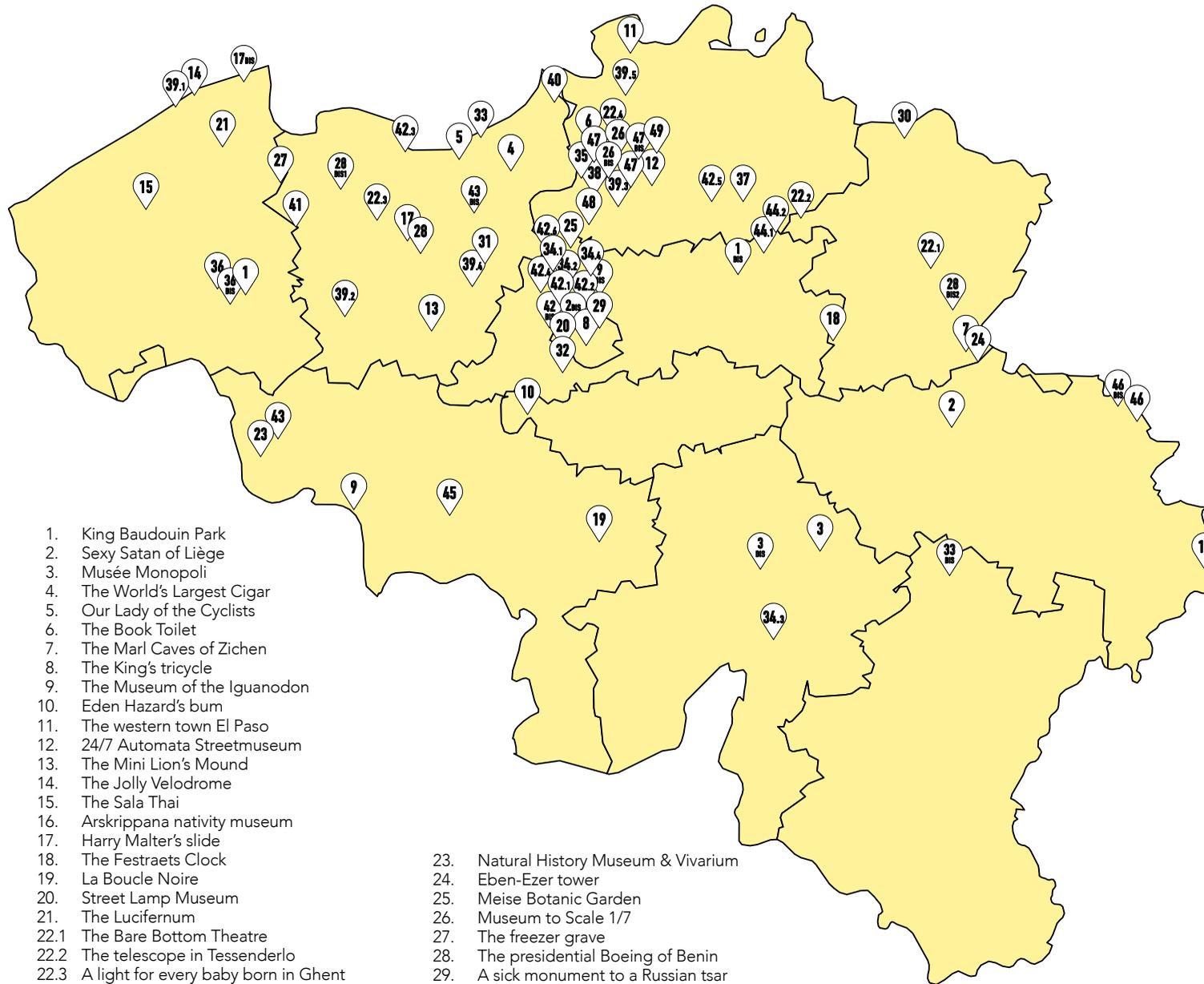
A word of caution: strange places often have strange opening hours. To avoid disappointment, be sure to check the opening times online before you set off.

BIZARRE BAROMETER ?????

For each place, we've added a bizarre barometer. Of course, everything in this book is bizarre by definition, but even in the wonderful world of absurdity, there are levels. While some places are only a little weird, others are completely out-there. This score helps you judge whether it's just a fun story for a night at the pub or absolute Belgian madness.

BELGIUM AND DOG-FRIENDLINESS ✓

Let's just say there's room for improvement. But for anyone who likes bringing their dog along, we've noted whether the little stinker is welcome at each place. Perhaps your dog can join you on your next adventure!



- 1. King Baudouin Park
- 2. Sexy Satan of Liège
- 3. Musée Monopoli
- 4. The World's Largest Cigar
- 5. Our Lady of the Cyclists
- 6. The Book Toilet
- 7. The Marl Caves of Zichen
- 8. The King's tricycle
- 9. The Museum of the Iguanodon
- 10. Eden Hazard's bum
- 11. The western town El Paso
- 12. 24/7 Automata Streetmuseum
- 13. The Mini Lion's Mound
- 14. The Jolly Velodrome
- 15. The Sala Thai
- 16. Arskrippana nativity museum
- 17. Harry Malter's slide
- 18. The Festraets Clock
- 19. La Boucle Noire
- 20. Street Lamp Museum
- 21. The Lucifernum
- 22.1 The Bare Bottom Theatre
- 22.2 The telescope in Tessenderlo
- 22.3 A light for every baby born in Ghent
- 22.4 Upside-down operating theatre

- 23. Natural History Museum & Vivarium
- 24. Eben-Ezer tower
- 25. Meise Botanic Garden
- 26. Museum to Scale 1/7
- 27. The freezer grave
- 28. The presidential Boeing of Benin
- 29. A sick monument to a Russian tsar
- 30. The Sound Forest

- 31. Herdersem Pig Museum
- 32. Palace of Justice
- 33. Casanus
- 34.1 The Royal Station of Laeken
- 34.2 The Royal Waiting Room in Brussels-Central Station
- 34.3 Royal stop d'Ardenne
- 34.4 The underground station of Laeken
- 35. Private wellness Lakonia
- 36. The world's largest washing-up brush
- 37. Da Vinci's Last Supper
- 38. The Jain Temple of Antwerp
- 39.1 Monobloc Moments
- 39.2 The Scheldt Queen
- 39.3 The Duffel Coat
- 39.4 Giant Clown Nose
- 39.5 Lego blocks
- 40. Lillo Gunpowder Magazine
- 41. UFO monument
- 42.1 Manneken Pis
- 42.2 Jeanneke Pis
- 42.3 Mietje Stroel
- 42.4 Zinneke Pis
- 42.5 Tist honneke da pist in oe monneke
- 42.6 Memorial plaque of our King's pissing
- 43. The Clothes Peg Cathedral of Tournai
- 44.1 The Iron Bum of Averbode
- 44.2 The Tits letterbox
- 45. The Mundaneum
- 46. The Carrot Museum
- 47. The Emperor's Bastion
- 48. The Anal triangle
- 49. The Natural History Museum Boekenberg
- 50. The Thai - Belgian bridge

EXTRA TIPS

- 1.BIS Mini fairy-tale garden
- 2.BIS Original Sexy Satan
- 3.BIS Cave of Saint Anthony of Padua
- 9.BIS Other original iguanodons
- 17.BIS The Chameleon Slide by Jeremy Deller
- 26.BIS Paul Van Hoeydonck's Fallen Astronaut
- 28.BIS1 Kokorico Nightclub
- 28.BIS2 B&B Air Bilzen
- 33.BIS The Trojan horse in Wallonia
- 36.BIS Museum Stoom en Stroom
- 42.BIS GardeRobe MannekenPis
- 43.BIS Museum Zeels Erfgoed
- 46.BIS Art vending machine from Atelier Schoenen
- 47.BIS The Kipdorp Bastion



WHO ARE WE?

Kamiel De Bruyne makes not only dad jokes but also TV programmes and books. He is the proud chairman of the National Association for Useless Signs, which started out as a joke and now has hundreds of members. As a 'Weird Travel Reporter', he shares unusual travel tips every week on the Belgian radio station Joe. When he's not doing that, he loves visiting – you guessed it – strange places, and openly admits to having a passion for magic tricks and musicals.

Karen François usually describes herself as 'the one who makes those "I want to go home" bags'. She is known for her dry humour and big, uh... letters. She sometimes writes about herself in the third person, doesn't like tiramisu (no, not even yours – yes, she knows you make it differently), and has a weakness for googly eyes. When she's not hunting for absurd places or gadgets nobody needs, she works as a creative for public radio and television in Flanders.

And last but not least, we present Clémentine, aka Snorezilla, aka Stinky, aka Clemmie CleCle. She is Karen and Kamiel's tiny, bearded dog, whom they try to take everywhere.

Kamiel, Karen, and Clémentine are on a marathon mission (not literally, they're not big on exercise) to find the weirdest places worldwide and share them with their social media followers. They've road-tripped to a Danish town called Karen's Klit (spoiler: it was quite sandy), visited the three largest pecan nuts in Texas, and slept inside a giant guitar in Romania.

Knowing that, when it comes to absurdity, Belgium is just as bizarre as a sandy clit or oversized nuts, they decided to compile this book – a gigantic collection of Belgian madness. If absurdity were an Olympic sport, Belgium would win gold, silver, bronze, and the consolation prize.

**FOLLOW THEIR TROPHY TRAVELS AT
@KARENFRANCOISS AND @KAMIELUS_ ON INSTAGRAM**



1

KING BAUDOUIIN PARK

THE MOST BELGIAN
FRONT GARDEN IN BELGIUM

The Vlasschaardstraat in Ingelmunster might just be the liveliest dead-end street in our tiny country. As soon as you drive into it, you'll see the flags waving from the colourful front garden of number 12. It looks like a tricolour bomb exploded in this fever dream of a garden. Not a single blade of grass in sight – just a wild collection of curiosities in the three bold colours of the Belgian flag: black, yellow, and red.

Why settle for a grey letterbox when you can paint it in the national colours? A black–yellow–red hamburger? Sure. Giant *Manneken Pis* statues in patriotic hues? Why not. And don't call it a front garden – call it 'King Baudouin Park'. That's what the owner, Armand, prefers. He doesn't care that there's a well-known dolphinarium with the same name just half an hour away.

Armand is a patriotic eighty-something who has lived in this house for over forty years. He shares his home with his daughter Isabelle and his wife Marie-Thérèse. Back in 1984, things weren't going so well for Armand, until he stumbled on a state portrait of King Baudouin at a flea market. The photo made him feel so much better that he started seeing King Baudouin as his guardian angel. That one purchase sparked a collecting frenzy that has taken over his home and front garden for the past four decades. Armand began hoarding anything related to the Belgian royal family and, by extension, anything featuring the national colours. The rest of his collection fills his home. From the kitchen to the toilet, there's barely room to stand, with books, clippings, and royal memorabilia piled everywhere. Armand himself usually wears a black, yellow, and red outfit. Even his walking cane is painted in the national colours. When we ask him if he's ever met the king, he replies, 'No, but a lookalike did officially inaugurate my park.'

BIZARRE BAROMETER: ?????? **DOG FRIENDLY: ✓**



**VLAASSCHAARDSTRAAT 12
8770 INGELMUNSTER**

GOOD TO KNOW

The house itself isn't open to visitors, but you can appreciate the front garden from the street. If you're lucky, Armand might be outside admiring his treasures, eager to tell you all about his collection. He's hard of hearing and speaks in a thick dialect, but his daughter Isabelle is happy to translate – dirty jokes included.

ANOTHER FRONT GARDEN WORTH VISITING



**MINI FAIRY-TALE GARDEN
JUNCTION OF
WIJNGAARDSTRAAT AND
SOLLEWEG, TIELT-WINGE**

For forty years, Willy has been crafting a fairy-tale garden inspired by the Dutch theme park De Efteling. From the street, you can spot a dragon, a mermaid, and a character with an unusually long neck.



HIER WAREN IN
HET VERleden DE VLUUGERS
VAN
ZANDVLUUGENAARS
VLASWIJKENAARS
INGELMUNSTERENAARS
VLAMINGEN
BELGEN
EUROPEANEN
ARMAND TREES ISABELL

HEREN
VROUWEN
KINDEN

M IN
DE
GEGE
O. CEECHT
TEN JAAR
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2

SEXY SATAN OF LIEGE

THE DEVIL WHO WAS TOO SEXY
FOR THE CHURCH

For anyone looking for an exciting adventure in Liège, a visit to the city's last adult cinema is in order: Ciné Midi-Minuit. This small erotic temple with five rooms is equipped with dozens of glory holes and gets top reviews online such as 'It smells like sex and it's sticky everywhere.' But if you prefer a less sticky adventure that smells not of sex but of incense, then head to the other sex temple in the city: St. Paul's Cathedral. Yes, a 13th-century house of worship that you might assume to be completely sin-free with its stained-glass windows, dramatic paintings, and imposing organ. But, lo and behold, in the middle of this church stands a 19th-century sex scandal: a devilishly handsome statue we like to call the 'Sexy Satan of Liège'.

In 1837, the diocese of Liège decided the cathedral needed a bit of a facelift. They ordered a new pulpit and also wanted a statue of Lucifer, the fallen angel, aka THE DEVIL. The job was given to Joseph Geefs, a young guy from Antwerp who booked a male model and immediately put his chisel skills to work on a piece of marble. In 1842, his *Ange Du Mal* (Angel of Evil) was finished and placed in the church. Joseph's devil was easy on the eyes. Maybe too easy on the eyes: sitting on a rock, this beautiful, muscular guy wears little more than a loincloth and looks seductively at his own body, as if to say, 'Look how handsome I am.' The 'Angel of Evil' was portrayed as a sex god, which had churchgoers swooning en masse... at mass. Girls were fighting temptation during the Lord's Prayer, and even some men only had eyes for Sexy Satan. Of course, this became a problem for the church, so the statue had to go. This Satan was way too sexy for the church.

A new statue was commissioned, this time from Willem Geefs, Joseph's brother. And what do you do as a sculptor when you're asked to make a devil that's less sexy than your brother's? Exactly, you book the same handsome model and create an even hotter devil. Willem's devil, *Le Genie Du Mal*, is even more muscular and better looking than his predecessor. This is not Sexy Satan, but Super Sexy Satan. What was supposed to make him less attractive, according to Willem, were the claw-like toenails (to each their own), the chains around his ankles (definitely a market for that), and the hyperrealistic veins in his bat wings (we can give you a website). The church gave up and left the statue in place, where it remains today under the cathedral's pulpit. When we saw it, the sunlight was streaming through the stained-glass windows, shining right on his six-pack. Our only thought: 'Damn, that Satan's a master of seduction.'



ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
PLACE DE LA CATHÉDRALE
4000 LIÈGE

BIZARRE BAROMETER: ??????

DOG FRIENDLY: ✓

WANT TO SEE THE ORIGINAL
SEXY SATAN BY JOSEPH GEEFS?



You'll find it in the Royal Museums of Fine
Arts in Brussels.