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Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

9th Edition

by George McDonald

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"Hotel information is close to encyclopedic."

—*Des Moines Sunday Register*

"Frommer's Guides have a way of giving you a real feel for a place."

—*Knight Ridder Newspapers*



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About the Author

George McDonald has lived and worked in both Amsterdam and Brussels, as deputy editor of the in-flight magazine for KLM and as editor-in-chief of the in-flight magazine for Sabena. Now a freelance journalist and travel writer, he has written extensively on both the Netherlands and Belgium for magazines and for travel books that include *Frommer's Amsterdam*; *Frommer's Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp*; *Frommer's Europe*; and *Frommer's Europe from \$70 a Day*.

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An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

Frommer's Amsterdam
Frommer's Irreverent Guide to Amsterdam
Frommer's Brussels & Bruges
with Ghent & Antwerp
Frommer's Europe
Frommer's Europe from \$70 a Day
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Europe For Dummies

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Finds** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Kids** Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

Well, the long-predicted, much-feared slide in value of the U.S. dollar against the euro never happened—instead, the dollar went off a cliff. Two editions of this book ago, a dollar would buy you close to 1.20€, and the Benelux countries were a happy spending-ground for U.S. tourists. At this writing, a dollar will buy you around 80 euro cents, and American visitors to Amsterdam, Brussels, Bruges, and the other Benelux cities are looking mighty close at sticker prices before buying, and at tabs before deciding how much of a tip, if any, is in order.

Canadian, British, Australian, and New Zealander visitors aren't wearing such long faces, since their currencies haven't gone down anything as far and as fast. But all of the above could wish for the luck of the Irish, who both earn and spend euros, and who are walking the streets of Europe with even more spring than usual in their steps.

And now for the good news. With euro-zone economies scrabbling slowly and uncertainly out of a 4-year recession, European consumers are looking just as closely at prices as are most foreign visitors. In many cases, hotel, restaurant, store, and entertainment tabs have not gone up by much, if at all, and transportation prices by only a smidgeon. There are plenty of bargains to be had. This means that

you should shop around, and in hotels don't hesitate to wave a fistful of dollars or plastic in their faces and say, "C'mon, surely you can do better than that!"

GETTING AROUND A construction binge underway in Amsterdam will provide the city with the underground stations and tunnels of a new subway line, the Noord/Zuid (North/South) Metro line, due to be completed in 2011. Meanwhile, some trams have been diverted from their published routes onto alternate lines around the obstacle-course of the construction works. More construction is ongoing among the old docks of the IJ waterfront east and west of Centraal Station. This, too, will continue for years to come. At the end of 2004, the fast IJtram was due to enter service, arrowing east toward the artificial islands of the new IJburg residential projects. It'll be handy, too, for getting to the new waterfront Muziekgebouw concert hall, the Amsterdam passenger terminal for cruise-ship passengers, and the new Lloyd Hotel. Fans of the public transportation *Opstapper* minibus service along the Prinsengracht canal breathed a sigh of relief in 2004 when it was reprieved from a pending death sentence. Visitors should hasten to take advantage of this. Use it or lose it! See chapter 11 for more details.

WHERE TO STAY In Brussels, the already great little hotel **Welcome** got greater still, with the completion of its project to become a country *auberge* in the heart of town. Its 17 rooms will likely be harder to book than ever, now that each one is fitted out, carefully and conscientiously, in a different international style. Sadly, the hotel's equally great seafood restaurant *La Truite d'Argent* has closed. See chapter 4 for more details.

Amsterdam continues to be top-heavy when it comes to hotels—too many luxury-class lodgings and not enough genuinely good places lower down the price scale. The new (or better said “re-newed”; it's back again after a 69-year absence) **Lloyd Hotel**, Oostelijke Handelskade 34 (☎ **020/561-3636**), manages to straddle just about all hotel categories, with rooms of various classes going for 80€ to 300€ (\$100–\$375). Located on the old harbor waterfront east of Centraal Station, it does business with a sense of modern style, pride in tradition, and even *mission* (though that might prove to be a temporary phase born of opening-year enthusiasm and jitters). See chapter 11 for more details.

WHERE TO DINE It's hard to keep up with the comings and goings at the prime Amstelveld canal-side dining site just off Prinsengracht. There are many—count me among them—who still miss the superb restaurant *Kort* that was here until 2001. We were partly mollified by the adventurous (if over-pricey), South Seas-influenced eatery *Moko* that the proprietors brought in as a replacement. Now *Moko* has departed too, vanished like a too-brief Pacific sunset, leaving only wistful memories. Make way for **Proeflokaal Janvier**, Amstelveld 12 (☎ **020/626-1199**). It opens on this book's deadline, and the menu and style were both state secrets at press time. I mention it only

because the ownership team has done such good work with their two previous ventures that it's hard to imagine *Janvier* being anything less than interesting and worthwhile. Besides, the location is one of the finest in town. Check it out, and drop me a line to say how it is.

WHAT TO SEE & DO Brussels has introduced the **Brussels Card**, a chip-enabled plastic card, to smooth access for visitors. The card, which costs 30€ (\$38), is enabled for 3 days, and affords free or reduced admission to around 30 city museums and attractions, along with free use of public transportation and discounts on a range of other services. See chapter 4 for more details.

Fans of the city's superb legacy of Art Nouveau architecture should check out the works of Gustave Strauven (1878–1919), the Brussels-born student of master Victor Horta. Strauven's signature is his use of blue and yellow bricks. He built the *Maison Saint-Cyr* on Square Ambiorix, as well as about 100 private homes in Brussels and Tournai. A private enthusiast is restoring his home from 1902 at rue Luther 28.

Refurbishment has ended at the plush but ugly, modernist *Casino-Kursaal Ostend*, Belgium's faded but still lively “Queen of the Coast.”

Under Antwerp city center is a hidden network of vaulted canals. Around the end of 2004, the tourism authorities began to open these canals to visitors for guided tours. Antwerp has plenty of style, and a roster of top fashion designers. Now it has the Antwerp Fashion Museum **MoMu**, Nationalestraat 28 (☎ **03/470-27-70**; tram: 2 or 8). “MoMu” is an *à la mode* contraction of “Mode Museum.” See chapter 6 for more details.

Amsterdam's premier cultural collection, the **Rijksmuseum**, Stadhouderskade 42 (☎ **020/670-7047**), is in

the middle years of a 5-year closure for renovation during the lifetime of this edition of *Frommer's Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg*. Its Philips Wing, Jan Luijkenstraat 1 (at Museumplein; ☎ 020/647-7000) remains open to display important paintings by the 17th-century Dutch Masters, as well as other highlights from its inventory. An information bureau has opened in the museum gardens to afford insight into how the radically spruced-up institution will look when it re-opens in 2008.

Amsterdam's modern art **Stedelijk Museum CS**, Oosterdokskade 3-5 (☎ 020/573-2911), has set up shop temporarily in the old TPG Post building just east of Centraal Station (and temporarily added that "CS" tag to its name to denote the change). It might be ready to return to its usual stamping ground at Paulus Potterstraat 13 as this edition reaches the end of its shelf life.

Both Amsterdam and Russia's St. Petersburg are often described (or misdescribed) as the "Venice of the North." Their joint image drew closer in 2004 with the opening of **Hermitage Amsterdam**, Nieuwe Herengracht 14 (☎ 020/530-8755), a

satellite of the world-famous State Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Over the next few years, the Dutch operation will fully occupy its chosen premises in the neoclassical Amstelhof beside the Amstel River. Until then, a changing program of exhibits from the Russian mother museum is being mounted in the complex's 19th-century Neerlandia Building. See chapter 11.

AFTER DARK A key element in the brave new world of 21st-century Amsterdam is the **Muziekgebouw**, Piet Heinkade 1 (temporary ☎ 020/668-1805; www.muziekgebouw.nl). A concert hall for modern, jazz, and experimental music that was due to enter service in 2005, on the IJ waterfront east of Centraal Station, it will complement the venerable and elegant Concertgebouw classical music hall just off Museumplein. Both the Bimhuis jazz and De IJsbreker modern music operations were due to move to the Muziekgebouw, whose ocean of glass and steel and uncompromisingly modern lines are a far cry from their erstwhile dark and cozy premises. See chapter 11 for more details.

The Best of Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

Although they're such small places, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg contain a diversity of culture, language, and tradition that defies easy definition. This is true even within each individual country.

Belgium, for example, is fractured along the age-old European great divide between the Germanic north and the Latin south, a division expressed in the constant regional bickering between Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia that threatens to split the country entirely.

Holland (the Netherlands) also has its great divide, along the "three great rivers"—the Maas, the Waal, and the Rhine. The northerners are straitlaced and Calvinist and only know what to do with a glass of beer because they've been shown by the exuberant, Catholic southerners. Then there's the matter of nations within the nation. Friesland, Zeeland, and Limburg have their notions of separateness and their own languages to back them up.

As for Luxembourg, you'd think a country so small that even on a big map its name can't fit within its borders would be simpler. Not a bit of it. Luxembourgers are such a mixed bag that they're still trying to sort out the mess left behind when the Germanic tribes overran the Roman Empire's Rhine defenses in A.D. 406.

The Benelux Union came into existence in 1944 as much as anything because these small countries were tired of being trampled by bigger neighbors with sharp elbows and puffed-out chests. It was the seed from which the subsequent European Union emerged. Diversity is their greatest asset, and their willingness to adapt diversity to the needs of a new era is perhaps their best gift to the new Europe. The visitor from afar may well be more impressed by their shared characteristics, which include a determined grasp on the good life, than by the differences that separate them.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Traveling Through Time in Bruges** (Belgium): Without a doubt, Bruges is one of Europe's most handsome cities. Its almost perfectly preserved center sometimes seems more like a film set or museum exhibit than a living city, because it throws your sense of time so out of joint. Its historic buildings run the gamut of architectural styles from medieval times to the 19th century. The city's picturesque canals are the icing on Bruges's cake. See chapter 5.
- **Riding the Kusttram (Coast Tram)** (Belgium): Riding the modern and comfortable Kusttram still seems like an old-fashioned adventure. The 2-hour journey takes you all along the 70km (44-mile) Belgian coast, from De Panne on the French

The Benelux Countries



border to ritzy Knokke-Heist near the Dutch border. Along the way, you can stop at a number of inviting resorts or even smaller places, such as a stretch of beach or a horse-riding trail—whatever takes

your coastal fancy, the Coast Tram can get you there. See chapter 7.

- **Touring the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): The Ardennes, which covers the eastern third of Belgium, beyond the River Meuse

and on into Luxembourg, is unlike any other landscape in the Benelux countries. Its steep river valleys and thickly forested slopes make it a place apart. This is a historic land of castles, stone-built villages, and farmhouses, but that's not all. The region also has famous resort towns like Spa and Bouillon, unequaled cuisine based on its fresh produce and game, excellent winter skiing, nature and fresh air in abundance, and towns like Bastogne and Ettelbruck which recall the sacrifice American soldiers made for victory in the Battle of the Bulge. See chapter 9 and chapter 18.

- **Skating on the Canals** (Holland): When the thermometer drops low enough for long enough, the Dutch canals freeze over, creating picturesque highways of ice through the cities and countryside. At such times, the Dutch take to their skates. Joining them could be the highlight of your trip. See p. 284.
- **Following the Tulip Trail** (Holland): The place to see the famous Dutch tulips in their full glory is the Keukenhof Gardens at Lisse, where vast numbers of tulips and other flowers create dazzling patches of color in the spring. Combine your visit with a trip through the bulb fields between Leiden and Haarlem. See chapter 12.
- **Checking Out the Windmills on the Zaanse Schans** (Holland): In flat Holland, wind is ever-present, so it's not surprising that the Dutch have used windmills to assist with their hard labor, from

draining polders to sawing wood. At one time the industrious people around the Zaan, northwest of Amsterdam, had almost 500 windmills working for them. Today, of the 12 that survive, four have been reconstructed in the Zaanse Schans, together with other historical buildings reminiscent of the Zaan region's bustling past. See chapter 12.

- **Celebrating Carnival in Maastricht** (Holland): The country never seems so divided by the great rivers as it does during carnival season. Southerners declare that their celebrations are superior, and if you ever run into a southern carnival parade, you'll have to admit that they know how to party. In Maastricht the festivities are especially boisterous. On the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, the mayor officially hands over the keys of the city to Prince Carnival, who will reign for the next 3 days. During this time, people parade through the streets of Maastricht in an endless procession of outrageous outfits and boundless energy. The atmosphere is always high spirited, but it never gets out of hand. See p. 430.
- **Driving the Wine Trail** (Luxembourg): Follow the Route du Vin along the peaceful banks of the Moselle River from Echternach to Mondorf-les-Bains. Here, the low hills of Luxembourg are covered with vineyards. Several wineries open their doors to visitors, offer guided tours, explain how their wine is produced, and treat you to a little of what they have stored in their vats. See chapter 18.

2 The Best Castles & Stately Homes

- **Beersel** (near Brussels, Belgium): This 13th-century castle just 8km (5 miles) south of Brussels looks

to be the ideal place for pulling up the drawbridge and settling in for a siege—and if the owners have

had the foresight to amply stock the rustic Auberge Kasteel Beersel restaurant inside, the proceedings need not be too burdensome. This is a castle just like Disney makes them, with turrets, three towers, a drawbridge, a moat, and the spirits of all those who have, willingly or unwillingly, resided within its walls. See p. 103.

- **Gravensteen** (Ghent, Belgium): Even more than 900 years after it was built, the castle of the Counts in Ghent can still summon up a chilly feeling of dread as you look at its gray stone walls. It's a grim reminder that castles were not all for chivalrous knights and beautiful princesses; this one was intended as much to cow the independent-minded citizens of Ghent as to protect the city from foreign marauders. Inside are the tools of the autocrat's profession: torture instruments that show that what the Middle Ages lacked in humanity they made up for in invention. See p. 130.
- **Bouillon** (near Dinant in the Ardennes, Belgium): This was once the home of a genuine hero, although a hard-handed and ruthless one: Godfrey of Bouillon, who led the First Crusade in 1096, and in 1099 took Jerusalem by storm (massacring its Muslim inhabitants in the process). Meanwhile, back in Bouillon, his castle was being taken over by the prince bishop of Liège. It still stands today, 61km (38 miles) southeast of Dinant on the River Meuse, atop a steep bluff overlooking the town, the bridge over the River Semois, and the road to Paris. You

can tour its walls, chambers, and dungeons. See p. 202.

- **Menkemaborg** (Uithuizen, in Groningen province, Holland): A borg is the Groningen version of a stately home, developed from an earlier, defensive structure. Once home to Groningen landed gentry, the Menkemaborg is a beautiful example of the style. Rebuilt in the 1700s, it was owned by the same family until the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays it is a museum, with period furnishings re-creating a vivid picture of the life and times of a wealthy provincial squire. See p. 374.
- **Het Loo Palace** (near Apeldoorn, Holland): William III, who became king of England, had a royal hunting lodge built here, in the forests surrounding Apeldoorn. Subsequent members of the House of Orange made alterations to the palace, especially in the 19th century, but recent renovations have revealed much of the original decoration, and what couldn't be saved has been redesigned according to the original plans. Don't miss the gardens, which have once again been returned to their 17th-century splendor. See p. 391.
- **Ammersoyen Castle** (near 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland): This is a magnificent example of a moated fortress with sturdy towers at its corners, an architectural type that was introduced into Holland in the second half of the 13th century. The Ammersoyen's history was turbulent—it burned down in 1590 and was left in ruins for half a century before being rebuilt. See p. 422.

3 The Best Museums

- **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts** (Brussels, Belgium): Paintings by

many of the finest Belgian artists are assembled in the exceptional

setting of this twin museum's neo-classical Museum of Historic Art. You'll find an entire section devoted to Brueghel, as well as works by Rubens, van Dyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and many others. Go underground to the Modern Art Museum for works by Magritte, Delvaux, Ensor, Rops, Alechinsky, and others. See p. 87.

• **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen**

(Royal Fine Arts Museum; Antwerp, Belgium): Brussels's art museum may be the more conveniently placed for most visitors, but if you want to see the Flemish Masters in all their glory, you should head north to Antwerp, where the Fine Arts Museum has the best collection of their works in the world, including the largest group of Rubens masterpieces in existence. See p. 138.

• **Musée de la Vie Wallonne**

(Museum of Walloon Life; Liège, Belgium): Set in a 17th-century convent, this museum rambles through the history and culture of the French-speaking (and Walloon dialect-speaking) region of Belgium called Wallonia. Its exhibits also ramble through the building that houses them, covering everything from popular arts and crafts to industry and agriculture; there's even an interesting section on theater marionettes. See p. 175.

• **Rijksmuseum**

(State Museum; Amsterdam, Holland): The Rijksmuseum houses some of the Netherlands's most important works of art: Rembrandt's world-famous *The Night Watch*, four of Vermeer's beautiful miniatures, and numerous works by Frans Hals. All in all, this is one of the most impressive collections of Old Masters in the world. Unfortunately,

until mid-2008 you'll be able to view a lot fewer than previously, since most of the museum is closed for refurbishment. But in the sole wing that remains open, the Philips Wing, the Rijksmuseum has assembled *The Masterpieces*, highlights from its collection of 17th-century Dutch Golden Age, ah, masterpieces. See p. 269.

• **Van Gogh Museum**

(Amsterdam, Holland): This museum has an extensive collection of its namesake's work: a total of 200 paintings and 500 drawings, ranging from the famous *Sunflowers* to earless self-portraits. The permanent collection also includes important works by van Gogh's 19th-century contemporaries, and there are often temporary or visiting exhibitions concentrating on the same period. A new partly underground elliptical wing, by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, opened on Museumplein in 1999 to house temporary exhibitions of work by van Gogh and other artists. See p. 272.

• **Mauritshuis**

(The Hague, Holland): This wonderfully intimate museum is set in the 17th-century palace of a Dutch count. Its collection of Golden Age art treasures is small but unrivaled. See p. 322.

• **Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen**

(Rotterdam, Holland): This museum features a range of art forms, from visual to applied arts, covering a period of over 7 centuries. Here you see paintings by everyone from Brueghel and van Eyck to surrealists like Magritte and Dalí. See p. 322.

• **Museum Het Catharijneconvent**

(St. Catherine's Convent; Utrecht, Holland): This museum, appropriately housed in a former convent, will give you a clear picture of Holland's Christian heritage.

The collection of medieval art and illuminated manuscripts is particularly impressive. See p. 384.

- **National Museum of Military History** (Museum of the Battle of the Bulge; Diekirch, Luxembourg): Luxembourg has many museums devoted to the peaceful aspects of life, but there's something special about this tribute to the heroes of the Battle of the Bulge (1944–45)—something

gritty, immediate, and real that sets it apart from other war museums. Its centerpiece is a series of dioramas that give you an eerie sense of being there in the battle, in the snow, with danger all around. The display is bound to inspire both sympathy and admiration for the men who fought and died for freedom all over the beautiful Ardennes region that is now so peaceful. See p. 461.

4 The Best Cathedrals & Churches

- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Bruges, Belgium): The soaring 122m (396-ft.) spire of this church can be seen from a wide area around Bruges. As a magnificent bonus, the church also holds a beautiful marble *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo (one of his few works outside Italy); a painting by Anthony van Dyck; and the 15th-century bronze tomb sculptures of Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy. See p. 118.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Antwerp, Belgium): You can't miss this towering example of the Flemish Gothic style if you visit Antwerp, or even pass close to the city. Its 123m (400-ft.) spire dominates the area. This is in fact the biggest church in the Benelux countries, with seven naves and 125 pillars. But oversize statistics are not Our Lady's only attraction—there are no fewer than three Rubens masterpieces inside, as well as paintings by other prominent artists. See p. 139.
- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Tournai, Belgium): This cathedral is a harmonious blending of the Romanesque and Gothic styles. It has five towers and a magnificent

suite of stained-glass windows, as well as paintings by Rubens and Jordaens. Equally interesting are the opulent pieces in the Treasury, especially the gold-and-silver reliquary, The Shrine of Our Lady, dating from 1205. See p. 196.

- **Westerkerk** (West Church; Amsterdam, Holland): The Westerkerk's 85m (277-ft.) tower, the Westertoren, is the tallest in Amsterdam, providing a spectacular view of the city. Anne Frank could hear every note of the carillon's dulcet tones while in hiding from the Nazis in her nearby house. See p. 278.
- **Sint-Bavokerk** (St. Bavo's Church; Haarlem, Holland): Walking to the town center from Haarlem station, you catch only glimpses of the church, but the moment you reach the market square it is revealed in all its splendor. This church, which was completed after a relatively short building period, has a rare unity of structure and proportion. Regular concerts are given here on the famous organ built by Christian Müller in 1738. The young Mozart once played on this instrument. See p. 296.
- **Sint-Janskerk** (St. John's Church; Gouda, Holland): At 122m (400 ft.), this is the longest church in

Holland. It also has some of the most magnificent stained-glass windows in Europe. See p. 347.

- **Domkerk** (Utrecht, Holland): This magnificent cathedral was begun in the 13th century. Its 111m (365-ft.) tower, which dominates old Utrecht's skyline, offers a great view of the city. See p. 384.
- **Sint-Servaasbasiliek** (Basilica of St. Servatius; Maastricht, Holland): One of the oldest churches in Holland, this basilica was built over the grave of St. Servatius, the first bishop of Holland. Parts of it date back to the 10th century, and it was enlarged in the 14th and 15th centuries, when the south portal and the entrance to the cloister at Keizer Karelplein were added. These are adorned with beautiful statues and intricate stone carvings. The church interior is largely Romanesque, and

recent restorations have given it a cool and restrained atmosphere, emphasizing the simple arches and vaults. Over the centuries people have honored St. Servatius with gifts, so the Treasury holds a collection of incredible richness and beauty. Most impressive are the reliquaries of Saint Thomas and of Saint Servatius, made by Maas-tricht goldsmiths in the 12th century. See p. 428.

- **Notre-Dame Cathedral** (Luxembourg City): The cathedral of Luxembourg City was built late for the Gothic style—in the early 17th century—but is nevertheless a great Gothic monument, albeit clearly influenced by Renaissance ideals. The Octave of Our Lady of Luxembourg takes place here every year before the statue of the Virgin, which is said to have miraculous powers. See p. 451.

5 The Best Offbeat Trips

- **Walking on the Wadden Sea** (Holland): At low tide, the Wadden Sea, between the northern coast and the Wadden Islands, virtually disappears, and if you're up for a walk in the mud, you can join a Wadden Walking (*Wadlopen*) trip and plow your way over land to one of the islands. Several companies, both in Groningen and Friesland, organize guided trips from May to early October. If you're lucky you might encounter some seals gallivanting in pools left by the retreating tide or sunbathing on the flats. See p. 368.
- **Riding White Bikes in Hoge Veluwe National Park** (Holland): It was tried once in Amsterdam—providing free white bikes for everyone to use—but the bikes mysteriously disappeared and turned up in private hands with fresh coats of paint. The scheme has worked much better in this beautiful national park (which apparently doesn't shelter as many bike thieves). Just head to Hoge Veluwe's parking lot, pick up a bike, and explore the traffic-free scenery to your heart's content. See p. 393.

6 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **Hiking Across the Hautes Fagnes** (Belgium): Wooden walkways stretch like the Yellow Brick Road across the high and bleak moorland plateau of Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve in eastern Belgium, between Eupen and Malmédy. It's forbidden to leave

these walkways except in the company of an official guide accredited to the Walloon region. On the walkways you can explore the remnants of an ancient morasslike landscape that has claimed lives in bad weather through the centuries, into recent times. It is a beautiful, wild place and satisfying to cross at any time of year. A fine summer's day may be best, but venturing onto the moor, adequately clothed, in the middle of a snowbound winter night also has its attractions. See chapter 9.

- **Sand Yachting at De Panne** (Belgium): Conditions on the beach at De Panne are ideal for this exciting, unusual sport. See chapter 7.
- **Skiing the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): Quite a few ski and winter sports shops in the Belgian and Luxembourg Ardennes have bet the farm and lost their shirts by banking on snowfall each winter. Some years it snows and some years it doesn't, and some years it does but by the time skiing enthusiasts arrive from Brussels the covering has melted and the ski slopes are as green as a golf course. Still, when it does snow enough, the Ardennes is a pleasant place to ski. There are a dozen or so downhill centers but most skiing in the Ardennes is cross-country. A particularly good location is Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve between Eupen and Malmédy, but you can ski only on the designated trails, as this is a

protected landscape. See chapter 9 and chapter 18.

- **Biking in Holland:** In this nation with a population of 15 million people, there are some 11 million bikes, so you can believe that the Dutch are all but born in the saddle. To fully engage in the Dutch experience, you positively have to board a bicycle and head out into the wide green yonder. The tourism authorities have marked out many cycling tour routes and have published descriptive booklets and maps to go along with them, available from VVV offices. A few suggestions for longer tours: cycling around the IJsselmeer, the big lake north of Amsterdam, which you can do in anything from 2 days to a week; biking along the coast from Zeeland to Zandvoort; touring the beautiful countryside of the "green province," Drenthe; and following the course of the River Maas down into hilly Limburg. Many rail stations around the country have bikes for rent.
- **Canoeing in the Biesbosch** (Holland): This unique natural park of marshland, meadows, and willow woods was formed during the St. Elizabeth floods of 1421, when 16 villages were submerged and the former polders became an inland sea. There are several possibilities for exploring the Biesbosch, including tour boat, but paddling your own canoe is the best way to get close to nature. See chapter 16.

7 The Best Romantic Getaways

- **Château Vacations** (Wallonia, Belgium): The French-speaking region of Belgium is noted for its beautiful châteaux, dating from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, set in the countryside amidst ornamental gardens and often surrounded by

moats. Nowadays, some of these venerable, stately homes have been transformed into hotels or restaurants, offering guests luxurious living and fine dining. There are châteaux in the suburbs of Brussels, along the steep valley of the River

Meuse, among the rolling hills of the Ardennes, and set amidst the wide-open green spaces of Hainaut on the French border. A weekend in one of these châteaux is surely among the most romantic getaways imaginable. For further information, contact the **Wallonia-Brussels Tourist Office** (☎ 02/504-0200; fax 02/513-6950). See chapter 8.

- **Kasteel Wittem** (Wittem, Holland; ☎ 043/450-1208): This romantically idyllic 12th-century castle is also a hotel. It's the perfect place to stay after exploring the south of Holland's Limburg province. In summer you can dine or have breakfast on a magnificent terrace overlooking the garden and moat. See p. 433.

8 The Best Deluxe Hotels

- **Métropole** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/217-23-00): This century-old hotel in the heart of Brussels maintains the Belle Epoque splendor of its first days and combines it with modern furnishings and service. Its **L'Alban Chambon** restaurant is one of Brussels's best. See p. 67.
- **Hotel des Indes** (The Hague, Holland; ☎ 070/361-2345): Within this opulent hotel, you can lean over the balustrade on the first-floor landing to watch the cream of The Hague's society having tea in the lounge, the lights of chandeliers reflecting in the polished marble pillars. The rooms are equally grand and comfortable. See p. 324.
- **Hotel Lauswolt** (Beetsterzwaag, near Leeuwarden, Holland; ☎ 051/238-12-45): This 19th-century country house has been converted into a luxury hotel equipped with the latest amenities and leisure facilities. Some 2,700 acres of woods and heather offer ample opportunity for walking or horseback riding. You can also play golf or tennis, and there are even two swimming pools. All this

activity will surely stir your appetite—luckily, the cuisine is of the same high standard as the other comforts in the hotel, and dinner in the elegant 19th-century dining room will be an unforgettable experience. See p. 357.

- **De Campveerse Toren** (Veere, Holland; ☎ 0118/501-291): This ancient inn guards the harbor of Veere. With the Veerse Meer (Lake Veere) lapping at the walls below your room, you can look over the entire length of the lake and to the harbor where pleasure boats are moored. Little is as calming to the spirit as a walk through the old streets of Veere at dusk, when most of the tourists have gone for the day. Later, back in your room at the inn for the night, you'll be gently lulled to sleep by the murmuring waters of the lake. See p. 416.
- **Grand Hôtel Cravat** (Luxembourg City; ☎ 22-19-75): The Grand Hôtel Cravat has been a Luxembourg institution for nearly a century. And for fine dining nearby, you won't need to look much further than its own Le Normandy. See p. 455.

9 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Comfort Art Hotel Siru** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/203-35-80):

This is one of the most surprising—even shocking—hotels you'll

find anywhere. Its art-aficionado owner had the innovative idea of inviting Belgium's top artists to decorate a room with a painting, sculpture, or installation on the theme of travel. Many of them took up the challenge, with the result that each room is a miniature single-exhibit art gallery. The art is, obviously, contemporary, so the response from guests can vary. Some regulars ask for a different room each time so that after a hundred visits they'll have toured the full "gallery"; some always ask for the same room; others, shaken by an unsettling image, ask for a room change in the middle of the night. One thing is certain: The Siru is unforgettable. See p. 73.

- **Welcome** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/219-95-46): This is the best little hotel in Brussels. With only 17 rooms, it's small, but the welcome's a big one, and the standard of the rooms is high. As a bonus, you have only to trip down the stairs to find yourself in one of the best seafood restaurants in the city, La Truite d'Argent. Try to get Michel to tell you about the hotel and restaurant's history, preferably over a glass or two of Kwak beer—but be careful: it's a long story and Kwak is strong beer. See p. 70.
- **Egmond** (Bruges, Belgium; ☎ 050/34-14-45): You can think of the Egmond as your own country mansion, for not much more than a hundred bucks a room. There's just one problem with this image: The Egmond is not actually in the country. In compensation, it has its own grounds and gardens, and is next to the Minnewater (Lover's Lake) and the Begijnhof. See p. 111.
- **Ambassade** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/555-0222): This hotel occupies 10 neighboring

canal houses on the "Golden Bend"—for centuries the city's most fashionable address. Here, you really feel that you're in the home of a rich 17th-century merchant. Most of the individually styled and spacious rooms have large windows overlooking the canal, as does the split-level chandelied breakfast room. If you need some modern—in fact, New Age—relaxation, you can take to the flotation tanks or relax into a deep massage at the hotel's Koan Float center. See p. 246.

- **Seven Bridges** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/623-1329): There are some hotels where you realize that the owners aren't just running a business, but doing what they love. The Seven Bridges is that kind of place—Pierre Keulers and Günter Glaner have found both their hobby and their profession in this fine hotel in Amsterdam. It's no exaggeration to say that all the furniture, fixtures, and fittings have been selected with loving care, and guests receive the same conscientious attention. See p. 248.
- **Best Western Hotel du Casque** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/321-4343): Maastricht, in the south of Holland, is where the cold-blooded northern Dutch come to get lessons in how to have fun. Though Maastrichters do their best, you can generally see them shaking their heads sadly, as though their less-talented brethren never will learn the lesson. The Hotel du Casque overlooks the Vrijthof, which basks in its reputation as the liveliest square in the liveliest city in the country. Despite its prestigious address, this hotel is as moderately priced as you'll find in Maastricht. See p. 430.

- **Grand Hôtel du Parc** (Clervaux, Luxembourg; ☎ 92-06-50): The northern Luxembourg town of Clervaux is one of the most dramatic in the Ardennes; it's situated in a plunging valley, watched over by a castle on the mountain

heights. The Grand Hôtel du Parc offers old-fashioned charm with all the benefits of modern facilities, including a sauna and solarium, at a downright affordable price. See p. 463.

10 The Best Restaurants

- **Comme Chez Soi** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/512-29-21): If Michelin were to introduce a four-star category, Comme Chez Soi would undoubtedly be one of the first to collect the extra star. The irony about this culinary holy-of-holies is its name: "Just Like Home." I definitely don't eat gourmet fare in my home, but perhaps this is standard stuff at owner and master chef Pierre Wynants's place. A hallowed silence descends on diners as they sample their first mouthful of his French specialties with added Belgian zest. This being Belgium, the silence doesn't last long, but the taste and the memory linger. See p. 74.
- **In 't Spinnepokke** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/511-86-95): For a different kind of Brussels eating experience, try this down-home restaurant dating from 1762. Here, traditional Belgian dishes are given the care and attention expected of more refined—though not necessarily more tasty—cuisine. See p. 79.
- **Hostellerie le Sanglier des Ardennes** (Durbuy, Belgium; ☎ 086/21-32-62): This restaurant, in a hotel in one of the prettiest of Ardennes villages, has the rustic looks and ideal location to go along with its fine country food. Walking in the surrounding wooded hills is the perfect preparation for lunch or dinner here. See p. 207.
- **La Rive** (in the Amstel Intercontinental Hotel, Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/520-3264): If two prestigious Michelin stars don't make your mouth water, then what will? La Rive even has a special table where you can watch how the chefs actually do it. While dining, you can enjoy the view through tall French windows to the broad Amstel River. The service and wine cellar are in the finest modern French traditions. See p. 266.
- **Le Restaurant** (in the Hotel des Indes, The Hague, Holland; ☎ 070/361-2345): The Hague's nickname "Dowager of the Dutch East Indies" could well apply to the elegant Hotel Des Indes. The food it serves is refined and delicious, combining European and colonial flavors. See p. 324.
- **Restaurant de Echoput** (Apeldoorn, Holland; ☎ 055/519-14-63): Game features prominently on the menu at this restaurant, set amidst the forests near Apeldoorn, on the edge of the Royal Wood. During the hunting season you can have wild boar, venison, and any kind of fowl, always succulent and prepared with flair. In spring and summer the menu is just as delectable, and in fair weather you can dine on the terrace in the fresh forest air. See p. 392.
- **Château Neercanne** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/325-1359): "To

live like a god in France” goes the Dutch proverb expressing the pinnacle of earthly pleasure. You might imagine yourself to be both a god and in France if you dine at this château, which was designed following French models. What’s more, in true French culinary style, the food here is seductively elegant and the wine cellar is unique and impressive—the wines

are kept under perfect conditions in the marlstone caves behind the château. See p. 431.

- **Salon Saint-Michel** (Luxembourg City; ☎ 352/22-32-15): The Saint-Michel occupies a little side street in the Old Town, but lights up the entire city with classic French cuisine that makes no concessions where quality is concerned. See p. 456.

11 The Best Cafes & Bars

- **Falstaff Gourmand** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 26-20-06-20): Le Falstaff deserves the highest accolades for its eclectic, accomplished mix of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and its extensive drink list. This is self-satisfied, bourgeois Brussels at its best. See p. 76.
- **De Engel** (Antwerp, Belgium): There are cafes in Antwerp with a lot more action, but for a real Antwerpenaar brown cafe-style pub, it’s hard to beat De Engel. Its location at a corner of the Grote Markt adds to the attraction, but to experience De Engel’s crowning glory, order a glass of Antwerp’s own, lovingly poured De Koninck beer—a golden-brown liquid in a glass called a *bolleke* (little ball) that glows like amber in the sunlight streaming through De Engel’s windows. See p. 147.
- **’t Dreupelkot** (Ghent, Belgium): Ghent has no shortage of fine cafes, and you can just about guarantee that any one you enter will provide pleasant memories. ’t Dreupelkot adds a particularly warm glow of appreciation, however; its stock-in-trade is *jenever*, one of the most potent alcoholic liquids known to

humankind. Actually, some of ’t Dreupelkot’s 100 varieties are fairly mild, while others have been flavored with herbs and spices. The atmosphere in the cafe is great—it’s filled with cultured *jenever* buffs rather than with drunks. See p. 135.

- **Cafe ’t Smalle** (Amsterdam, Holland): This cozy, crowded brown cafe on Amsterdam’s Egelantiersgracht is usually thick with cigar smoke, *jenever* vapor, and lively conversation. You can escape the crush on the splendid waterside terrace, a perfect place to watch cyclists and cars rushing past while you rest your legs on the terrace railing. See p. 290.
- **In den Ouden Vogelstruys** (Maastricht, Holland): This friendly, popular Maastricht watering hole was already well-trodden territory when it came under artillery fire in some war or another in 1653, and took a hit from a cannonball that remains lodged in one of its walls. The place attracts a broad—in some cases very broad—cross-section of Maastricht society. See p. 434.

12 The Best Shopping

- **Diamonds** (Antwerp, Belgium): One thing is for sure, you’ll be spoiled for choice in Antwerp’s

Diamond Quarter, which does six times as much diamond business as Amsterdam. Much of the trade

here is carried on by the city's Orthodox Jewish community, whose conservative ways and traditional black clothing make a striking contrast to the glitter of their stock-in-trade. See chapter 6.

- **Lace** (Belgium): There are two kinds of Belgian lace: exquisitely handmade pieces, and machine-made stuff. Machine-made lace is not necessarily bad—indeed some of it is very good—but this is the form used to mass-produce pieces of indifferent quality to meet the demand for souvenirs. The highest-quality lace is handmade. Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent are the main, but far from the only, points of sale. See chapters 4, 5, and 6.
- **Chocolates** (Belgium): The Swiss might argue the point, but the truth is that Belgian handmade chocolates, filled with various fresh-cream flavors, are the best in the universe. You can't go wrong if you buy chocolates made by Wit-tamer, Nihoul, Leonidas, and Neuhaus, available in specialist shops all over Belgium (and in Holland and Luxembourg, too). See chapter 4.
- **Delftware** (Holland): Originally, the pottery made in the factories at Delft was white, imitating tin-glazed products from Italy and Spain. But during the 16th century, blue Chinese porcelain was imported to Holland, and this was soon recognized to be of superior quality. So the Delftware factories started using a white tin glaze to cover the red clay and decorating the pottery in blue. This Delft Blue became famous the world over, along with Makkumware, which is pottery produced in the Dutch town of Makkum. Delftware and Makkumware are for sale in specialized shops all over the country, but it's far more interesting to go to one of the workshops in the towns themselves and see how it's made. Little has changed over the centuries, and all the decorating is still done by hand. See chapters 13 and 14.
- **Flower Bulbs** (Holland): Nowadays many growers offer bulbs with a health certificate clearing them for entry into foreign countries, so you'll have no problem buying bulbs for home. You might not know what kind to buy, though, as it is difficult to choose from the incredible variety of shapes and colors offered in Holland. Some bulbs flower early in January, others wait until the warmer months of May or June. Knowing this, you can choose bulbs with different flowering times, so you can enjoy their blooming over a long period in spring. Check before buying, however, as not all bulbs are certified for entry into the U.S. Packages must have a numbered phytosanitary certificate attached to the label, allowing you to import the bulbs. In Amsterdam, you can't do better than buying them from the Floating Flower market on the Singel canal. See chapter 11.
- **Wine** (Luxembourg): Holland's tiny output notwithstanding, Luxembourg is the only real wine producer in the Benelux countries. The vintage in question is the highly regarded Moselle wine, perhaps not as well known outside the Grand Duchy and its immediate neighbors as German and French wines, but fine stock nonetheless. See chapter 18.

Planning Your Trip to Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

Before any trip, most of us like to do a bit of advanced planning. When should I go? What is this trip going to cost me? Will there be a special holiday when I visit? What special bits of practical advice might be useful? We'll answer these and other questions for you in this chapter. For information specific to the three individual countries, see also chapters 3, 10, and 17.

1 The Countries in Brief

Perhaps nowhere else in all of Europe are there so many points of interest compressed into such a small area as there are in Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. Topping the list are such purely aesthetic attractions as lyrically beautiful scenery, artistic masterpieces, cultural events, and intriguing reminders of a long and colorful history. There are also the more mundane (but essential) advantages of convenience, economy, and friendly populations, not to mention a host of other travel delights—the exquisite food and drink of Brussels, the exuberant sociability of Amsterdam, and Luxembourg's sidewalk cafes.

BELGIUM For a graphic picture of Belgium's two ethnic regions, Dutch-speaking *Vlaanderen* (Flanders) and French-speaking *Wallonie* (Wallonia), draw an imaginary east-west line across the country just south of Brussels. North of the line is Flanders, where you find the medieval cities of Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, and Belgium's North Sea coastline. South of the line is Wallonia. The art cities of Tournai and Mons, historic castles by the score, and the scenic resort towns

of the Ardennes are the attractions of this beautiful region. Then there's Brussels, the capital, roughly in the geographic middle, and going off on a trajectory of its own as the "capital of Europe."

HOLLAND The Netherlands is a *wysiwyg* kind of country: What you see is what you get. There are no dramatic canyons or towering peaks. The nation's highest point wouldn't top the roof of a New York City skyscraper, and its average altitude is just 11m (37 ft.) above sea level. This makes for few panoramic vantage points; you can't see most of the lakes and canals until you're about to fall into them. Are the views therefore boring? The answer is a flat "No." As the famous Dutch landscape painters of the 17th century showed the world, vistas in Holland are among the most beautiful anywhere: wide-angle views of green pastures and floating clouds, with tiny houses, church spires, and grazing cattle silhouetted against the horizon.

LUXEMBOURG At first sight, Luxembourg—a county-size nation with a population little bigger than a small- to medium-size city—might

appear to have an obvious provincial aspect. But size isn't everything, and in this case at least, small really is beautiful. Luxembourg manages to pack

into its handful of square miles a fascinating little capital city and an enviable inventory of cultural diversity and scenic splendor.

2 Visitor Information

The official tourist agency for each country maintains overseas branches that provide excellent in-depth information on a vast array of subjects, including special interests. You'll find national and local tourist office addresses given in the appropriate chapters; useful overseas addresses for all three countries are given below:

BELGIAN TOURIST OFFICE

www.visitbelgium.com

U.S. 220 E. 42nd St., Ste. 3402, New York, NY 10017 (☎ 212/758-8130; fax 212/355-7675).

CANADA P.O. Box 760, Succursale N.D.G., Montreal, Quebec H4A 3S2 (☎ 514/457-2888; fax 514/457-9447).

U.K. & IRELAND For Brussels and French-speaking Wallonia (and its German-speaking district): 217 Marsh Wall, London E14 9FJ (☎ 020/7531-0390; fax 020/7531-0393; www.belgiumtheplacetobe.be). For Brussels and Dutch-speaking Flanders: 1A Caven-dish Sq., London W1G 0LD (brochure line ☎ 020/7307-7730; fax 020/7307-7731; www.visitflanders.co.uk).

NETHERLANDS BOARD OF TOURISM (NBT)

www.goholland.com

U.S. & CANADA 355 Lexington Ave., 19th Floor, New York, NY 10017 (☎ 212/557-3500; fax 212/370-9507).

Destination Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg: Red Alert Checklist

- If you purchased traveler's checks, have you recorded the check numbers, and stored the documentation separately from the checks?
- Did you pack your camera and an extra set of camera batteries, and purchase enough film or memory disks for your digital camera? All of these items are easily available in the Benelux countries—but they might cost more than at home.
- Do you have a safe, accessible place to store money?
- Did you bring your ID cards that could entitle you to discounts, such as AAA and AARP cards, student IDs, and so forth?
- Did you bring emergency drug prescriptions and extra glasses and/or contact lenses?
- Do you have your credit card PINs? Is there a daily withdrawal limit on your credit card's cash advances?
- Have you booked your tickets yet for classical music at the Concertgebouw, and for opera and dance at the Muziektheater (see "The Performing Arts," in chapter 11)?
- Did you pack that umbrella? It's likely you will need it.

U.K. & IRELAND (Mail inquiries only): P.O. Box 30783, London WC2B 6DH (☎ **020/7539-7950**; premium-rate brochure order line ☎ 09068/717777; fax 020/7539-7953).

LUXEMBOURG NATIONAL TOURIST OFFICE

www.visitluxembourg.com

U.S. & CANADA 17 Beekman Place, New York, NY 10022 (☎ **212/935-8888**; fax 212/935-5896).

U.K. & IRELAND 122 Regent St., London W1B 5SA (☎ **020/7434-2800**; fax 020/7734-1205; www.luxembourg.co.uk).

WEBSITES

You may want to check out the following sites on the Net (also see the tourist office sites above): **Belgian Tourism** (www.belgique-tourisme.net), **Flanders Tourism** (www.toervl.be), **Welcome to Belgium** (www.trabel.com), **Brussels** (www.trabel.com/brussels.htm), **Visit Amsterdam** (www.visitamsterdam.nl), **Amsterdam Hotspots** (www.amsterdamhotspots.nl), **Channels Amsterdam** (www.channels.nl), and **Go Amsterdam** (www.go-amsterdam.nl). Luxembourg City's website (www.luxembourg-ville.lu) has good information on the city.

3 Entry Requirements & Customs

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand need only a valid passport for a visit of less than 3 months to Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. If you are a citizen of another country, be sure to check the travel regulations before you leave. No health and vaccination certificates are required, and drivers need only produce a valid driver's license from their home country.

CUSTOMS

Duty-free shopping has been abolished in all European Union countries, so standard allowances do not apply to goods bought in one EU country and brought into another. In this case, there are no import limitations for most goods, but the following guideline limits may apply: 800 cigarettes, 400 cigarillos, 200 cigars, 1 kilogram of tobacco; 10 liters of liquor, 20 liters of aperitifs (port and so on), 90 liters of wine (of which 60 liters may be sparkling wine), and 110 liters of beer.

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO THE BENELUX

BELGIUM Travelers 17 and older residing in a country outside the EU can bring in, free of duty, 200 cigarettes, 100 cigarillos, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco; 1 liter of liquor or 2 liters of wine; and 50 milliliters of perfume. Import of most other goods is unlimited, so long as import duty is paid—the duty must not exceed a value of 100€. Forbidden products include firearms, counterfeit goods, banned narcotic substances, and protected animals and plants and products made from these. For further information, contact **Belgian Customs** (☎ **02/753-48-50**, 32-2/753-48-50 from outside Belgium).

HOLLAND Travelers 17 years and older resident in a country outside the EU can bring in, free of duty, 200 cigarettes, 100 cigarillos, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco; 1 liter of liquor or 2 liters of wine; and 50 milliliters of perfume. Import of most other goods is unlimited, so long as import duty is

Tips Passport Savvy

Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee. When traveling, safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt, and keep a copy of the critical pages with your passport number in a separate place.

paid and does not exceed a value of 250€. Forbidden products include firearms, counterfeit goods, banned narcotic substances, and protected animals and plants and products made from these. For further information, contact **Netherlands Customs** (☎ 0800/0143, 31-20/586-751 from outside the Netherlands; www.douane.nl).

LUXEMBOURG Travelers 17 years and older resident in a country outside the EU can bring in, free of duty, 200 cigarettes, 100 cigarillos, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco; 1 liter of liquor or 2 liters of wine; and 50 milliliters of perfume. Import of most other goods is unlimited, so long as import duty is paid and does not exceed a value of 180€. Forbidden products include firearms, counterfeit goods, banned narcotic substances, and protected animals and plants and products made from these. For further information, contact **Luxembourg Customs** (☎ 352/290-19-11, 352/290-19-11 from outside Luxembourg; www.etat.lu/DO).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM THE BENELUX

Returning **U.S. citizens** who have been away for at least 48 hours are allowed to bring back, once every 30 days, \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. You'll be charged a flat rate of duty on the next \$1,000 worth of purchases. Any dollar amount beyond that is dutiable at whatever rates apply.

On mailed gifts, the duty-free limit is \$200. Be sure to have your receipts or purchases handy to expedite the declaration process.

For specifics, download the free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at www.cbp.gov. (Click on "Travel," and then click on "Know Before You Go! Online Brochure.") Or request the pamphlet from the **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP)**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (☎ 877/287-8667).

For a summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.ccr-adrc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C\$750 exemption, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, one can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada valued at less than C\$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under \$60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as expensive foreign cameras.

In essence, there is no limit on what **U.K. citizens** can bring back from another EU country like the Netherlands, as long as the items are for personal use (this includes gifts), and you

have already paid the necessary duty and tax. However, the law sets out guidance levels. If you bring in more than these, you may be asked to prove that the goods are for your own use: 3,200 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 400 cigarillos, 3 kilograms of smoking tobacco, 10 liters of spirits, 90 liters of wine, 20 liters of fortified wine (such as port or sherry), and 110 liters of beer. For more information, contact **HM Customs & Excise** at ☎ **0845/010-9000**, 020/8929-0152 from outside the U.K.; or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

The duty-free allowance in **Australia** is A\$400 or, for those under 18, A\$200. Citizens can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125 milliliters of alcohol. If you're returning with valuables you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go*. For

more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ **1300/363-263**, or log onto www.customs.gov.au.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

4 Money

The three Benelux countries are by no means inexpensive. Clearly, whether you agree with this statement will depend on how much you can bring to bear—or bear to bring—in the way of financial resources. If you are used to the prices in New York and London, those in Amsterdam, Brussels, and Luxembourg City likely won't seem too out of whack. But opportunities for scoring genuine bargains run a thin gamut from few-and-far-between to nonexistent. In your favor is that the natives themselves display a reluctance to part unnecessarily with a euro. A sound rule of thumb is that if

you lodge, dine, and entertain yourself in the same places where “ordinary” locals do, you can limit the financial damage.

CURRENCY

The **euro** (€) is the currency in the Netherlands. There are 100 euro cents to each euro. Eight euro **coins** are in circulation: 0.01€, 0.02€, 0.05€, 0.10€, 0.20€, 0.50€ (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 euro cents, respectively), 1€, and 2€. The seven euro **notes** are: 5€, 10€, 20€, 50€, 100€, 200€, and 500€.

Price Conversions

The price conversions in this book are based on an exchange rate of 1€ = US\$1.25, and 1€ = £1.45. Bear in mind that exchange rates fluctuate daily. For up-to-the-minute currency conversions, go to www.xe.com/ucc.

The Euro, The U.S. Dollar & the British Pound

€	U.S.\$	U.K.£	€	U.S.\$	U.K.£
1.00	1.25	0.69	10.00	12.50	6.90
2.00	2.50	1.38	20.00	25.00	13.80
3.00	3.75	2.07	30.00	37.50	20.70
4.00	5.00	2.76	40.00	50.00	27.60
5.00	6.25	3.45	50.00	62.50	34.50
6.00	7.50	4.14	75.00	93.75	51.70
7.00	8.75	4.83	100.00	125.00	68.95
8.00	10.00	5.52	125.00	156.25	86.20
9.00	11.25	6.21	150.00	187.50	103.45

It's a good idea to exchange some money—enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home, so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs.

For details on **currency exchange**, see “Fast Facts: . . .” in the individual country Planning chapters (3, 10, and 17).

ATMS

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine). The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and your daily withdrawal limit before you leave home. Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5

or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$1.50). On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee.

You can also get cash advances on your credit card at an ATM. Keep in mind that credit card companies try to protect themselves from theft by limiting the funds someone can withdraw outside their home country, so call your credit card company before you leave home. You'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

These days, traveler's checks are less necessary because the Benelux countries have plenty of 24-hour ATMs. However, you will be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own, so if you're going to withdraw money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks, which will be replaced if lost or stolen. You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank, and from **American Express**, **Thomas Cook**, **Visa**, and **MasterCard**.

Small Change

When you change money, ask for some small bills or loose change. Petty cash will come in handy for tipping and public transportation. Consider keeping the change separate from your larger bills, so that it's readily accessible and you'll be less of a target for theft.

 Tips Dear Visa: I'm Off to Maastricht!

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip abroad so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in a foreign destination and block your charges.

Euro **traveler's checks** are accepted at locations where dollar and pound traveler's checks may not be, but you'll have to reconvert any unused ones or keep them for a future trip to a euro-zone country.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN.

Visa and **MasterCard** (also known as **EuroCard** in Europe) are the most widely used cards in Holland. **American Express** is often accepted, mostly in the middle- and upper-bracket category. **Diners Club** is not as commonly accepted as American Express. Credit cards are not so commonly accepted as in the United States and Britain. Many restaurants and shops in Amsterdam, and some hotels, don't accept them at all, and others add a 5% surcharge for card payment.

5 Travel Insurance

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, cancelled tickets, or medical expenses. The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of the trip, your age, your health, and the type of trip you're taking.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disaster to the State Department declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won't cover vague fears, though, as many travelers discovered who tried to cancel their trips in Oct 2001 because they were wary of flying.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good

buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print—and make sure that your airline or cruise line is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy.

For more information, contact one of the following insurers: **Access America** (☎ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (☎ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE For travel overseas, most health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) do not provide coverage, and the ones that do often require you to pay for services upfront and reimburse you

Quick ID

Tie a colorful ribbon or piece of yarn around your luggage handle, or slap a distinctive sticker on the side of your bag. This makes it less likely that someone will mistakenly appropriate it. And if your luggage gets lost, it will be easier to find.

only after you return home. Even if your plan does cover overseas treatment, most out-of-country hospitals make you pay your bills upfront, and send you a refund only after you've returned home and filed the necessary paperwork with your insurance company. If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (☎ 410/453-6300; www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (☎ 800/821-2828; www.travelassistance.com; for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ☎ 800/777-8710).

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE

On domestic flights, checked baggage is covered up to \$2,500 per ticketed passenger. On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage coverage is limited to approximately \$9.07 per pound, up to approximately \$635 per

checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, since many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

6 Health & Safety

STAYING HEALTHY

There are no particular health concerns in the Benelux—if you don't count the "risk" in Amsterdam and other Dutch towns of occasionally breathing in a whiff of someone else's legally tolerated hashish smoke (and of course they'd likely argue that it's perfectly healthy). You will encounter few other health problems when traveling. The tap water is safe to drink, the milk is pasteurized, and healthcare is excellent.

GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHCARE

The state-owned healthcare systems in the Benelux lands are among the

world's best, even if they've begun to show signs of the strain of universal healthcare for all. It's easy to get over-the-counter medicines for minor ailments, and both local brands and generic equivalents of most common prescription drugs are available. Many doctors speak English (though the words they use might be a little disturbing, like the doctor who told me he knew what "disease" I had when I reported a minor ailment).

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT)**; ☎ 716/754-4883 or,

in Canada, 416/652-0137; www.iamat.org) for tips on travel and health concerns in the countries you're visiting, and lists of local, English-speaking doctors. The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (☎ 800/311-3435; www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on health hazards by region or country and offers tips on food safety.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

If a medical emergency arises, your hotel staff can usually put you in touch with a reliable doctor. Most hospitals have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening; you may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit. Embassies in Brussels and The Hague can provide a list of area doctors who speak English (meaning just about any doctor in town). We list hospitals, embassies, and emergency numbers under "Fast Facts" in the various country planning and capital city chapters.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (☎ 888/633-4298; www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert's 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in

case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

STAYING SAFE

In Holland, be wary of pickpockets on trams, buses, and Metro trains; in rail and Metro stations; on busy shopping streets and in busy stores; and even in your hotel lobby. The rest of Holland is not as bad in this respect as the capital, though Rotterdam and The Hague are not so far behind.

Belgium is generally safe—even the big cities are low-crime areas. However, like many countries, Belgium has experienced a creeping spread of drug-related crime. In Brussels, the Métro system has been plagued by muggers, and though increased police presence and video surveillance have brought this under control, it's still better not to venture into deserted Métro access corridors after dark; when other people are around, it's generally safe.

Both Holland and Belgium are showing an increase in votes for right-wing political parties that are ideologically opposed, to one degree or another, to immigration, or even to the continued presence of immigrant communities. Rising levels of some crimes—muggings, break-ins, pickpocketing, bag snatching, and auto theft—attributed to legal and illegal immigrants and to ethnic minorities, appear to be fueling this trend. Indigenous Dutch and Belgian criminals are quite capable of generating trouble of their own, of course, as demonstrated by the violent hooligans associated with some Dutch soccer clubs, and by homicidal pedophilia cases in Belgium during the '90s.

And then there's Luxembourg. In the unlikely event that you become a victim of any kind of crime in the squeaky-clean Grand Duchy, watch out—you'll likely be stuffed and placed in a museum for the astonishment of future generations.

7 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before.

Many hotels and restaurants now provide easy access for people with disabilities, and some display the international wheelchair symbol in their brochures and advertising. It's always a good idea to call ahead to find out just what the situation is before you book. Both Brussels National Airport and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol have services to help travelers with disabilities through the airport. There's also comprehensive assistance for travelers with disabilities throughout the railway systems of all three countries. Inquire also at the national tourist board offices in each country for specific details on the available resources.

Not all trams in Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, and other cities are easily accessible for travelers in wheelchairs, but the new trams being introduced on some routes have low central doors that are accessible. The Metro system is fully accessible, but that's not as good as it sounds, because few Metro stations are near places where visitors want to go. Taxis are also difficult, but new minivan taxis are an improvement. Or call **Boonstra Taxis** (☎ 020/613-4134), which has wheelchair-accessible cabs. There's comprehensive assistance for travelers on **Netherlands Railways** (☎ 030/235-5555) trains and in stations. If you give them a day's notice of your journey by visiting a station or calling ahead, they can arrange for assistance along the way.

Two good sources of information in the Netherlands are **NIZQ** (☎ 030/230-6603) and **ANWB Disabled Department** (☎ 070/314-1420). In

Luxembourg, contact **Info Handicap**, rue de Contern 20, 5955 Itzig (☎ 352/366-466; fax 352/360-885).

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ 507/451-5005; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Access-Able Travel Source** (☎ 303/232-2979; www.access-able.com) offers extensive access information and advice for those traveling around the world with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800/846-4537 or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers, wheelchair travelers, and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include **MossRehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; **SATH (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality)**; ☎ 212/447-7284; www.sath.org; annual membership fees \$45 adults, \$30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for people with all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind** (AFB; ☎ 800/232-5463; www.afb.org), a referral resource for the blind or visually impaired that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

For more information specifically targeted to travelers with disabilities, the community website **iCan** (www.icanonline.net/channels/travel/index.cfm) has destination guides and several regular columns on accessible travel. Also check out the quarterly magazine *Emerging Horizons*

(\$14.95 per year, \$19.95 outside the U.S.; www.emerginghorizons.com); and *Open World* magazine, published by SATH (see above; subscription \$13 per year, \$21 outside the U.S.).

The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Rd., London EC1V 8AF (☎ 020/7250-3222), publishes three holiday “fact packs” for £2 each or £5 for all three. The first one provides general information on planning and booking a holiday, insurance, and finances; the second outlines transportation available when going abroad and equipment for rent; the third covers specialized accommodations.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

In Amsterdam, you can get information, or just meet people, by visiting **COC**, Rozenstraat 14 (☎ 020/626-3087; www.cocamsterdam.nl), the Amsterdam branch of the Dutch lesbian and gay organization. On the premises are a daytime cafe serving coffee and quiches, a meeting space for special-interest groups, weekend discos (mainly men Fri, women Sat), and a special ethnic evening called *Strange Fruit* on Sunday. The **Gay and Lesbian Switchboard** (☎ 020/623-6565; www.switchboard.nl), open daily from 10am to 10pm, can provide you with all kinds of information and advice.

You shouldn't have much trouble finding information about gay and lesbian bars and clubs because they are well publicized. Also see “Gay & Lesbian Bars” under “The Bar & Cafe Scene,” in chapter 11. The free biweekly listings magazine *Shark* is a great source of cultural information, in particular for the off-beat and alternative scenes, and comes with a centerfold pullout, titled *Queer Fish*, which has excellent lesbian and gay listings. *Gay News Amsterdam* and *Gay & Night*, competing monthly

magazines in both Dutch and English, are available free in gay establishments around the city.

For Belgium, contact **Infor Homo**, av. de l'Opale 101, 1030 Brussels (☎ 02/733-10-24). In Luxembourg, the gay men's organization is **Rosa Letzebuerg**, bd. Patton 94, 2316 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 021-412-812; www.gay.lu).

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA); ☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on “Members.”

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ 800/397-2681; www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Now, Voyager** (☎ 800/255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco-based gay-owned and operated travel service. **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (☎ 800/631-6277; www.olivia.com) charts entire resorts and ships for exclusive lesbian vacations and offers smaller group experiences for both gay and lesbian travelers.

The following travel guides are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores, or you can order them from **Giovanni's Room** bookstore, 1145 Pine St., Philadelphia, PA 19107 (☎ 215/923-2960; www.giovannisroom.com): *Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe* (www.frommers.com), an excellent travel resource; *Out and About* (☎ 800/929-2268; www.outandabout.com), which offers guidebooks and a newsletter (\$20 per year; 10 issues) packed with solid information on the global gay and lesbian scene; *Spartacus International*

Gay Guide (Bruno Gmünder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and **Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner** (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.), both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; the **Damron** guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians; and **Gay Travel A to Z: The World of Gay & Lesbian Travel Options at Your Fingertips** by Marianne Ferrari (Ferrari International, Box 35575, Phoenix, AZ 85069), a very good gay and lesbian guidebook series.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. Some sightseeing attractions may offer senior discounts, but only to local residents when they produce an appropriate ID. Be sure to ask when you buy your ticket.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (☎ 877/426-8056; www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those ages 55 and over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Most courses last 5 to 7 days in the U.S. (2–4 weeks abroad), and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for

seniors include: the quarterly magazine **Travel 50 & Beyond** (www.travel50andbeyond.com); **Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler** (Avalon); **101 Tips for Mature Travelers**, available from Grand Circle Travel (☎ 800/221-2610 or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); and **Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50** (McGraw-Hill), by Joann Rattner Heilman.

FAMILY TRAVEL

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes.

To locate those accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the “Kids” icon throughout this guide.

As for keeping the children amused, what child wouldn't be happy exploring the castles that are scattered across the Benelux landscapes? Give your youngsters a head start with a short rundown on the people who built these fascinating structures and what happened within their walls, and you'll soon find their imaginations running wild. In the cities, small towns, and villages, the colorful pageantry of past centuries as depicted in numerous festivals will surely delight the younger set. In Holland, watch faces light up at the Lilliputian “Holland in a Nutshell” miniatures at Madurodam. In Belgium, Brussels's *Manneken-Pis* statue, a famous national monument of a little boy urinating, is usually a winner. And look for wildlife centers in all three countries. Virtually every sightseeing attraction admits children at half

price, and many offer family-ticket discounts.

Arrange ahead of time for such necessities as a crib, bottle warmer, and car seat (small children are not allowed to ride in the front seat). For information on babysitters, see "Fast Facts: Brussels," in chapter 4; and "Fast Facts: Amsterdam," in chapter 11.

Familyhostel (☎ 800/733-9753; www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced domestic and international learning vacations. Lectures, field trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

Recommended family travel Internet sites include **Family Travel Forum** (www.familytravelforum.com), a comprehensive site that offers customized trip planning; **Family Travel Network** (www.familytravelnetwork.com), an award-winning site that offers travel features, deals, and tips; **Traveling Internationally with Your Kids** (www.travelwithyourkids.com), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com), which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

More and more hotels are ratcheting up security measures for women traveling alone on business or for pleasure. Some even offer secure "women only" floors, with the added perk of spa services.

Check out the award-winning website **Journeywoman** (www.journeywoman.com), a "real life" women's travel information network where you can sign up for a free e-mail newsletter and get advice on everything from etiquette to dress to safety; or the travel guide *Safety and Security for Women Who Travel* by Sheila Swan

and Peter Laufer (Travelers' Tales, Inc.), offering common-sense tips on safe travel.

STUDENT TRAVEL

Arm yourself with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC)**, which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for \$22 from **STA Travel** (☎ 800/781-4040 in North America; www.sta.com or www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). (**Note:** In 2002, STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It still operates some offices under the Council name.) **Travel CUTS** (☎ 800/667-2887 or 416/614-2887; www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students may prefer to turn to **USIT** (☎ 01/602-1600; www.usitnow.ie), an Ireland-based specialist in student, youth, and independent travel.

SINGLE TRAVELERS

Single travelers are often hit with a "single supplement" to the base price. To avoid it, you can agree to room with other single travelers on the trip, or you can find a compatible roommate before you go from one of the many roommate locator agencies.

Travel Buddies Singles Travel Club (☎ 800/998-9099; www.travelbuddiesworldwide.com), based in Canada, runs small, intimate, single-friendly group trips and will match you with a roommate free of charge.

TravelChums (☎ 212/787-2621; www.travelchums.com) is an Internet-only travel-companion matching service with elements of an online personals-type site, hosted by the respected New York-based Shaw Guides travel service. **The Single Gourmet Club** (www.singlegourmet.com/chapters.php) is an international social, dining, and travel club for singles of all ages, with club chapters in 21 cities in the U.S. and Canada. Annual membership fees vary from city to city.

Many reputable tour companies offer singles-only trips. **Singles Travel International** (☎ 877/765-6874;

www.singlestravelintl.com) offers singles-only trips to places like London, Fiji, and the Greek Islands. **Backroads** (☎ 800/462-2848; www.backroads.com) offers more than 160 active-travel trips to 30 destinations worldwide, including Bali, Morocco, and Costa Rica.

For more information, check out Eleanor Berman's latest edition of *Traveling Solo: Advice and Ideas for More Than 250 Great Vacations* (Globe Pequot), a guide with advice on traveling alone, whether on your own or on a group tour.

8 Planning Your Trip Online

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity.com**, and **Orbitz.com** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try Expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go for Expedia.co.uk and Opodo.co.uk.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it's wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer's authors. It's a browser add-on that purports to “search 140 sites at once,” but in reality only beats competitors' fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites**, especially those for low-fare carriers such as Southwest, JetBlue, AirTran, WestJet, EasyJet, or Ryanair, whose fares are often misreported or simply missing from travel agency websites. Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the

airline and avoiding a travel agency's transaction fee. But you'll get these discounts only by **booking online**: Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from your destination, see “Getting There,” p. 33.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. For last-minute trips, **Site59.com**, **Lastminutetravel.com** in the U.S., and **Lastminute.com** in Europe often have better deals than the major sites.

If you're willing to give up some control over your flight details, use “**opaque**” fare services like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a “mystery airline” at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire. In 2004 Priceline added non-opaque service to its roster.

Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend **Frommers.com** (www.frommers.com), voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine*. We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, bookstore, and online-booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Destinations** section, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,500 destinations around the globe; the **Frommers.com Newsletter**, with the latest deals, travel trends, and money-saving secrets; our **Community** area featuring **Message Boards**, where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); and our **Photo Center**, where you can post and share vacation tips. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of *Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia** offers a long list of special deals and "virtual tours" or photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for. **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable are **Hotels.com** and **Quikbook.com**. An excellent free

program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxenet.com), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of. It's a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

Priceline is even better for hotels than for airfares, and covers Europe; you're allowed to pick the neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering your money, though it's better at getting five-star lodging for three-star prices than at finding anything at the bottom of the scale.

9 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Travelers have any number of ways to check e-mail and access the Internet on the road. Of course, using your own laptop, PDA (personal digital assistant), or electronic organizer with a modem gives you the most flexibility. But even if you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail and your office computer from cybercafes.

WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking for them are **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**.

Aside from formal cybercafes, most **youth hostels** nowadays have at least one computer with Internet access. And most **public libraries** across the world offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These kiosks, which you'll also see in shopping malls, hotel lobbies, and tourist information offices around the world, give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. The kiosks' clunkiness and high prices mean they should be avoided whenever possible.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view and reply to your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free, Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (<http://mail.yahoo.com>). (Microsoft's Hotmail is another popular option, but Hotmail has severe spam problems.) Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafe—provided your “target” PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafe computer to access the GoToMyPC system.

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Major Internet Service Providers (ISP) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home, and how much it will cost. If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries. Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable.

USING A CELLPHONE IN THE BENELUX

GSM (Global System for Mobiles) is a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. If your cellphone is on a GSM system, and you have a world-capable multiband phone, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas on much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for “international roaming” to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high—usually \$1 to \$1.50 in western Europe.

Many cellphone operators sell “locked” phones that restrict you from using any other removable computer memory phone chip (called a **SIM card**) other than the ones they supply. Having an unlocked phone allows you to install a cheap, prepaid SIM card (found at a local retailer) in your destination country. You'll get a local phone number—and much lower calling rates.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. Phone rental isn't cheap. You'll usually pay \$40 to \$50 per week, plus air-time fees of at least a dollar a minute. If you're traveling to Europe, though, local rental companies often offer free incoming calls

within their home country, which can save you big bucks.

For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked, prepaid phone systems.

Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than \$100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

10 Getting There

BY PLANE

FLYING TO BELGIUM

Brussels National Airport, at Zaventem, 15km (9 miles) northeast of the city center, has direct rail connection to Brussels and from there to Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and other Belgian cities; to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague; and to Luxembourg City. See "Orientation," in chapter 4.

FROM THE U.S. & CANADA

Carriers with flights to Brussels from cities that include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Toronto are **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.ca), **American Airlines** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.im.aa.com), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), and **United Airlines** (☎ 800/538-2929; www.united.com).

FROM THE U.K. **British Airways**

(☎ 0870/850-9850; www.britishairways.com), **SN Brussels Airlines** (☎ 020/7559-9787; www.flysn.com), **Virgin Express** (☎ 0870/730-1134; www.virgin-express.com), and **BMI** (☎ 0870/607-0555; www.flybmi.com) fly to Brussels from cities that include Edinburgh, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds/Bradford, London, Manchester, and Sheffield. **Ryanair** (☎ 0871/246-0000; www.ryanair.com) flies from London and Glasgow to Charleroi.

FROM IRELAND **Aer Lingus**

(☎ 01/886-8888; www.aerlingus.com) and **SN Brussels Airlines** (in Britain ☎ 020/7559-9787; www.flysn.com) fly from Dublin to Brussels.

Ryanair (☎ 01/609-7881; www.ryanair.com) flies from Dublin to Charleroi.

FROM AUSTRALIA **KLM**

(☎ 130/030-3747; www.klm.com) and **Qantas** (☎ 131313; www.qantas.com.au) fly from Sydney to Amsterdam, where you can transfer for Brussels.

FROM NEW ZEALAND **Air New Zealand**

(☎ 0800/737000; www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to London, where you can transfer for Brussels.

FLYING TO THE NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, 13km

(8 miles) southwest of the city center, has quick, direct rail links to Amsterdam's city center; to Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and other Dutch cities; and to Antwerp and Brussels. See "Orientation," in chapter 11.

In 2004, the Netherlands flag carrier KLM Royal Dutch Airlines merged with Air France, in what was widely interpreted as being a takeover of the Dutch airline by the French one. It remains to be seen what effect control by the lumbering, state-controlled French giant will have on the services of a formerly lean and efficient (but small for a would-be global player) KLM.

FROM THE U.S. & CANADA

Carriers with frequent flights to Amsterdam from cities that include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul,

Memphis, Montreal, Newark, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, Vancouver, and Washington, D.C., are **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.ca), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), **KLM Royal Dutch Airlines** (☎ 800/374-7747; www.klm.com), **Northwest Airlines** (☎ 800/447-4747; www.nwa.com), and **United Airlines** (☎ 800/538-2929; www.united.com).

FROM THE U.K. **British Airways** (☎ 0870/850-9850; www.britishairways.com), **BMI** (☎ 0870/607-0555; www.flybmi.com), **Easy Jet** (☎ 0870/600-0000; www.easyjet.com), and **KLM Royal Dutch Airlines** (☎ 0870/507-4074; www.klm.nl) and its subsidiaries KLM Cityhopper and KLM uk, fly to Amsterdam from cities that include Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds/Bradford, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, and Teesside; KLM Cityhopper flies also from London to Rotterdam; and KLM Exel flies from London to Eindhoven and Maastricht.

FROM IRELAND **Aer Lingus** (☎ 01/886-8888; www.aerlingus.com) flies daily from Dublin to Amsterdam.

FROM AUSTRALIA **KLM** (☎ 130/030-3747; www.klm.com) and **Qantas** (☎ 131313; www.qantas.com.au) fly from Sydney to Amsterdam.

FROM NEW ZEALAND **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800/737000; www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to London, where you can transfer for Amsterdam.

FLYING TO LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg Findel Airport is 6km (4 miles) northeast of Luxembourg City. See “Orientation,” in chapter 18.

FROM NORTH AMERICA You can fly to Brussels and Amsterdam

(see “Flying to Belgium” and “Flying to the Netherlands,” above), and transfer for Luxembourg City.

FROM THE U.K. **British Airways** (☎ 0845/773-3377; www.britishairways.com) flies from London to Luxembourg City. **Luxair** (☎ 01293/596663; www.luxair.lu) flies from London and Manchester to Luxembourg City.

FROM IRELAND **Aer Lingus** (☎ 01/886-8888; www.aerlingus.com) and **Luxair** (☎ 44-1293/596663 in Britain; www.luxair.lu) fly from Dublin to Luxembourg City.

FROM AUSTRALIA **KLM** (☎ 130/030-3747; www.klm.com) and **Qantas** (☎ 131313; www.qantas.com.au) fly from Sydney to Amsterdam, where you can transfer for Luxembourg City.

FROM NEW ZEALAND **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800/737000; www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to London, where you can transfer for Luxembourg City.

GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1 hour** before a domestic flight and **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and she'll probably whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport. Keep your ID at the ready to show at check-in, the security checkpoint, and sometimes even the gate. (Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for domestic flights, but they do for international flights to most countries.)

Security checkpoint lines are getting shorter than they were during 2001 and 2002, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners. Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security, except for folks escorting disabled passengers or children.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't**. The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov/public/index.jsp) for details.

Airport screeners may decide that your checked luggage needs to be searched by hand. You can now purchase luggage locks that allow screeners to open and re-lock a checked bag if hand-searching is necessary.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

Passengers sharing the same airplane cabin rarely pay the same fare. Travelers

who need to purchase tickets at the last minute, change their itinerary at a moment's notice, or fly one-way often get stuck paying the premium rate. Here are some ways to keep your airfare costs down.

- Passengers who can book their ticket **long in advance**, who can **stay over Saturday night**, or who **fly midweek or at less-trafficked hours** may pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.
- You can also save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars**, when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see "Planning Your Trip Online").
- Try to book a ticket **in its country of origin**. For instance, if you're planning a one-way flight from Johannesburg to Bombay, a South Africa-based travel agent will probably have the lowest fares. For multi-leg trips, book in the country of the first leg; for example, book New York–London–Amsterdam–Rome–New York in the U.S.
- **Consolidators**, also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets, although they usually can't beat the Internet on fares within North America. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Miami Herald*. For less-developed destinations, small travel agents who cater to immigrant communities in large cities often have the best deals. **Beware:** Bucket shop

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

Airlines go bankrupt, so protect yourself by **buying your tickets with a credit card**, as the Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy). **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against “carrier default” for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust mid-trip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than \$25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines, which may leave at inconvenient times and experience delays. Several reliable consolidators are worldwide and available on the Net. **STA Travel** is now the world’s leader in student travel, thanks to their purchase of Council Travel. It also offers good fares for travelers of all ages. **ELTExpress (Flights.com; ☎ 800/TRAV-800; www.eltexpress.com)** started in Europe and has excellent fares worldwide, but particularly to that continent. It also has “local” websites in 12 countries. **FlyCheap (☎ 800/FLY-CHEAP; www.1800flycheap.com)** is owned by package-holiday megalith MyTravel and so has especially good access to fares for sunny destinations. **Air Tickets Direct (☎ 800/778-3447; www.airticketsdirect.com)** is based in Montreal and leverages the currently weak Canadian dollar for low fares.

- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Accrue enough miles, and you’ll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It’s free, and you’ll get the best choice of seats and faster response to phone inquiries. You’ll also get prompter service if your luggage is stolen, if your flight is

canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don’t need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.

- For many more tips about air travel, including a rundown of the major frequent-flier credit cards, pick up a copy of *Frommer’s Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS: HOW TO STAY COMFORTABLE

Long flights can be trying; stuffy air and cramped seats can make you feel as if you’re being sent parcel post in a small box. But with a little advance planning, you can make an otherwise unpleasant experience almost bearable.

- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your legroom. Find more details at www.seatguru.com, which has extensive details about almost every seat on six major U.S. airlines. For international airlines, research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches at www.airlinequality.com.
- Emergency exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency exit seats are usually held back to be assigned the day of a flight (to ensure that the seat is filled by someone able-bodied); it’s worth getting to the

ticket counter early to snag one of these spots for a long flight. Many passengers find that bulkhead seating (the row facing the wall at the front of the cabin) offers more legroom, but keep in mind that bulkheads are where airlines often put baby bassinets, so you may be sitting next to an infant.

- To have two seats for yourself in a three-seat row, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you're traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you'll end up with three seats to yourselves. And in the event that a third passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be more than happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- Ask about entertainment options. Many airlines offer seatback video systems where you get to choose your movies or play video games—but only on some of their planes. (Boeing 777s are your best bet.)
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or a row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet areas. Avoid seats in the back of many jets—these can be more narrow than those in the rest of coach class. You also may want to reserve a window seat so that you can rest your head and avoid being bumped in the aisle.
- Get up, walk around, and stretch every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. This helps you avoid **deep vein thrombosis**, or “economy-class syndrome,” a potentially dangerous condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions for too long. Other preventative measures include drinking lots of water and avoiding alcohol (see next bullet).

- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack of humidity in airplane cabins—which can be drier than the Sahara. Bring a bottle of water on board. Avoid alcohol, which will dehydrate you.

- If you're flying with kids, don't forget to carry on toys, books, pacifiers, and chewing gum to help them relieve ear pressure buildup during ascent and descent. Let each child pack his or her own backpack with favorite toys.

GETTING THERE BY BOAT

TO BELGIUM P&O Ferries

(☎ 08705/202020 Britain; 02/710-64-44 Belgium; www.poferries.com) has daily car ferry service between Hull in northeast England and Zeebrugge. The overnight trip time is 12½ hours.

Superfast Ferries (☎ 0870/234-0870 Britain; 050/25-22-92 Belgium; www.superfast.com) has daily car ferry service between Rosyth, across the Forth River from Edinburgh, Scotland, to Zeebrugge. The overnight trip time is 17½ hours.

At Zeebrugge a bus shuttles between the harbor and the rail station, and there's hourly train service from there to Brussels, via Bruges and Ghent.

TO THE NETHERLANDS Stena

Line (☎ 08705/707070 Britain; 0174/389-333 Holland; www.stena.line.com) has twice-daily fast car-ferry service between Harwich in southeast England and Hoek van Holland (Hook of Holland) near Rotterdam. The trip time is 3 hours 40 minutes.

P&O Ferries (☎ 08705/202020 Britain; 018/125-5555 Holland; www.poferries.com) has daily car ferry service between Hull in northeast England and Rotterdam (Europoort). The overnight trip time is 10 hours.

DFDS Seaways (☎ 08705/333000 Britain; 0255/534-546 Holland; www.dfdsseaways.co.uk) has daily car ferry service between Newcastle in northeast England and IJmuiden on the North Sea coast west of Amsterdam. The overnight trip time is 15 hours.

GETTING THERE BY TRAIN

Rail service to the Benelux countries from major European cities is frequent, fast, and generally inexpensive compared to air travel.

TO BELGIUM Britain is connected to the Continent (or as the Brits might say, the Continent is connected to Britain) through the Channel Tunnel. On the **Eurostar** high-speed train, with a top speed of 300kmph (186 mph), travel times between London Waterloo Station and Brussels Midi Station are 2 hours 40 minutes. Departures are approximately every 2 hours. For Eurostar reservations, call ☎ 08701/606600 in Britain; 02/528-28-28 in Belgium. Or book online at www.eurostar.com. Tickets also are available from main rail stations and travel agents.

The **Thalys** high-speed train, with a top speed of 300kmph (186 mph), that connects Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Cologne, has cut travel times from Paris-Nord Station to Brussels-Midi Station to 1 hour 25 minutes. Departures are approximately every hour. For Thalys reservations in Belgium, call ☎ 02/528-28-28. Or book online at www.thalys.com. Tickets also are available from main rail stations and travel agents.

TO THE NETHERLANDS On the **Thalys** high-speed train, travel times from Paris-Nord Station to Amsterdam Centraal Station (via Brussels, Antwerp, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Schiphol Airport) are 4 hours 10 minutes, and from Brussels-Midi Station 2 hours 15 minutes. Departures are approximately every

hour. For Thalys reservations in Holland, call ☎ 0900/9296. Or book online at www.thalys.com. Tickets also are available from main rail stations and travel agents.

TO LUXEMBOURG Direct, though relatively slow, international trains connect Luxembourg with Brussels, Amsterdam, Paris, and Cologne. None of the high-speed international trains—Eurostar, Thalys, TGV—serve Luxembourg City.

GETTING THERE BY BUS

Eurolines has the most comprehensive bus network in Europe. For reservations, call ☎ 08705/808080 in Britain; ☎ 02/274-13-50 in Belgium; or ☎ 020/560-8787 in the Netherlands. Or book online at www.eurolines.com.

TO BELGIUM **Eurolines** has coach service (through the Channel Tunnel) between London Victoria Bus Station and Brussels Nord Bus Station, with up to four departures daily. Travel time is 8 hours.

TO THE NETHERLANDS **Euro-lines** has bus service between London and Amsterdam, with four departures daily. Travel time is 12 hours.

TO LUXEMBOURG Luxembourg City can be reached by **Eurolines** coach from London, with two departures a day, and from Amsterdam, both via Brussels. Travel time is 13 hours from London and 7 hours from Amsterdam.

GETTING THERE BY CAR

The Benelux countries are crisscrossed by a dense network of major highways connecting them with other European countries. Distances are relatively short. Road conditions are excellent throughout all three Benelux countries, service stations are plentiful, and highways have good signs. Traffic congestion in both Brussels and Amsterdam, however, can cause monumental tie-ups—in these two cities, it's best to

park your car at your hotel garage and use local transportation or walk (the best way, incidentally, to see either city).

VIA THE CHANNEL TUNNEL FROM BRITAIN The fast and efficient **Eurotunnel** (☎ 08705/353535

in Britain; www.eurotunnel.com) auto-transporter trains transport your car through the Channel Tunnel from Folkestone, England, to Calais, France (a 35-min. trip). Departures are every 15 minutes at peak times, every 30 minutes at times of average demand, and every hour at night.

11 Packages for the Independent Traveler

Before you start your search for the lowest airfare, you may want to consider booking your flight as part of a travel package. Package tours are not the same thing as escorted tours. Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and sometimes even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices—kind of like one-stop shopping. Packages are sold in bulk to tour operators—who resell them to the public at a cost that usually undercuts standard rates.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages, including **American Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (☎ 800/221-6666; www.deltavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/301-3800; www.covacations.com), and **United Vacations** (☎ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com). Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59, and Lastminute.com—also do a brisk business in packages. If you're unsure about the pedigree of a smaller packager, check with the Better Business Bureau in the city where the company is based, or go online to www.bbb.org. If a packager won't tell you where they're based, don't fly with them.

Travel packages are also listed in the travel section of your local Sunday newspaper. Or check ads in the

national travel magazines such as *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine*, *Travel & Leisure*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

Package tours can vary by leaps and bounds. Some offer a better class of hotel than others. Some offer the same hotels for lower prices. Some offer flights on scheduled airlines, while others book charters. Some limit your choice of accommodations and travel days. You are often required to make a large payment upfront. On the plus side, packages can save you money, offering group prices but allowing for independent travel. Some even let you add on a few guided excursions or escorted day trips (also at prices lower than if you booked them yourself) without booking an entirely escorted tour.

Before you invest in a package tour, get some answers. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each. Then look up the hotels' reviews in a Frommer's guide and check their rates online for your specific dates of travel. You'll also want to find out what **type of room** you get. If you need a certain type of room, ask for it; don't take whatever is thrown your way. Request a nonsmoking room, a quiet room, a room with a view, or whatever you fancy.

Finally, look for **hidden expenses**. Ask whether airport departure fees and taxes, for example, are included in the total cost.

12 Escorted General-Interest Tours

Escorted tours are structured group tours, with a group leader. The price usually includes everything from airfare to hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation.

Many people derive a certain ease and security from escorted trips. Escorted tours—whether by bus, motor coach, train, or boat—let travelers sit back and enjoy their trip without having to spend lots of time behind the wheel or worrying about details. You know your costs upfront, and there are few surprises. Escorted tours can take you to the maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle—you don't have to sweat over the plotting and planning of a vacation schedule. Escorted tours are particularly convenient for people with limited mobility. They can also be a great way to make new friends.

On the downside, an escorted tour often requires a big deposit upfront, and lodging and dining choices are predetermined. You'll get little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. The tours can be jam-packed with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure—plus they also often focus only on the heavily touristed sites, so you miss out on the lesser-known gems.

Before you invest in an escorted tour, ask about the **cancellation policy**: Is a deposit required? Can they cancel the trip if they don't get enough

people? Do you get a refund if they cancel? If *you* cancel? How late can you cancel if you are unable to go? When do you pay in full? **Note:** If you choose an escorted tour, think strongly about purchasing trip-cancellation insurance, especially if the tour operator asks you to pay upfront. See the section on "Travel Insurance," p. 23.

You'll also want to get a complete **schedule** of the trip to find out how much sightseeing is planned each day and whether enough time has been allotted for relaxing or wandering solo.

The **size** of the group is also important to know upfront. Generally, the smaller the group, the more flexible the itinerary, and the less time you'll spend waiting for people to get on and off the bus. Find out the **demographics** of the group as well. What is the age range? What is the gender breakdown? Is this mostly a trip for couples or singles?

Discuss what is included in the **price**. You may have to pay for transportation to and from the airport. A box lunch may be included in an excursion, but drinks might cost extra. Tips may not be included. Find out if you will be charged if you decide to opt out of certain activities or meals.

Finally, if you plan to travel alone, you'll need to know if a **single supplement** will be charged and if the company can match you up with a roommate.

13 Getting Around Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

BY TRAIN

One of the best rail systems in the world operates in and between these small countries. There is virtually no spot so remote that it cannot easily be reached by trains that are fast, clean, and almost always on time. Furthermore, rail travel is a marvelous way to

meet the locals, because the people of the Benelux countries spend as much time riding public transportation as they do behind the wheel of an automobile. Schedules are exact—if departure is set for 12:01pm, that means 12:01pm precisely, not 12:03pm—and station stops are sometimes as

short as 3 or 4 minutes, which means you must be fleet of foot in getting on and off.

RAIL PASSES

An important consideration for anyone planning to travel a lot by train is an appropriate pass allowing reduced-rate travel. In addition to those referred to below, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg have discount rail passes for travel within their own country's borders. In each country there are many lower-cost options, including cheaper weekend and day returns, reductions for multiple journeys, and reductions for more than one passenger (not all options are available in each country). You should always ask about lower-cost options before buying. You'll find more details in the planning chapters of each country.

EURAIL PASSES The **Eurailpass** (www.eurail.com) allows unlimited first-class travel throughout the rail systems of many European countries, including the Benelux countries, at a cost of \$588 for 10 days and \$762 for

15 days. The **Eurail Youth Pass** gives you the same deal at discount rates and in second class; and there are other variations. These passes should be purchased before you leave the United States (they're more expensive if you buy them in Europe) and are available from **Rail Europe** (☎ 800/438-7245; www.raileurope.com) as well as from travel agents.

BENELUX PASS If all or most of your travel within Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg will be by train, a good investment is the **Benelux Tour-rail Pass**, available through **Rail Europe** (☎ 800/438-7245; www.raileurope.com), and through travel agents. It gives you unlimited travel in all three countries on any 5 days in a 1-month period. The pass costs \$228 for first class, \$163 for second class.

BY CAR

While getting around by train is relaxing and fast, and touring by bike is healthier and more human in pace, traveling by car still gives you the most freedom to ramble at your own speed,

Tips When Going by Train

To make your train travels as pleasant as possible, remember a few general rules:

- Hold onto your train ticket after it's been marked or punched by the conductor until you leave the train.
- While you nap, be sure your valuables are in a safe place; you might temporarily attach a small bell to each bag to warn you if someone attempts to take it. If you've left bags on a rack in the front or back of the car, consider securing them with a small bike chain and lock to deter thieves, who consider trains happy hunting grounds.
- Water on trains is not for drinking, and the dining car may be closed just when you're at your thirstiest, so take along a bottle of mineral water. Experienced travelers come armed with food and drink, and munch away throughout the trip.
- If you want to leave bags in a rail station locker, don't let anyone help you store them in it. A favorite trick among thieves is to feign helpfulness, then pocket the key to your locker while passing you the key to an empty one.

either on or off the beaten path. You'll find information on specific requirements, rules of the road, gasoline prices, maps, automobile clubs, and other driving assistance resources in the appropriate chapters for each country.

There is a major proviso to this, however. The Benelux countries have a high density of population in relation to their size, so roads are busy. In addition, many drivers in the region have high-density road aggression, so driving can degenerate into a struggle for survival. The major roads are often busiest precisely at the most popular vacation times, and accidents are not uncommon.

Virtually all major **car-rental** companies have offices in the three capital cities and some other large cities, though arranging a rental outside of a metropolitan area can present problems. Names and locations of rental companies are listed in the appropriate chapters for each country.

BY BUS

Intercity bus service ranges from poor to nonexistent throughout the Benelux countries. This is not as bad as it sounds, because the rail network is among the best in the world, and fast, comfortable intercity trains do most of the work. If you really want to, you can travel intercity by bus, but the buses stop a lot en route, so trip times are long, and you often have to change at an intermediate town—for example, a trip from Brussels to Liège is two journeys: Brussels to Leuven and Leuven to Liège. Tourist offices and bus stations can furnish schedule and fare information.

The exception to the avoid-the-bus rule is in sparsely populated places where there is little or no rail service, such as Zeeland in Holland and the Ardennes in Belgium. In such areas there are more regional bus services, though the buses still may be few and far between. In general, unless you

have a specific reason for wanting to go by bus, you'll always find it better to go by train.

All cities have excellent bus and/or tram (and in one case, trolleybus) service. Some have metro (subway) service, which means you can easily leave your car at the hotel and avoid city driving woes.

BY PLANE

The Benelux cities are so close together that air travel is really not worth the added expense unless time is a vital factor (and even then it might still be quicker going by train). Air service among the three countries is provided by **KLM Cityhopper**, **KLM Exel**, and **SN Brussels Airlines**. The KLM associates fly frequent scheduled services between Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Eindhoven, Maastricht, Groningen, and Enschede in Holland; to Brussels and Antwerp in Belgium; and to Luxembourg City. SN Brussels Airlines flies from Brussels to Amsterdam. For current schedules, fares, and reservations, call **KLM** (www.klm.com) at ☎ **020/474-77-47** in Holland; and **SN Brussels Airlines** (www.flysnn.com) at ☎ **070/35-13-13** in Belgium. See "Getting There," earlier in this chapter, for KLM, SN Brussels Airlines, and Luxair contact numbers in the U.S., Canada, and Britain.

BY BIKE

Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg are all ideal biking countries. In Holland, especially, and in parts of Flanders, there are often special bike tracks in towns and cities, and well-signed long-distance routes. You can also take your bike on a train. Rental bikes are usually available at major rail stations and often at smaller ones, and some even allow you to pick up and return bikes at stations at either end of a particular route. All three national tourist boards can help you plan an itinerary best suited to your physical condition

and time restraints. Holland's excellent *Cycling in Holland* publication is especially useful. Organized bike tours can be arranged through **International Bike Tours**, P.O. Box 754, Essex, CT 06426 (☎ 860/767-7005; fax 860/767-3090); and **Cycletours**, Keizersgracht 181, 1016 DR Amsterdam (☎ 20/627-4098; fax 20/627-9032).

BY HITCHHIKING

Hitchhiking is permitted (not encouraged) in Belgium and Luxembourg, though prohibited on highways (you can, however, stand on the approach road). It's officially forbidden in Holland, but many a blind eye is turned by officialdom to those standing in a safe spot to hitchhike.

14 Tips on Accommodations

Traditional European hotels tend to be simpler than American ones and emphasize cleanliness and friendliness over amenities. For example, even in the cheapest American chain motel, free cable is as standard as indoor plumbing. In Europe, few hotels below the moderate level even have in-room TVs.

Unless otherwise noted, all hotel rooms in this book have private en suite bathrooms. However, the standard European hotel bathroom might not look like what you're used to. For example, one European concept of a shower is a nozzle stuck in the bathroom wall and a drain in the floor. Shower curtains are optional. In some cramped private bathrooms, you have to relocate the toilet paper outside the bathroom before turning on the shower and drenching the whole room. Another interesting fixture is the "half tub," in which there's only room to sit, rather than lie down. Hot water may be available only once a day and not on demand—this is especially true with shared bathrooms. Heating water is costly, and many smaller hotels do so only once daily, in the morning.

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg established the Benelux Hotel Classification System back in 1978 and updated the standards in 1994. Each establishment that accepts guests must publicly display a sign indicating its classification (from "1"

for those with minimum amenities to "5" for deluxe, full-service hotels). The national tourist boards do an excellent job of providing full accommodations listings and advance booking for visitors. The Belgian and the Netherlands tourist offices (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter), and the **Netherlands Reservations Center (NRC)**, Nieuwe Gouw 1, 1442 LE Purmerend, Netherlands (☎ 0299/689-144, 0299/689-154; www.hotelres.nl), will reserve accommodations for you at no charge before you leave home. The Luxembourg Tourist Office can furnish a complete list of accommodations in the Grand Duchy.

In all three countries, you can choose among luxury hotels in city or rural locations; smaller urban hotels with moderate rates and somewhat limited facilities; and charming, family-run country inns. No matter what end of the price scale it's on, each lodging will be spotlessly clean and will feature a staff dedicated to personal attention and excellent service. The rates quoted include the service charge (usually 15%), tax and, in most cases, breakfast.

Be sure to inquire about discounts when you book your room. Many hotels have a variety of room rates. It's sometimes possible to pay less if you settle for a shower instead of full bathroom facilities. Also, weekend or mid-week rates are often available.

SAVING ON YOUR HOTEL ROOM

The **rack rate** is the maximum rate that a hotel charges for a room. Hardly anybody pays this price, however, except in high season or on holidays. To lower the cost of your room:

- **Ask about special rates or other discounts.** Always ask whether a room less expensive than the first one quoted is available, or whether any special rates apply to you. You may qualify for corporate, student, military, senior, or other discounts. Mention membership in AAA, AARP, frequent-flier programs, or trade unions, which may entitle you to special deals as well. Find out the hotel policy on children—do kids stay free in the room or is there a special rate?
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, you'll often get a better deal by calling the individual hotel's reservation desk rather than the chain's main number.
- **Book online.** Many hotels offer Internet-only discounts, or supply rooms to Priceline, Hotwire, or Expedia at rates much lower than the ones you can get through the hotel itself. Shop around. And if you have special needs—a quiet room, a room with a view—call the hotel directly and make your needs known after you've booked online.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Resort hotels are most crowded and therefore most expensive on weekends, so discounts are usually available for midweek stays. Business hotels in downtown locations are busiest during the week, so you can expect big discounts over the weekend. Many hotels have high-season and low-season prices, and

booking the day after high season ends can mean big discounts.

- **Look into group or long-stay discounts.** If you come as part of a large group, you should be able to negotiate a bargain rate, since the hotel can then guarantee occupancy in a number of rooms. Likewise, if you're planning a long stay (at least 5 days), you might qualify for a discount. As a general rule, expect 1 night free after a 7-night stay.
- **Avoid excess charges and hidden costs.** When you book a room, ask whether the hotel charges for parking. Use your own cellphone, pay phones, or prepaid phone cards instead of dialing direct from hotel phones, which usually have exorbitant rates. And don't be tempted by the room's minibar offerings: Most hotels charge through the nose for water, soda, and snacks. Finally, ask about local taxes and service charges, which can increase the cost of a room by 15% or more. If a hotel insists upon tacking on a surprise "energy surcharge" that wasn't mentioned at check-in or a "resort fee" for amenities you didn't use, you can often make a case for getting it removed.
- **Book an efficiency.** A room with a kitchenette allows you to shop for groceries and cook your own meals. This is a big money saver, especially for families on long stays.

LANDING THE BEST ROOM

Somebody has to get the best room in the house. It might as well be you. You can start by joining the hotel's frequent-guest program, which may make you eligible for upgrades. A hotel-branded credit card usually gives it owner "silver" or "gold" status in frequent-guest programs for free.

Always ask about a corner room. They're often larger and quieter, with more windows and light, and they often cost the same as standard rooms. When you make your reservation, ask if the hotel is renovating; if it is, request a room away from the construction. Ask about nonsmoking rooms; rooms with views; rooms with twin, queen- or king-size beds. If

you're a light sleeper, request a quiet room away from vending machines, elevators, restaurants, bars, and discos. Ask for a room that has been most recently renovated or redecorated.

If you aren't happy with your room when you arrive, ask for another one. Most lodgings will be willing to accommodate you.

Planning Your Trip to Belgium

While Belgium is not a difficult country to come to grips with, thanks to its widespread use of English, relatively small size, and excellent tourist infrastructure, a little forethought can still save you precious time and effort. This chapter gives you the practical information you need to plan your trip. For information that covers the Benelux countries in general, see chapter 2.

1 The Regions in Brief

Modest little Belgium has never been known to boast of its charms, yet its variety of language, culture, history, and cuisine would do credit to a country many times its size. Belgium's diversity stems from its location at the cultural crossroads of Europe. The boundary between the Continent's Germanic north and Latin south cuts clear across the nation's middle, leaving Belgium divided into two major ethnic regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia.

Although international attention is focused on Brussels as the "capital of Europe," there's another Belgium of Gothic cathedrals, medieval castles, cobblestone streets, and tranquil canals waiting in the wings. In a country the size of Maryland, the timeless beauty of Bruges and Ghent are accessible, even to the most hurried visitor, and to get away from it all, there's no better place than the unhurried and unspoiled Ardennes.

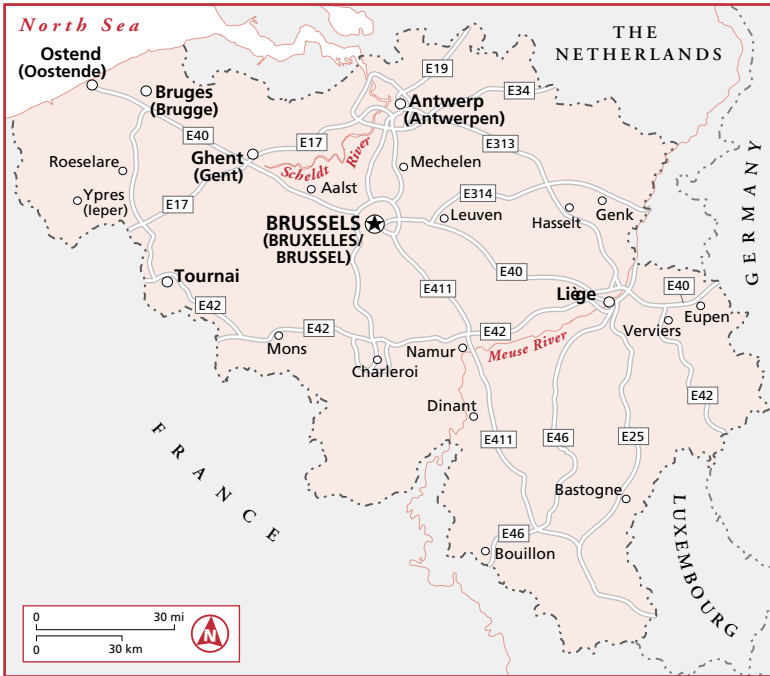
BRUSSELS In a sense, Brussels, approximately in the middle of the old provinces of Brabant—which has been divided into a Flemish and a Walloon part—has a split personality. One is this brash new "capital of Europe," increasingly aware of its power and carrying a padded expense account in its

elegant leather pocketbook. The other is the old Belgian city—once a seat of emperors, but lately more than a little provincial, tenaciously hanging onto its heritage against the wave of Euroconstruction that has swept over it.

These two cities intersect, of course, generally in a popular bar or restaurant, though they may sit together uneasily. Most foreigners who live here long enough, or who stay on an extended vacation, find they need to choose between the two. As an outsider, it's easy enough to live in the Eurocity. Getting below the surface to the real Brussels is more difficult, but worth the effort. Should you be tempted to compare Washington, D.C., and what we might, entirely unofficially, call "Brussels, D.E. (District of Europa)," remember President Kennedy's remark about the U.S. capital being a city of Southern efficiency and Northern charm, and see how much the same applies to Brussels.

BRUGES From its 13th-century origins as a cloth-manufacturing town to its current incarnation as a tourism mecca, the main town of West Flanders province seems to have changed little. As in a fairy tale, swans glide down the winding canals, and the stone houses look as if they're made of

Belgium



gingerbread. Even though glass-fronted stores have taken over the ground floors of ancient buildings, and swans scatter before tour boats chugging along the canals, Bruges has made the transition from medieval to modern with remarkable grace. The town seems revitalized rather than crushed by the tremendous influx of tourists.

GHEENT & ANTWERP The old town and capital of Ghent province, at the confluence of the Scheldt and Leie rivers, has been spruced up, and Ghent has never looked so good. Although this former seat of the powerful counts of Flanders is larger and more citified than Bruges, it has enough cobblestone streets, meandering canals, and antique Flemish architecture to make it nearly as magical as its more famous sister. Ghent fought

one ruler after another, with mixed results, always holding onto a fierce sense of the working man's independence, a sensibility that has brought it into modern-day industrial importance in a setting that quite happily blends reminders of the past with commercial requirements of today.

Antwerp is a port city, with all the liveliness, sophistication, and occasional seediness that you would expect from the world's fifth largest port. The capital of Antwerp province is also the acknowledged "Diamond Center of the World," the leading market for cut diamonds and second only to London as an outlet for raw and industrial diamonds. Given that the city boasts a magnificent cathedral, a fine-arts museum full of Flemish masterpieces, a maze of medieval streets in the town center, and a vibrant cultural life, it's

amazing that Antwerp has been relatively neglected by tourists.

THE BELGIAN COAST & YPRES

Outside the towns, the famous Flanders fields—immortalized in a World War I poem—behind the seacoast and along the alluvial plains of the Scheldt River are actually polders, much like those in Holland, which consist of land reclaimed after disastrous floods that began a few centuries before the birth of Christ and occurred time and again right up to the 10th century A.D. Extending some 8 to 16km (5–10 miles) inland from the sea, the polders create a landscape of rich farmland crisscrossed by canals and ditches lined with poplars and fields dotted with solitary farmhouses surrounded by their outbuildings. In medieval times, these were the large land holdings of feudal lords and wealthy abbey, and few have been broken into smaller plots in the intervening years—farm boundaries today remain much as they were then.

At the center of the seacoast itself is Ostend, the “Queen of the Coast.” Ostend’s title has long historic roots. The town has seen Crusaders embark for the Holy Land, hosted pirates, resisted Spanish rule from the end of the 16th century into the 17th, and seen its harbor blocked to thwart German submarines in World War I. But it retains a little of the cachet—and more of the seaside ambience—of its great days as a Victorian beach resort. In this role it is ably complemented by resorts such as Knokke-Heist and De Panne.

Having suffered through centuries of intermittent warfare and almost total destruction during World War I, Ypres (Ieper) has picked itself up in the years since, its indomitable spirit

intact—a spirit that shines in the perseverance underlying its incredible 20th-century rebuilding of 13th-century buildings.

LIEGE, THE MEUSE VALLEY & HAINAUT

Covering approximately one-fifth of the country, the rugged Meuse Valley is a taste of a different kind of Belgium. Dotted with resort towns and villages where fine cuisine is a way of life, a visit here after being in Brussels and the Flemish art cities of Bruges and Ghent adds the third dimension to Belgium, in the heartland of French-speaking Wallonia. Tucked into an area south of Brussels that stretches to the French border, **Hainaut**, Belgium’s “Green Province,” can seem isolated from the mainstream of Belgian life. But no place possessing assets like the historic art towns of Mons and Tournai can be considered isolated.

THE ARDENNES Belgium’s wild-est, most heavily forested region is also its least populated. The country’s landscape slides easily from Flanders’s flatness into the rolling hills along the Meuse River valley, then almost abruptly begins to climb into the dense forests—the largest forest in all Gaul,” Julius Caesar called it, though it has been diminished since the 1st century B.C.—of the low but rugged Ardennes-Eifel Massif, which stretches from this part of Belgium across into Germany, Luxembourg, and France. French is the most common language, but in the northeast, in the area called the *Ostkantone* (East Cantons), you most often hear German spoken, a residue from the years before 1919 when this part of the Ardennes belonged to Germany.

2 Visitor Information & Money

VISITOR INFORMATION

For contact details of the Belgian tourist offices in the United States,

Britain, and other countries, see “Visitor Information” in chapter 2.

In Belgium, contact the **Belgian Tourist Information Center**, rue du

The Euro

Belgium's currency is the euro (see "Currency," in chapter 2).

Marché-aux-Herbes 63, 1000 Bruxelles (☎ **02/504-03-90**; fax 02/513-04-75; www.opt.be, www.visitflanders.com; Métro: Gare Centrale). The first website covers Brussels, the French-speaking region of Wallonia, and Wallonia's small German-speaking Ostkantone district; the second also covers Brussels, and the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders. The center is open April to October, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, and weekends and holidays from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm, and Sunday from 9am to 1pm.

In addition, Brussels has its own city tourist office (see "Visitor Information," in chapter 4). All other cities and towns, and even some villages, have their own tourist offices. Many of these are listed in this book under the appropriate destination.

Tourist offices in French-speaking areas are generally called the *Office du Tourisme*, and in small places the *Syndicat d'Initiative*; in Dutch-speaking areas, *Toerisme Whatever*, for instance Toerisme Brugge, for Bruges, or VVV followed by the place name; in the German-speaking area, look for the *Verkehrsamt*.

WEBSITES A good starting point for exploring Brussels and the Wallonia and Flanders regions of Belgium on the Web are the official tourist office sites www.visitbelgium.com, www.opt.be, www.wallonie-tourisme.be, and www.visitflanders.com. You might also want to check out the independent www.trabel.com. A website in English that covers Belgian news, weather, tourism, and more is www.xpats.com.

A good website for hotel research, where you can compare prices and see pictures of the rooms, is www.hotels-belgium.com. For dining-out pointers, go to www.resto.be.

MONEY

CURRENCY EXCHANGE Change your money at a bank, or if you carry American Express traveler's checks, at **American Express**. The currency-exchange offices (*bureaux de change*) at Brussels's three main rail stations—Gare du Nord, Gare Centrale, and Gare du Midi—also offer fair rates for cash and traveler's checks, as do offices of **Thomas Cook**. The worst deals are at Brussels Airport, where exchange rates at all currency-exchange offices in the Arrivals area are lousy; at street currency-exchange offices throughout the country, which often combine poor exchange rates with high commission charges (but are often open when banks are closed); and at hotels.

CREDIT CARDS These are almost universally accepted by hotels, restaurants, shops, and gas stations, and for travel by plane, train, and even taxi (but not all taxi drivers accept them). The smaller the business, the less likely it is to accept credit cards.

ATMS Cash machines are widespread in Belgian cities and towns, and you even find them in some villages. Most are called "Bancontact" or "Mister Cash" and are identified by a logo with one or both of these names. They accept bank cards and credit cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks. There are a few ATMs at Brussels National Airport, and using them is a way to avoid the bad deals from the airport's currency-exchange booths.

3 When to Go

“In season” in Belgium, as in the other Benelux countries, means from mid-April to mid-October. The peak of the tourist season is July and August, when the weather is at its finest. If you’re one of the growing numbers who favor shoulder- or off-season travel, you’ll find Belgium every bit as attractive during those months. Not only are airlines, hotels, and restaurants cheaper and less crowded during this time (with more relaxed service, which means you get more personal attention), but some very appealing events are going on. For example, Brussels swings into its rich music season in April, and Tournai turns out for the colorful thousand-year-old Plague Procession the second Sunday in September.

CLIMATE

Belgium’s climate is moderate, with few extremes in temperature either in summer or winter. It does, however, rain a lot, though there are more showers than downpours. (It’s a good idea to pack a raincoat.) Temperatures are lowest in December and January, when they average 42°F (5.5°C), and highest in July and August, when they average 73°F (23°C).

You could even get to love Brussels in the springtime, when the parks are coming up flowers and the first sidewalk tables put in a tentative appearance, but the weather can be variable. July and August are the best months for soaking up some rays at a sidewalk cafe, dining at an outdoors restaurant in the evening, and swimming and sunbathing at the seacoast. September usually has a few weeks of fine late-summer weather; and there are even sunny spells in winter, when brilliant, crisp weather alternates with clouded skies.

In the hilly, forested Ardennes, autumn’s falling leaves bring out visitors searching for the finest fall colors. It’s not quite New England but it’s spectacular enough, and any short-

comings in the color spectrum are compensated for by the culinary feasts on the menus of the many great restaurants here, during the hunting season for wild game.

Winters at the coast, moderated a touch by the North Sea and the dying embers of the Gulf Stream, most often are rainy. Inland, it’s a different story. Some years, though not very often, the temperature falls low enough for canals (in places like Bruges and Ghent) and lakes to freeze sufficiently and become playgrounds for ice-skaters. In the hilly, forested Ardennes, snow brings cross-country skaters and even a few intrepid (or more likely, desperate) downhill skiers to the region’s handful of ski-lifts and short runs. Expect lots of gray skies in Brussels—Eurocrats from sunny Mediterranean countries confess to going stir-crazy for the sight of blue skies and sun during winter in the capital.

You’re well advised to pack a fold-up umbrella at any time of year. Likewise, carry a raincoat (with a wool liner for winter). Second, pack a sweater or two (even in July) and be prepared to layer your clothing at any time of year. Don’t worry: You’re allowed to leave some space for T-shirts, skimpy tops, and sneakers.

HOLIDAYS

National holidays are January 1 (New Year’s Day); Easter Sunday and Monday; May 1 (Labor Day); Ascension Day; Pentecost Sunday and Monday; July 21 (Independence Day); August 15 (Assumption Day); November 1 (All Saints’ Day); November 11 (World War I Armistice Day); and December 25 (Christmas). In Flanders only, July 11 is Flemish Community Day, the anniversary of the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302. In Wallonia only, September 27 is French Community Day, recalling liberation from Dutch rule in 1830.

BELGIUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Belgium is big on festivals. You could arrive in a town or village to find that the populace has turned out, some of them in costume, to honor with all due solemnity (followed by some fun and games) the local cheese. The country has a lively and colorful Carnival tradition, which includes, in the otherwise unprepossessing town of Binche, one that's among the most spectacular in Europe.

January

Festival of Fools, Ronse. *Zotte Maandag* (Crazy Monday) festivities, with masked characters called "Bommels," actually take place on a Saturday. Contact **Ronse Tourist Office** (☎ 055/23-28-16). Saturday after the Epiphany (Jan 6).

Antiques Fair, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. Contact **Palais des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 02/507-84-66). End of January.

Brussels International Film Festival, Cinema Porte de Namur, Brussels. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Late January.

February

Carnival, Eupen. Five days of pre-Lenten revelry in the capital of Belgium's German-speaking district. Highlight is the *Rosenmontag* (Rose Monday) Procession. Contact **Verkehrsamt Eupen** (☎ 087/55-34-50). Thursday to Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday).

Carnival, Malmédy. The pre-Lenten festival brings good-natured mayhem to the streets of this otherwise sober town. Sunday is the day of the big parade, when costumed characters called Banes Courants chase people through the streets and others called Haguètes snare passers-by with long wooden pin-cers. Contact **Malmédy Tourist Office** (☎ 080/33-02-50). Saturday to Shrove Tuesday.

Carnival, Aalst. Three days of pre-Lenten festivities, including the

Giants' Parade with the horse Bayard, onion-throwing from the roofs of the Grote Markt, and the parade of Vuil Jeannetten—men dressed as women. Contact **Aalst Tourist Office** (☎ 053/73-22-70). Sunday to Shrove Tuesday.

Carnival, Binche. One of Europe's most colorful street carnivals, led on Shrove Tuesday by the sumptuously costumed Gilles of Binche, modeled, or so it is believed, on Inca nobles. Contact the **Binche Tourist Office** (☎ 064/33-67-27). Sunday to Shrove Tuesday.

March

Bal du Rat Mort, Ostend. This outrageous fancy-dress event takes its grisly name from a chic Paris cafe. Proceeds go to charity. Contact **Ostend Tourist Office** (☎ 059/70-11-99). First Saturday in March.

Carnival, Stavelot. The Blancs Moussis, characters with long red noses and hooded white costumes, are the stars of the town's Laetere procession. Contact **Stavelot Tourist Office** (☎ 080/86-27-06). Sunday (3 weeks before Easter).

Carnival, Fosses-la-Ville. Costumed characters called Chinels parade through the streets. Contact **Fosses-la-Ville Tourist Office** (☎ 071/71-46-24). Sunday.

Brussels International Fantasy Film Festival, Auditorium du Passage 44, Brussels. Screens science fiction and fantasy films. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Late March.

April

International Folklore Festival, Leuven. Contact **Leuven Tourist Office** (☎ 016/21-15-39). Easter weekend.

Sablon Spring Baroque Music Festival, Place du Grand-Sablon, Brussels. Open-air concerts in the square. Contact **Brussels International**

Tourism (☎ 02/513-89-40). April/May.

May Day's Eve Festival, Hasselt. Participants in the *Meieavondviering* plant a May Tree in the Grote Markt and burn dummies representing winter, while witches dance. Contact **Hasselt Tourist Office** (☎ 011/23-95-40). April 30.

May

Floralien Flower Show, Ghent. Contact **Ghent Tourist Office** (☎ 09/266-52-22). Belgium's top flower show, held every 5 years. May 14 to 24, 2005.

Queen Elisabeth Contest, Brussels. For promising young musicians, featuring a different instrument each year. Generally at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Contact **Concours Reine Elisabeth** (☎ 02/513-00-99). Three weeks from late April to mid-May.

KunstenFESTIVALdesArts (KFDA), Brussels. Arts festival renowned across the cultural universe for its irritatingly scrunched-up name, which means—brilliantly original, this—Arts Festival, in both Dutch and French. It spotlights stage events, putting an emphasis on opera, theater, and dance, but also finds space for cinema, music concerts, and fine arts exhibits. Various auditoriums and venues around town. Contact **KFDA** (☎ 02/219-07-07). Four weeks from late April to the third week in May.

Festival of the Cats, Ypres (Ieper). During the traditional Kattestoet, velvet cats are thrown from the town belfry. Contact **Ypres Tourist Office** (☎ 057/22-85-84). Every third year on the second Sunday in May; next in 2006.

Procession of the Holy Blood, Bruges. The bishop of Bruges carries a relic of the Holy Blood through the streets, while costumed

characters act out biblical scenes. Contact **Bruges Tourist Office** (☎ 050/44-86-86). Ascension Day (fifth Thurs after Easter).

Cartoon Festival, Knokke-Heist. Contact Knokke-Heist Tourist Office (☎ 050/63-03-80). During 3 days in mid-May.

Chariot of Gold Procession, Mons. Religious procession of guilds and the reliquary of St. Waudru, followed by a street performance, the Lumeçon, in which St. George slays the dragon. Contact **Mons Tourist Office** (☎ 065/33-55-80). Holy Trinity Sunday (first Sun after Pentecost).

Jazz Marathon, Brussels. Stuff yourself on jazz, all kinds, at a slew of concerts on the Grand-Place, place du Grand-Sablon, and place Sainte-Catherine; at other open-air venues around town; and in jazz clubs, cafes, and hotel bars. Contact **Jazz Marathon** (☎ 0900/00-750). During 3 days in mid-May.

June

Festival of Gregorian Chant, West Flanders province. Five days of religious choral music sung by leading international church choirs at churches in the province (☎ 047/829-23-80 after 5pm). First week of June.

Day of the Four Processions, Tournai. Features flower-decked floats, a military band, and the highlight, a procession of giants representing historical characters, including King Childeric of the Franks and France's King Louis XIV. Contact **Tournai Tourist Office** (☎ 069/22-20-45). Second Sunday in June.

Carillon Concerts at St. Romhout's Tower, Mechelen. Contact **Mechelen Tourist Office** (☎ 015/29-76-55). Saturday to Monday evenings, mid-June to August.

July

Entertainment, Grand-Place, Brussels. Concerts, theater, dance, exhibitions, and other forms of entertainment animate the Grand-Place. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Entire month.

Ommegang, Grand-Place, Brussels. Dramatic historic pageant and procession, representing the entry of Emperor Charles V into Brussels in 1549. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). First Tuesday and Thursday in July.

Brosella Folk and Jazz, Théâtre de Verdure, Brussels. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Mid-July.

Belgian National Day, Brussels. Marked throughout Belgium but celebrated most in Brussels, with a military procession and music at the Royal Palace. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). July 21.

Gentse Feesten, Ghent. Free street festival of music, dance, theater, puppet shows, and fun and games. Contact **Festivities Department** (☎ 09/269-46-00; www.gentsefeesten.be). During 10 days around July 21.

August

Planting of the Meiboom (May Tree), Grand-Place, Brussels. Despite the name, this does happen in August. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Early August in even-numbered years.

Carpet of Flowers, Grand-Place, Brussels. The historic square is carpeted with two-thirds of a million begonias arranged in a kind of tapestry. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Mid-August in even-numbered years.

Blessing of the Sea, Knokke-Heist. Contact **Knokke-Heist Tourist Office** (☎ 050/63-03-80). Mid-August.

Marktrock Rock Festival, Leuven. Rock and jazz in the square in front of the Town Hall. Contact **Leuven Tourist Office** (☎ 016/21-15-39). Mid-August.

Outre-Meuse Folklore Festival, Liège. Music, dance, and theater performances. Contact **Liège Tourist Office** (☎ 04/221-92-21). Mid-August.

September

Liberation Parade, Brussels. The *Manneken-Pis* statue is dressed in a Welsh Guard's uniform in honor of the city's liberation in 1944. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). September 3.

Procession of the Plague, Tournai. Commemorates the epidemic of 1090. Contact **Tournai Tourist Office** (☎ 069/22-20-45). Second or third Sunday in September.

October

Ghent International Film Festival, Ghent. Contact **Ghent Tourist Office** (☎ 09/266-52-32). Mid-October.

December

Walnut Fair, Bastogne. Traditional matchmaking market. Contact **Bastogne Tourist Office** (☎ 061/21-27-11). Second Saturday in December.

Christmas Market, Grand-Place, Brussels. Includes an open-air ice-skating rink. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Throughout the month.

Nativity Scene and Christmas Tree, Grand-Place, Brussels. The crib has real animals. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (☎ 02/513-89-40). Throughout the month.

4 Getting Around

Belgium's compact size makes it easy on travelers. The roads are excellent (though often busy), and the comprehensive train and bus system is one of Europe's best.

BY TRAIN

All major tourist destinations in Belgium can be done easily in a day-trip by train from Brussels, on the excellent railway network of the **Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges/SNCB**, or **NMBS** in Dutch (☎ **02/528-28-28**; www.sncb.be). Antwerp is just 29 minutes away; Ghent, 32 minutes; Namur, 40 minutes; Bruges, 55 minutes; and Liège, 60 minutes. These times are by the fast Intercity (IC) trains; Inter-Regional (IR) trains are somewhat slower; Local (L) trains are the tortoises of the system, stopping at every station on the way.

If all or most of your travel will be by train, a good investment is a **Rail Pass**, good for 10 single journeys anywhere on the network, except for stations at international borders. It costs 62€ (\$78).

Another option is the discounted weekend return ticket, valid from noon on Friday to noon on Monday; the more people you travel with, the greater the discount per ticket. Even if you make only 1 or 2 day-trips by rail, be sure to inquire about **Minitrips**—1-day excursion tickets to major sightseeing destinations at discount prices.

BY BUS

In Brussels, Bruges, Liège, and all other major cities, there is good local bus service. Regional buses serve every area of the country, with fares and schedules available from local bus or train stations, but they're slow, are often infrequent, and require transfers at intermediate points for long-distance journeys.

BY BICYCLE

Main rail stations, and some minor ones, have bikes for rent. If you plan to travel by train in Belgium and would like to have a trusty steed awaiting you when you arrive, use the Belgian Railways *Train+Vélo/Trein+Fiets* (Train+Bike) formula to reserve a bike

Driven Crazy

The behavior of many Belgian car drivers could easily be described as "hoglike," a moderate term employed because finding the pertinent adjective would tax even the considerable powers of the English language as an instrument of personal abuse.

Part of the blame attaches to the *priorité à droite* traffic rule, whereby, in some cases (not always), traffic from the right has the right of way, even if it is coming from a minor road onto a more important one. You can imagine how this plays at multiple-road intersections, particularly since Belgians will relinquish their *priorité* under no known circumstances, cost what it might. For proof of this, just look at the number of autos with crumpled *left* sides.

This hoglike behavior is extended to pedestrians, too. Don't expect cars to stop for you just because you're crossing at a black-and-white "pedestrian crossing." It's only recently that drivers have been obliged legally to stop at these, and many of them haven't received the message yet.

Tips Slow Lanes

A network of special walking, cycling, and horse-riding routes in Belgium's French-speaking region, Wallonia, provides a healthy alternative to touring by car, and links scenic parts of the country that are far from the beaten track. RAVeL—the word stands for Réseau Autonome des Voies Lentes (Independent Network of Slow Routes)—is a new way to travel, or rather gives new life to old ways. Using disused rail and tram lines, river and canal towpaths, and other minor paths, connected where necessary by purpose-built sections, RAVeL routes provide you with an opportunity to tour without resorting to cars and buses. Four main RAVeL routes and a spider's web of secondary ones crisscross the region. Guide booklets with detailed maps are available from tourist offices.

at the same time you buy your ticket. You collect the bike on arrival from the bike-hire facility in the rail station.

BY CAR

Driving conditions are excellent in Belgium, with lighted highways at night. Belgian drivers, though, are not as excellent. They're notoriously fast and aggressive and have clocked some of the worst road-accident statistics in Europe, so drive carefully.

RENTALS Rental cars with U.S. specifications are available from **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3001 in the U.S.), which has offices at bd. Maurice Lemonnier 8 in Brussels and at Brussels Airport (☎ 02/720-60-44); **Avis** (☎ 800/331-2112 in the U.S.), which has offices at the airport and at rue de France 2 in Brussels (☎ 02/527-17-05); **Budget** (☎ 02/753-21-70); and **Europcar** (☎ 02/348-92-12). Expect to pay from 60€ (\$75) a day and 200€ (\$250) a week, including insurance and other charges, as well as unlimited mileage.

GASOLINE Leaded Super gasoline, identified by red markings on the pump and pump handle, is around 1.10€ (\$1.40) a liter (.25 gal.); lead-free Eurosuper (95 octane) and Super-plus (98 octane), identified by green markings on the pump and pump handle, cost around 1.05€ (\$1.30) a liter. Most gas stations, except those

on main expressways, close at night, but many remain accessible to bank cards through automatic payment systems.

DRIVING RULES To drive in Belgium, U.S. citizens need only a valid passport, a U.S. driver's license, and a valid auto registration. The minimum age for drivers is 18. On highways, speed limits are 70kmph (43 mph) minimum, 120kmph (74 mph) maximum; in all cities and urban areas, the maximum speed limit is 50kmph (31 mph). Lower limits might be posted. Seat belts must be worn in both the front seats and in the back. One important driving rule is the *priorité à droite* (priority to the right), which makes it perfectly legal most of the time to pull out from a side road to the right of the flow of traffic. That means, of course, that you must keep a sharp eye on the side roads to your right (see "Driven Crazy," below).

ROAD MAPS Tourist offices provide excellent city, regional, and country maps. Michelin map nos. 213 and 214 cover the country; they are detailed and reliable, and can be bought for about 8€ (\$10) from bookstores, news vendors, some supermarkets, and other outlets.

BREAKDOWNS/ASSISTANCE Roadside telephones connect to emergency services, whose "TS" (Touring

Secours) yellow cars patrol major highways to render emergency service at minimal cost. If you have car trouble, pull off the road and dial ☎ **070/**

34-47-77 at one of the phones, then wait for the TS. On other roads, call TS from the nearest telephone or your cellphone.

FAST FACTS: Belgium

Airport See "Getting There," in chapter 4.

American Express See "Fast Facts: Brussels," in chapter 4.

Business Hours Banks are usually open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30pm, and some branches are also open on Saturday morning. Stores generally stay open from 10am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, though more and more are also open on Sunday. Most department stores have late hours on Friday, remaining open until 8 or 9pm.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," above.

Climate See "When to Go," earlier in this chapter.

Currency See "Money," in chapter 2.

Currency Exchange See "Money," earlier in this chapter.

Driving Rules See "Getting Around," above.

Drugs Belgium has rigid prohibitions against the possession and use of controlled narcotic drugs, and a strict enforcement policy that virtually guarantees stiff fines and/or jail sentences for offenders. This can be especially important if you are traveling from neighboring Holland, where the rules are more tolerant and enforcement (for soft drugs) is generally lax.

Drugstores For such items as toothpaste, deodorant, and razor blades, go to a supermarket. See also "Pharmacies," below.

Electricity Belgium runs on 220 volts electricity (North America uses 110 volts). So you need to take with you a small voltage transformer and a European-style adapter plug (available in drug and appliance stores and by mail order) that plugs into the round-holed European electrical outlet.

Embassies These are all in Brussels. **U.S.:** bd. du Régent 25–27 (☎ **02/508-21-11**; www.usembassy.be; Métro: Arts-Loi), open for visa applications Monday to Friday from 9am to noon, and for assistance to U.S. citizens from 1:30 to 4:30pm. **Canada:** av. de Tervuren 2 (☎ **02/741-06-11**; Métro: Merode), open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 4pm, Tuesday and Thursday from 9am to noon. **U.K.:** rue Arlon 85 (☎ **02/287-62-11**; Métro: Maalbeek), open for visa applications Monday to Friday from 9:30am to noon, and for other matters from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 4:30pm. **Australia:** rue Guimard 6–8 (☎ **02/286-05-00**; Métro: Arts-Loi), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 4pm. **New Zealand:** Square de Meeûs 1 (☎ **02/512-10-40**; Métro: Trone), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 3:30pm. **Ireland:** rue Wiertz 50 (☎ **02/235-66-76**; Métro: Schuman), open Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ☎ **101**. For an ambulance or the fire department, call ☎ **100**.

Holidays See "When to Go," earlier in this chapter.

Language Belgian people speak either French or Dutch (or as you may hear it called, Flemish), and a tiny minority in the east of the country is German-speaking. Many Belgians speak two or all three of the national tongues but, since language is a sensitive subject in the land, they might not be willing to prove this by actually doing so in practice. English is in effect the second language, and it is taught in the schools from the early grades, with the result that many Belgians speak it fluently. You may speak English in Belgium almost as freely as you do at home, particularly to anyone in the business of providing tourist services, whether cab driver, hotel receptionist, waitperson, or store assistant.

Mail Postage for a postcard or letter to the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa is 0.85€ (\$1.05); to the U.K. and Ireland 0.45€ (55¢).

Pharmacies For both prescription and nonprescription medicines, go to a pharmacy (*pharmacie* in French; *apotheek* in Dutch). Regular pharmacy hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm (some close earlier on Sat). Each pharmacy posts a list of late-night pharmacies on the door.

Police For emergency police assistance, call ☎ **101**.

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Restrooms These likely will display an "H" or *Hommes* for men, and an "F" or *Femmes* for women (or a graphic that should leave no doubt either way). Be sure to *pay the person* who sits at the entrance to a *toilette*. He or she has a saucer where you put your money. If you don't, you might have a visitor in the inner sanctum while you're transacting your business. Even if you have paid, in busy places the attendant may have forgotten your face by the time you emerge and will then pursue you out of the toilet and along the street. It's tiresome, but toilets usually cost only about 0.30€ (40¢).

Safety See "Health & Safety," in chapter 2.

Taxes On top of a 16% service charge, there's a value-added tax (TVA) of 6% on hotel bills and a whopping 21.5% on restaurant bills. The higher rate is charged on purchased goods, too. If you spend over 125€ (\$156) in some stores, and you are not a resident of the European Union, you can recover it by having the official receipt stamped by Belgian Customs on departure and returning the stamped receipt to the shop. Your refund should arrive by check or be credited to your credit card within a few weeks. Not all shops participate in this scheme so it pays to ask first, particularly for major purchases.

Telephone The country code for Belgium is **32**. When calling Belgium from abroad, you do not use the initial **0** in the area code. For example, if you're calling a Brussels number (area code **02**) from outside Belgium, you dial the international access code (which is **011** when calling from North America, and **00** from elsewhere in Europe) and then **32-2**, followed by the subscriber number.

You only dial the initial **0** of the area code if you're calling within Belgium (and this includes if you're calling another number in the same area code zone). When you call someone in Belgium, you always need to use

the telephone area code even if you're calling from inside the same area. The two main formats for Belgian phone numbers are: For the main cities, a two-digit area code followed by a seven-digit number; and for other places, a three-digit area code followed by a six-digit number.

For information inside Belgium, call ☎ **1207** or ☎ **1307**; for international information in English, call ☎ **1405**.

To make international calls from Belgium, first dial **00** and then the country code. To call the United States or Canada, dial **00** (the international access code) + **1** (the country code) + the area code + the number. For example, if you want to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., dial 00-1-202-588-7800. Other country codes are: United Kingdom, **44**; Ireland, **353**; Australia, **61**; New Zealand, **64**. International calls, per minute, cost: **U.S., Canada, U.K., Ireland:** 0.35€ (45¢); **Australia, New Zealand:** 1€ (\$1.25).

You can use most pay phones in booths all around town with a Belgacom *telecard* (phone card), selling for 5€ (\$6.25), 10€ (\$13), and 25€ (\$31) from post offices, train ticket counters, and newsstands. Some pay phones take coins, of 0.20€, 0.50€, and 1€. Both local and long-distance calls from a pay phone are 0.25€ (30¢) a minute at peak time (Mon–Fri 8am–7pm) and the same amount for 2 minutes at other times. Calls placed through your hotel switchboard or dialed direct from your room phone are usually more than twice the standard rate.

To charge a call to your calling card, contact: **AT&T** (☎ 0800/100-10); **MCI** (☎ 0800/100-12); **Sprint** (☎ 0800/100-14); **Canada Direct** (☎ 0800/100-19); **British Telecom** (☎ 0800/100-24).

Time Zone Belgium is on Central European Time (CET), which is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) plus 1 hour. Brussels is normally 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (New York) and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time (Los Angeles). Clocks are moved ahead 1 hour each year at the end of March and back 1 hour at the end of September.

Tipping The prices on most restaurant menus already include a service charge of 16%, so it's unnecessary to tip. However, if the service is good, it's usual to show appreciation with a tip. It's enough to round up the bill to the nearest convenient amount, if you wish, rather than leave a full-fledged tip. Otherwise, 10% is adequate, and more than most Belgians would leave. Service charge is included in your hotel bill as well. Taxis include the tip in the meter reading. You can round up the fare if you like, but you need not add a tip unless you have received extra service like help with luggage. Here's a general guide to tipping for other services: Give 1€ (\$1.25) to ushers in some theaters and cinemas, 20% of the bill to hairdressers (leave it with the cashier when you pay up), and 1€ to 2€ (\$1.25–\$2.50) per piece of luggage to porters.

Water The water from the faucet in Belgium is safe to drink. Many people drink bottled mineral water, generally Belgian brands like Spa and Bru.

Brussels

A city with a notable history, Brussels is carving out a bright future. The “capital of Europe” has begun to act like Europe’s Washington, D.C., a focus of economic and political power, where decisions are made that affect the lives of people around the world. Headquarters of the European Union (EU), Brussels both symbolizes the Continent’s vision of unity and is a bastion of officialdom, a breeding ground for the regulations that govern and often exasperate the rest of Europe.

Bruxellois have ambivalent feelings about their city’s transformation into a power center. At first, the waves of Eurocrats brought a new cosmopolitan air to a somewhat provincial city (though once the seat of emperors), but as old neighborhoods were leveled to make way for office towers, people wondered whether Brussels was losing its soul. After all, this city doesn’t only mean politics and business. It inspired surrealism and Art Nouveau, worships

comic strips, prides itself on hand-made lace and chocolate, and serves each one of its craft beers in a unique glass.

Fortunately, not all of Brussels’s individuality has been lost in this transition, and though the urban landscape has suffered from wanton “development,” the city’s spirit survives in traditional cafes, bars, bistros, and restaurants. Whether elegantly Art Nouveau or eccentrically festooned with posters, curios, and knickknacks, such centuries-old establishments provide a warm, convivial ambience that is peculiarly Belgian.

Bruxellois like things convivial and simple yet stylish. If you are at home waving cutlery over a proud regional specialty, or feel at ease with a carefully crafted artisanal beer, or think that centuries-old traditions are not only worth keeping alive but still have meaning today—why, then, you should fit right in.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport, served by most major European airlines and many other international carriers, is at Zaventem, 14km (9 miles) northeast of the city center. There’s direct train service to Brussels’s three main rail stations (Gare du Nord, Gare, and Gare du Midi) between 5:43am and 11:14pm, for a one-way fare of 2.10€ (\$2.65). The trip time to Gare Centrale is around 25 minutes. Most airport trains have wide corridors and extra space for baggage.

The **Airport Line bus**, no. 12, departs from the airport every 25 to 30 minutes to place Schuman (Métro: Schuman) in the city center, with stops on the way, for 3€ (\$3.75). **De Lijn bus** BZ connects the airport hourly with Gare du Nord rail station, for the same fare.

Go to the taxi stand and wait your turn. Taxis that display an orange sticker depicting a white airplane offer reduced fares from the airport to the city center.

Damage Assessment

The heavy hits Brussels's architectural heritage has taken from a combination of unscrupulous property developers, venal local officials, and the steamroller of Euroconstruction, has led to the coining of a term to describe the condition: *Bruxellisation*, the destruction of beautiful old buildings and their replacement by dreary office blocks.

Others charge about 30€ (\$38), and some offer reduced rates for a pre-booked return journey (ask your driver for details).

BY TRAIN

Brussels is well served by high-speed trains—Eurostar through the Channel Tunnel from London, and Thalys connecting with Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. For Eurostar information and reservations, call ☎ **08701/606600** in Britain and **02/528-28-28** in Belgium. For Thalys information and reservations, call ☎ **02/528-28-28** in Belgium; **08/3635-3536** in France; **0221/19419** in Germany; and **0900/9226** in Holland.

There are three main rail stations in the Brussels metropolitan area. Travelers arriving from other European countries will probably want to get off at one of them: **Gare Centrale**, Carrefour de l'Europe 2; **Gare du Midi**, rue de France 2 (which is also the Eurostar and Thalys terminal); and **Gare du Nord**, rue du Progrès 86. For train information and reservations, call ☎ **02/528-28-28**.

BY BUS

Eurolines (www.eurolines.com) has service three times daily from London's Victoria Coach Station to Brussels. For schedule and fare information on this, and on Eurolines service from all other major towns and cities in Europe, contact Eurolines at ☎ **08705/808080** in Britain and **02/274-13-50** in Belgium. Most buses from Continental destinations arrive on **rue Fonsny** beside Gare du Midi, though some stop at various city center locations around **place de Brouckère**.

BY CAR

Should you be driving to Brussels, you are advised to park your car at the hotel parking lot (if it has one) and leave it there. You won't need a car to get around.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The city tourist office is **Brussels International Tourism**, Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall), Grand-Place, 1000 Bruxelles (☎ **02/513-89-40**; fax 02/513-83-20; www.brusselsinternational.be; Métro: Gare Centrale). Very good information is available here, including a comprehensive visitors' booklet, *Brussels Guide & Map*. It also makes hotel reservations; organizes paid-for guided walking tours in summer; and has well-trained, multilingual tour guides whom you can engage by the hour or the day. The office is open in summer daily from 9am to 6pm; and in winter Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, Sunday from 10am to 2pm.

Also in Brussels is the **Belgian Tourist Information Center**, which covers the entire country (see "Visitor Information," in chapter 3).

CITY LAYOUT

A city of one million inhabitants, Brussels is divided into 19 *communes* (local government districts)—"Brussels" being both the name of the central commune and of the city as a whole (which comprises the Brussels Capital Region). The

city center, once ringed by fortified ramparts, is now encircled by broad boulevards known collectively as the **Petite Ceinture**. Most of the city's premier sight-seeing attractions are located in this zone. Around 14% of the zone's total area of 160 sq. km (63 sq. miles) is occupied by parks, woods, and forest, making this one of Europe's greenest urban centers.

Brussels sits smack-dab on Europe's great Continental Divide, the oftentimes edgy interface between its Latin south and Germanic north. You'll hear both French and Dutch (along with a Babel of other tongues) spoken in its streets. It is bilingual: *Bruxelles* in French and *Brussel* in Dutch, and street names and places are in both languages. Grand-Place is *Grote Markt* in Dutch; Gare Centrale is *Centraal Station*; Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie is *Koninklijke Munttheater*. **Note:** For convenience and to save space, I use only the French names in this chapter.

STREET MAPS Go to Brussels International Tourism and pick up its *Brussels Guide*, which has a fairly detailed street map of the inner city marked with principal tourist attractions. If you need a comprehensive street map, you can buy the *Géocart Bruxelles et Périphérie* at most news vendors and bookstores.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Brussels is flat in its center and western reaches, where the now-vanished Senne River once flowed. To the east, a range of low hills rises to the upper city, which is crowned by the Royal Palace and has some of the city's most affluent residential and prestigious business and shopping districts. The **Grand-Place** stands at the very heart of Brussels, and is both starting point and reference point for most visitors.

The Old Center comprises the **Grand-Place** and environs, place du Grand Sablon and place du Petit Sablon; and adjacent streets. Central Brussels also includes the **Marché-aux-Poissons (Fish Market)** and the **Haute Ville (Upper City)**, east of and uphill from the Grand-Place, along rue Royale and rue de la Régence, and abutting the working-class Marolles district.

Just north of the center lies **Gare du Nord** and nearby place Rogier.

Beyond the center, things start to get hazier. On either side of **avenue**

Louise, a chic boulevard south of the city center, are the classy districts of Ixelles and Uccle; they're both good areas for restaurants and shopping, and both border the wide green spaces of the Bois de la Cambre and the Forêt de Soignes.

East of the city center lies a part of Brussels whose denizens are regarded by many Bruxellois with the same suspicion they might apply to just-landed extraterrestrials. I refer, of course, to the **European Union district** around place Schuman, where the European

Tips Student Deals

Students with appropriate ID can get **half-price tickets** to many cultural events, and discounts on train and plane fares and certain tours. **Acotra**, rue de la Madeleine 51, 1000 Bruxelles (☎ 02/512-86-07; Métro: Gare Centrale), sells discount student train, plane, boat, and bus tickets and books accommodations in youth hostels and private rooms. It also sells the ISIC (International Student Identity Card). Across a small park from Gare Centrale, toward the Grand-Place, it's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5:30pm.

Frommer's Favorite Brussels Experiences

- **Seeing the Grand-Place for the First Time.** There's nothing quite like strolling out of one of its unremarkable side streets into the historic Grand-Place. You'll never forget your first look at this timelessly perfect cobbled square, surrounded by gabled guild houses and the Gothic tracery of the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) and Maison du Roi (King's House).
- **Meeting with Brueghel and Magritte.** The Historic section of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (Royal Fine Arts Museums) has Brueghels such as *The Fall of Icarus* and *Winter Landscape with Ice Skaters*, along with works by Rubens, Bosch, van Dyck, Jordaens, and others. Go underground to the Modern section for works by Magritte, Delvaux, Ensor, Rops, Alechinsky, and others.
- **Admiring Art Nouveau.** Brussels considers itself the world capital of Art Nouveau, and local architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) was its foremost exponent. You can view the master's colorful, sinuous style at his former home, now the Horta Museum, and in buildings around the city.
- **Standing under the Seven Giant Spheres of the Atomium.** And hoping that the seven giant spheres of this colossal representation of an iron atom won't fall on your head. Next to this monstrous model, 165 billion times bigger than the real thing, you'll be the one who feels like a microscopic particle.
- **Strolling Around Europe.** Mini-Europe, that is. This collection of emblematic buildings from the European Union's 15 member nations includes the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Big Ben, the Acropolis, the Arc de Triomphe, and the Brandenburg Gate, all in beautifully rendered 1:25-scale detail.
- **Dining at Comme Chez Soi.** This restaurant, with space for just 45 diners, has earned three Michelin stars. It's probably easier to get into the kingdom of heaven than master chef Pierre Wynants's culinary holy-of-holies. If you do get a seat, though, you're sure to agree that heaven can wait.
- **Shopping at Galeries Royales St-Hubert.** The world's first shopping mall, opened in 1847, is a light and airy triple gallery enclosing boutiques, bookshops, cafes, restaurants, and a theater and cinema.
- **Shopping for Antiques in place du Grand-Sablon.** You'll need luck to score a bargain at this weekend antiques market—the dealers are well aware of the precise worth of each item in their stock and are calmly determined to get it. But it's still fun to wander the market, browsing and haggling, and who knows? You just might stumble on that hard-to-find affordable treasure.

Commission, Parliament, and Council of Ministers buildings jostle for space in a warren of offices populated by civil servants, journalists, and lobbyists. (The area is also

home to a wealth of restaurants and cafes that cater to Euro-appetites.) A quaint old neighborhood was made to disappear to make way for these noble edifices.

In the north of the city (and something of a leap of the imagination) is the **Bruparck**. Inside this recreation complex you find the Mini-Europe theme park; the 26-screen Kinopolis multiplex movie theater; a made-to-order village

with shops, cafes, and restaurants; and the Océade water recreation center. Beside it are the Atomium, Brussels Planetarium, Roi Baudoin Soccer Stadium, and Parc des Expositions congress center.

2 Getting Around

Brussels's center is small enough that walking is a viable option, but it's not *that* small and traffic can be heavy and frantic, adding up to a tiring experience. The best solution, if you have several days, is to divide your time into walking tours. Otherwise, a combination of walking and using the excellent public transportation is best. Beyond the center, public transportation is a virtual necessity.

Be especially careful when crossing roads at the black-and-white pedestrian crossings with no signals. Astonishingly, pedestrians at these crossings were only recently given legal priority over cars! Drivers are not yet completely reconciled to the new regulations. Also watch out for cars turning (legally) right or left at traffic lights, even when the green "walking man" indicates that you can cross.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Maps of the integrated transit network—Métro (subway), tram (streetcar), and bus—are available free from the tourist office, from offices of the **STIB** public transportation company at Galerie de la Toison d'Or 15 (☎ **02/515-20-00**; www.stib.be), and from the Porte de Namur, Rogier, and Gare du Midi Métro stations. In addition, all stations and most tram and bus stops have transit maps. The full system operates from 6am to midnight, after which a limited night-bus system takes over. If possible, avoid the crush at morning and evening rush hours. Watch out for pickpockets, especially at busy times, and avoid walking alone in deserted access tunnels, particularly after dark—the risk of being mugged is small but not entirely absent.

FARE INFORMATION & DISCOUNT PASSES Tickets, which you can use on the Métro, trams, and buses, cost 1.40€ (\$1.75) for a single ride (known as a *direct*), and 6.50€ (\$8.15) for a five-ride ticket. You may buy both from the driver. A 10-ride ticket is available from Métro and rail stations for 9.80€ (\$11); and a 1-day ticket valid on all urban services is available for 3.80€ (\$4.75). There also are several multiday options. Children under 12 ride free on the STIB transit network; they need to get a free pass called an *Abonnement J*. A maximum of four children under 6 can ride free per paying adult.

VALIDATION You validate your ticket by inserting it into the orange electronic machines inside buses and trams and at the access to Métro platforms. Though the ticket must be revalidated each time you enter a new vehicle, you are allowed multiple transfers within a 1-hour period of the initial validation, so you can hop on and off Métros, trams, and buses during that time, and only one journey will be canceled by the electronic scanner. If more than one person is traveling on one ticket, the ticket must be validated each time for each traveler.

BY METRO The Métro is quick and efficient, and covers many important city-center locations, as well as the suburbs, the Bruparck recreation zone, and the Heysel congress center. Stations are identified by signs with a white M on a blue background. A trip underground takes you into an art center—Métro

Tips Ride the Rails

Though not as fast as the Métro, trams are generally faster than buses and are a great way to get around, not least because you can view the cityscape while you ride. Lines 92, 93, and 94 pass by key sights along rue Royale and rue de la Régence, and as far as avenue Louise.

stations are decorated with specially commissioned paintings by contemporary Belgian artists.

BY TRAM & BUS An extensive network of tram lines provides the ideal way to get around the city. Both trams and urban buses are yellow. Their stops are marked with red-and-white signs and often have a shelter. You stop a tram or bus by extending your arm as it approaches so the driver can see it; if you don't signal, the bus or tram might not stop.

Two bus companies provide service to points outside the city (and stop at some points within it): TEC's orange buses cover French-speaking Wallonia; De Lijn's white buses cover Dutch-speaking Flanders.

BY TAXI

The minimum rate for taxis is 2.35€ (\$2.95) during the day and 4.20€ (\$5.25) at night. Charges per kilometer are either 1.15€ (\$1.45) or 2.30€ (\$2.85), depending on location and time. Tip and taxes are included in the meter price, and you need not add an extra tip unless there has been extra service, such as help with heavy luggage (though drivers won't refuse a tip in any circumstances). All taxis are metered. You cannot hail them in the street, but there are taxi stands on many principal streets, particularly in the city center, as well as at rail stations. To request a cab by phone, call **Taxis Bleus** (☎ 02/268-00-00), **Taxis Oranges** (☎ 02/349-43-43), or **Taxis Verts** (☎ 02/349-49-49).

BY CAR

Don't drive; it's a jungle out there. Good public transportation and an occasional taxi ride will get you anywhere you want inexpensively and hassle-free. Park your car either at your hotel or in one of the many public parking areas—your hotel can furnish the address of the nearest one—and do not set foot in it again until you're ready to leave the city. Belgium has some of Europe's worst road-accident statistics. Normally polite citizens of Brussels turn into red-eyed demons once they get behind the steering wheel. Driving is fast, except at rush hour, and always aggressive. At rush hour (which actually lasts about an hour to either side of 9am and 5pm), it is almost impossible to move on main roads inside the city and on the R0 outer ring road. Sunday and early morning are better, and evening is not too bad.

If you must drive, watch out for the notorious *priorité à droite* (priority to the right) system, whereby traffic merging from your right usually has priority (or right-of-way) to enter the road you're on, which means you must stop to allow it to do so, even if there is no other indication by way of street signs that you should. And always remember that Brussels drivers will give up their *priorité* under no known circumstances, cost what it might. Be ready to stop instantly at *all* such intersections. Poles with orange diamond signs, which you see mostly on main roads, mean that priority lies with traffic already on the road, so you don't have to stop. At most (but not all) rotaries, traffic entering the rotary usually has priority over traffic already on it, unless STOP lines on the road indicate otherwise.

This system has caused so much mayhem that it's being changed at some accident hot spots and obvious danger zones. Not everyone knows about the changes or acts according to them, so stay alert and be careful.

RENTALS See "Getting Around," in chapter 3.

FAST FACTS: Brussels

Airport See "Orientation," earlier in this chapter.

American Express The office at bd. du Souverain 100, 1000 Bruxelles (☎ 02/676-21-11; Métro: Horrmann-Debroux), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 5pm. Call ahead before visiting, because this is an administrative office only, out in the suburbs.

ATMs You'll find many **ATMs** around town, identified by **BANCONTACT** and **MISTER CASH** signs. A convenient bank with an ATM is **CBC**, Grand-Place 5 (☎ 02/547-12-11; Métro: Gare Centrale), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Babysitters Many hotels can provide reliable babysitting services. A student babysitting roster is maintained by U.L.B. Service, "Jobs," av. P. Héger 22, 1000 Bruxelles (☎ 02/650-21-71).

Business Hours See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," above.

Currency Exchange **Thomas Cook**, Grand-Place 4 (☎ 02/513-28-45; Métro: Gare Centrale), also has fair rates. See also "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3.

Doctors/Dentists For 24-hour emergency medical service, call ☎ 02/479-18-18; ask for an English-speaking doctor. For emergency dental care, call ☎ 02/426-10-26.

Drugstores See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3. See also "Pharmacies," below.

Electricity See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3.

Embassies/Consulates See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ☎ 101. For an ambulance or the fire department, call ☎ 100.

Hospital **Cliniques Universitaires St-Luc**, av. Hippocrate 10 (☎ 02/764-11-11; Métro: Alma), has an emergency department.

Internet Access In the city center, the large **easyEverything**, place de Brouckère 9-13 (☎ 02/211-08-20; www.easyeverything.com; Métro: De Brouckère), is open 24 hours a day; access begins at 2.50€ (\$3.15).

Mail See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3.

Newspapers/Magazines For English-speaking visitors, the most useful publication is the weekly magazine **The Bulletin**, published each Thursday and filled with news, articles, information on special events, and useful addresses.

Pharmacies See "Fast Facts: Belgium," in chapter 3. A centrally located pharmacy is **Grande Pharmacie de Brouckère**, Passage du Nord 10-12 (☎ 02/218-05-07; Métro: De Brouckère).

Police In an emergency, call ☎ **101**. In non-urgent situations, go to **Brussels Central Police Station**, rue du Marché-au-Charbon 30 (☎ **02/279-79-79**; Métro: Bourse).

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. The office at Centre Monnaie, place de la Monnaie (☎ **02/226-21-11**; Métro: De Brouckère), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 3pm. The office at Gare du Midi, av. Fonsny 1E/F (☎ **02/538-33-98**; Métro: Gare du Midi), is open 24 hours.

Restrooms See “Fast Facts: Belgium,” in chapter 3. Should you have a toilet emergency in Brussels, the very best address to find relief is the Hotel Métropole (see “Where to Stay,” below).

Safety Brussels is generally safe, but there is a growing trend of pick-pocketing, theft from and of cars, and muggings in places such as Métro station foot tunnels. Don’t overestimate the risk, but take sensible precautions, particularly in obvious circumstances such as on crowded Métro trains and when withdrawing cash from an ATM at night.

Taxes See “Fast Facts: Belgium,” in chapter 3.

Telephone See “Fast Facts: Belgium,” in chapter 3. The area code for Brussels is **02**. You need to dial this area code both from inside Brussels and from elsewhere in Belgium (you always need to dial the area code in Belgium). When you’re calling from outside Belgium, the area code for Brussels is **2**.

Tipping See “Fast Facts: Belgium,” in chapter 3.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, and Métro service, call ☎ **02/515-20-20**.

Useful Phone Numbers The baggage office (☎ **02/753-68-20**) in the Arrivals hall of Brussels National Airport can help if you have lost luggage or other property aboard an aircraft or in the airport. The bigger rail stations have lost-property offices as well; call ☎ **02/555-25-25** if you lose something on a train. Property lost on the Métro, tram, or bus may be recovered from STIB, av. de la Toison d’Or 15 (☎ **02/515-23-94**). If you lose something in the street, try the local police station; many Belgians are honest enough to hand in property they’ve found.

3 Where to Stay

The business of Brussels is business (and politics), a fact reflected in the cost and nature of available accommodations. Hotels in the upper price range, including deluxe hotels of just about every international chain, have a wealth of facilities for business travelers as well as efficient, though invariably impersonal, service. At every level, hotels fill up during the week and empty out on weekends and during July and August. In off-peak periods, rates can drop as much as 50% from those quoted below; be sure to ask for lower rates and confirm that you’re quoted the correct rates, which include 6% value-added tax (TVA) and a 16% service charge.

Brussels International Tourism (see “Visitor Information,” earlier in this chapter) makes reservations for the same day if you go to their offices in person

and pay a small fee (which is deducted by the hotel from their room rate). **Belgian Tourist Reservations**, bd. Anspach 111, 1000 Brussels (☎ 02/513-74-84; fax 02/513-92-77; btr@horeca.be), provides a similar service.

AROUND THE GRAND-PLACE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Amigo ★★ In Brussels slang, an “amigo” is a prison, and indeed a prison once stood here, in a highly convenient location (both then and now) across the street from the Town Hall. But any resemblance to the former accommodations is purely nominal. Under new ownership, the Amigo has gone from being a worthy but somewhat dull lodging to among the city’s finest. The hotel’s Spanish Renaissance architecture, stately corridors, and flagstone lobby are right at home in this ancient neighborhood. Some of the previous incarnation’s antiques, sculptures, wall tapestries, and wood accents have been retained, to good effect. The rooms are quite spacious and traditionally elegant, but with touches of modern Flemish design to brighten things up—and Tintin motifs in the bathrooms to add an element of whimsy. Ask for a room with a view of the Town Hall’s fantastic Gothic spire.

Rue de l’Amigo 1–3 (off the Grand-Place), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/547-47-47. Fax 02/502-28-05. www.roccofoorthotels.com. 174 units. 195€–500€ (\$244–\$625) double; from 890€ (\$1,113) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 15€ (\$19). Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar; lounge; health club; concierge; 24-hr. business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Métropole ★★ Even if you’re not staying here, the hotel is worth a visit on its own account. An ornate, marble-and-gilt interior distinguishes this late-19th-century hotel several blocks from the Grand-Place. Soaring ceilings, potted palms, and lavishly decorated public rooms add to the Belle Epoque allure. Spacious guest rooms have classic furnishings and some modern luxuries, including heated towel racks, hair dryers, and trouser presses. An elegant French restaurant, L’Alban Chambon, caters to the sophisticated diner, and the Belle Epoque Cafe Métropole (see “Where to Dine,” later in this chapter) to the sophisticated cafe hound.

Place de Brouckère 31 (close to Centre Monnaie), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/217-23-00. Fax 02/218-02-20. www.metropolehotel.com. 305 units. 329€–429€ (\$411–\$536) double; from 650€ (\$813) suite. Rates include buffet or continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ (\$16). Métro: De Brouckère. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge; sidewalk cafe; health club and spa; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Radisson SAS ★ Modern, yet in harmony with its neighborhood a few blocks from the Grand-Place, this highly regarded hotel incorporates part of the medieval city wall. The large rooms are decorated in a variety of styles, including Scandinavian, Asian, and Italian, and the Royal Club rooms are plushly upholstered. There’s a huge atrium with cafe terraces and fountains; some rooms look out on this atrium rather than the outside world. The Sea Grill restaurant wins plaudits for its seafood, and the Bar Dessinée has a Belgian comic strip theme.

Rue du Fossé-aux-Loups 47 (close to Galeries Royales St-Hubert). ☎ 800/333-3333 in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/219-28-28. Fax 02/219-62-62. www.radissonsas.com. 281 units. 220€–405€ (\$275–\$506) double; 590€–890€ (\$738–\$1,113) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 25€ (\$31). Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (seafood; Belgian/international); bar; lounge; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; courtesy car; business center; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

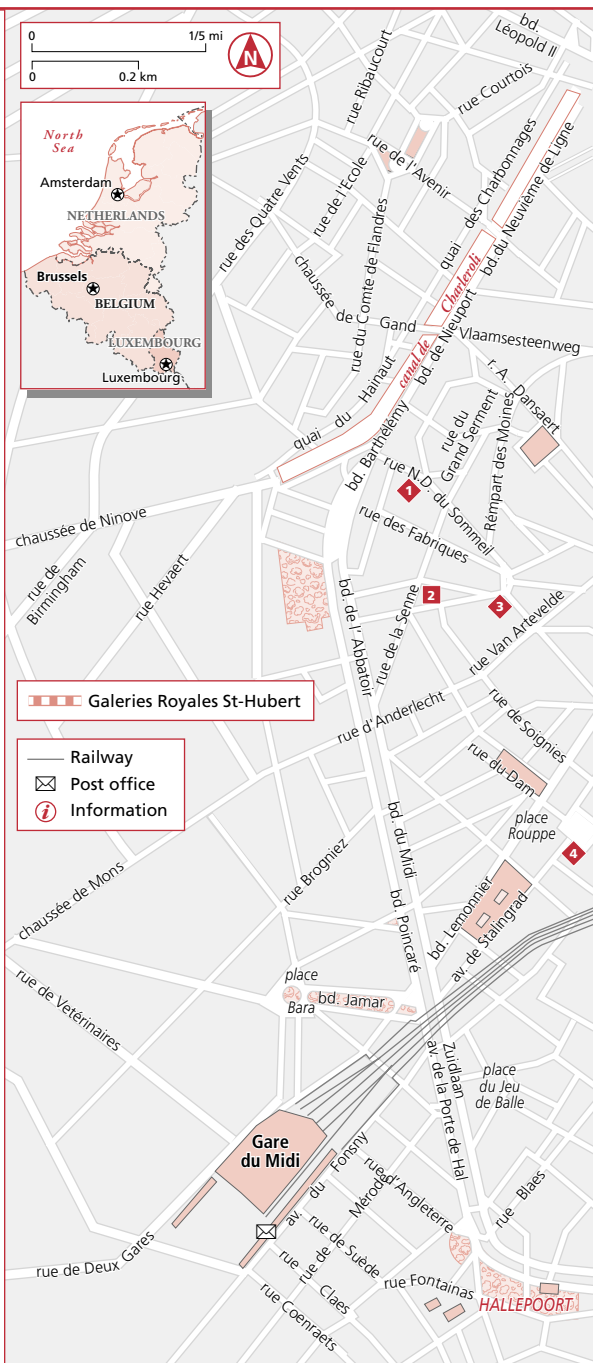
Where to Stay & Dine in Brussels

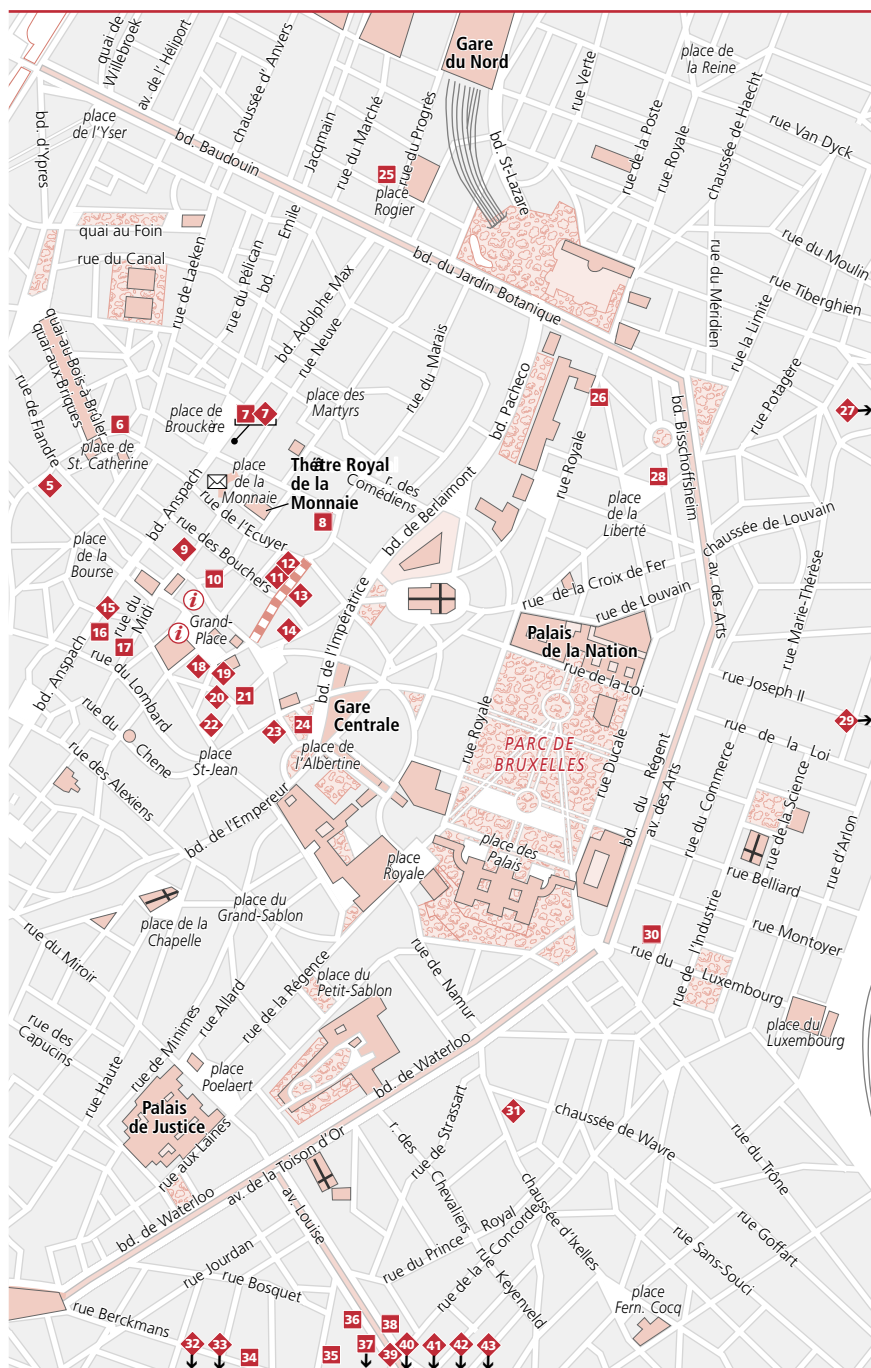
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MODERATE

Arlequin ★ You can't get closer to the heart of the city than this, with the restaurant-lined rue des Bouchers right outside the hotel's back entrance. Then there's the fine view, from some rooms, of the Town Hall spire in the neighboring Grand-Place (which is spectacular when lit at night), and of the Old City's rooftops and narrow medieval streets from the top-floor breakfast room. The guest rooms themselves are not quite so spectacular, but all have modern, comfortable furnishings and most have plenty of natural light.

Rue de la Fourche 17–19 (off rue des Bouchers), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/514-16-15. Fax 02/514-22-02. www.arlequin.be. 92 units. 125€ (\$156) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, hair dryer.

Le Dixseptième ★★ This graceful, 17th-century house that was once the official residence of the Spanish ambassador stands close to the Grand-Place in a neighborhood of restored dwellings. Guest rooms have wood paneling and marble chimneys, and are as big as suites in many hotels; some have balconies. All are in 18th-century style and are named after Belgian painters from Brueghel to Magritte. Two beautiful lounges are decorated with carved wooden medallions and 18th-century paintings.

Rue de la Madeleine 25 (off place de l'Albertine), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/502-57-44. Fax 02/502-64-24. www.ledixseptieme.be. 24 units. 200€–400€ (\$250–\$500) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** Lounge; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Mozart Go up a flight from the busy, cheap-eats street level, and guess which famous composer's music wafts through the lobby? Salmon-colored walls, plants, and old paintings create a warm, intimate ambience that's carried into the rooms. Although furnishings are blandly modern, colorful fabrics and exposed beams lend each unit a rustic originality. Several are duplexes with a sitting room underneath the loft bedroom. Top rooms have a great view.

Rue du Marché-aux-Fromages 23 (close to Grand-Place), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/502-66-61. Fax 02/502-77-58. www.hotel-mozart.be. 47 units. 95€ (\$119) double. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** Lounge. *In room:* TV.

AROUND THE FISH MARKET**MODERATE**

Welcome ★★ The name of this gem of a hotel, overlooking the Fish Market, couldn't be more accurate, thanks to the untiring efforts of the husband-and-wife proprietors. You can think of it as a country *auberge* (inn) right in the heart of town. Rooms are furnished and styled on individual, unrelated international and travel themes, such as Provence, Tibet, Egypt, Africa, Jules Verne, and Laura Ashley, all to a high standard. The fine in-house seafood restaurant La Truite

Value Passport to Brussels

One of the best discounts is the **Brussels Card**, available from the Brussels International tourist office in the Grand-Place, and from hotels, museums, and offices of the STIB city transit authority, for 30€ (\$38). Valid for 3 days, it allows free use of public transportation; free and discounted admission to around 30 of the city's museums and attractions; and discounts at some restaurants and other venues, as well as on some guided tours.

d'Argent closed in 2004, creating space for more rooms, but there's no shortage of good alternatives on the Marché-aux-Poissons. There's a free airport shuttle to and from Brussels National Airport. Book ahead; the Welcome's regular guests are fiercely loyal.

Quai au Bois-à-Brûler 23 (at the Marché-aux-Poissons), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/219-95-46. Fax 02/217-18-87. www.hotelwelcome.com. 17 units. 95€–130€ (\$119–\$163) double; 150€ (\$188) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ (\$13). Métro: Ste-Catherine. **Amenities:** Lounge; Internet desk. *In room:* A/C (some rooms), TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

George V ★ This agreeable little hotel is tucked away in a corner of the city center that looks more down-at-the-heels than it really is and is currently being reborn as a trendy shopping-and-eating area. The George, in a town house from 1859 within easy walking distance of the Grand-Place, provides a free shuttle bus to this square and the main museums, and to Gare du Midi. The rooms are plain but clean and have new furnishings; but some of the fittings are in clear need of replacement.

Rue 't Kint 23 (off place du Jardin-aux-Fleurs), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/513-50-93. Fax 02/513-44-93. www.george5.com. 16 units. 74€ (\$93) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Parking 7.50€ (\$9.40). Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* TV.

THE UPPER CITY EXPENSIVE

Astoria ★★ This fine luxury hotel has an ideal location for exploring both the old Brussels of the city center and the newer upper city. You're transported to a more elegant age the moment you walk into the Belle Epoque foyer, where the sumptuous surroundings feature Corinthian columns, antique furnishings, and textured marble. The Astoria dates from 1909, and its plush interior recalls the panache of that vanished heyday. Rooms, which are somewhat smaller than those in other hotels of this category, are attractively and comfortably furnished, though not extravagantly so, in a style that's in keeping with the character of the hotel. You can dine at the beautiful French restaurant Le Palais Royal and have a drink in the ornate Pullman Bar, which is based on the restaurant car of the legendary Orient Express train.

Rue Royale 103 (close to Colonne du Congrès), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 800/SOFITEL in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/227-05-05. Fax 02/219-30-46. www.sofitel.com. 118 units. 139€–350€ (\$174–\$438) double; from 480€ (\$600) suite. Weekend double rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 18€ (\$23). Métro: Botanique. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge; health club and spa; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

AROUND AVENUE LOUISE EXPENSIVE

Bristol Stephanie ★★ Every feature of this sleek, Norwegian-owned hotel on one of the city's toniest shopping streets, from its lobby fittings to furnishings in the kitchenette suites, is streamlined, functional, and representative of the best in Nordic design. Some rooms have four-poster beds and "anti-allergy" hardwood floors; all are furnished to a high level of modern style and comfort (though the standard rooms could use a little more Nordic drawer space). The rooms are quite large but should you need more space, it's worth the extra 40€ (\$50) or so to upgrade to a far larger executive room. Try to get a room in the main building; the security in the back building is good, but nothing beats a 24-hour doorman. Restaurant Le Chalet d'Odin has a refined French menu, and the breakfast room serves a pretty reasonable American-style buffet breakfast.

Av. Louise 91–93, 1050 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/543-33-11. Fax 02/538-03-07. www.bristol.be. 142 units. 350€–400€ (\$438–\$500) double; from 630€ (\$788) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ (\$25). Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Restaurant (international); lounge; bar; heated indoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Stanhope Brussels ★★ An old convent and some recently acquired neighboring properties in the upmarket shopping district around avenue Louise and Porte de Namur have been transformed into this graceful hotel. The ambience of the Stanhope combines that of a country retreat with a prime metropolitan location. All guest rooms are individually decorated in variations of Old English style. For all the hotel's English image, the in-house restaurant, Brighton, is French but is certainly tasteful.

Rue du Commerce 9 (off rue du Trône), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/506-91-11. Fax 02/512-17-08. www.stanhope.be. 95 units. 120€–325€ (\$150–\$406) double; 625€ (\$781) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 10€ (\$13). Métro: Trône. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; tearoom; health club and spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar.

MODERATE

Hotel Agenda Louise ★ This fine, small, middle-of-the-road hotel affords a good balance of advantages for both leisure visitors who are looking for modern comforts without spending too much to get them, and for business visitors who don't have sheafs of locked-and-loaded plastic to get by on. The recently renovated, spiffily decorated rooms are in a pleasant though not particularly noteworthy style that encompasses light-colored wood furniture and gold-and-orange curtains and fittings, and have enough room to swing a cat, so long as it's not an overly big one. All have complete kitchens. The bathrooms have tiled walls and floors and just about break out of the shoehorned-in syndrome that afflicts many moderately priced city hotels. Ask for a room that overlooks the inner courtyard for the best view.

Rue de Florence 6 (off av. Louise), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/539-00-31. Fax 02/539-00-63. www.hotel-agenda.com. 37 units. 116€ (\$145) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 6€ (\$7.50). Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Lounge; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Melia Avenue Louise This gem offers typically English country house decor, down to the fireplace in the lobby. The spacious, attractively furnished guest rooms all have private bathrooms, hair dryers, writing desks, and trouser presses. Some have kitchenettes. An English-style buffet breakfast is served in a pleasant and intimate breakfast room—so if you like your ham 'n' eggs done with a touch of class, this could be the place for you.

Rue Blanche 4 (off av. Louise), 1050 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/535-35-00. Fax 02/535-96-00. www.solmelia.com. 80 units. 130€–260€ (\$163–\$325) double; 360€ (\$450) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Bar; sauna. *In room:* TV, minibar.

INEXPENSIVE

De Boeck's Kids In a well-maintained 19th-century town house, this graceful hotel has unusually spacious and quiet rooms. They don't quite measure up to the Victorian elegance of the public spaces but are adequately furnished, with comfortable modern beds, soft carpeting, and floral-patterned curtains. Some rooms, ideal for families and small groups, can be used as quads or even quints.

Rue Veydt 40 (off chaussée de Charleroi), 1050 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/537-40-33. Fax 02/534-40-37. www.hotel-deboecks.be. 46 units. 62€–100€ (\$78–\$125) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Louise. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Family-Friendly Hotels

De Boeck's (p. 72) This family favorite near place Louise has huge, well-furnished rooms—they don't necessarily have all the latest amenities, but the whole family can stay in one room in considerable comfort.

Les Bluets (below) The hospitable proprietor of this hotel will make your family feel like members of *her* family.

Les Bluets ★  If you're searching for classic European charm or are a fan of American B&Bs, you'll enjoy it here. In a town house from 1864, the hotel is more of a comfortable country residence. You feel as though you're staying with friends when you breakfast in the antiques-filled dining room or in the sun room. A sweeping stairway (no elevator) leads up to the guest rooms, several of which have 4m (14-ft.) ceilings and ornate moldings; all have antiques and knickknacks. This is one of the city's few nonsmoking hotels.

Rue Berckmans 124 (off av. Louise), 1060 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/534-39-83. Fax 02/543-09-70. www.geocities.com/les_bluets. 10 units. 68€–81€ (\$85–\$101) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Hôtel des Monnaies. *In room:* TV.

AROUND GARE DU NORD **MODERATE**

Comfort Art Hotel Siru ★★ This is a fascinating midsize hotel in an area that was formerly decrepit—it used to be a red-light district and still has some peep-show joints and offbeat appliance shops—but has been going upmarket fast since a slew of fancy office blocks were built nearby. What sets the Siru apart is that the owner of this art-gallery-cum-hotel in a redeveloped business district persuaded 130 Belgian artists, including some of the country's biggest names, to “decorate” each of the coolly modern, well-equipped rooms and the corridors with a work on travel. Given the unpredictable nature of reactions to modern art, some clients apparently reserve the same room time after time; others ask for a room change in the middle of the night. It is not easily forgotten.

Place Rogier 1 (opposite Gare du Nord), 1210 Bruxelles. ☎ 800/228-3323 in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/203-35-80. Fax 02/203-33-03. www.comforthotelsiru.com. 101 units. 65€–250€ (\$81–\$313) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ (\$19). Métro: Rogier. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Sabina This small hostelry is like a private residence, presided over by hospitable owners. A grandfather clock in the reception area and polished wood along the restaurant walls give it a warm, homey atmosphere. Rooms vary in size, but all are comfortable and simply yet tastefully done in modern style with twin beds. Three rooms have kitchenettes.

Rue du Nord 78 (at place des Barricades), 1000 Bruxelles. ☎ 02/218-26-37. Fax 02/219-32-39. www.hotel.sabina.be. 24 units. 77€–105€ (\$96–\$131) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Madou. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

AIRPORT HOTELS **VERY EXPENSIVE**

Sheraton Brussels Airport ★ You can't be more convenient to Brussels National Airport than here without lodging on the runway. You'll find all the

comfort you would expect of a top-flight Sheraton, including soundproof rooms with big, comfortable beds. The Concorde restaurant has a French slant complemented by international dishes.

Luchthaven Brussel Nationaal (facing Departures), 1930 Zaventem, Belgium. ☎ 800/325-3535 in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/725-10-00. Fax 02/725-11-55. www.sheratonairport.be. 533 units. 275€–335€ (\$344–\$419) double; from 590€ (\$738) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 12€ (\$15). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/international); bar; health club; sauna; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

MODERATE

Holiday Inn Express Brussels Airport For a cheaper near-airport option than the Sheraton, try this efficient small place a 5- to 10-minute shuttle ride away. Rooms often are steeply discounted, so always inquire about this. If you get the munchies, you can dine at its big brother Holiday Inn next door. There's free long-term parking and an airport shuttle.

Holidaystraat 7 (access road opposite NATO HQ), 1831 Diegem. ☎ 02/720-58-65. Fax 02/720-41-45. www.brussels-airport.holiday-inn.com. 310 units. 150€–250€ (\$188–\$313) double. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV.

4 Where to Dine

Food is a passion in Brussels, which boasts more Michelin-star restaurants per head than Paris. People here regard dining as a fine art and their favorite chef as a grand master. It's just about impossible to eat badly, no matter what your price range. The city has no fewer than 1,500 restaurants. You can spend as much as 200€ (\$250) for a meal in one of the culinary giants or as little as 15€ (\$19) for one prepared with maybe as much loving care in an informal place. Even if you're on a tight budget, you should try to set aside the money for at least one big splurge in a fine restaurant—food for the soul as well as the stomach.

The Brussels restaurant scene covers the entire city, but there are one or two culinary pockets you should know about. It has been said that you haven't truly visited this city unless you've dined at least once along **rue des Bouchers** or its offshoot, **Petite rue des Bouchers**, both of which are near the Grand-Place. Both streets are lined with an extraordinary array of ethnic eateries—most with a proudly proclaimed specialty, and all with modest prices (under 15€/ \$19)—and some very good Belgian restaurants. Reservations are not usually necessary in these colorful, and often crowded, restaurants—if you cannot be seated at one, you simply stroll on to the next one.

Then there's the cluster of fine restaurants at the **Marché-aux-Poissons (Fish Market)**, a short walk from the Grand-Place around place Ste-Catherine. This is where fishermen once unloaded their daily catches from a now-covered canal. Seafood, as you'd expect, is the specialty. A well-spent afternoon's occupation is to stroll through the area to examine the bills of fare exhibited in windows and make your reservation for the evening meal.

In Brussels, if you are a nonsmoker you're mostly out of luck—get ready to consume a garnish of secondhand smoke with your meal. Finally, don't fret if the service is slow: People take their time dining out here.

AROUND THE GRAND-PLACE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Comme Chez Soi ★★☆☆ CLASSIC FRENCH A visit to the revered, Art Nouveau “Just Like Home” will surely be the culinary highlight of your trip to Brussels. Although the food is a long way from what most people eat at home,

the welcome from master chef Pierre Wynants is warm, and his standards are high enough for the most rigorous taste buds. Ask for a table in the kitchen, where you can watch the master at work. The sautéed lobster with truffles and chanterelles and the roast saddle of lamb are memorable main courses; for dessert, try the soufflé of preserved oranges in Mandarine Napoléon liqueur. Book as far ahead as possible. Getting a table at short notice is more likely at lunchtime, which is generally a shade less busy than the evenings.

Place Rouppe 23 (at av. de Stalingrad). ☎ 02/512-29-21. www.commechezsoi.be. Reservations required. Main courses 31€–94€ (\$39–\$118); fixed-price menus 56€–124€ (\$70–\$155). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–1:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Métro: Anneessens.

La Maison du Cygne ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This grande dame of Brussels's internationally recognized restaurants overlooks the Grand-Place from the former guild house of the Butchers Guild—where Karl Marx worked on *The Communist Manifesto* during a 3-year sojourn in Brussels. The service, though a tad stuffy, is as elegant as the polished walnut walls, bronze wall sconces, and green velvet. The menu has haute cuisine Belgian and French classics, such as *waterzooï de homard* (a souplike lobster stew), veal sautéed with fresh wild mushrooms, and *tournedos* (filet steak) with green peppercorns. There are fine chicken and fish dishes, and specialties such as *huîtres au champagne* (oysters in champagne) and *goujonette de sole mousseline* (sole mousse). Because of its location, the restaurant is usually crowded at lunchtime, but dinner reservations are likely to be available.

Grand-Place 9 (entrance at rue Charles Buls 2). ☎ 02/511-82-44. www.lamaisonducygne.be. Reservations recommended. Main courses 30€–58€ (\$38–\$73); *menu du jour* 90€ (\$113). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:15pm and 7pm–midnight; Sat 7pm–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

EXPENSIVE

Aux Armes de Bruxelles ★ TRADITIONAL BELGIAN A Brussels institution—no jokes, please, about who wants to eat in an institution—since it opened in 1921, this family-owned establishment offers gracious, rather formal service, combined with a casual, relaxed ambience. It's an excellent place for your introduction to Belgian cooking, since it combines traditional cuisine with great quality, and offers just about every regional specialty you can think of (including mussels in every conceivable style). You can sample anything from an excellent beef stewed in beer to a delicious *waterzooï* to a steak with pepper-and-cream sauce, all at reasonable prices.

Rue des Bouchers 13 (off the Grand-Place). ☎ 02/511-55-98. www.auxarmesdebruxelles.be. Main courses 14€–21€ (\$18–\$26); lunch menu 13€ (\$16); *menus du jour* 28€–43€ (\$35–\$54). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–11:15pm. Métro: De Brouckère.

De l'Ogenblik ★★ FRENCH/BELGIAN In the elegant surroundings of the Galeries Royales St-Hubert, this restaurant supplies good taste in a Parisian bistro-style setting that's popular with off-duty actors and audiences from the nearby Gallery theater, among others. It often gets busy, but the ambience in the split-level, wood-and-brass-outfitted dining room, with a sand-strewn floor, is convivial, though a little too tightly packed when it's full. Look for garlicky meat and seafood menu dishes, and expect to pay a smidgeon more for atmosphere than might be strictly justified by the results on your plate. If you like duck, try the *magret du canard mulard aux deux poivres*, *gratin dauphinois* (filet of duck with peppers and potatoes gratin). A good seafood choice is the *ragoût de coquilles St-Jacques et gambas*, *sauce diable* (scallop and prawn stew in a “devil”—spicy—sauce).

Galerie des Princes 1 (in the Galeries Royales St-Hubert). ☎ 02/511-61-51. www.ogenblik.be. Main courses 22€–28€ (\$28–\$35); *plat du jour* 12€ (\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight; Fri–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7pm–12:30am. Métro: De Brouckère.

Le Scheltema ★ BELGIAN This is one of those solid restaurants in the Ilôt Sacré district that keep going day in, day out, year after year, serving up much the same fare but never forgetting that quality counts. Good service and fine atmosphere complement the seafood specialties at this brasserie-style restaurant, which is similar to others in the district but always goes the extra mile in class and taste. *Pâté*, *bisque d'homard* (lobster soup), *croquettes aux crevettes* (prawn croquettes), mussels (in season), and a wide range of fish and meat options all grace the excellent menu.

Rue des Dominicains 7 (off rue des Bouchers). ☎ 02/512-20-84. Main courses 16€–24€ (\$20–\$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–3pm and 6–11:30pm; Fri–Sat noon–3pm and 6pm–12:30am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

MODERATE

Brasserie de la Roue d'Or ★★ TRADITIONAL BELGIAN This welcoming Art Nouveau brasserie, with lots of dark wood, mirrors, a high frescoed ceiling, Magritte images on the walls, and marble-topped tables, has a loyal local following. An extensive menu, ranging from grilled meats to a good selection of cooked salmon and other seafood, as well as old Belgian favorites like *stoemp* (mashed potatoes and carrots with sausage, a steak, or other meat), caters to just about any appetite, and the beer, wine, and spirits list is equally long. Jeff De Gelas, the colorful owner (he also owns 't Kelderke; see below), is known locally as the “King of *Stoemp*.”

Rue des Chapeliers 26 (off the Grand-Place). ☎ 02/514-25-54. Main courses 13€–23€ (\$16–\$29); fixed-price menus 23€–28€ (\$29–\$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–12:30am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Falstaff Gourmand ★ *Value* BELGIAN/FRENCH Le Falstaff across from the Bourse (see “Brussels After Dark,” later in this chapter) is widely renowned as a classic Art Nouveau cafe. Around the corner, its former sister establishment—now operating on its own hook—has a different but equally notable style. Service is attentive, prompt, and friendly. First-class Belgian and French menu dishes include one of the best deals in Brussels: a three-course *menu gourmand*, which includes an aperitif, glass of wine with the starter, and small pitcher of wine with the main course.

Rue des Pierres 38 (near the Bourse). ☎ 02/512-17-61. Main courses 14€–21€ (\$18–\$26); *menu gourmand* 30€ (\$38). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–3pm; Tues–Sun 7–11pm. Métro: Bourse.

Le Marmiton ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH A welcoming environment, hearty servings, and commitment to satisfying customers are hallmarks of this cozy

On Your Guard in the Ilôt Sacré

A few restaurants (not reviewed here) in this colorful restaurant district just off the Grand-Place take advantage of tourists. If you decide to dine at a restaurant not reviewed here, and you don't want to get fleeced, be sure to ask the price of everything *before* you order it. Most visitors leave the Ilôt Sacré with no more serious complaint than an expanded waistline, but a little caution is in order.

restaurant, now on two floors. On a menu that emphasizes fish, the seafood cocktail starter is a heap of shellfish and crustaceans substantial enough to be a main course, and the sole is excellent. Meat dishes are available, too. The menu is complemented by an excellent wine list selected by Portuguese/Belgian owner and chef Antonio Beja da Silva, whose love of his own cooking shows in his waistline and in the attention he devotes to his customers.

Rue des Bouchers 43 (off Grand-Place). ☎ 02/511-79-10. Main courses 12€–18€ (\$15–\$23); *menu du jour* 9.90€–21€ (\$12–\$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–11:30pm (12:30am weekends). Métro: Gare Centrale.

INEXPENSIVE

Cafe Métropole ★ SNACKS/AFTERNOON TEAS Many Brussels visitors never get beyond the pleasant heated sidewalk section of this massive Victorian-style cafe. Inside you find a casually elegant decor, highlighted by a marble fireplace, colorful wooden puppets hanging from the high ceilings, and comfortable leather seating arranged in cozy groupings. The menu includes sandwiches, soups, quiches, and other light meals. The bar menu fills no fewer than six pages, including some rather exceptional specialties from the head barman.

In the Hôtel Métropole, place de Brouckère 31. ☎ 02/217-23-00. Reservations not accepted. *Plat du jour* 9€ (\$11); light meal 9€–13€ (\$11–\$16). AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–2am. Métro: De Brouckère.

Chez Léon BELGIAN/MUSSELS Think of it as the mussels from Brussels, as this big, basic restaurant is the city's most famous purveyor of that marine delicacy. Léon has been flexing its mussels since 1893 and now has clones all over Belgium. The mollusks in question are top quality, at low prices, in a variety of styles, such as *moules marinières* (mussels boiled in vegetable stock) and *moules au vin blanc* (mussels in white wine sauce). If you don't like mussels, there are plenty of other fishy delights—like eels in green sauce, cod, and bouillabaisse.

Rue des Bouchers 18 (off of Grand-Place). ☎ 02/511-14-15. www.chezleon.be. Main courses 9.40€–22€ (\$12–\$28); *menu Formule Léon* 12€ (\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat noon–11:30pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

L'Auberge des Chapeliers ★★ Value TRADITIONAL BELGIAN In a 17th-century building that was once the headquarters of the hat makers' guild, the Auberge des Chapeliers preserves its historic charm. Behind a beautiful brick facade, the first two floors are graced with timber beams and paneling and connected by a narrow wooden staircase. Popular with locals who live and work in the area, as well as with tourists fortunate enough to find it, it can be crowded at the height of lunch hour, so it's a good idea to come just before noon or just after 2pm. The food is typical hearty Belgian fare, with an accent on mussels in season and dishes cooked in beer. The prices are modest, considering the location.

Rue des Chapeliers 1–3 (off Grand-Place). ☎ 02/513-73-38. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 9.50€–18€ (\$12–\$23); set-price menus 15€–21€ (\$19–\$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–2pm and 6–11pm; Fri noon–2pm and 6pm–midnight; Sat noon–3pm and 6pm–midnight; Sun noon–3pm and 6–11pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Paradiso ITALIAN This great little Italian restaurant is close enough to the Grand-Place to be convenient, but just far enough away to not be immediately obvious to the crowds. As such, it is one of Brussels's best-kept secrets. Owner/chef Santino Trovato has created a little gem, with pasta and pizza just like *Mamma* used to make and a list of fine Italian wines as long as your arm.

Rue Duquesnoy 34 (off place St-Jean). ☎ 02/512-52-32. Main courses 8.50€–14€ (\$11–\$18). No credit cards. Tues–Fri noon–3pm and 6:30pm–midnight; Sat–Sun 6:30pm–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

't Kelderke ★★ TRADITIONAL BELGIAN Despite being on the square that is the focus of tourism in Brussels, this is far from being a tourist trap. As many Bruxellois as tourists throng the long wooden tables in a 17th-century, brick-arched cellar, and all are welcomed with time-honored respect, even if that should be perceived as being a little rough and ready. Memorable traditional Belgian fare, with little in the way of frills, is served up from an open kitchen. This is a great place to try local specialties such as *bloedpens* (blood sausage) à la *Bruxelloise*, *stoemp* (mashed potato and vegetable) with *boudin* (sausage)—owner Jef De Gelas is renowned locally as the “King of *Stoemp*”—*carbonnades à la Flamande* (Flemish beef stew), *lapin à la gueuze* (rabbit in Brussels beer), and big steaming pans piled high with Zeeland mussels.

Grand-Place 15. ☎ 02/513-73-44. Main courses 9.50€–19€ (\$12–\$24); *plat du jour* 8.50€ (\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

AROUND AVENUE LOUISE

EXPENSIVE

La Quincaillerie ★★ MODERN FRENCH/OYSTER BAR In the Ixelles district, where fine restaurants are as common as streetlights, this spot stands out, even though it may be a little too aware of its own modish good looks and a shade pricey. The setting is a traditional former hardware store from 1903, with a giant rail station clock, wood paneling, and masses of wooden drawers, designed by students of Art Nouveau master Victor Horta. It's busy enough to get the waitstaff harassed and absent-minded, yet they're always friendly. Seafood dishes predominate on the menu. Specialties include *escalope du saumon rôti au gros sel* (salmon in roasted rock salt) and *canette laquée au miel et citron vert* (baby duck with a crust of honey and lime). You don't need to look much further than a crisp Sancerre as the ideal wine accompaniment to most dishes.

Rue du Page 45 (at rue Américaine). ☎ 02/533-98-33. www.quincaillerie.be. Main courses 17€–26€ (\$21–\$33); fixed-price menus 23€–26€ (\$29–\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight; Sat–Sun 7pm–midnight. Tram: 81, 82, 91, or 92 to chaussée de Charleroi.

La Table de l'Abbaye ★ FRENCH This is a restaurant for the French-cuisine enthusiast who likes things done just so and is not too enamored of nouvelle cuisine. The setting is a well-appointed town house near the tranquil grounds of the Abbaye (Abbey) de la Cambre. The food here is hard to beat and its prices are not excessive, considering the quality of the fare and its presentation. Look for many French favorites, all best accompanied with a fine wine—from France, of course. Lobster flexes its claws in several interesting ways on the menu here: in pancakes with caviar butter, in a mixed salad, and with a pepper-cream sauce. Lamb marinated in Bourgogne wine is another specialty. In a romantically atmospheric touch, candlelight provides the main illumination for the classic decor, enlivened by sculptures and paintings.

Rue de Belle-Vue 62. ☎ 02/646-33-95. Main courses 15€–25€ (\$19–\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4:30pm and 7–11pm. Closed Dec 20–30. Tram: 94 (to top of av. Louise).

MODERATE

Au Vieux Bruxelles BELGIAN/SEAFOOD This convivial, brasserie-style restaurant from 1882 specializes in mussels, which it serves in a wide variety of ways. In Belgium, the personality of the humble but tasty mussel is a staple of conversation as much as of diet, and people assess the quality of each year's crop with the same critical eye that other countries reserve for fine wines (the fact that the mussels all come from neighboring Holland adds sharpness to their critical

faculties). Au Vieux Bruxelles, a kind of temple to the Belgian obsession with mussels, serves the shellfish in 15 different ways, including raw (accompanied only by a light white wine sauce), baked, fried, grilled, and broiled, as well as in traditional dishes like *moules marinères* (boiled in water with vegetables) and *moules au vin* (boiled in wine). Should you not wish to work on the mussels, you can get great steaks like *steak au poivre flambé* (flamed pepper steak), *escargots* (snails), and crepes.

Rue St-Boniface 35 (close to Porte Namur). ☎ 02/503-31-11. www.auvieuxbruxelles.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses 9€–19€ (\$11–\$24). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2:30pm and 6:30–11pm. Métro: Porte de Namur.

L'Amadeus ★★ MODERN BELGIAN The postmodern chic of this restaurant/wine bar/oyster bar in a former sculptor's studio with garden-courtyard terrace makes a refreshing change from traditional Belgian style. Its candlelit interior is so dim you would think they're hiding something, but the cooking is nothing to be ashamed of. The menu includes such vegetarian treats as vegetarian lasagna and ricotta and spinach tortellini; and for meat eaters, caramelized spare ribs and several salmon dishes, all accompanied by delicious homemade nut bread. The Sunday brunch is an all-you-can-eat affair that includes smoked fish, cheese, eggs, bread, cereal, juice, and coffee.

Rue Veydt 13 (off chaussée de Charleroi). ☎ 02/538-34-27. Main courses 15€–23€ (\$19–\$29); *plat du jour* (Mon–Fri) 9.50€ (\$12); Sun brunch 18€ (\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:30pm and 7pm–1am; Mon and Sat 7pm–1am. Tram: 91 or 92.

Le Pain et le Vin ★ MEDITERRANEAN The owners of this restaurant were once steeped in the Michelin-star milieu but now have decided to jettison the rigorously controlled bag-and-baggage of that system and concentrate on having some good, clean, tasty fun instead. “Bread and Wine” fits the bill perfectly—and the bill won't be excessive either. The restaurant, in a converted house, looks out onto a garden. There's a terrace for alfresco dining in good weather. Whether the dish is chicken, fish, meat, or vegetables, the preparation concentrates on bringing out the natural taste, rather than smothering it with over-rich sauces. For interesting variations on common dishes, try the chicken ravioli with basil and Parmesan, or the lobster and shrimp lasagna with ginger sauce. Vegetarian dishes are available on request, and vegetables form a big part of the menu offerings.

Chaussée d'Alsemberg 812A. ☎ 02/332-37-74. Main courses 12€–16€ (\$15–\$20). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 6–10pm; Sat 6–10pm. Tram: 55.

INEXPENSIVE

Shanti ★ VEGETARIAN/SEAFOOD An exotic look keeps faith with the restaurant's multicultural menus: Lots of greenery and flowers create a gardenlike feel, and crystal lamps, mirrors, and old paintings adorn the walls. Try “Neptune's pleasure,” crab with avocado and seaweed, as a starter. For a main course, shrimp masala with mixed vegetables and coriander is excellent, as is eggplant with ricotta in a tomato-and-basil sauce. There is a big choice of menus.

Av. Adolphe Buyl 68. ☎ 02/649-40-96. www.shanti.be. Main courses 8€–13€ (\$10–\$16); fixed-price menus 22€–25€ (\$28–\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–10pm. Tram: 92 or 93.

WEST OF THE BOURSE MODERATE

In 't Spinnepokke ★★ *Finds* TRADITIONAL BELGIAN In the Spider's Web occupies a stagecoach inn from 1762, just far enough off the beaten track

downtown to be frequented mainly by “those in the know.” You dine in a tilting, tiled-floor building, at plain tables, and more likely than not squeezed into a tight space. This is one of Brussels’s most traditional cafe/restaurants—so much so, in fact, that the menu lists its hardy standbys of regional Belgian cuisine in the old Bruxellois dialect. *Stoemp mi sossisse* is hotchpotch with sausage, and *toung ave mei* is sole. The bar stocks a vast selection of traditional beers.

Place du Jardin-aux-Flours 1 (off rue Van Artevelde). ☎ 02/511-86-95. Main courses 11€–20€ (\$14–\$25); *plat du jour* 9€ (\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 6–11pm; Sat 6pm–midnight (bar Mon–Fri 11am–midnight; Sat 6pm–midnight). Métro: Bourse.

La Manufacture ★★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL Even in its former incarnation, this place was concerned with style—it used to be the factory of chic Belgian leather-goods maker Delvaux. Fully refurbished, with hardwood floors, leather banquettes, polished wood, and stone tables, all set amid iron pillars and exposed air ducts, it produces trendy world cuisine on a French foundation, for a mostly youthful public. You may find it a little disconcerting at first, being able to mix Asian menu dishes like dim sum and sushi with Moroccan couscous, Lyon sausage, sliced ostrich filets with mango and green pepper, and Belgian specialties like *waterzooï*, but you soon get the hang of it (the menu changes seasonally, so these particular dishes might not be available). Some evenings there’s live piano music. On sunny days in summer, you can dine outdoors on a terrace shaded by giant bamboo plants.

Rue Notre-Dame du Sommeil 12–20 (off place du Jardin-aux-Flours). ☎ 02/502-25-25. www.manufacture.be. Main courses 12€–19€ (\$15–\$25); *menu du jour* (lunch only) 14€ (\$18); fixed-price menus 30€–65€ (\$38–\$81). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 7–11pm; Sat 7pm–midnight. Métro: Bourse.

INEXPENSIVE

Le Paon Royal ★ BELGIAN One of my favorite small, family-owned restaurants, this typically Bruxellois treat is in a house dating from 1631 that has a rustic wood-and-exposed-brick interior and timber-beamed ceiling. You can have just a snack with one of the 65 brands of beer, six of them draught beers, behind the tiny bar (some of which are also used in the cooking), or try the hearty *plat du jour*, which is invariably a traditional Belgian dish, offered at lunchtime only. Specialties of the house are roast suckling pig in a mustard sauce, and cod filet in a *Hoegaarden* (Belgian white beer) sauce. In fine weather, chairs are generally set out under a cluster of plane trees in a little park just across the street.

Rue du Vieux Marché-aux-Grains 6. ☎ 02/513-08-68. www.paonroyal.com. Main courses 8.95€–18€ (\$11–\$23); *plat du jour* 7.90€ (\$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–9:30pm. Métro: Ste-Catherine.

THE EUROPEAN DISTRICT

EXPENSIVE

Le Stévin ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH Should you be experiencing an uncontrollable desire to rub shoulders with the European Union’s politicians and bureaucrats—including an occasional august commissioner or government minister from an EU member state—this tranquil town house is a likely place. True, that’s not much of a recommendation, but fine food can make all the difference. Belgian specialties are prepared in a light, modern way that makes a pleasant change from the weighty portions in traditional Belgian eateries. You can take a pre-meal drink at an Art Deco bar, and in fine weather dine alfresco in a garden at the back. The traditional wood-paneled setting features antique furnishings and old pictures of Brussels. Popular dishes here are sole, red mullet, and grilled or roast lamb. Wild mushrooms make a nice accompaniment for any of these meat and fish dishes.

Rue St-Quentin 29 (off Sq. Ambiorix). ☎ 02/230-98-47. Main courses 18€–25€ (\$23–\$31); fixed-price lunch 20€–25€ (\$25–\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 7–11:30pm. Métro: Schuman.

NORTH BRUSSELS

MODERATE

Passage to India INDIAN In an enclave of Indian and Pakistani restaurants, Passage to India stands out for its friendly welcome, warm ambience, and unpretentious yet careful presentation. The decor is bright but restrained, and in the evenings little oil lamps illuminate the room to almost magical effect. Prawn *puri* is a particularly good starter here. *Tandoori* (cooked in the clay oven), curry, and *dhansak* (Persian-style) dishes predominate on the main-course menu. Most are mild to medium in terms of spiciness. If you like it hotter, ask for *Madras* dishes; and for hotter still, *vindaloo*. Kashmiri dishes are a light and fruity option for those who don't want so many spices, while *pasanda* dishes, made with red wine, provide a more rounded flavor. Adventurous diners can ask about special Bangladeshi fish dishes.

Chaussée de Louvain 223. ☎ 02/735-31-47. Main courses 9.50€–19€ (\$12–\$23); *menu du jour* 9.50€ (\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight. Bus: 29.

SOUTH BRUSSELS

VERY EXPENSIVE

Villa Lorraine ★★ TRADITIONAL FRENCH You'll find one of the city's top kitchens in this renovated château on the fringes of the Bois de la Cambre park. The dining rooms are spacious, with wicker furnishings, flower arrangements everywhere, and a skylight. In good weather you may elect to have drinks outside under the trees. Among the classic French offerings are saddle of lamb in a delicate red-wine-and-herb sauce, cold salmon in an herb sauce, partridge cooked with apples, and baked lobster with butter rose.

Av. du Vivier d'Oie 75. ☎ 02/374-31-63. Main courses 27€–45€ (\$34–\$56); fixed-price lunch menu 50€ (\$63); *menu gastronomique* 75€ (\$94). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed 3 weeks in July. Going by car or taxi is the most practical way to get here.

INEXPENSIVE

Le Mâcon BELGIAN/SWISS Tasty, uncomplicated Belgian fare, such as mussels (*moules*) and steak with french fries (*steak frites*), is this superior neighborhood cafe-restaurant's stock-in-trade. The extensive menu also has slightly more exotic items—try the *tournedos Rossini* in port sauce, and skate *au beurre noir* (in black butter). Service is simple, and the cozy, wood-paneled dining area is a style-free zone (smoky, too), but there are a few tables with tablecloths, usually kept for regulars unless you ask for one. A Swiss menu, including fondue, is served every Thursday.

Impressions

One must . . . loiter during long afternoons in the crowded, narrow, sloping streets of the lower town, lunch in the little restaurants in the neighborhood of the Grand-Place . . . and somehow learn to know and appreciate the tang and flavor of the local accent, and, by slow degrees, find one's way into and be accepted by the great heart of the city that is not like any other in the world.

—Brand Whitlock, pre–World War I U.S. ambassador to Belgium

Rue Joseph Stallaert 87 (off av. Winston Churchill). ☎ 02/343-89-37. Main courses 6.50€–20€ (\$8.15–\$25); fixed-price menus 9.50€–25€ (\$12–\$31); Swiss menu 21€ (\$26). No credit cards. Daily noon–dawn. Tram: 23 or 90.

5 Seeing the Sights

Brussels has such a variety of things to see and do that it can sometimes be overwhelming. There are more than 75 museums dedicated to just about every special interest under the sun, in addition to impressive public buildings, leafy parks, and interesting squares. History is just around every corner. Fortunately, numerous sidewalk cafes offer respite for weary feet, and there's good public transport to those attractions beyond walking distance of the compact, heart-shaped city center, which contains many of Brussels's most popular attractions.

THE PRINCIPAL SQUARES

Ornamental gables, medieval banners, gilded facades, sunlight flashing off gold-filigreed rooftop sculptures, a general impression of harmony and timelessness—there's a lot to take in all at once when you first enter the **Grand-Place** ★★ ★ (Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse). Once the pride of the Hapsburg Empire, the Grand-Place (*Grote Markt* in Dutch) has always been the very heart of Brussels. Jean Cocteau called it “a splendid stage.”

Its present composition dates mostly from the late 1690s, thanks to France's Louis XIV. In 1695, his army lined up its artillery on the heights of Anderlecht and blasted away at the medieval Grand-Place, using the Town Hall spire as a target marker. The French gunners destroyed the square but, ironically, the Town Hall spire escaped undamaged. Other structures were not so fortunate, however, such as the wood-fronted buildings of the great trading and mercantile guilds.

But the Bruxellois weren't about to let a mere French king do away with their centuries-old corporate headquarters. The guildsmen had the place up and running again within 4 years, on the same grand scale as before but on more solid foundations. The result throws your sense of time out of joint, as the medieval atmosphere is conjured up mostly in the baroque style known as the Flemish Renaissance. The Town Hall, though badly damaged by Louis's guns, is the real thing, however, dating from the early 1400s.

Top honors go to the Gothic **Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** ★★ and the neo-Gothic **Maison du Roi (King's House)** ★, which houses the **Musée de la Ville (Museum of the City of Brussels)**; see below). You'll also want to admire no. 9, the former headquarters of the guild of butchers—where Karl Marx created an ideology that would change the world when he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* there—and now a tony restaurant, **Le Cygne**; no. 10, **L'Arbre d'Or**, headquarters of the guild of brewers and location of the Brewing Museum; and nos. 13 to 19, an ensemble of seven mansions known as the **Maison des Ducs de Brabant**, adorned with busts of 19 dukes. Victor Hugo spent part of his time in exile at no. 26 (“**The Pigeon**”), firing off literary broadsides at Napoléon III

Tips Free Culture

Be sure to take advantage of the free admission some museums offer on the first Wednesday afternoon every month.

Fun Fact The Lost River

Believe it or not, Brussels is built on a river called the Senne. In the 19th century the City Fathers had it covered up, but you can still see traces of the missing river at courtyards off place St-Géry.

until the City Fathers asked him to leave for fear the outraged French emperor would send an army to collect him.

Don't miss the cafes lodged within the opulent wooden interiors of old guild houses; their upper-floor windows overlooking the Grand-Place give some of the best views in Europe. And be sure to take in the *son-et-lumière* on summer evenings in the Grand-Place. This sound-and-light show, in which a series of colored lamps on the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) are switched on and off in sequence to appropriately grand music, is admittedly kind of kitsch. But who cares? It's also magical.

Though the traffic passing through it diminishes the experience, **Place du Grand-Sablon** ★ (tram: 92, 93, or 94) is filled with sidewalk cafes and lined with gabled mansions. Locals consider it a classier place to see and be seen than the Grand-Place. The Grand-Sablon is also antiques territory; many of its mansions house antiques shops or private art galleries with pricey merchandise on display. The dealerships have spread into neighboring side streets as well. Saturday and Sunday mornings, an excellent antiques market sets up its stalls in front of **Notre-Dame du Sablon** (☎ 02/511-57-41; tram: 92, 93, or 94). This flamboyantly Gothic church, with no fewer than five naves, was paid for by the city's Guild of Crossbowmen in the 15th century. The statue of Minerva in the square dates from 1751. The church is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and weekends from 10am to 6:30pm; admission is free.

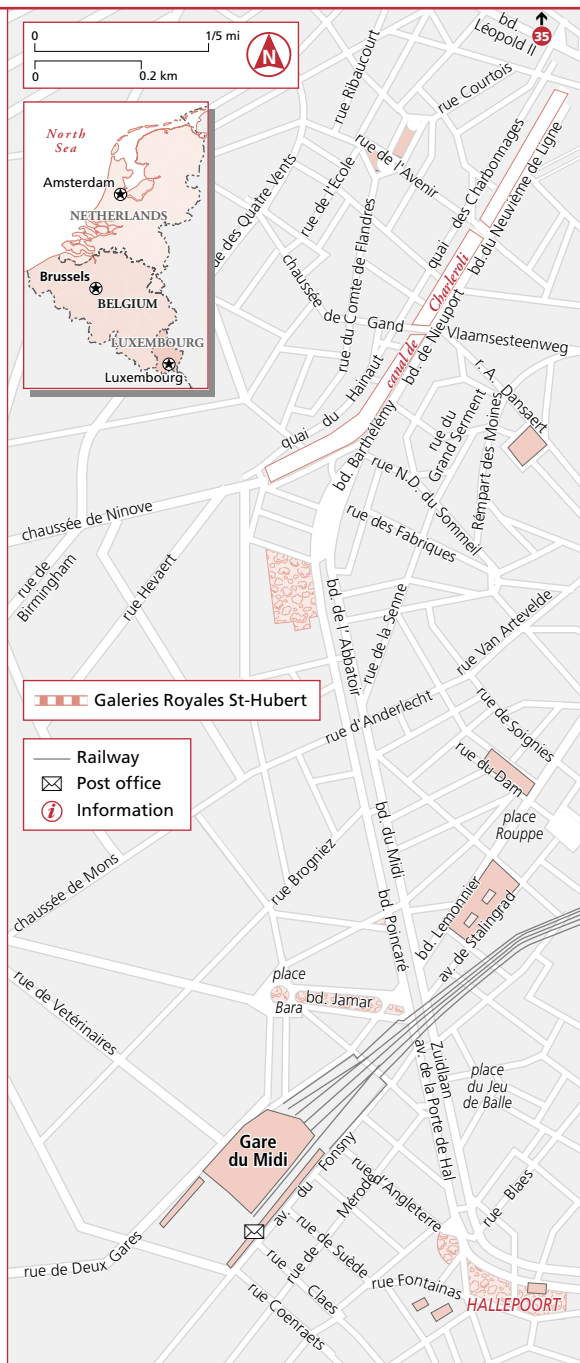
Just across rue de la Régence is the Grand-Sablon's little cousin, **Place du Petit-Sablon** ★ (tram: 92, 93, or 94). An ornamental garden with a fountain and pool, it's a magical little retreat from the city bustle. The 48 bronze statuettes adorning the surrounding wrought-iron fence symbolize Brussels's medieval guilds. Two statues in the center commemorate the counts of Egmont and Hornes, who were beheaded in 1568 for protesting the cruelties of the Council of Blood, the enforcement arm of Spain's Holy Inquisition in the Low Countries.

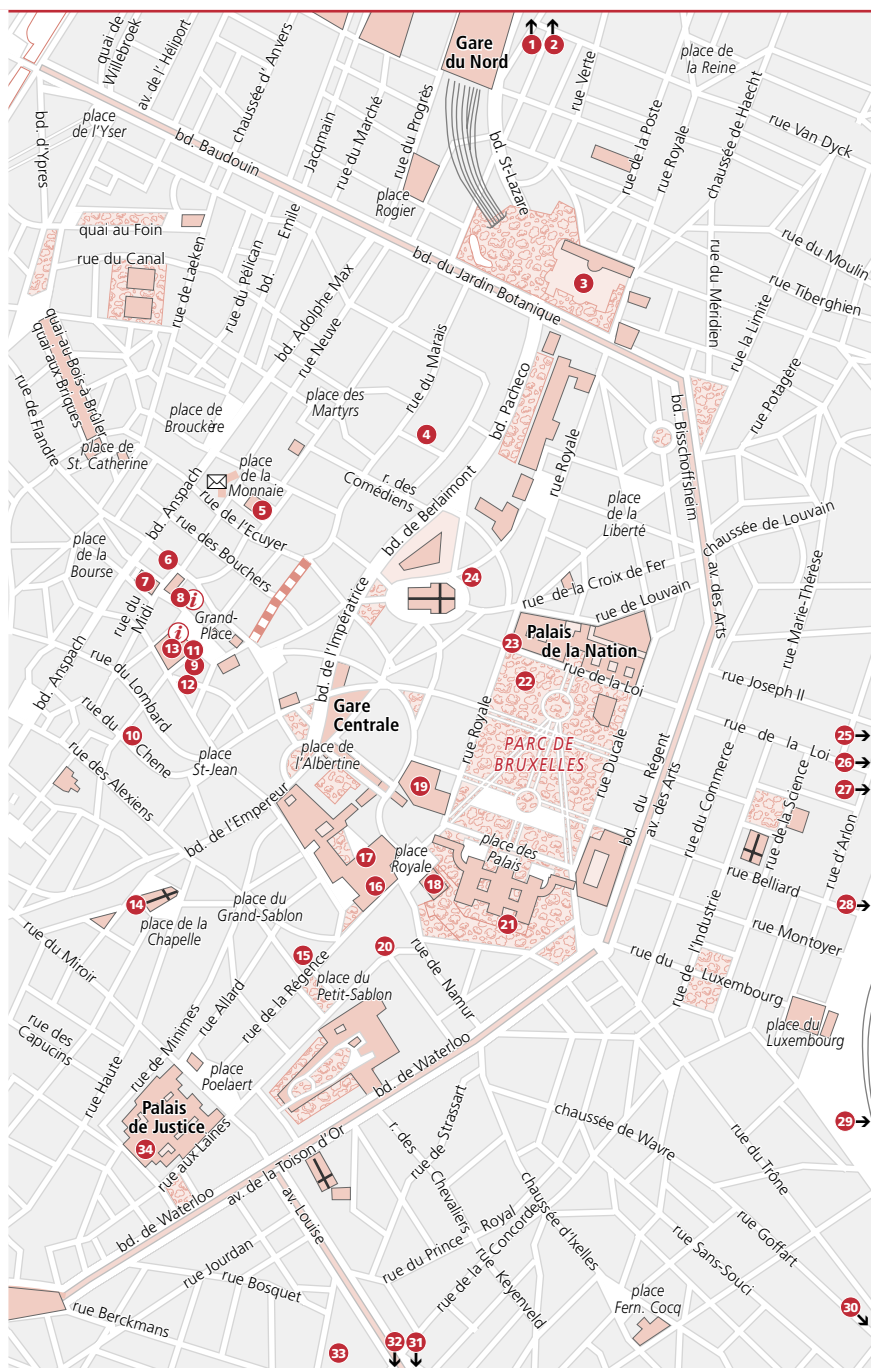
Brussels's royal square, **Place Royale** ★★ (tram: 92, 93, or 94), is at the meeting point of rue de la Régence and rue Royale, two streets that hold many of the city's premier attractions. The square, which was laid out in neoclassical style by the French architect Barre, is graced by an appropriately heroic **equestrian statue** of the leader of the First Crusade, Duke Godefroid de Bouillon. The inscription describes him as the "First King of Jerusalem," a title Godefroid himself refused, accepting instead that of "Protector of the Holy Places" (which amounted to the same thing). Also in place Royale is the neoclassical **Church of St-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg**. Archaeologists have excavated the foundations of the Royal Palace of Emperor Charles V in the square, but the site has been covered over again.

A few years ago, the once-elegant 18th-century **place des Martyrs** (Métro: Brouckère) in the lower city, near the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, was in a sorry state, literally crumbling to the ground. It entombs the "500 Martyrs" of Belgium's 1830 War of Independence. It has been extensively restored, and

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though it lost some of its former ragged charm in the process, the square is once again an important and attractive public place.

IMPORTANT BUILDINGS & MONUMENTS

The famous *Manneken-Pis* statue ★★, on the corner of rue du Chêne and rue de l'Étuve (Métro: Gare Centrale), 2 blocks from the Grand-Place, is Brussels's favorite little boy, gleefully doing what a little boy's gotta do. More often than not he's watched by a throng of admirers snapping pictures. Children especially seem to enjoy his bravura performance. This is not the original statue, which was prone to theft and anatomical maltreatment and was removed for safekeeping.

It's known that the boy's effigy has graced the city since at least the time of Philip the Good, who became count of Flanders in 1419. Among the speculations about the boy's origins are that he was the son of a Brussels nobleman who got lost and was found while answering nature's call and that he was a patriotic Belgian kid who sprinkled a hated Spanish sentry passing beneath his window. Perhaps the best theory is that he saved the Town Hall from a sputtering bomb by extinguishing it—like Gulliver—with the first thing handy.

Louis XV of France began the tradition of presenting colorful costumes to “Little Julian” to make amends for the French abduction of the statue in 1747. Since then the statue has acquired more than 500 outfits, which are housed in the Museum of the City of Brussels in the Grand-Place.

The ornately decorated **Bourse (Stock Exchange)**, rue Henri Maus 2 (📍 02/509-12-11; Métro: Bourse), a landmark of the French Second Empire architectural style, dates from 1873. It's a temple to the venerable religion of making money, and is not open to casual visitors.

You may not want to spend too much time around the **Palais de Justice (Palace of Justice)**, place Poelaert adjacent to place Louise (📍 02/508-65-78; Métro: Louise). This is, after all, where people who have run afoul of the law go directly to jail. Nonetheless, it's worth viewing architect Joseph Poelaert's extravagant (some would say megalomaniac) 19th-century neoclassical temple dedicated to the might and majesty of the law. The palace's domed magnificence looms over the rebellious, working-class Marolles district, a none-too-subtle warning that its creators undoubtedly considered salutary. You can visit the reception hall of the palace, which is open Monday to Friday from 9 to 11:30am and 1:30 to 3pm. Admission is free.

THE TOP MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) ★★ The facade of the dazzling Town Hall, from 1402, shows off Gothic intricacy at its best, complete with dozens of arched windows and sculptures—some of these, like the drunken monks, a sleeping Moor and his harem, and St. Michael slaying a female devil, displaying a sense of humor. A 66m (215-ft.) tower sprouts near the middle, yet it's not placed directly in the center. A colorful but untrue legend has it that when the architect realized his “error,” he jumped from the summit of the tower.

Impressions

The principal [fountain] whereof is the Mannicke Piss, being the figure of a brass boy erected upon a pedestal, the water issuing from his privy member (at a good distance) into a stone cistern.

—William Lord Fitzwilliam (Apr 16, 1663)

You can visit the interior on 40-minute tours, which start in a roomful of paintings of the past foreign rulers of Brussels, who have included the Spanish, Austrians, French, and Dutch. In the spectacular Gothic Hall, open for visits when the city's aldermen are not in session—and surrounded by mirrors, presumably so each party can see what underhanded maneuvers the others are up to—you can see baroque decoration. In other chambers are 16th- to 18th-century tapestries. One of these depicts the Spanish duke of Alba, whose cruel features reflect the brutal oppression he and his Council of Blood imposed on the Low Countries; others show scenes from the life of Clovis, first king of the Franks.

Grand-Place. ☎ 02/279-43-65. Admission (for guided tours only) 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children 5–15, free for children under 5. Guided tours in English: Apr–Sept Tues and Wed 3:15pm, Sun 10:45am and 12:15pm; Oct–Mar Tues and Wed 3:15pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée de la Ville (Museum of the City of Brussels) ★ This museum is in the neo-Gothic King's House (which, despite its name, has never housed a king). Exhibits inside document the history of Brussels. Among the most fascinating displays are old paintings and modern scale reconstructions of the historic city center, particularly those depicting riverside activity along the now-vanished Senne. There are also exhibits on traditional arts and crafts, such as tapestry and lace. The pride of the museum, however, is the more than 500 costumes donated to outfit Brussels's famous *Manneken-Pis* statue—including an Elvis outfit—each equipped with a strategically positioned orifice so that the little sculpture's normal function is not impaired.

Grand-Place 1. ☎ 02/279-43-50. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) seniors and students, 1.50€ (\$1.90) visitors with disabilities and children 6–15, free for children under 6. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts ★★ In a vast museum of several buildings, this complex combines the **Musée d'Art Ancien** and the **Musée d'Art Moderne** under one roof (connected by a passage). The collection shows off works, most of them Belgian, from the 14th to the 20th century, starting in the historical section with Hans Memling's portraits from the late 15th century, which are marked by sharp lifelike details, works by Hieronymus Bosch, and Lucas Cranach's *Adam and Eve*. You should particularly seek out the subsequent rooms featuring Pieter Brueghel, including his *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Fall of Icarus*. Don't miss his unusual *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, with grotesque faces and beasts. But don't fear—many of Brueghel's paintings, like those depicting Flemish village life, are of a less fiery nature. Later artists represented include Rubens, van Dyck, Frans Hals, and Rembrandt.

Next door, in a circular building connected to the main entrance, the modern art section has an emphasis on underground works—if only because the museum's eight floors are all below ground level. The overwhelming collection includes works by van Gogh, Matisse, Dalí, Tanguy, Ernst, Chagall, Miró, and local boys Magritte, Delvaux, De Braekeleer, and Permeke.

Rue de la Régence 3 (at place Royale). ☎ 02/508-32-11. www.fine-arts-museum.be. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults; 3.50€ (\$4.40) students, seniors, and visitors with disabilities; free for children under 12; free for everyone 1st Wed afternoon of the month (except during special exhibits). Museum of Historical Art Tues–Sun 10am–noon and 1–5pm; Museum of Modern Art Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 2–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Parc.

Palais Royal (Royal Palace) The King's Palace, which overlooks the Parc de Bruxelles, was begun in 1820 and had a grandiose Louis XVI-style face-lift in

A New Art

Another artistic style appeared briefly at the turn of the 20th century. It was called Art Nouveau in the United States and Britain. Art Nouveau's prime materials were glass and iron, which were worked with decorative curved lines and floral and geometric motifs. Belgium produced one of its greatest exponents in Victor Horta (1861–1947); his work can be seen in Brussels where the Tassel House (1893) and the Hôtel Solvay (1895) are forerunners of the ambitious Maison du Peuple (1896–99), with its concave, curved facades and location within an irregularly shaped square. His most famous building was the Innovation department store (1901), which was destroyed by fire.

1904. The older side wings date from the 18th century and are flanked by two pavilions, one of which sheltered numerous notables during the 1800s. Today the palace is used for state receptions. It also contains the offices of King Albert II, though he and Queen Paola do not live there. The national flag flies when the sovereign is in Belgium.

Place des Palais. ☎ 02/551-20-20. Free admission. July 22 to late Sept Tues–Sun 10:30am–4:30pm. Métro: Parc.

PARC DU CINQUANTENAIRE

Designed to celebrate the half-centenary of Belgium's 1830 independence, the Cinquantenaire (Golden Jubilee) Park was a work in progress from the 1870s until well into the 20th century. Extensive gardens have at their heart a triumphal arch topped by a bronze four-horse chariot sculpture, representing *Brabant Raising the National Flag*, flanked by several fine museums.

Autoworld  Even if you're not a car enthusiast, you'll find this display of 500 historic cars set in the hangarlike Palais Mondial fascinating. The collection starts with 1899 early motorized tricycles and moves on to a 1911 Model T Ford, a 1924 Renault, a 1938 Cadillac that was the official White House car for FDR and Truman, a 1956 Cadillac used by Eisenhower and then by Kennedy during his June 1963 visit to Berlin, and more.

Parc du Cinquantenaire 11. ☎ 02/736-41-65. www.autoworld.be. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults; 3.70€ (\$4.65) students, seniors, and visitors with disabilities; 2€ (\$2.50) children 6–13; free for children under 6. Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 9:30am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Métro: Mérode.

Musée du Cinquantenaire  This vast museum shows off an eclectic collection of antiques, decorative arts (sculptures, tapestries, lace, porcelain, silver, furniture, toys, stained glass, jewels, folklore, and old vehicles including 18th-century coupes, sedan chairs, sleighs, and royal coaches), and archaeology. Some highlights are an Assyrian relief from the 9th century B.C., a Greek vase from the 6th century B.C., a tabletop model of imperial Rome in the 4th century A.D., the A.D. 1145 reliquary of Pope Alexander, some exceptional tapestries, and colossal statues from Easter Island.

Parc du Cinquantenaire 10. ☎ 02/741-72-11. www.kmkg-mrah.be. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.10) students and seniors, 1.25€ (\$1.55) children 12–18, free for children under 12. Free admission every 1st Wed afternoon of the month (except during special exhibits). Tues–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Mérode.

SIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule ⚔ Victor Hugo considered this magnificent church, dedicated to the city's patron St. Michael and to St. Gudula, to be the "purest flowering of the Gothic style." Its choir is Belgium's earliest Gothic work. Begun in 1226, it was officially consecrated as a cathedral only in 1961. The 16th-century Habsburg Emperor Charles V donated the superb stained-glass windows. Apart from these, the spare interior decoration focuses attention on soaring columns and arches. The bright exterior stonework makes a fine sight. On Sunday at 10am the Eucharist is celebrated with a Gregorian choir. In July, August, and September, polyphonic Masses are sung by local and international choirs at 10am. From August to October, chamber-music and organ concerts are occasionally performed on weekdays at 8pm. In spring and autumn at 12:30pm, Mass is sung accompanied by instrumental soloists and readings by actors (in French).

Parvis Ste-Gudule (off bd. de l'Impératrice 2 blocks west of Gare Centrale). ☎ 02/217-83-45. Cathedral, free admission; crypt, treasury, archaeological zone 2.50€ (\$3.15). Mon–Fri 8:30am–6pm; Sat–Sun 8am–6pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Notre-Dame de la Chapelle (Our Lady of the Chapel) This Romanesque-Gothic church is interesting both historically and architecturally. François Anneessens (1660–1719), a Brussels hero who lost his head for campaigning for civil rights, is buried here. Anneessens was a champion of the freedom of the Belgian communes against the centralist rule of Belgium's Austrian masters. Condemned to death, he refused to plead for forgiveness, saying, "Never! I die innocent. May my death expiate my sins and be of service to my country." He was then beheaded in the Grand-Place. A statue of Anneessens stands in the square named after him—place Anneessens—in the city center, and you'll find a commemorative plaque dedicated to him in Notre-Dame's Chapel of the Holy Sacrament. Notre-Dame de la Chapelle is also the burial site of Pieter Brueghel the Elder and his wife; their epitaph is in one of the chapels.

Place de la Chapelle. ☎ 02/512-07-37. Free admission. Tram: 92, 93, or 94.

MORE MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Le Botanique This graceful 19th-century glass-and-wrought-iron palace is no longer the Botanical Gardens of Brussels, but it still merits a visit as a monument of 19th-century architecture. There's still a fine ornamental garden outside. Nowadays Le Botanique functions as a cultural center in which theater, music and dance performances, and visiting art exhibitions are held.

Moments **Underground Art**

Most of Brussels's Métro stations have been decorated with works of art—a painting, sculpture, mosaic, or installation—by leading Belgian modern artists. Taken together, they form an underground museum that you can tour for the price of a Métro ticket. Among interesting Métro stations are: Bourse, in the city center, which has a mural of old Brussels trams by the surrealist painter Paul Delvaux; Stockel, the eastern terminus of line 1B, where the walls are decorated with strips from the comic series *Tintin*, which was created by local hero Hergé; and Horta, south of Gare du Midi, which pays homage to Brussels's Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta, by way of elements from some of the buildings and interiors he designed.

Rue Royale 236. ☎ 02/226-12-11. Free admission to gardens, main building; admission charged for most cultural events. Métro: Botanique.

Musée des Brasseurs Belges (Belgian Brewers' Museum) This museum, operated by the Confederation of Belgian Breweries, is housed in the home of the Brewers' Guild, the Knights of the Mash Staff. A permanent exhibition on modern high-tech brewing methods has joined an old one on traditional techniques. You'll find numerous paintings, stained-glass windows, and collections of pitchers, pint pots, and old china beer pumps. And you get a chance to sample some of your host's finished product.

Maison des Brasseurs, Grand-Place 10. ☎ 02/511-49-87. www.beerparadise.be. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults. Apr–Nov daily 10am–5pm; Dec–Mar Sat–Sun noon–5pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle (Costume and Lace Museum) This marvelous museum is near the Grand-Place. Its collection includes some fine examples of historical Belgian lace styles from the once-renowned factories of Mechelen, Bruges, Antwerp, Binche, Turnhout, Poperinge, and Sint-Truiden. In addition, the museum houses displays of costumes, including an array of dresses from the 16th to the 19th century.

Rue de la Violette 6 (near Grand-Place). ☎ 02/213-44-50. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15), 2€ (\$2.50) children 6–16, free for children under 6. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri 10am–12:30pm and 1:30–5pm (until 4pm Oct–Mar); Sat–Sun 2–4:30pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée Horta (Horta Museum) ★ Art Nouveau might take its name from the gallery opened by art dealer Siegfried Bing in Paris in 1895, but Brussels considers itself the capital of this medley of related art styles that burst across the Western world at the end of the 19th century and drew on exotic sources, including Celtic, Viking, Asian, and Islamic art. The city owes much of its rich Art Nouveau heritage to the inspired creative vision of Victor Horta, a resident architect who led the style's development. His home and an adjoining studio have been restored to their original condition and are now a museum. They showcase his use of flowing, sinuous shapes and colors in interior decoration as well as architecture.

Rue Américaine 25 (off chaussée de Charleroi). ☎ 02/543-04-90. www.hortamuseum.be. Admission 4.95€ (\$6.19) adults, 3.70€ (\$4.65) seniors and students, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 5–18, free for children under 5. Tues–Sun 2–5:30pm. Closed holidays. Tram: 81, 82, 91, or 92.

Musée René Magritte ★ From 1930 to 1954, the great Belgian Surrealist artist René Magritte lived and worked in an undistinguished town house in suburban Jette in northwest Brussels. Now restored, that 19-room house is a museum of the artist's life. You can visit most of the rooms, but can only view through glass the dining room-cum-studio where he painted many of his fantastical masterpieces while wearing a three-piece suit. You can even look through the famous window, with a view of nothing in particular, on to which Magritte projected images that would revolutionize art and the way we look at the world. Be warned, though, that there is very little to see—"This is not a studio," you might say—even though the museum's founders have been diligent in uncovering bits and pieces of the artist's banal private life. On the first and second floors are a few original sketches, his easel and trademark bowler hat, a pipe, his passport, his checkbook and will, household objects, letters and photographs illustrating his commercial work, negotiations with museums about exhibitions, and contacts with art dealers.

Moments A Stroll Through the Marolles

The iconoclastic working-class Marolles district, lying beneath the long shadow of the Palace of Justice, is a special place where the old Brussels dialect called *Brusseleir* can still be heard. The generally poor community is under constant threat of encroachment and gentrification from neighboring, far wealthier areas—a process the Marolliens seem to want nothing to do with. Locals remain resolutely unimpressed by the burgeoning “Capital of Europe.”

Rue Essegheem 135 (off bd. De Smet de Naeyer). ☎ 02/428-26-26. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 13–18 and students, free for children under 13. Wed–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 18 to Woeste.

Musée Royal de l’Afrique Central (Royal Museum of Central Africa) ★★

Originally founded to celebrate Belgium’s colonial empire in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), this museum has moved beyond imperialism to feature exhibits on ethnography and environment, mostly in Africa, but also in Asia and South America. The beautiful grounds of this impressive museum are as much a draw as the exhibits inside. The collection includes some excellent animal dioramas, African sculpture, and other artwork, and even some of the colonial-era guns and artillery pieces that no doubt helped make Belgium’s claim to its African colonies more convincing. A more modern perspective is added by environmental displays that explain desertification, the loss of rainforests, and the destruction of habitats.

Leuvensesteenweg 13, Tervuren (a suburban commune just east of Brussels). ☎ 02/769-52-11. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children under 13. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Tram: 44 from Métro Montgomery to Tervuren terminus.

Palais de la Nation (National Palace) The Parliament building opposite the Parc de Bruxelles is quite an elegant place, if you ignore the politicians squabbling in the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate—bickering, after all, is part of the charm of democracy. You can enter only during sessions in either assembly (call in advance; they’re usually open Mon–Sat 10am–3pm). The entrance to the chamber is at rue de Louvain 11; the entrance to the senate is at rue de Louvain 7B. You can also call ahead to arrange a guided tour of the actual building.

Rue de la Loi 16. ☎ 02/519-81-36. Free admission. Métro: Parc.

GREEN BRUSSELS

Brussels is a green city with a great extent of parks and gardens. Once a hunting preserve of the dukes of Brabant, the **Parc de Bruxelles (Brussels Park)**, rue Royale (Métro: Parc), between Parliament and the Royal Palace, was laid out in the 18th century as a landscaped garden. In 1830, Belgian patriots fought Dutch regular troops here during the War of Independence. Later it was a fashionable place to stroll and to meet friends. Although not very big, the park manages to contain everything from carefully trimmed borders to rough patches of trees and bushes, and has fine views along its main paths, which together with the fountain form the outline of Masonic symbols. In 2001, the park was closed for refurbishment and restored as close as possible to its 18th-century look. Diseased chestnut trees have been cut down and lime trees replaced with sturdier

specimens; statues have been restored and cleaned; and the 1840s bandstand by Jean-Pierre Cluysenaer has been refurbished, with the promise that it will host regular summer concerts. Maybe the cleanup will also bring an end to the various unwholesome nighttime activities in the park.

The big public park called the **Bois de la Cambre** begins at the top of avenue Louise (tram: 92 or 93) in the southern section of Brussels. Its centerpiece is a small lake with an island in its center that can be reached by a neat little electrically operated pontoon. The park gets crowded on sunny weekends. A few busy roads with fast-moving traffic run through it, so be careful with children. The **Forêt de Soignes**, south of the Bois, is no longer a park with playing areas and regularly mown grass, but a forest that stretches almost to Waterloo. This is a great place to escape the maddening crowds and fuming traffic, particularly in the fall, when the colors are dazzling.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Atomium ★★ *Kids* There's nothing quite like this cluster of giant spheres representing the atomic structure of an iron molecule enlarged 165 billion times. It's like something from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The view from the viewing deck is marvelous, and you can even wander around inside the spheres. The model was built for the 1958 World's Fair.

Bd. du Centenaire, Heysel. ☎ 02/475-47-77. www.atomium.be. Admission 5.50€ (\$6.90) adults, 4€ (\$5) children under 13, free for children under 1.2m (4 ft.). Last week of Mar to June and Sept daily 9.30am–5pm; July–Aug daily 9.30am–7pm (to 11pm mid-July to mid-Aug); Oct–Dec and New Year holidays 10am–5pm. Métro: Heysel.

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (Belgian Center for Comic-Strip Art) ★★ *Kids*

Grown-ups will love this place as much as kids do. Called the CéBéBéDé for short, the center, in a side street not far from the Gothic spires and baroque guild houses of the Grand-Place, is dedicated to comic strips and takes a lofty view of what it calls “the Ninth Art.” As icing on the cake, it's in a restored Art Nouveau department store from 1903, the Magasins Waucquez designed by Victor Horta, which was slated for demolition before the center took it over. A model of the red-and-white checkered rocket in which Hergé's Tintin and Snowy flew to the Moon, long before Armstrong and Aldrin did it in mere fact, takes pride of place at the top of the elegant staircase. Beyond is a comic strip wonderland. All the big names appear in a library of 30,000 books and in permanent and special exhibitions, including Tintin, Asterix, Thorgal, Lucky Luke, the Smurfs, Charlie Brown, Andy Capp, Suske and Wiske—yes, even Superman, Batman, and the Green Lantern—along with many lesser heroes.

Rue des Sables 20 (off bd. de Berlaimont). ☎ 02/219-19-80. www.brusselsdtour.com. Admission 6.20€ (\$7.75) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) students and seniors, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children under 12. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Mini-Europe ★ *Kids* Kids and adults alike will get a kick out of strolling around such highlights from member states of the European Union as London's Big Ben, Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Bull Ring in Seville (complete with simulated sounds of fans yelling ¡Olé!), and Montmartre in Paris, as well as more modern emblems of Continental achievement such as the Channel Tunnel and the Ariane rocket. Meanwhile, Mount Vesuvius erupts, gondolas float around the canals of Venice, and a Finnish girl dives into the icy waters of a northern lake. As the scale is 1:25, the kids will feel like giants.

Bruparck, Heysel. ☎ 02/478-05-50. www.minieurope.com. Admission 12€ (\$15) adults, 8.70€ (\$11) children under 13, free for children under 1.2m (4 ft.). Late Mar to June and Sept 9:30am–5pm; July–Aug

9:30am–7pm (mid-July to mid-Aug Fri–Sun 9:30am–11pm); Oct–Dec and 1st week Jan 10am–5pm. Closed rest of Jan to late Mar. Métro: Heysel.

Six Flags Belgium ★ *Kids* In 2001, after 25 years of devoted service, the cuddly kangaroo mascot was shown the gate at Walibi children's theme park near Wavre, southeast of Brussels. And that's not all folks—the park's U.S. owners changed the name from the much-loved, if baffling, Walibi, to Six Flags Belgium. In “compensation” for a blow to the national psyche as severe as when Jean-Claude Van Damme upped muscles and decamped to Hollywood, Six Flags has introduced Bugs Bunny, Tweetie Pie, and other stars of the cartoon firmament from across the pond. There are now white-knuckle rides like the mountainous Wooden Coaster, more than a kilometer (half-mile) long, the six backward loops of the 75kmph (47 mph) Boomerang, and a Looney Tunes play area for children.

Wavre. ☎ 010/42-15-00. From Brussels by car, take E411 to Exit 6 Wavre and follow the signs. By train to Bierges station 29€ (\$36) adults, 24€ (\$30) children 3–11, free for children under 3. Easter vacation 10am–6pm; May Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; June–July daily 10am–6pm; Aug 10am–8pm; Sept–Oct Sun 10am–6pm.

THE EUROPEAN DISTRICT

Home to the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Ministers, and related institutions, Brussels has no less than 1.2 million sq. m (12.7 million sq. ft.) of office space packed with 20,000-plus Eurocrats to back up its “capital of Europe” tag. Entire neighborhoods full of character were swept away to make room for them.

To tour the heartland of European Union governance, take the Métro to Schuman station. Your first sight is the X-shaped **Palais de Berlaymont (Berlaymont Palace)**, the commission's former headquarters, at Rond-Point Schuman.

Across rue de la Loi, the Council of Ministers headquarters, the **Consilium**, is instantly recognizable for its facade's lavish complement of rose-colored granite blocks. On its far side, a soothing stroll through little Parc Léopold brings you to the new, post-modern **European Parliament** and **International Conference Centre** complex, an architectural odyssey in white marble and tinted glass. Take the passageway through the building's middle to place Léopold, an old square that looks lost and forlorn in comparison to its powerful new neighbors.

ORGANIZED TOURS

BY BUS Coach tours, which last 3 hours and operate throughout the year, are available from **De Boeck Brussels City Tours**, rue de la Colline 8 (☎ 02/513-77-44). Each tour is 20€ (\$23) for adults, 18€ (\$21) for students and seniors, and 10€ (\$12) for children. Reservations can be made through most hotels, and hotel pick-up is often available.

ON FOOT & BY BUS From June 15 to September 15, **Le Bus Bavard**, rue des Thuyas 12 (☎ 02/673-18-35), operates a daily 3-hour “chatterbus” tour at 10am from the Galeries Royales St-Hubert (Métro: Gare Centrale), a mall next to rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 90, a few steps off the Grand-Place. A walking tour covers the historic center, followed by a bus ride through areas the average visitor never sees. You hear about life in Brussels and get a real feel for the city. The price is 8.75€ (\$11). You don't need a reservation for this fascinating experience—just be there by 10am.

ARAU, bd. Adolphe-Max 55 (☎ 02/219-33-45; www.arau.org; Métro: De Brouckère), organizes tours that help you discover not only Brussels's countless

Finds The Best Things in Brussels Are Free

I sometimes feel that simply strolling the streets of Brussels is one of the world's best free attractions. For something a bit more spectacular (but still free), don't miss the festive **Ommegang** celebration in the Grand-Place on the first Tuesday and Thursday in July, and the street entertainment around this area during the entire month. On the second Sunday in August, there's the **Planting of the Meiboom (May Tree)**, another joyous public occasion.

treasures but also problems the city faces. It runs 3-hour themed coach tours: "Grand-Place and Its Surroundings," "Brussels 1900—Art Nouveau," "Brussels 1930—Art Deco," "Surprising Parks and Squares," and "Alternative Brussels." You are advised to book ahead. Tours by bus are 15€ (\$19), and 12€ (\$15) for those under 26; tours by foot are 10€ (\$13). They take place on Saturday mornings from March to November; private group tours can be arranged year-round.

6 Sports & Recreation

BOWLING Leading bowling alleys are **Bowling Crosly Brunswick**, quai du Foin 43 (☎ 02/217-28-01); and **Bowling Crosly Empereur**, bd. de l'Empereur 36 (☎ 02/512-08-74).

HORSEBACK RIDING For information on riding stables, contact the **Fédération Royale Belge des Sports Equestres**, av. Houba de Strooper 156 (☎ 02/478-50-56).

HORSE RACING There are three tracks in the Brussels area: **Boitsfort**, chaussée de la Hulpe 53 (☎ 02/660-85-53; tram: 94); **Groenendaal**, G.B. Charlielaan 20, Hoeilaart (☎ 02/657-30-63; train: Hoeilaart); and **Sterrebeek**, du Roy de Blicquy laan 43, Sterrebeek (☎ 02/767-54-75; tram: 39).

ICE-SKATING There's ice-skating from September to May at **Forest National**, av. du Globe 36 (call ☎ 02/345-16-11 for hours and fees), reached by bus no. 48 or 54; and at **Poseidon**, av. des Vaillants 4, in Woluwe-St-Lambert (☎ 02/762-16-33), reached by Métro to Tomberg or by bus no. 28.

SOCCER The **Maison du Football**, av. Houba de Strooper 145 (☎ 02/477-12-11), can arrange tickets for international soccer matches if you phone Monday to Friday between 9am and 4:15pm. The local team is FC Anderlecht, which is always in contention for Belgian prizes and usually in the running for European honors as well. During Continental tournaments, some of the crack European soccer squads can often be seen in action in Brussels.

7 Shopping

Brussels is not the place to come looking for bargains. On the whole it's rather expensive, though no more so than neighboring big cities like Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. Still, there are reasonable prices to be found, and even bargains. A lot depends on where and when you shop. As a general rule, the upper city around avenue Louise and the Porte de Namur is more expensive than the lower city around rue Neuve and the city-center shopping galleries around La Monnaie and place de Brouckère. But this is not a fixed rule. For example, rue Haute,

in the upper city, is generally inexpensive, while the Galeries Royales St-Hubert, in the lower city, is generally expensive.

Shopping hours are generally from 9 or 10am to 6pm Monday to Saturday. On Friday evening, many city-center stores, particularly department stores, stay open until 8 or 9pm. A useful source of shopping information is the weekly English-language magazine *The Bulletin*, which keeps tabs on the latest shopping ideas and trends, and reviews individual shops.

SHOPPING PROMENADES

Many of Brussels's most interesting shops are clustered along certain promenades or arcades. The **rue Neuve**, which starts at place de la Monnaie and extends north to place Rogier, is practically a pedestrian shopping mall; this busy and popular area is home to many boutiques and department stores, including City 2, a modern shopping complex. **Boulevard Ansapach**, which runs from the Stock Exchange up to place de Brouckère, is home to a number of fashion boutiques, chocolate shops, and electronic-appliance stores. The **Ansapach Center** (near place de la Monnaie) is a shopping mall.

One of Europe's oldest shopping malls, the **Galeries Royales St-Hubert**, is a light and airy arcade hosting boutiques, café terraces, and street musicians playing classical music. Built in Italian neo-Renaissance style and opened in 1847, architect Pierre Cluysenaer's gallery offers shopping with a touch of class and is well worth strolling through even if you have no intention of window-shopping. The elegant gallery is near the Grand-Place, between rue du Marché-aux-Herbes and rue de l'Ecuyer, and split by rue de Bouchers (Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse). There are entrances on each of these streets. **Avenue Louise** attracts those in search of world-renowned, high-quality goods from such stores as Cartier, Burberry's, Louis Vuitton, and Valentino.

Belgian Specialties: Chocolate & More

Belgians know a thing or two about chocolate. Just ask anyone who has ever bitten into one of those devilish little creations—handmade pralines, made and sold by Wittamer, Nihoul, Cornez, Neuhaus, Leonidas, and . . . well, it's a long list. So addictive are they that they really should be sold with a government health warning. You find some of the finest confections at **Chocolatier Mary** (see "Shopping A–Z," below).

Lace is another old favorite that's widely available in the city, particularly in and around the Grand-Place. Buy from **Maison Antoine** or **Manufacture Belge de Dentelle** (see "Shopping A–Z," below).

For Brussels area beers like *gueuze*, *kriek*, and *faro*, among the 450 or so different Belgian beers, head for the great bar **A la Mort Subite** (see "Bars" under "Brussels After Dark," later in this chapter).

Other traditional products include *geneva* (gin), of which there are some 270 brands produced by 70 distilleries; crystal, particularly superb Val-Saint-Lambert crystal from Liège; ceramics; jewelry; hand-beaten copper or bronze; and even diamonds, though Brussels is nowhere near as sparkling in this respect as Antwerp.

Finally, sweet-toothed shoppers might like this tip: Try **Dandoy** (see "Shopping A–Z," below).

The **Galerie Agora** (off the Grand-Place) offers a wide variety of modestly priced merchandise, including leather goods, clothing, souvenirs, records, and jewelry.

OUTDOOR MARKETS

At the **Marché-aux-Puces (Flea Market)** on place du Jeu-de-Balle, a large square in the Marolles district, you can find some exceptional decorative items, many recycled from the homes of the “recently deceased,” as well as unusual postcards, clothing, and household goods. So you should be able to snap up a bargain on everything from the weird to the wonderful. The market is held daily from 7am to 2pm.

Every weekend, the place du Grand Sablon hosts a fine **Antiques Market**. The salesmanship is low-key, the interest is pure, the prices are not unreasonable (don’t expect bargains, though), and the quality of the merchandise—which includes silverware, pottery, paintings, and jewelry—is high. The market is open Saturday from 9am to 6pm and Sunday from 9am to 2pm.

The Grand-Place has a daily **Flower Market**. Nearby, at the top of rue du Marché-aux-Herbes, in a square loosely called the Agora, a weekend **Crafts Market** offers lots of fine specialized jewelry and other items, mostly inexpensive.

From mid-May to September, painters, sculptors, potters, photographers, and other artists sell their work—and some of them produce it, too—at the **Marché d’Art**, Parvis Saint-Pierre, Uccle. The market is on Sunday from 10am to 1pm.

Two weekends before Christmas is the occasion for the **European Union Christmas Market** in the Grand-Place. From Friday evening until Sunday evening, the square is a hub of activity, as each country of the EU sets out its stall with traditional foods and products. There’s music, singing, and dancing, and the festive spirit is fueled by mulled wine and typical national drinks. The main problem is that at times the square gets so busy that it is almost impossible to move. Still, this is another colorful and memorable event.

SHOPPING A TO Z

Here’s a short list of my personal recommendations, which is only a small sampling of Brussels’s best shopping.

ART

Ma Maison de Papier ★ Owner Marie-Laurence Bernard is an enthusiast for vintage posters—she has written three books on the subject—that do more than hide a crack on your bathroom wall. You can buy any kind of poster here, from a 1930s cigarette ad, to a reproduction Toulouse-Lautrec, to original Art Nouveau and Art Deco works by Belgian, French, and other masters of the

Tips An Affordable Wine Source

If you’re planning to buy wine by the bottle, don’t be fooled into the idea that you have to go to some expensive wine shop to get something worthwhile. The mid-price **Delhaize** supermarket chain has built up an enviable reputation and a loyal local following for the quality of its wine department. Delhaize’s buyers look for good value in all price categories and have an adventurous streak that makes them look beyond the classic names. There are Delhaize supermarkets all over Brussels (and Belgium). Ask at your hotel desk for the nearest branch and try it out.

genre. Galerie de la Rue de Ruysbroeck 6, rue de Ruysbroeck (off place du Grand-Sablon). ☎ 02/512-22-49. Tram: 92, 93, or 94 to Petit-Sablon.

BOOKS

Waterstones It's not so easy to find a wide selection of English-language books in Brussels, but the major British bookshop chain does have a full-size branch here, which sells magazines and newspapers as well as books. The books, however, usually are 30% to 60% more than in Britain. Bd. Adolphe Max 71. ☎ 02/219-27-08. Métro: Rogier.

CHILDREN

Boutique de Tintin Forget computer games and other electronic toys. If you need to buy a gift for the kids, take home some Tintin mementos from this excellent, if somewhat pricey, store. Rue de la Colline 13. ☎ 02/514-45-50. Métro: Gare Centrale.

EURO-STUFF

Eurotempo One of the most surprising marketing phenomena of recent years has been the popularity of the European Union's symbol: a blue flag with a circle of 12 stars. At Eurotempo you can find this logo on an astonishing range of products: umbrellas, T-shirts, pens, golf balls, watches, hats, knives, towels—you name it. Where better to buy Euro-stuff than in the capital of Europe? Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 84. ☎ 02/502-37-47. Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

FASHION & APPAREL

Delvaux This local company makes and sells some of the best—and priciest—handbags and leather goods in Belgium. Galerie de la Reine 31. ☎ 02/512-71-98. Métro: Gare Centrale Station or Bourse.

Ganterie Italienne This is a glove shop with Italian style, selling attractive handwear that keeps out the winter cold. It's open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6pm. Galerie de la Reine 3 (off the Grand-Place). ☎ 02/512-75-38. Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Olivier Strelli This top-rated Belgian fashion designer is just one of several big names with boutiques in this area. His shop is strong on elegant, ready-to-wear items. Av. Louise 72. ☎ 02/511-21-34. Métro: Louise.

FLOWERS

Les Fleurs Isabelle de Baecker ★ This superb flower shop in a superb Art Nouveau location is just the place for that important bouquet. Rue Royale 13. ☎ 02/217-26-69. Métro: Botanique.

FOOD & WINES

Chocolatier Mary ★ Supplier of pralines to the Belgian royal court—which tells you right away that these are no plain chocolates—Mary's is a small store but its wares look every bit as good as they taste. Rue Royal 73. ☎ 02/217-45-00. Métro: Parc.

Dandoy ★★ Dandoy is the place for sweet-toothed cookies-'n-cakes fans. Try the traditional Belgian house specialties: spicy *speculoos* cookies (made with brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and almonds, and baked in wooden molds), and *pain à la grecque* (thin, spicy caramelized, sugary flaky pastries). Rue au Beurre 31. ☎ 02/511-03-26. Métro: Bourse.

De Boe ☼ Don't miss this small shop near the Fish Market. It has a superb selection of roasted and blended coffees and wines in all price categories, as well as an array of specialty crackers, nuts, spices, teas, and gourmet snacks, many of which are canned, making them suitable for transport home. Hours are Tuesday to Saturday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm. Rue de Flandre 36. ☎ 02/511-13-73. Métro: Ste-Catherine.

Neuhaus This chocolatier sells some of the best of the dangerously delicious Belgian handmade chocolates. You can buy gift pralines here. Galerie de la Reine 25. ☎ 02/502-59-14. Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Wittamer Wittamer makes some of the best handmade pralines in the world. Their rolls, breads, pastries, and cakes have also been winning fans here since 1910. Place du Grand Sablon 12. ☎ 02/512-37-42. Tram: 92 or 93.

LACE

Maison Antoine This lace boutique is one of the best in Brussels and surely has the best location, a former guild house where Victor Hugo lived in 1852. The quality is superb, the service friendly, and the prices decent. Hours are daily from 10am to 7pm. Grand-Place 26. ☎ 02/512-14-59. Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Manufacture Belge de Dentelle This is a good source for top-quality handmade Belgian lace. Galerie de la Reine 6-8. ☎ 02/511-44-77. Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

MULTIMEDIA

FNAC This good-value books, electronics, and photo chain has a branch in the City 2 multistory shopping mall off rue Neuve. It also sells concert tickets. City 2. ☎ 02/209-22-11. Métro: Rogier.

8 Brussels After Dark

Brussels is not known for its nightlife, but that's partly because it's overshadowed by the worldwide reputations of neighboring capitals like Paris and Amsterdam. Nightlife is actually alive and well in Brussels, and if the range is inevitably thinner than in bigger cities, the quality is not.

For current information on after-dark entertainment during your visit, consult the **Brussels International Tourism** office in the Town Hall, Grand-Place, Brussels (☎ 02/513-89-40); or buy the weekly English-language magazine *The Bulletin*, which has an extensive "What's On" section.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

OPERA & BALLET The superb and historic **Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie** ☼, place de la Monnaie (☎ 02/229-12-11), founded in the 17th century, is home to the Opéra National and l'Orchestre Symphonique de la Monnaie. Belgium's 1830 War of Independence broke out during a performance at this graceful neoclassical theater—so you never can tell what an evening at the opera has in store. Ballet performances are also presented here. The present resident ballet company is local choreographer Anne Theresa de Keersmaecker's Group Rosas.

CLASSICAL MUSIC The **Palais des Beaux-Arts**, rue Royale 10 (☎ 02/507-82-00), is the home of Belgium's National Orchestra. Concerts are also performed at the **Cirque Royal**, rue de l'Enseignement 81 (☎ 02/218-20-15), which was formerly a real circus but is now a venue for music, opera, and ballet; and at **Le Botanique**, rue Royale 236 (☎ 02/218-37-32), which generally focuses on small-scale modern and avant-garde performances, not only of classical music but also of jazz and other forms.

Puppet Shows: A Belgian Passion

A special word is in order about a special sort of theater—that of the wooden marionettes that have entertained Belgians for centuries. In times past, puppet theaters numbered in the hundreds nationwide (Brussels alone had 15), and the plays were much like our modern-day soap operas. The story lines went on and on, sometimes for generations, and working-class audiences returned night after night to keep up with the *Dallas* of the times. Performances were based on folklore, legends, or political satire.

Specific marionette characters came to personify their home cities: A cheeky ragamuffin named Woltje (Little Walloon) was from Brussels; Antwerp had the cross-eyed, earthy, ne'er-do-well Schele; Pierke, from Ghent, was modeled on the traditional Italian clown; and Liège's Tchantchès stood only 16 inches high and always appeared with patched trousers, a tasseled floppy hat, and his constant companion, the sharp-tongued Nanesse (Agnes).

Today a few Belgian puppet theaters still survive and their popularity has increased in recent years after a decline following World War II, when bombing raids severely damaged many theaters and destroyed many marionettes.

THEATERS Brussels theater is quite important among French-speaking countries, with more than 30 theaters presenting performances in French, Flemish, and (occasionally) English. Among the most important are **Théâtre Royal du Parc**, rue de la Loi 3 (☎ 02/505-30-30; www.theatreduparc.be; Métro: Parc), for classic and contemporary drama and comedies; **Théâtre Royal des Galeries**, Galerie du Roi 32 (☎ 02/512-04-07), with a wide variety of offerings, including drama, comedy, and musicals; the Art Deco-style **Théâtre du Résidence Palace**, rue de la Loi 155 (☎ 02/231-03-05); **Le Botanique**, rue Royale 236 (☎ 02/218-37-32), which inclines toward the experimental in mostly French theater; and **Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg**, Delaunoystraat 58, 1080 Brussels (☎ 02/412-70-70), a neo-Renaissance-style building dating from 1887 that brings the world's theatrical highlights to the city in Dutch.

PUPPET THEATER

Théâtre Toone VII ☘ Look for the small wooden sign in the tiny alleyway—impasse Schuddeveld—to reach this theater, in an upstairs room in a bistro of the same name. It's the latest in the Toone line of puppet theaters, which dates back to the early 1800s—the title being passed from one puppet master to the next—and it may be the most popular theater in Brussels. At Toone, puppet master José Géal presents his adaptation of such classic tales as *The Three Musketeers*, *Faust*, and *Hamlet* in the Brussels dialect, Brussels Vloms, but also in English, French, Dutch, and German. In any case, language should present no difficulties since it's easy to follow the action on stage. Impasse Schuddeveld 6, Petite rue des Bouchers 21. ☎ 02/513-54-86. Ticket prices and performance times vary; check in advance.

JAZZ & BLUES CLUBS

Jazz has taken a hit in Brussels in recent years, and some of the best-loved spots have bitten the dust. Still, some old places remain, and new ones have sprung up. **Phil's Jazz Kitchen Café**, rue Haute 189 (☎ 02/513-95-88), a relaxed bar with good atmosphere, has jazz or other music most nights of the week, and a jam session on Wednesday. **L'Archiduc**, rue Antoine Dansaert 6 (☎ 02/512-06-52), had the brilliant idea to put on after-shopping jazz concerts on Saturday, beginning at 5pm, then went one better by repeating the idea (minus the shopping) on Sunday. **The New York Jazz Club**, chaussée de Charleroi 5 (☎ 02/534-85-09), is maybe a little too cool and refined for its own good, but it's willing to be experimental and is well worth checking out. The **Marcus Mingus Jazz Spot**, impasse de la Fidélité 10–11 (☎ 02/502-02-97), lights up jazz, Brazilian, Latin, blues, funk, or whatever, from Tuesday to Sunday at 10pm. For those who like their licks a little more restrained, there's a jazz brunch at the **Airport Sheraton Hotel**, facing the terminal building (☎ 02/725-10-00), every Sunday from noon to 3pm.

During the 3-day, mid-May Brussels **Jazz Marathon** (☎ 02/456-04-75), there are more than 125 concerts, covering all known jazz forms, at outdoor venues like the Grand-Place and Place du Grand-Sablon, as well as at clubs, bars, and indoor cultural venues around town. Outdoor concerts are free; a pass for all indoor concerts is 14€ (\$18), and 12€ (\$15) if you book ahead.

DANCE CLUBS

Nothing in life changes quite so fast as the “in” discos. Still, there are some that have stood the test of time—and that of course makes them anathema to genuine disco hounds. Since the turnover rate is so high, be sure to check locally to see if the following are still in operation before setting out for a night of dancing. The most sophisticated dance club in Brussels is **Griffin's Club** in the Royal Windsor Hotel, rue Duquesnoy 5 (☎ 02/505-55-55), which is in full swing every night except Sunday. **Mirano Continental**, chaussée de Louvain 38 (☎ 02/227-39-70), is more of a dance hall than a disco, a classy place for those whose wildest years are a few years behind them yet who still like to enjoy themselves. **Nostalgia Club**, rue de la Fourche 49 (☎ 02/513-3291), is similar, with hits from the '60s and '70s at the top of the bill.

Le Sparrow, rue Duquesnoy 18 (☎ 02/512-66-22), just off the Grand-Place, always seems on the verge of going out of style yet never quite gets there, even if it has lost the wild and wonderful cachet of its earlier days—its location just off the Grand-Place undoubtedly helps, as does its consistently up-to-date approach to the music. **Cartagena**, rue du Marché-au-Charbon 70 (☎ 02/502-59-08), is as hot as a night in, well, Cartagena, and dispenses drinks and music from all over Latin America. If only techno will do, **Le Fuse**, rue Blaes 208 (☎ 02/511-97-89), is the place—on the first Friday of every month it reinvents itself as the women-only **Pussy Lounge**, and every Sunday as the men-only **La Démence**.

BARS

Now you're talking. Bars are where Brussels lives. It's hard to be disappointed, whether you pop into a neighborhood watering hole where a *chope* or *pintje* (a glass of beer) will set you back a mere 2€ (\$2.50), or whether you prefer to fork out several times as much in one of the trendier places.

Unique, to say the least, is a Brussels favorite, **A la Mort Subite**, rue Montagneux-Herbes-Potagères 7 (☎ 02/513-13-18), a bistro of rather special character

whose name translates to “Sudden Death,” which is also the name of one of the beers you can buy here. Don’t worry. The name is just a name—it comes from a dice game regulars used to play. The decor consists of stained-glass motifs, old photographs, paintings, and prints on the walls; and plain wooden chairs and tables on the floor. Specialties are traditional Brussels beers: *gueuze*, *lambic*, *faro*, and *kriek*; and abbey brews like Chimay, Maredsous, and Grimbergen.

In a quite different vein is **La Fleur en Papier Doré** (☞), rue des Alexiens 55 (☎ 02/511-16-59), in a 16th-century house. From its beginnings in 1846, this bistro and pub has been a mecca for poets and writers. Even now, about once a month, young Brussels poets gather here informally for poetry readings—the dates vary, but you might inquire by phone or, better yet, drop by and ask in person. This is a wonderfully atmospheric old pub, much like a social club, where patrons gather for good conversation and welcome any and all newcomers. The place also serves what is possibly the best onion soup in Brussels, a great late-night snack.

The following are only a few of the many Brussels pubs and bistros worthy of recommendation. **Au Bon Vieux Temps**, rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 12 (☎ 02/217-26-26), hidden away at the end of a narrow alleyway, is a gloomily atmospheric old tavern that seems to harken back to a bygone era. You should try the appropriately named Duvel (Devil) beer here—just go easy, that’s all. **A l’Imaige Nostre-Dame**, impasse des Cadeaux (☎ 02/219-42-49), off rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 6, is a good, quiet place to drink and read or reflect if you’re alone, or to converse with a companion without having to compete with a blaring jukebox.

Le Cirio, rue de la Bourse 18 (☎ 02/512-13-95), is across the road from the Stock Exchange, and indeed many of the bar’s customers look like they’ve just made a killing on the stock market and have retired to a state of genteel splendor. And what better place to do it in? Le Cirio is a quiet, refined sort of place to sip your beer, in attractive surroundings that make the whole exercise seem worthwhile. **Toone VII**, impasse Schuddeveld 6, Petite rue des Bouchers 21 (☎ 02/513-54-86), is the home of the puppet theater and an artistic hangout.

Art Nouveau design from 1904 by master Paul Hamesse (incorporating a plaster-covered interior wall that mimics a rock face) and an extensive range of Belgian beers are two good reasons to visit trendy bar-brasserie **De Ultieme Hallucinatië**, rue Royale 316 (☎ 02/217-06-14; Métro: Botanique). You sit in little booths on 1930s railroad station benches designed by Henry Van de Velde or at a long bar. In summertime, you can tan while you quaff beer on a courtyard terrace at the back. Salads, snacks, and full meals are available in the brasserie.

Shock and horror reverberated through the city a few years back, when the legendary 1904 Art Nouveau tavern, enlivened with a dash of Art Deco and rococo, **Le Falstaff**, rue Henri Maus 17–25 (☎ 02/511-87-89), went bankrupt and closed. Reopened under new management, it has shed its former, famously vain waitstaff and slipped a few notches on the hip scale as a result. If such considerations doesn’t worry you, there’s still the same stunning decor, stained-glass scenes in the style of Pieter Brueghel the Elder depicting Shakespeare’s Falstaff tales, and reasonably priced brasserie food.

Rick’s, av. Louise 344 (☎ 02/640-03-05), brings a touch of Humphrey Bogart and Ernest Hemingway, accompanied by American and Mexican food, to the stylish avenue Louise. The decor might give you the creeps at **Halloween**, rue des Grands-Carmes 10 (☎ 02/514-12-56), where gargoyles, devils, and other assorted creatures from the darker recesses of the mind help create an unforgettable ambience. Fortunately, it’s also a pretty good bar. Something sad has happened to

the painfully chic denizens of **L'Archiduc**, rue Antoine Dansaert 6 (☎ 02/512-06-52)—they've loosened up a little. Not much, mind you—just enough so that you don't see a hundred lips curling with disdain when you enter wearing clothes that were de rigueur last week instead of today.

GAY & LESBIAN BARS

Rue des Riches-Clares and **rue du Marché-au-Charbon** host some gay and lesbian bars. **Macho 2**, 108 rue du Marché-au-Charbon (☎ 02/513-56-67; Métro: Bourse), a block from rue des Riches-Clares, houses a gay men's sauna, pool, steam room, and cafe. It's open Monday to Thursday from noon to 2am, Friday and Saturday from noon to 4am, and Sunday from noon to midnight. Admission is 12€ (\$15) or 8€ (\$10) for men under 25 (on Thurs, it's 8€/ \$10 for everyone); students enter for 5€ (\$6.25). **Le Fuse** and **Le Sparrow** (see above) have gay nights.

For more information, contact **Infor Homo**, av. de Roodebeek 57 (☎ 02/733-10-24; Métro: Diamant), open Tuesday to Friday from 8am to 6pm. Or stop by the gay and lesbian community center, **Telsquels**, rue du Marché-au-Charbon 81 (☎ 02/512-45-87; Métro: Bourse), open Saturday to Thursday from 5pm to 2am and Friday from 8am to 4am.

MOVIES

Since most movies in Brussels are shown in the original language, you'll always be able to find many English-language films in the theaters. Part of the Bruparck recreation complex beside the Atomium, **Kinepolis**, bd. du Centenaire 20 (☎ 0900/352-41), is the best equipped and the biggest, with 26 screens, including an IMAX screen. Most movies shown here are big releases, usually from Hollywood, which is no doubt the main reason why the place is so popular.

9 Side Trips from Brussels

The lovely Brabant countryside around Brussels offers scenic beauty, as well as several sightseeing attractions well worth the short trip.

WATERLOO

10km (6 miles) S of Brussels

The Battle of Waterloo was Europe's Gettysburg. The battlefield remains much as it was on June 18, 1815. To visit it, you don't actually go to the town of Waterloo which, though a pleasant enough suburb of Brussels—and capital of Brabant-Wallon (Walloon Brabant) province, is not really worth going out of your way for. The Battle of Waterloo was not actually fought there. A stretch of rolling farmland dotted with stoutly built manor-farmhouses several miles to the south got that "honor."

At the cluster of buildings beside the **Visitor Center**, you can find rations at one of the cafes or restaurants, which have names like Le Hussard, Bivouac de l'Empereur, and Les Alliés. There are also souvenir shops selling everything from Napoleonic corkscrews to hand-painted model soldiers. Beside the crossroads at the Brussels–Charleroi road are monuments to the Belgians and Hanoverians; to Colonel Gordon, Wellington's aide; and to General Picton, shot down at the head of his division. A little way down the Brussels–Charleroi road is La Haie-Sainte, a farmhouse that played a crucial role in Napoléon's defeat by shielding Wellington's center from direct assault.

Tips Action This Day

The next re-enactment of the Battle of Waterloo, a spectacular event held every 5 years that features thousands of uniformed participants from around the world, is due to take place on June 19, 2005—the Sunday nearest to the battle’s June 18 anniversary. **Note:** The date had not been confirmed at this writing, so you should call ahead to the Visitor Center before going. The previous day, Saturday, when the “troops” are assembling, is also an interesting time to be in Waterloo and at the battlefield.

Before exploring the battlefield, you should stop here, where an audiovisual presentation on the tactical background plus an extract from a fictional film version of the conflict will give you an idea of the battle’s impressive scale.

The view of the theater of war from the top of the great Lion Mound (Butte du Lion) beside the Visitor Center is worth the 226-step climb, though it takes an active imagination to fill the peaceful farmland with slashing cavalry charges, thundering artillery, and 200,000 colorfully uniformed, struggling soldiers.

Across the road from the Visitor Center is the Waxworks Museum, where Napoléon, Wellington, Blücher, and others appear as rather tatty wax figures. Also next to the Visitor Center is the Battlefield Panorama (Panorama de la Bataille), featuring a painted diorama of the massive French cavalry charge led by Marshal Ney. It was a sensation in the pre-cinema era.

These three sites are open daily: April to September from 9:30am to 6:30pm; and October to March from 10am to 5pm; closed January 1, December 25. Admission to the Visitor Center is free; the audio-visual presentation is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 4.20€ (\$5.25) for seniors and students, and 3.35€ (\$4.20) for children ages 6 to 12; admission to the Lion Mound is 1€ (\$1.25) for adults, and 0.50€ (65¢) for children ages 6 to 12; admission to the panorama is 2.75€ (\$3.40) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for seniors and students, and 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 6 to 12; a combination ticket is 7.45€ (\$9.30) for adults, 6.20€ (\$7.75) for seniors and students, and 4.70€ (\$5) for children ages 6 to 12; in all cases, children under 6 are free.

From Brussels, bus W departs twice hourly for Waterloo from Gare du Midi (Métro: Gare du Midi). The 18km (11-mile) ride takes 50 minutes and costs 3€ (\$3.75). The bus stops at both the Wellington Museum in Waterloo itself and at the battlefield Visitor Center, south of the town. By car from Brussels, take the ring road (R0) to Exit 27 for Waterloo, and N5 south to the battlefield.

In Waterloo itself is the well-ordered **Musée Wellington (Wellington Museum)**, chaussée de Bruxelles 147 (☎ 02/354-78-06), in an old Brabant coaching inn that was the duke’s headquarters. It was from here that Wellington sent his historic victory dispatch. The museum is open April to September, daily from 9:30am to 6:30pm; November to March, daily from 10:30am to 5pm. Admission, which includes an audio guide, except for children under 6, is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 4€ (\$5) for seniors and students, 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

BEERSEL

9km (5½ miles) SW of Brussels

The only local example of a still intact **fortified medieval castle** is at Beersel, a little off the Mons road (watch for the signpost). The three-towered, 13th-century

castle is set in a wooded area and surrounded by a moat, which you cross via draw-bridge. Pick up the excellent English-language guidebook at the entrance for a detailed history of the castle and its inhabitants, then wander through its rooms for a trip back through time. End your visit with a stop at the magnificent mausoleum that holds the alabaster effigies of Henry II of Witthem and his wife, Jacqueline de Glimes, who lived here during the early 1400s.

Leafy pathways through the castle grounds make this a favorite rural retreat for Brussels residents, especially during the summer months. At the entrance to the park, you find **Auberge Kasteel Beersel**, Lotstraat 65, Beersel (☎ 02/377-10-47), a charming rustic restaurant with a decor of dark wood, exposed brick, and accents of copper and brass. In good weather there's service on the shaded outdoor terrace. Light meals (omelets, salads, soups, and sandwiches) are available, as well as complete hot meals for both lunch and dinner. Prices are moderate. If you don't want a meal, you're welcome to stop in for a relaxing draft of Belgian beer.

GAASBEEK

13km (8 miles) SW of Brussels

The ancestral **château of the counts of Egmont** is at Gaasbeek, beyond the village of Vlezenbeek. The furnishings here are nothing less than magnificent, as is the castle itself. All the rooms are splendid, and far from presenting a dead "museum" appearance, they create the eerie impression that the counts and their families may come walking through the door any moment. Before each guided tour, a slide show will augment your appreciation of the countless works of art, silver items, religious artifacts, and priceless tapestries you see in the castle.

Bruges

The graceful small city of **Bruges** (**Brugge**) has drifted down the stream of time with all the self-possession of the swans that cruise its canals. To step into the old town is to be transported instantly back to the Middle Ages, when Bruges was among the wealthiest cities of Europe. Unlike so many European cities that have had their hearts torn out by war, Bruges has remained unravaged, its glorious monumental buildings intact. UNESCO has recognized the cultural importance of the historic center by awarding it World Heritage status. The city (pop. 115,000, of whom 25,000 live in the old center) is the capital town of West-Vlaanderen

(West Flanders) province, and the pride and joy of all Flanders.

Medieval Gothic architecture is the big deal here. Sure, there's a layer of Romanesque; a touch of Renaissance, baroque, and rococo; a dab of neoclassical and neo-Gothic; and a smidgen of Art Nouveau and Art Deco. But Gothic is what Bruges provides, in quantities that come near to numbing the senses—and likely would do so if it weren't for the distraction of the city's contemporary animation.

In the 15th century Bruges became a center for the Hanseatic League and has a rich heritage of civic buildings from the period—guildhalls, exchanges, warehouses, and wealthy merchants' residences.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING BY TRAIN

Trains arrive every hour or so from Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent, and from the North Sea ports of Ostend (Oostende) and Zeebrugge. Journey time is about 1 hour by train from Brussels and Antwerp, 30 minutes from Ghent, and 15 minutes from Ostend and Zeebrugge. A train to and from Lille in northern France connects there with the Eurostar trains through the Channel Tunnel from London to Paris and Brussels. From Paris, you can take the Thalys high-speed trains through Brussels direct to Bruges, or the slower and cheaper International trains, changing in Brussels. International trains from Cologne to London, via Ostend, stop in Bruges. From Amsterdam, you can go via Antwerp or Brussels, either on the Thalys, or the normal International and Inter-City trains.

Impressions

The difference between Bruges and other cities is that in the latter, you look about for the picturesque, and don't find it easily, while in Bruges, assailed on every side by the picturesque, you look curiously for the unpicturesque, and don't find it easily.

—Arnold Bennett (1896)

Although the city is called Bruges in English and French, in Flemish it's "Brugge," and that's what the rail station destination boards say. The station is on Stationsplein, about 1.6km (1 mile) south of town, a 20-minute walk to the town center or a short bus or taxi ride. For train information, call ☎ **050/38-23-82**.

BY BUS

Buses are less useful than trains for getting to Bruges, although there are frequent buses from Ostend, Zeebrugge, and other Belgian seacoast resorts. Bruges bus station adjoins the rail station (see above). For schedule and fare information, call ☎ **070/22-02-00** from 6am to 9pm.

Eurolines operates a daily service from London's Victoria Coach Station—via the Dover–Calais ferry or the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle train—to Brussels, stopping at Bruges. Bruges can also be reached from all over Britain and Europe on the Eurolines network, via London or Brussels. For schedule and fare information, contact Eurolines at ☎ **08705/808080** in Britain, or 02/274-13-50 in Belgium.

BY CAR

Bruges is 89km (55 miles) northwest of Brussels and 46km (28 miles) northwest of Ghent on E40, 92km (57 miles) west of Antwerp on A14/E17 and A10/E40,

Frommer's Favorite Bruges Experiences

- **Cruising the Canals.** Those open-top canal boats can be scorching in hot weather and bracing in cold, but they're fun and they give you a uniquely satisfying view of the city. There's even a stern-wheel paddle steamer that sails along the canal to the nearby village of Damme.
- **Admiring a Michelangelo.** You can view a small but beautiful sculpture of the Madonna and Child—the only work by the great Italian artist to leave Italy during his lifetime—at the Church of Our Lady.
- **Comparing Codpieces.** Ahem, I mean admiring the finely carved suits of armor of the statues of Emperor Charles V, Emperor Maximilian of Austria, and King Ferdinand II of Aragon on the Renaissance chimneypiece in the Hall of the Liberty of Bruges in the Burg. (I say Charles's is the biggest.)
- **Biking Everywhere.** Unlike most Belgian cities, Bruges has made bikers privileged road users, with rights of way that motorists would kill for. You can ride through the city, around it on the ring canal park, and outside it on fresh-air excursions.
- **Strolling the Back Streets.** You don't need to visit the top 10 highlights to enjoy Bruges. Shut your guidebook, put away the street map, and just wander, taking time out to make your own discoveries. Bruges's residents live their everyday lives in absurdly beautiful surroundings and don't need to put on a show for the tourists.
- **Buying Handmade Lace.** If you're willing to be seduced by the lace shops in just one Belgian town, make it Bruges. You can still find plenty of the genuine article here.

and 24km (37 miles) southeast of Ostend on A10/E40. From Calais, France, and the Channel Tunnel, take E40 east.

For a hassle-free visit to Bruges, drive directly to the large underground car park near the rail station at 't Zand and leave your car there until you're headed out of town (see "Getting Around," below). You'll find it all but impossible to use a car in the center.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The tourist office, **Toerisme Brugge**, at Burg 11, 8000 Brugge (☎ 050/44-86-86; fax 050/44-86-00; www.brugge.be), is open from March to mid-November, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 6:30pm, weekends from 10am to noon and 2 to 6:30pm. From mid-November to February, it's open Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5pm, weekends from 9:30am to 1pm and 2 to 5:30pm. This friendly, efficient office has brochures that outline walking, coach, canal, and horse-drawn carriage tours, as well as detailed information on many sightseeing attractions. Ask for the complimentary monthly *events@brugge* newsletter and *Exit* brochure, both of them excellent directories of current goings-on.

In addition, there's a booth for tourist information and hotel bookings outside the rail station.

CITY LAYOUT

Bruges has two hearts, the side-by-side monumental squares called the Markt and the Burg. Narrow streets fan out from these two squares, while a network of canals threads its way to every section of the small city. The center is almost encircled by a canal that opens at its southern end to become the Minnewater (Lake of Love), which is filled with swans and other birds and bordered by the Begijnhof and a fine park. On the outer side of the Minnewater is the rail station.

2 Getting Around

The center of Bruges is compact and filled with pedestrians-only streets, which makes walking the best way to get around. Wear good walking shoes, though, because those charming cobblestones can be hard going.

BY BUS

Most city buses depart from the bus station beside the rail station, or from a secondary station at 't Zand, and many buses stop in the center at the Markt. Schedules are prominently posted. A day pass giving unlimited travel on all city buses is 2.90€ (\$3.70) and can be bought on the bus, or at the booths at the bus stations; you only have to take three buses to do better than if you purchase single-journey tickets at 1€ (\$1.25) each. For city and regional bus information, call ☎ 070/22-02-00.

BY BIKE

You can rent a bike from the rail station (☎ 050/30-23-29) for 9€ (\$11) per day; you get a discount on rentals of 3 days or more. In addition, many hotels rent bikes to guests, and there are also at least a dozen bike rental shops around town. Biking is a terrific way to get around Bruges or to get out of town to the nearby village of Damme (see later in this chapter) by way of beautiful canal-side roads. Recent traffic control measures have made bikers privileged road users—in more than 50 of the narrow, one-way streets in the city center, bikers can travel in both directions. But some streets are one-way only and you can be fined if you're caught riding against the traffic flow. In addition, you should always be careful because

the streets are filled with pedestrians, many of whom have no experience of bikes en masse, and are liable to step in front of you without looking.

BY CAR

Don't drive: Leave your car at your hotel parking lot (if it has one); at one of six big, prominently labeled underground parking garages in the center (these get expensive for long stays); at one of four cheap park-and-ride lots beside the rail station; or at a free parking zone outside the city center. It's a short walk into the heart of the old city from any of the parking lots. Driving the narrow streets, many of them one-way, can be confusing. Parking rules are firmly enforced, and unlawfully parked cars will be ticketed, wheel-clamped, or towed.

BY TAXI

There are taxi stands at the Markt (☎ 050/33-44-44) and outside the rail station on Stationsplein (☎ 050/38-46-60).

FAST FACTS: Bruges

American Express There is no office in Bruges; the nearest is in Brussels (see "Fast Facts: Brussels," in chapter 4).

Area Code The telephone area code for Bruges is **050**. You need to dial the **050** area code both from inside Bruges and from elsewhere in Belgium. Dial **50** (without the initial 0) if you are phoning Bruges from outside Belgium.

Car Rental Driving is not a good way to see the city's attractions, but if you must rent a car, you'll find **Avis** at Koningin Astridlaan 97/7 (☎ 050/39-44-51), and **Hertz** at Baron Ruzettelaan 6 (☎ 050/37-72-34).

Currency Exchange The tourist office (see "Visitor Information," above) is a good place to change money and traveler's checks, as are banks. ATMs, identified by MISTER CASH and BANCONTACT signs, in the Markt and at numerous other points in the city center, can be accessed by credit cards, bank cards, and charge cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks.

Doctors For a doctor on weekend duty (Fri 8pm–Mon 8am), call ☎ 050/36-40-10.

Emergencies For the police, dial ☎ 101; for firefighters and ambulance, ☎ 100.

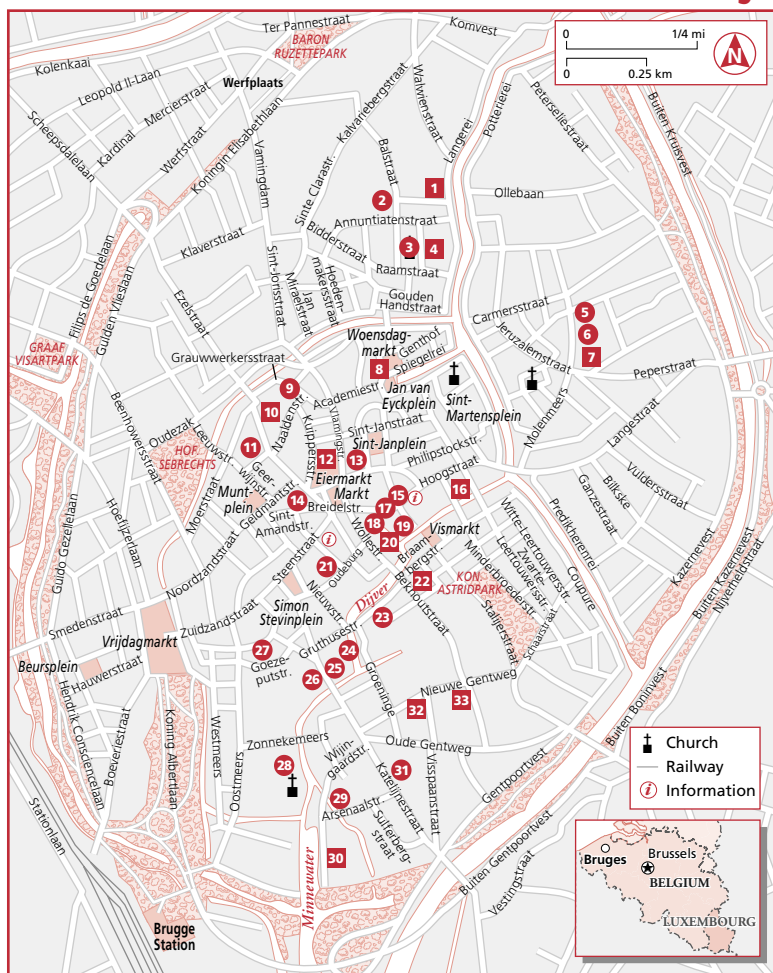
Hospital In case of medical problems, go to the **Academisch Ziekenhuis Sint-Jan**, Riddershove 10 (☎ 050/45-21-11).

Internet Access A centrally located choice is **The Coffee Link**, Mariastraat 38 (☎ 050/349973; www.thecoffeelink.com), in the medieval Oud Sint-Jan Hospital complex.

Police For routine police matters, go to police headquarters, Hauwerstraat 7 (☎ 050/44-89-30).

Post Office The main post office, Markt 5 (☎ 050/33-14-11), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, and Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Safety Crime is not much of a problem in Bruges. The city is safe and there are no areas you need to fear going into. That said, since it's a big tourist center, it can't hurt to take routine precautions against pickpocketing and other types of theft.

**ATTRACTIONS** ●

Basilica of the Holy Blood **18**
 Begijnhof **28**
 Belfry and Market Halls **22**
 Burg **15**
 Church of Our Lady **25**
 Craenenburg **14**
 De Vos Almshouse **29**
 Diamond Museum **31**
 Folklore Museum **9**
 Groeninge Museum **23**
 Gruuthuse Museum **24**

Hof Bladelin **12**
 Holy Savior Cathedral **27**
 Hospital of St. John
 (Memling Museum) **26**
 Jerusalem Church **6**
 Lace Center **2**
 Palace of the Liberty
 of Bruges **17**
 Sint-Jacobskerk **11**
 Sint-Walburgakerk **3**
 Statue of Breydel and
 De Coninck **13**
 Town Hall **19**

ACCOMMODATIONS

De Snippe **32**
Die Swaene **16**
Egmond **30**
Erasmus **20**
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Montanus **32**
Oud Huis Amsterdam **8**
Romantiek Pandhotel **22**
Ter Duinen **1**

3 Where to Stay

If a high-rise luxury hotel is your cup of tea, then my best advice is that you stay in Brussels and commute to Bruges. But if you like the idea of a small, atmospheric hostelry, perhaps right on the banks of a picturesque canal, with modern (if not necessarily luxurious) facilities, then opt to stay at one of the hotels reviewed below. You'll find that the accommodations here enhance your visit by enabling you to sink into the timelessness of Bruges.

Try not to arrive without a reservation. With a mind-boggling four million visitors a year, Bruges is Belgium's premier tourist destination, and even though many are day-trippers, it's still essential to make reservations at least 2 weeks before you plan to come. If you do come into town with no place to stay, head immediately to the tourist office—like tourist offices throughout Belgium, Bruges has a reservation service, and also can book ahead for you. Accommodations are less heavily booked during the week than on weekends.

Note that where hotels have no private parking, there's another option beyond the "limited street parking" that might be listed in the service information. Bruges's small city center holds six big public parking garages, all clearly marked on access roads. So there will always be at least one within a short walk of your hotel.

EXPENSIVE

De Snippe ★★ Set in an early-18th-century building in the center of town, De Snippe offers luxurious and spacious rooms, all furnished with restrained elegance and some with fireplaces. Two rooms have Jacuzzis. All bathrooms have been fully renovated. The hotel has one of Bruges's leading restaurants (see "Where to Dine," below).

Nieuwe Gentweg 53, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/33-70-70. Fax 050/33-76-62. www.desnippe.be. 9 units. 145€–195€ (\$181–\$244) double; 310€ (\$388) suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1 or 11. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; concierge; limited room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Die Swaene ★★ This small hotel on the beautiful city-center Groenerei canal has rightly been called one of the most romantic in Europe, thanks in great part to the care lavished on it by the Hessels family. The comfortable rooms are elegantly and individually furnished, and the lounge, from 1779, was formerly the Guildhall of the Tailors. You might also lodge in an annex, the Canal House. The in-house restaurant, where the specialties are seafood and regional cuisine, has won favorable reviews from guests and critics alike.

Steenhouwersdijk 1, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-27-98. Fax 050/33-66-74. www.dieswaene-hotel.com. 32 units. 185€–225€ (\$231–\$281) double; 320€–420€ (\$400–\$525) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, V. Parking 10€ (\$13). Bus: 1 or 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood/Flemish); bar; lounge; heated indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; concierge; secretarial services; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C (some rooms), TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Romantik Pandhotel ★★ Close to the Markt, this lovely 18th-century mansion surrounded by plane trees is an oasis of tranquillity. Although it provides modern conveniences, its exquisite, old-fashioned furnishings lend special grace to comfortable rooms. Guests praise Mrs. Chris Vanhaecke-Dewaele for her hospitality and attention to detail. You can use an Internet-connected computer in the lobby to send and receive e-mail.

Pandreitje 16, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-06-66. Fax 050/34-05-56. www.pandhotel.com. 24 units. 150€–320€ (\$188–\$400) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 1

or 6. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Dante ★ This ultramodern brick hotel is set alongside a lovely canal, a short walk west from the center of Bruges—it takes its name from a reference to Bruges in the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. The hotel is an artful combination of old Bruges style and modern amenities and fittings. Its spacious guest rooms are restfully decorated in warm colors like peach, and are furnished with bamboo and rattan beds. Most have a view of the canal at Coupure. The Dante's vegetarian restaurant Toermalijn is highly regarded locally.

Coupure 29, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-01-94. Fax 050/34-35-39. www.hotelldante.be. 22 units. 106€–131€ (\$133–\$164) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (vegetarian); game room; limited room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Egmond ★★ The Egmond has just eight rooms, in a rambling mansion next to the Minnewater Park, but the lucky few who stay here will find ample space, plenty of family ambience, abundant local color, and lots of peace and tranquility. All rooms have recently been redecorated and are furnished in individual styles with views of the garden and the Minnewater Park. Every afternoon, free coffee and tea are served on the new garden terrace or in the lounge, which has an 18th-century fireplace. There's also an "honesty bar," where you help yourself to a drink and leave payment. Some rooms have air-conditioning.

Minnewater 15, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-14-45. Fax 050/34-29-40. www.egmond.be. 8 units. 100€–120€ (\$125–\$150) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. Bus: 1 or 11. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer, safe.

Erasmus ★ This small, cozy hotel is set in a picturesque little square alongside a canal in the town center. The rooms were renovated in 2001, with new carpets and new bathroom fixtures and fittings. All rooms have attractive, modern furnishings, and some have air-conditioning.

Wollestraat 35 (near the Belfry), 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/33-57-81. Fax 050/33-47-27. www.hotelerasmus.com. 10 units. 80€–175€ (\$100–\$219) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. No parking. Bus: 1 or 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; limited room service; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Heritage ★ The Hansa, a short walk from the Markt in a mansion dating from 1869, has a well-established reputation in Bruges. Its rooms are modern and not overly big, but they are warmly furnished and decorated, and are fitted with DVD players. The beds are comfortable, the staff friendly, and the ambience of the hotel welcoming. The ornamental ceiling in the breakfast room is a reminder of the building's respectable origins.

Niklaas Deparsstraat 11, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/44-44-44. Fax 050/44-44-40. www.hotel-heritage.com. 20 units. 135€–218€ (\$169–\$273) double; 310€–370€ (\$388–\$463) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 15€ (\$19). **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; health club; bike rental; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Montanus ★ The former budget Hotel St. Christophe now has new ownership, a new name, and a whole new, more upmarket ethos. This three-story hotel offers a range of price options for comfortable accommodations. Some of the individually styled guest rooms overlook a big and lovely garden.

Nieuwe Gentweg 78, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/33-11-76. Fax 050/34-09-38. www.montanus.be. 24 units. 108€–220€ (\$135–\$275) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ (\$19). Bus: 1 or 11. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Relais Oud Huis Amsterdam ★★ Philip and Caroline Traen have made a fine hotel out of this large canal-side building, parts of which date back to the 1300s. Rooms are large and sumptuously furnished. The colors and decorative accents hearken back to the building's origins, based on meticulous research and restoration. Some of the bathrooms feature whirlpool tubs. The elegant guest rooms in the front overlook the canal; those in back overlook the garden and picturesque rooftops. The entrance hall, the small salon off the reception area, and the popular bar called The Meeting all have a pleasant atmosphere. In the rear, there's a charming little courtyard with umbrella tables and a garden off to one side—the setting for Sunday concerts in June. The famed Traen hospitality makes a stay here in the town center very special. Around half of the guest rooms have air-conditioning.

Spiegelrei 3, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-18-10. Fax 050/33-88-91. www.oha.be. 34 units. 140€–238€ (\$175–\$298) double; 388€ (\$485) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ (\$16). Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Bar; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer.

Ter Duinen ★ This charming hotel is an ideal marriage of classical style and modern conveniences. Brightly decorated guest rooms are ample in size and have modern furnishings. Some rooms have wooden ceiling beams, and some have a great view overlooking the tranquil Langerei canal, just north of the town center and within easy walking distance. Proprietors Marc and Lieve Bossu-Van Den Heuvel take a justified pride in their hotel and extend a friendly welcome to guests.

Langerei 52, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/33-04-37. Fax 050/34-42-16. www.terduinenhotel.be. 20 units. 98€–149€ (\$123–\$186) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Lounge; limited room service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Fevery ★ Don't be put off by the name: It's the Fevery (*fay-ver-ee*), not Fevery as in "feverish." This recently renovated family hotel is on a quiet side street in a quiet part of town, facing the Sint-Gilliskerk (St. Giles's Church), just north of the city center, a short and pleasant walk away. The modern and comfortably furnished guest rooms, enlarged through a rebuilding program that ended in 2002, are cheery and immaculate, with new bathrooms and monogrammed pressed sheets. One room is a quad. There's a downstairs lounge and breakfast room. The proprietor, Mr. Asselman, has a wealth of local information and clearly takes great pride in his establishment.

Collaert Mansionstraat 3 (off Langerei), 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/33-12-69. Fax 050/33-17-91. www.hotelfevery.be. 12 units. 60€–80€ (\$75–\$100) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Lounge; bike rental. *In room:* TV.

Lucca ★★ *Value* Built in the 14th century by a wealthy merchant from Lucca, Italy, the high ceilings and wide halls of this mansion convey a sense of luxury. Guest rooms are in fine condition and sport pine furnishings. Units with bathrooms also have TV. Breakfast is served in a cozy medieval cellar.

Naaldendraat 30, 8000 Brugge. ☎ 050/34-20-67. Fax 050/33-34-64. www.hotellucca.be. 19 units, 14 with bathroom. 50€ (\$63) double without bathroom; 85€ (\$106) double with bathroom. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV (some rooms).

4 Where to Dine

Bruges certainly has no shortage of restaurants. You'll be practically tripping over them in the city center. Most are decent, although some have perhaps gotten too used to the "here today, gone tomorrow" nature of the tourists that are their main market. The restaurants featured below aim to make dining a memorable part of your Bruges experience.

VERY EXPENSIVE

De Karmeliet ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH In 1996, chef Geert Van Hecke became the first Flemish chef to be awarded three Michelin stars. He has described his award-winning menu as "international cuisine made with local products" that aims to combine French quality with Flemish quantity. The result is outstanding, and the decor is as elegant as the fine cuisine deserves.

Langestraat 19. ☎ 050/33-82-59. Reservations required. Main courses 20€–35€ (\$25–\$44); fixed-price menus 68€–83€ (\$85–\$104). AE, DC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–9:30pm; Sun 7–9:30pm except June–Sept.

't Pandreitje ★★ FRENCH/BELGIAN This restaurant is one of the nicest spots in town. It's in the shade of the medieval Market Hall's bell tower, just off the Rozenhoedkaai, one of the most beautiful canalsides in Bruges. The interior of this Renaissance-era private home has been turned into an elegant Louis XVI setting for a menu of classic dishes. The four-course a la carte meal is superb, and the menu of pre-selected choices is excellent. Try the sea bass served with fennel, parsley sauce, and sautéed potatoes; or the salad of Dublin Bay prawns with artichoke and a truffle vinaigrette.

Pandreitje 6. ☎ 050/33-11-90. www.pandreitje.be. Reservations required. Fixed-price menus 55€–70€ (\$69–\$88). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat noon–2pm and 7–9:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

De Snippe ★★ NOUVELLE FRENCH De Snippe enjoys a well-earned reputation as one of Bruges's finest restaurants. Its seafood dishes are particularly good. If you like crustaceans, try the delicious *pot au feu* (stockpot soup) of lobster with basil and a sesame crust.

In De Snippe Hotel, Nieuwe Gentweg 53. ☎ 050/33-70-70. www.desnippe.be. Main courses 16€–35€ (\$20–\$44); fixed-price menus 71€ (\$89). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon 7–10pm; Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm.

De Visscherie ★★ SEAFOOD This attractive restaurant faces the old Fish Market in the town center and, as you might expect, "fruits of the sea" take top billing on the menu. Freshness is guaranteed. Specialties include shellfish in many guises (try the spotted scallops with roe) and Channel sole.

Vismarkt 8. ☎ 050/33-02-12. www.visscherie.be. Main courses 32€–53€ (\$40–\$66). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2pm and 7–10pm.

't Huidevettershuis ★★ FLEMISH/SEAFOOD This charmer, right on a canal in the town center, is in a stone house with flowers blooming in diamond-paned windows. There's a cozy, intimate room downstairs and a pleasant, larger one upstairs. Look for Flemish specialties such as the souplike *waterzooi* (with chicken), in addition to ham, rabbit, and herring dishes. A notable and, for Flanders, surprising, absentee from the menu is mussels; but the same people also own the De Visscherie seafood restaurant (see above) and a restaurant specializing in mussels (De Mosselkelder, also in Huidenvettersplein), so maybe that explains it.

Huidenvettersplein 10–11. ☎ 050/33-95-06. www.huidevettershuis.be. Main courses 22€–58€ (\$28–\$73). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2pm and 6–10pm.

MODERATE

Breydel-de-Coninck ★ SEAFOOD An aquarium of tropical fish at the entrance sets a marine mood in this seafood restaurant just off the Markt. Wood beam ceilings and plaid upholstery are cheerful, but the real attraction is the seafood. The specialties here are mussels, eels, and lobsters prepared with white wine, cream, or garlic sauces that enhance the flavor of the seafood without overwhelming it. Try a pail full of plain mussels, or go for something with a little more zest, like the *moules Provençal* (mussels in a light red sauce with mushrooms, peppers, and onions). And the homemade ice cream with caramel sauce is a good way to wind up.

Breidelstraat 24. ☎ 050/33-27-46. Main courses 9.90€–21€ (\$12–\$26); fixed-price meals 16€–36€ (\$20–\$45). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–3pm and 6–9:30pm.

De Stove ★★ FLEMISH/SEAFOOD This small, family-owned restaurant combines a rustic atmosphere with a more modern style than is the norm in Bruges. The seafood specialties are well worth a try, particularly the Flemish fish stew with *fruits de mer*.

Kleine Sint-Amandsstraat 4. ☎ 050/33-78-35. www.restaurantdestove.be. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 16€–28€ (\$20–\$35); fixed-price menu 42€–57€ (\$53–\$71). AE, MC, V. Fri–Tues noon–1:45pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

Kasteel Minnewater ★★ *Value* BELGIAN/FRENCH Old paintings on the walls, a marble fireplace, chandeliers, and fine table linen all complement this château-restaurant's superb location on the Minnewater (Lake of Love). It exudes an unstuffy charm that makes château dining not just something for lords and ladies, and though prices have been edging up, it still provides a good deal considering the setting. Specialties include a suite of unpretentious Flemish seafood dishes such as the *zeetong in boter gebakken en gebakken aardappelen* (sole baked in butter with baked potatoes) and, for a starter, the tasty *huisgemaakte garnaaalkroketten met salade* (homemade shrimp croquettes with salad), made with the little gray North Sea shrimps. There's an excellent, Marseilles-influenced bouillabaisse, but using North Sea ingredients like cod, sole, shrimps, and shellfish. Carnivores can go for the *varkenhaasje Archiduc en gebakken aardappelen* (pork filet Archiduc with baked potatoes).

Minnewater 4 (near the Begijnhof). ☎ 050/33-42-54. Main courses 25€–45€ (\$31–\$56); Markt-menu 30€ (\$37). V. Summer: daily 11am–11pm (food at lunch and dinner times only). Winter: Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6:30–11pm, Sat–Sun 11am–11pm (food at lunch and dinner times only).

INEXPENSIVE

Brasserie Erasmus ★ FLEMISH Small but popular, this is a great stop after viewing the cathedral and nearby museums. It serves a large variety of Flemish dishes, all prepared with beer. If you need help making a selection, you can ask owner Tom for advice, or try these suggestions: The typically Flemish soup-like stew dish *waterzooi* is very good here, and it's served with fish, as it's supposed to be, although they also make it with chicken instead, a style that has become the norm elsewhere. If that doesn't grab you, how about *lapin à la bière* (rabbit in a beer sauce)? About 150 different brands of beer are available (for drinking), 10 of them on tap.

Wollestraat 35. ☎ 050/33-57-81. www.hotelerasmus.com. Main courses 13€–18€ (\$16–\$22); fixed-price menu 33€ (\$41). MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–4pm (summer also Mon) and 6–11pm.

Graaf van Vlaanderen STEAK/SALADS This reasonably priced restaurant near the railroad station has an extensive menu and a decor that relies heavily on mirrors and plants. The fare is equally simple, featuring minute steak (steak so thin it cooks in 1 min.), spaghetti, salads, and *steak-frites* (steak and french fries). 't Zand 19 (in the Graaf van Vlaanderen hotel). ☎ 050/33-31-50. www.graafvanvlaanderen.be. Main courses 13€–19€ (\$16–\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed 7:30am–10pm.

Lotus ★ VEGETARIAN Even non-vegetarians will likely enjoy the delicious lunch here. There are just two menu options—but at least you can choose from a small, medium, or large serving—each with a hearty assortment of imaginatively prepared vegetables, served in a tranquil but cheery Scandinavian-style dining room.

Wapenmakersstraat 5. ☎ 050/33-10-78. Fixed-price lunch menus 8.50€–11€ (\$11–\$13). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:45am–2pm.

't Koffieboontje SEAFOOD/FLEMISH The bright, modern interior here strikes a noticeably stylish contrast to the often-dark ambience of many Bruges restaurants. An extensive menu is equally cheery, featuring good, but not fancy, seafood specialties like lobster and salmon, and Belgian staples like mussels, steak, and sole.

Hallestraat 4. ☎ 050/33-80-27. Main courses 9.75€–17€ (\$12–\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm.

5 Seeing the Sights

A leading contender for the title of Europe's most romantic town, Bruges is really one big attraction—a fairy-tale mixture of gabled houses, meandering canals, magnificent squares, and narrow cobblestone streets. But perhaps the most astonishing thing about Bruges is the consistently warm welcome its residents provide to the swarms of visitors. The basis for this is more than mere economics—those who live in Bruges love their city and can well appreciate that others want to experience it.

THE MARKT

In the Markt (Market Square), heraldic banners float from venerable facades. This square, along with the Burg (see below), is the heart of Bruges and the focal point of your sightseeing. Most major points of interest in the city are no more than 5 or 10 minutes' walk away.

Belfort en Hallen (Belfry and Market Halls) ★★ The Belfry was, and still is, the symbol of Bruges's civic pride. Its magnificent 47-bell carillon peals out over the city every quarter-hour, and several times a day in longer concerts during the summer. The tower itself stands 84m (272 ft.) high. Its lower section dates from around 1240, with the corner turrets added in the 14th century, and the upper, octagonal section in the 15th century. If you have the stamina, climb the 366 steps to the Belfry's summit for a panoramic view of Bruges and the surrounding countryside all the way to the sea—you can pause for breath at the second-floor Treasury, where the town seal and charters were kept behind multiple wrought-iron grilles. From the 13th to the 16th century, much of the city's commerce was conducted in the Hallen. They have recently been brought back into use, as an exhibition center operated by a consortium of local art dealers. Just outside the Hallen is a bronze replica of the Belfry and the Hallen, with descriptions in English, French, German, and Dutch, and in Braille.

Markt. ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

OTHER SIGHTS AROUND THE MARKT

The **sculpture group** in the center of the Markt depicts a pair of Flemish heroes, butcher Jan Breydel and weaver Pieter de Coninck. The two led an uprising in 1302 against the wealthy merchants and nobles who dominated the guilds, then went on to win an against-all-odds victory over French knights later that same year in the Battle of the Golden Spurs. The small, castlelike building called the **Craenenburg** (it's now a restaurant), on the corner of Sint Amandstraat at Grote Markt, was used to imprison Crown Prince Maximilian of Austria in 1482. In exchange for that humiliation, Maximilian later on exacted a penalty from the citizens of Bruges that added a note of pure beauty to the city: He obliged them to keep swans in the canals forever. The large neo-Gothic **Provinciaal Hof (Provincial Palace House)** dates from the 1800s and houses the government of the province of West Flanders.

THE BURG

The Burg, a public square just steps away from the Markt, holds an array of beautiful buildings, which together add up to a trip through the history of architecture. On this site, Baldwin Iron Arm, count of Flanders, once built a fortified castle (or “burg”), around which a village developed into Bruges.

Heilig-Bloedbasiliek (Basilica of the Holy Blood) ★★ A 12th-century Romanesque basilica with a Gothic upper floor, the church houses a venerated relic of Christ and is well worth a visit for the richness of its design and its other treasures. Since 1150, it has been the repository of a fragment of cloth stained with what is said to be the coagulated blood of Christ, wiped from his body after the crucifixion by Joseph of Arimathea. Legend says the cloth was brought to Bruges at the time of the Second Crusade by the count of Flanders, Diederik van de Elzas, who received it from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. More probably it came from Constantinople, which in 1204 was sacked by the Crusader army of Count of Flanders Baldwin IX. Every year, in the colorful Procession of the Holy Blood on Ascension Day, the bishop of Bruges carries the relic through the streets, accompanied by costumed residents acting out biblical scenes.

The relic is embedded in a rock-crystal vial, which itself is inside a small glass cylinder adorned with a golden crown at each end. Normally the relic is kept in a magnificent tabernacle (on which is an image of the “lamb of Christ”) on a side altar in the upstairs chapel, but it is brought out regularly so that the faithful can kiss it. In the Basilica Museum, a reliquary created in 1617 by Bruges goldsmith Jan Crabbe has a gem-encrusted hexagonal case to hold the relic and at the top a golden statue of the Virgin. A second reliquary, from 1612, with a lid from 1716, is silver with a golden flower garland added in 1890.

Aside from the relic, the 12th-century basilica is well worth a visit for the richness of its design and its other treasures.

Burg 10. ☎ 050/33-67-92. Basilica admission free. Museum 1.50€ (\$1.90) adults, free for children under 12. Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–noon and 2–6pm (closed Wed afternoon); Oct–Mar daily 10am–noon and 2–4pm (closed Wed afternoon).

Landhuis van het Brugse Vrije (Palace of the Liberty of Bruges) ★

Dating mostly from 1722 to 1727, when it replaced a 16th-century building as the seat of the Liberty of Bruges—the Liberty being the district around Bruges in the Middle Ages—the palace later became a courthouse, and now houses the city council's administration. Inside, at no. 11A, is the **Renaissancezaal Brugse Vrije (Renaissance Hall of the Liberty of Bruges)** ★★, the Liberty's council chamber, which has been restored to its original 16th-century condition. The

hall has a superb black marble fireplace decorated with an alabaster frieze and topped by an oak chimneypiece carved with statues of Emperor Charles V, who visited Bruges in 1515, and his grandparents: Emperor Maximilian of Austria, Duchess Mary of Burgundy, King Ferdinand II of Aragon, and Queen Isabella I of Castile.

Burg 11. ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission: courtyard free; Renaissance Hall, 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

Stadhuis (Town Hall) ★ This beautiful Gothic structure was built in the late 1300s, making it the oldest Town Hall in Belgium. Don't miss the upstairs **Gotische Zaal (Gothic Room)** ★★ with its ornate decor and wall murals depicting highlights of Bruges's history. Most spectacular of all is the vaulted oak ceiling, dating from 1385 to 1402, which features scenes from the New Testament. The statues in the niches on the Town Hall facade are 1980s replacements for the originals, which had been painted by Jan van Eyck and were destroyed by the French in the 1790s.

Burg 12. ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

OTHER SIGHTS AROUND THE BURG

The **Oude Civiele Griffie (Old Civic Registry)**, built beside the Town Hall as the offices of the Town Clerk, has the oldest Renaissance facade in the city, dating from 1534 to 1537, and now houses the city archives. Facing the Town Hall is the baroque **Proosdij (Provost's House)**, dating from 1665 to 1666, which used to be the residence of the bishop of Bruges and is now occupied by government offices of West Flanders province.

TOP MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Groeninge Museum ★★ The Groeninge ranks among Belgium's leading traditional museums of fine arts, with a collection that covers painting in the Low Countries from the 15th to the 20th century. The Gallery of Flemish Primitives holds some 30 works—many of which are far from primitive—by painters such as Jan van Eyck (there's a portrait of his wife, Margerita van Eyck), Rogier van der Weyden, Hieronymus Bosch (*The Last Judgment*), and Hans Memling. Works by Magritte and Delvaux are also on display.

Dijver 12. ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission 8€ (\$10) adults, 5€ (\$8) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

Gruuthuse Museum ★ The Flemish nobleman and herb merchant Lodewijk Van Gruuthuse, who was a counselor to the Dukes of Burgundy in the 1400s, lived in this ornate Gothic mansion. Among the 2,500 numbered antiquities in the house are paintings, sculptures, tapestries, lace, weapons, glassware, and richly carved furniture.

Dijver 17 (in a courtyard next to the Groeninge Museum). ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

Kantcentrum (Lace Center) ★★ A combination workshop, museum, and salesroom is where the ancient art of lacemaking is passed on to the next generation. You'll get a firsthand look at the artisans making many of the items for future sale in all those lace shops. When you purchase lace, ideally you should specify that you want handmade lace, which is more expensive and of higher

quality than the machine-made stuff. The most famous laces to look for are *bloemenwerk*, *rozenkant*, and *toversesteek*. Your ticket is valid also in the neighboring Jeruzalemkerk (Jerusalem Church; see “More Churches,” below).

Peperstraat 3A (at Jeruzalemstraat). ☎ 050/33-00-72. www.kantcentrum.com. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) seniors and children 7–11, free for children under 7. Mon–Fri 10am–noon and 2–6pm; Sat 10am–noon and 2–5pm. Bus: 6 or 16 to Langestraat.

Memling Museum ★★ This museum is housed in the former Sint-Janshospitaal (Hospital of St. John), where the earliest wards date from the 13th century. To get a sense of the vastness of the wards when this was a functioning hospital, take a look at the old painting near the entrance that shows small, efficient bed units set into cubicles along the walls. The 17th-century apothecary in the cloisters near the entrance is furnished exactly as it was when this building's main function was to care for the sick. Nowadays visitors come to see the typical medieval hospital buildings filled with furniture and other objects that illustrate their history, as well as the magnificent collection of paintings by the German-born artist Hans Memling (ca. 1440–94), who moved to Bruges from Brussels in 1465 and became one of the city's most prominent residents. At this museum you find such Memling masterpieces as the three-paneled altarpiece of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, which consists of the paintings *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, the *Shrine of St Ursula*, and *Virgin with Child and Apple*.

Mariastraat 38. ☎ 050/44-87-11. Admission 8€ (\$10) adults, 5€ (\$7.50) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25.

Stedelijk Museum voor Volkskunde (Municipal Folklore Museum) ★

Housed in the low whitewashed houses of the former Shoemakers Guild Almshouse, the Folklore Museum aims to re-create life in Bruges in times gone by. Exhibits depict a primary school class, a cooper's and a milliner's workshops, a spice store and a candy store, and everyday household scenes. A new emphasis is on the history of the important regional textile industry. Most refreshing of all is an old inn, De Zwarte Kat (The Black Cat), which has real beer on tap. In summer, children and adults can play traditional games in the garden.

Balstraat 43 (at Rolweg). ☎ 050/44-87-64. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25. Bus: 6 to Kruispoort.

HISTORIC CHURCHES

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady) ★★ It took 2 centuries (13th–15th) to build this church, whose soaring 119m (396-ft.) spire can be seen for miles around Bruges. Among the many art treasures here is a beautiful Carrara marble sculpture of the *Madonna and Child* ★★, by Michelangelo. This statue, made in 1504, was the only one of Michelangelo's works to leave Italy in his lifetime and is today one of the few that can be seen outside Italy. It was bought by a Bruges merchant, Jan van Mouskroen, and donated to the church in 1506. The church also holds a painting of the *Crucifixion* by Anthony van Dyck, and the impressive side-by-side **bronze tomb sculptures** ★ of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, who died in 1477, and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, who died in 1482 at age 25, after falling from her horse. A windowpane under the tombs allows you to view the 13th- and 14th-century graves of priests.

Tranquil Escapes

Through the centuries, since it was founded in 1245 by the Countess Margaret of Constantinople, the **Prinselijk Begijnhof ten Wijngaarde (Princely Beguinage of the Vineyard)** (★★★, Wijngaardstraat (☎ 050/33-00-11), at the Lake of Love, has been one of the most tranquil spots in Bruges, and so it remains today. *Begijns* were religious women, similar to nuns, who accepted vows of chastity and obedience, but drew the line at poverty, preferring to earn a living by looking after the sick and making lace. They provided an option for women to live without a husband and children, but without becoming a nun—there was little in the way of alternatives at the time.

The *begijns* are no more, but the Begijnhof is occupied by Benedictine nuns who try to keep the *begijns'* traditions alive. This beautiful little cluster of 17th-century whitewashed houses surrounding a lawn with poplar trees and flowers makes a marvelous escape from the hustle and bustle of the outside world. One of the houses, the **Begijnhuisje (Beguine's House)**, has been made over into a museum and can be visited, as can the convent church during a service. The Begijnhof courtyard is always open and admission is free. The Beguine's House is open from March to November, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm, Sunday from 10:45am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm; from December to February, Monday, Tuesday, and Friday from 11am to noon and 1:45 to 4:15pm, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:45 to 4:15pm, Saturday from 10am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm, Sunday from 10:45am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors, and 1€ (\$1.25) for students and children.

A fine example of the *godshuizen* (houses of God, or almshouses), built by the rich in Bruges from the 13th century onward as refuges for widows and the poor, is the **Godshuis de Vos (De Vos Almshouse)**, from 1713, at the corner of Noordstraat and Wijngaardstraat, near the Begijnhof. The moneybags weren't being entirely altruistic, since the residents had to pray for their benefactors' souls twice a day in the chapel that was an integral part of an almshouse's facilities. The pretty courtyard garden here is surrounded by a chapel and eight original houses, now converted to six, which are owned by the city and occupied by seniors. Admission is not permitted, but you can view the complex from over a low wall out front.

Founded in 1276 as a hospice, **Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Potterie (Our Lady of the Pottery)**, Potterierei 78–79, is now a seniors' home. Today part of it houses the **Potterie Museum** (☎ 050/44-87-11), which has a collection of tapestries, 15th- to 17th-century furniture, silverware, religious objects, and books, and early Flemish paintings. The adjoining 14th-century church, with a fine baroque interior, was the Potters Guild chapel. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm (open Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon; closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, Dec 25). Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors and ages 13 to 26, and free for children under 13.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerkhof Zuid. ☎ 050/34-53-14. Admission: Church and Madonna and Child altar free; chapel of Charles and Mary and Museum 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors/ages 13–26, children under 13 free. Mon–Fri 9–12:30pm and 1:30–5pm; Sat 9–12:30pm and 1:30–4pm; Sun 1:30–5pm.

Sint-Salvatorskathedraal (Holy Savior's Cathedral) This mainly Gothic church with a 100m (325-ft.) belfry has been Bruges's cathedral since 1834 (its predecessor, Saint Donatian's in the Burg, was demolished by the French around 1800). The 15th-century wooden choir stalls flanking the altar bear a complete set of escutcheons of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, who held a chapter meeting here in 1478. The Cathedral Museum (Mon–Fri 2–5pm, Sun 3–5pm) houses the *Martyrdom of St. Hippolytus* by Dirk Bouts with a side panel by Hugo van der Goes, as well as the Cathedral Treasury of gold and silver religious vessels, reliquaries, and Episcopal vestments.

Sint-Salvatorskerkhof (off of Steenstraat). ☎ 050/33-68-41. Admission: Cathedral free; Treasury 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors/students, children under 13 free. Museum: Mon 2–5:45pm, Tues–Fri 8:30–11:45am and 2–5:45pm, Sat 8:30–11:45am and 2–3:30pm, Sun 9–10:15am and 2–5:45pm; closed to casual visitors during services. Treasury: Sun–Fri 2–5pm.

MORE CHURCHES

There's no shortage of notable churches in Bruges, but as there's also no shortage of other places to see, you probably won't want to spend all your time visiting them. Anyone with a particular interest in churches, however, should try to visit a few of these.

The magnificent **Sint-Walburgakerk (St. Walburga's Church)** ✠, in Sint-Maartensplein (1619–43), is one of the few baroque monuments in this Gothic-fixated city. It has a satisfying amount of marble and a notable altar, pulpit, and communion bench. Sint-Walburgakerk was the Jesuit church of Bruges until 1774.

The wealthy Adornes merchant family constructed the **Jeruzalemkerk (Jerusalem Church)** ✠, Peperstraat 3, beside the Lace Center (see above), between 1471 and 1483, along the lines of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. A replica of Christ's Tomb is in the crypt underneath the choir. The admission to the Lace Center allows you to visit this church as well.

Also owing much of its ornamentation to wealthy benefactors is **Sint-Jakobs-kerk (St. James's Church)**, in Sint-Jacobplein. This heavy-looking 15th-century Gothic construction has an intricately carved wooden pulpit, with figures at the base representing the continents.

Founded in 1276 as a hospice, **Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Potterie (Our Lady of the Pottery)**, Potterierei 78–79, is now a seniors' home. Today part of it houses the **Potterie Museum** (☎ 050/44-87-11), which has a collection of tapestries, 15th- to 17th-century furniture, silverware, religious objects, books, and early Flemish paintings. The adjoining 14th-century church, with a fine baroque interior, was the Potters Guild chapel. The church is open April through September, daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm; October through March, Wednesday through Monday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 1.50€ (\$1.86).

OTHER SIGHTS

Diamantmuseum (Diamond Museum) Diamond polishing has been an important local industry for centuries, ever since Antwerp dealers, looking for cheaper skilled labor, brought the craft to Bruges. The technique of polishing diamonds using diamond powder on a rotating disk may have been invented by

the Bruges goldsmith Lodewijk van Berquem around 1450. This museum focuses on the history of diamond polishing in Bruges, with demonstrations and displays of the equipment employed by the craftspeople.

Katelijnestraat 43B (at Oude Gentweg). ☎ 050/34-20-56. www.diamondmuseum.be. Admission: Museum 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) students/children; Diamond-polishing demonstration and museum 9€ (\$11) adults, 6€ (\$7.50) students/children. Daily 10:30am–5:30pm; diamond-polishing demonstration daily 12:15pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Hof Bladelin (Bladelin House) This 15th-century mansion, which is now a seniors' home, was built by Pieter Bladelin, treasurer to Duke Philip the Good. The Medici Bank of Florence took over in 1466 and gave the place an Italian look, particularly in the courtyard, which is thought to be the earliest example of the Renaissance style in the Low Countries. On the facade are medallions depicting Lorenzo de Medici and his wife Clarice Orsini.

Naaldenstraat 19. ☎ 050/33-64-34. Admission free; donation appreciated. Daily 9am–noon and 2–6pm (mansion visits by prior appointment).

CITY GATES

The now-vanished city wall once boasted nine powerfully fortified gates dating from the 14th century. The four that survive are (clockwise from the rail station) the imposing **Smedenpoort**; **Ezelpoort**, which is famed for the many swans that grace the moat beside it; **Kruispoort**, which looks more like a castle with a drawbridge; and **Gentpoort**, now reduced in status to a traffic obstacle. Only one defensive tower remains, the **Poortoren**, which was used as a gunpowder store and overlooks the Lake of Love.

WINDMILLS

The park that marks the line of the city walls between Kruispoort and Dampoort in the northeast is occupied by a row of very photogenic windmills. They are (from south to north) the **Bonne Chièr Mill**, built in 1888 at Olsene in East Flanders and moved here in 1911; **Sint-Janshuismolen**, built in 1770 and open free to the public from April to September, daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm; **Nieuwe Papegaai Mill**, an oil mill rebuilt here in 1970; and **Coeleweymolen**, dating from 1765, rebuilt here in 1996 and open free to the public from June to September, daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm.

BREWERY TOURS

De Gouden Boom Brewery Museum Bruges's second major brewery has been operating in this area since 1587. The old malt house, which holds the museum, dates from 1902, and still has its beer vats and other equipment in place. Exhibits here feature not only the museum's parent brewery, but also the other 31 breweries that were in operation in the city at the turn of the 20th century. From here it's just a quick shuffle to Langestraat 45 and the **brewery** itself, which can only be visited by guided tour. Here you can see such popular beers as Brugse Tarwebier, Brugse Tripel, and Abdij Steenbrugge being brought to life, and get to taste some of the finished product. Tours are by prior arrangement only.

Verbrand Nieuwland 10. ☎ 050/31-15-04. www.degoudenboom.com. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40). May–Sept Wed–Sun 2–6pm.

De Halve Maan Brewery ★ The brewery here was mentioned in dispatches as early as 1546, and has been in use in “modern” times since 1856. Today it produces the famous (in Belgium) Straffe Hendrik beer, a strapping blond brew

that can be sampled in the brewery's own brasserie—it has a clean, heavenly taste.

Walplein 26. ☎ 050/33-26-97. www.halvemaan.be. Admission 3.70€ (\$4.65). Guided visits Apr–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–Mar daily 11am and 3pm.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

The **Boudewijnpark & Dolfinarium**, A. De Baeckestraat 12 (☎ 050/40-84-08; www.dolfinarium.be; bus: 7 or 17), in the southern suburb of Sint-Michiels, is a big favorite with children, who for some reason seem to prefer its rides, paddleboats, dolphins, and sea lions to Bruges's many historic treasures. Strange but true! Admission is 19€ (\$24) for adults and children over 1m (39 in.), 16€ (\$20) for seniors, and free for children under 1m (39 in.). The park is open June to August, daily from 10:30am to 5pm; and during Easter week and weekends in September from 11am to 5pm. The Dolfinarium is open intermittently at other times.

In the eastern suburbs, the **Kinderboerderij De Zeven Torentjes (Seven Towers Children's Farm)**, Canadaring 41, Assebroek (☎ 050/35-40-43; bus: 2), is a 14th-century manor farm that has been transformed into a children's farm, with pigs, hens, horses, and other animals. All the buildings—farmhouse, barns, coach house, bakery, and more—have been restored and a large play park added. An on-site cafeteria has a kids-friendly menu. A 16th-century dovecote has niches for 650 doves. The farm is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5:15pm, Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and Sunday from 1 to 6pm. Admission is free.

Both the theme park and the farm can be reached by bus from the rail station and from the Markt.

ORGANIZED TOURS & EXCURSIONS

If you'd like a trained, knowledgeable guide to accompany you in Bruges, the tourist office can provide one for 50€ (\$63) for the first 2 hours, and 25€ (\$31) for each additional hour. Or, in July and August, you can join a daily guided tour at 3pm that leaves from the tourist office; it costs 5€ (\$6.25) for adults and is free for children under 14. For self-guided tours, audio guides with taped details in English are available from the tourist office for 8€ (\$10) for one or two people.

A must for every visitor is a **boat trip** ★★ on the city canals. There are several departure points, all marked with an anchor icon on maps available at the tourist office. The boats operate March to November daily from 10am to 6pm; and December to February on weekends, school holidays, and public holidays from 10am to 6pm (except if the canals are frozen!). A half-hour cruise is 5.20€ (\$6.50) for adults, 2.60€ (\$3.25) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. Wear something warm if the weather is cold or windy.

Another lovely way to tour Bruges is by **horse-drawn carriage**. From March to November, carriages are stationed in the Burg (on Wed in the Markt). A 30-minute ride is 28€ (\$34).

Fifty-minute minibus tours with **Sightseeing Lines** (☎ 050/35-50-24; www.citytour.be) depart hourly every day from the Markt: January, February, and December from 10am to 4pm; March and April from 10am to 5pm; May and June from 9am to 7pm; July to September from 9am to 8pm; and October and November from 10am to 6pm. The tours are 12€ (\$14) for adults, 6€ (\$7.50) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

Folklore Events in Bruges

One of the most popular and colorful folklore events in Belgium is Bruges's **Heilig-Bloedprocessie (Procession of the Holy Blood)**, which dates back to at least 1291 and takes place every year on Ascension Day. During the procession, the bishop of Bruges proceeds through the city streets carrying the golden shrine containing the Relic of the Holy Blood (see "The Burg," earlier in this chapter). Residents wearing Burgundian-era and biblical costumes follow the relic, acting out biblical and historical scenes along the way.

Every 3 years, the canals of Bruges are the subject and location of a festival called the **Reiefeest**. This evening event is a combination of historical tableaux, dancing, open-air concerts, and lots of eating and drinking. It takes place on 6 non-consecutive days in August. The next Reiefeest is due in 2007.

The **Praalstoet van de Gouden Boom (Golden Tree Pageant)** recalls the great procession and tournament held in the Markt to celebrate the 1468 marriage of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, to Margaret of York. It takes place every 5 years in the last half of August, and the next one will be in 2007.

From March to October, you can get some exercise and at the same time visit little-known parts of Bruges, or head out of town to explore the nearby flat Flemish countryside and the village of Damme, on a bike tour, with commentary in English, led by the **QuasiMundo Bike Tours Brugge** (☎ 050/33-07-75; www.quasimundo.com). You can choose a city bike or mountain bike. Tours are 18€ (\$23) for adults, 16€ (\$20) for ages 8 to 26, and free for children under 8. Call ahead to make a reservation. The meeting and departure point is the Burg.

6 Shopping

No one comes here for stylish shopping—for that you need Brussels or Antwerp. What Bruges is famous for is **lace**. Most of it is machine-made, but there's still plenty of genuine, high-quality (if expensive) handmade lace to be found. The most famous lace styles are bloemenwerk, rozenkant, and toversesteek. Souvenirs of a more perishable nature include Oud-Brugge **cheese**, and local **beers** such as Straffe Hendrick, Brugse Tarwebier, and Brugse Tripel. The contents of a stone bottle of **jenever** (gin) and a box of handmade chocolate **pralines** should also go down well.

Upmarket shops and boutiques can be found in the streets around the Markt and 't Zand, including Geldmuntstraat, Noordzandstraat, Steenstraat, Zuidzandstraat, and Vlamingsstraat. There are souvenir, lace, and small specialty shops everywhere. Most shops are open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, with late-night shopping to 9pm on Friday. Many also open on Sunday, especially in summer.

MARKETS

The **Antiques and Flea Market** on the Dijver is a fine show in a scenic location beside the canal. It runs from March to October, Saturday and Sunday from

noon to 5pm. There are also **general markets** in the Markt, every Wednesday from 7am to 1pm, and in 't Zand and nearby Beursplein every Saturday from 7am to 1pm. The **fish market** in the colonnaded Vismarkt dating from 1821 may be less important—although you can buy ready-to-eat prawns and raw hering here—but it's still interesting to see. It takes place Tuesday to Saturday from 8am to 1pm.

7 Bruges After Dark

For information on what to do after dark, get the free monthly brochure *Exit* and the free monthly newsletter *events@brugge* from the tourist office, hotels, and performance venues. The monthly newspaper *Brugge Cultuurmagazine*, also free and available at these locations, is in Dutch, but its performance dates and venue details are fairly easy to follow.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

The new, ultramodern **Concertgebouw**, 't Zand (☎ 050/47-69-99), which opened in 2002, nicely in time for Bruges's reign as European Capital of Culture, is the main venue for opera, classical music, theater, and dance, which take place regularly throughout the year. This has left the **Koninklijke Stadsschouwburg (Royal Municipal Theater)**, Vlamingstraat 29 (☎ 050/44-30-60), from 1869 and the former venue for these events, at a bit of a loose end, and it remains to be seen what will happen here. Another important venue is the **Joseph Ryelandtzaal**, Achiel Van Ackerplein (☎ 050/44-86-86). Smaller-scale events, such as recitals, are often held at the **Prinsenhof**, Prinsenhof 8 (☎ 050/34-50-93), which used to be the palace of the Dukes of Burgundy, as well as at **Sint-Salvators Kathedraal**, **Sint-Jacobskerk**, and other churches.

Theater pieces—mostly in Dutch—are performed at theater **Het Net**, Sint-Jacobsstraat 36 (☎ 050/33-88-50), which also has a puppet theater, **Marionettentheater Brugge**, for what is a sophisticated, centuries-old art.

A different kind of theater is on the menu at **Brugge Anno 1468 (Bruges Year 1468)**, Celebrations Entertainment, Vlamingstraat 86 (☎ 050/34-75-72). In the atmospheric setting of the neo-Gothic former Heilige-Hartkerk (Sacred Heart Church), from 1885, which belonged to the Jesuit Order, actors re-create the wedding of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, to Margaret of York, while visitors pile into a medieval banquet. Performances are April to October, Thursday to Saturday from 7:30 to 10pm; November to March, Saturday from 7:30 to 10pm.

LIVE-MUSIC CLUBS

The **Cactus Club**, Sint-Jacobsstraat 33 (☎ 050/33-20-14), presents an eclectic concert schedule Friday and Saturday nights. Try **De Vuurmolen**, Kraanplein 5 (☎ 050/33-00-79), for a raucous dancing-on-the-tables kind of night; it's open nightly 10pm until the wee hours. **Ma Rica Rokk** ♣, 't Zand 7-8 (☎ 050/33-83-58), is another bar with dancing; it attracts a young, techno-oriented crowd nightly 7pm to 4am (9pm-6am weekends). A good gay-friendly place is the bar/disco **Ravel**, Karel de Stoutelaan 172 (☎ 050/31-52-74), open Wednesday and Friday through Monday from 10pm. **Vino Vino**, Grauwwerkersstraat 15 (☎ 050/34-51-15), somehow manages to successfully combine Spanish tapas and the blues. For jazz, from bebop to modern, you can't do better than **De Versteende Nacht** ♣, Langestraat 11 (☎ 050/34-32-93).

BARS

't Brugs Beertje ★, Kemelstraat 5 (☎ 050/33-96-16), is a traditional cafe that serves more than 300 different kinds of beer. **'t Dreupelhuisje**, Kemelstraat 9 (☎ 050/34-24-21), does something similar with *jenever*, stocking dozens of artisanal examples of this spirit. **Gran Kaffee De Passage**, Dweersstraat 26 (☎ 050/34-02-32), is a quiet and elegant cafe that serves inexpensive meals.

8 A Side Trip to Damme ★

This village, just 7km (4½ miles) from Bruges, was once the city's outer harbor, where seagoing ships loaded and unloaded their cargoes, until the Zwin inlet silted up in 1520. The marriage of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York was celebrated here in 1468—which indicates the importance of Damme at the time. Today visitors come to see the picturesque Markt (which holds a statue of native Jacob van Maerlant, the “father of Flemish poetry”) and the beautiful canal-side scenery en route from Bruges. It's easily possible to make a day trip to Damme, including lunch at one of the town's restaurants.

THE ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Getting to Damme is half the delight. One of the nicest ways is to take the small stern-wheel paddle steamer *Lamme Goedzaak*. Departures are from the Noorweegse Kaai in the north of Bruges, five times daily from April to September. The delightful half-hour trip along the poplar-lined canal takes you past a landscape straight out of an old Flemish painting. Round-trip tickets are 6.50€ (\$8.15) for adults, 5.50€ (\$6.90) for seniors, and 4.50€ (\$5.65) for children ages 3 to 12. For schedules and booking, contact **Rederij Damme-Brugge** (☎ 050/35-33-19).

You can also take one of the minibuses of the **Sightseeing Line** (☎ 050/31-50-24). The 2-hour tours run from April to September, at 2pm and 4pm from the Markt, returning from Damme on the paddle steamer *Lamme Goedzaak*. Round-trip tickets are 17€ (\$21) for adults, and 8.25€ (\$10) for children.

Public transportation buses depart six times daily in July and August, and three times daily from September to June, Monday to Saturday, from the rail station and the Markt in Bruges to Damme Town Hall.

You can also drive, bike, or even walk from Bruges to Damme, along the scenic canal-side road Daamse Vaart Zuid from Dampoort in Bruges.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Damme**, Jacob van Maerlantstraat 3, 8340 Damme (☎ 050/35-33-19; fax 050/37-00-21; www.vvvdamme.be), faces the Stadhuis (Town Hall) in the Markt.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The Gothic **Town Hall (Stadhuis)** in the Markt dates from 1464 to 1468. On its facade are statues of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, among other historic notables. In front of it stands a statue of the poet Jacob van Maerlant (1230–96), who wrote his most important works in Damme.

Across from the Town Hall, at Jacob van Maerlantstraat 3, is the 15th-century mansion called **De Grootte Sterre**. This was the Spanish governor's residence in the 17th century and is now occupied by the Damme Tourist Office, the **Tijl Uilenspiegel Museum**, and the **Van Hinsberg Forge and Foundry Museum**. Uilenspiegel is a 14th-century German folk-tale character who came to Damme by a roundabout route and has been adopted by the village. The

museums are open from May to September, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; October to April, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5pm. At Jacob van Maerlantstraat 13 is a 15th-century mansion, the **Saint-Jean d'Angély House** , where in 1468 Charles the Bold married Margaret of York.

In Kerkstraat, which runs south from the Markt, are the Gothic **St. John's Hospital (Sint-Janshospitaal)** at no. 33, a hospital for the poor, endowed in 1249 by Countess Margaret of Constantinople; and the **Church of Our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk)**, dating from around 1340.

Across the bridge over the Bruges-Sluis Canal, at Dammesteenweg 1, is the 18th-century whitewashed **De Christoffelhoeve (St. Christopher's Farm)**. Note the ornamental gate and the monumental barn with its mansard roof. A little way to the west along the Daamse Vaart is the **Schellemolen**, a windmill built in 1867.

Beside the jetty where the *Lamme Goedzaak* ties up is a modern **sculpture group** featuring the legend of Tijl Uilenspiegel.

Ghent & Antwerp

These two cities are often linked with Bruges as the “Three Flemish Art Cities.” Though everyone admits that Ghent and Antwerp can’t match Bruges for sheer good looks, many Belgians believe them to be the true heartland of Flemish culture. Both cities have a grittier, more lived-in feel compared with Bruges’s museum-piece air, and neither would yield a

millimeter in any argument over relative historical importance, artistic heritage, and contemporary vibrancy.

If time is limited, I’d always advise choosing Bruges ahead of the other two. But just two more days brings Ghent and Antwerp within range, and you miss much if you don’t reach out and grab them.

1 Ghent (★ ★)

48km (30 miles) NW of Brussels; 46km (28 miles) SE of Bruges

Ghent (Gent), the capital town of Oost-Vlaanderen (East Flanders) province, is often considered a poor relation of Bruges in tourism terms, with historical monuments and townscapes that are not quite as pretty as those in its sister city, and therefore only to be visited if there is time after seeing Bruges. From a traveler’s point of view there is some truth in this—but not too much. Life moves faster in Ghent, an important port and industrial center, and it compensates for its less precious appearance with a vigorous social and cultural scene.

This magnificent old city at the confluence of the Leie and Scheldt rivers has always been a pivotal point for Flanders. Ghent was the seat of the counts of Flanders, who built their great castle here in 1180, but local fortifications actually predate their reign, going back to the 900s.

After a long history of economic ups and downs, Ghent today has emerged once more as a major industrial center. Her medieval treasures are preserved, not as dry, showcase relics, but as living parts of the city. And to lighten what could be the overpowering grayness of industrialization, there are flowers everywhere, creating oases of color as a constant reminder that this is also the heart of a prosperous horticultural industry. In short, Ghent is a busy, lively city, whose reminders of the past are as comfortable in the present as a pair of well-broken-in shoes.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Ghent is just a 32-minute train ride from Brussels. The main rail station, **Gent Sint-Pieters Station** (☎ 09/222-44-44), is on Koningin Maria-Hendrikaplein, a mile or so south of the city center and connected by frequent tram to the center. The **bus station** (☎ 09/210-94-91) adjoins Sint-Pieters rail station. By **car**, you go on A10/E40 from Brussels and Bruges, and A14/E17 from Antwerp.

VISITOR INFORMATION Ghent **Tourist Office (Dienst Toerisme)** is at Predikherenlei 2, 9000 Gent (☎ **09/225-36-41**; fax 09/225-62-88; www.gent.be); it's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 4:30pm. More convenient for personal visits is the **Inquiry Desk (Infokantoor)** in the cellar of the Belfry, Botermarkt 17A, 9000 Gent (☎ **09/266-52-32**; fax 09/224-15-55); open April to October daily from 9:30am to 6:30pm, November to March daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm.

GETTING AROUND Walking is the best way to view the center. Farther out, you're better off using the city's excellent public transportation system, particularly the trams. Most lines travel along Nederkouter and continue to Korenmarkt. For taxis, call **V-Tax** (☎ **09/225-25-25**).

CITY LAYOUT

Korenmarkt lies at the center (*Centrum*) of the city. If you arrive by train at Sint-Pieters Station, take tram 1, 10, 11, or 12 from under the bridge to your left when you exit the station, to Korenmarkt. Unless you need to count every euro, don't walk to the center; it's a dull route. Save your shoe leather and energy for sightseeing in the oldest part of town. Most of the city's important sights—including the Town Hall, Saint Bavo's Cathedral, and the Belfry—lie within .8km (½ mile) of the Korenmarkt. The **Leie River** winds through the center to connect with the Scheldt River and a network of canals that lead to the busy port area. **Citadel Park**, location of the Fine Arts Museum, is near Sint-Pieters Station. **Patershol** (the word for the cave—or hole—in which monks lived a hermit's existence) is an ancient enclave not far from the Castle of the Counts. The place is fast becoming a gastronomic center, as more and more small restaurants move into renovated old buildings in the area.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

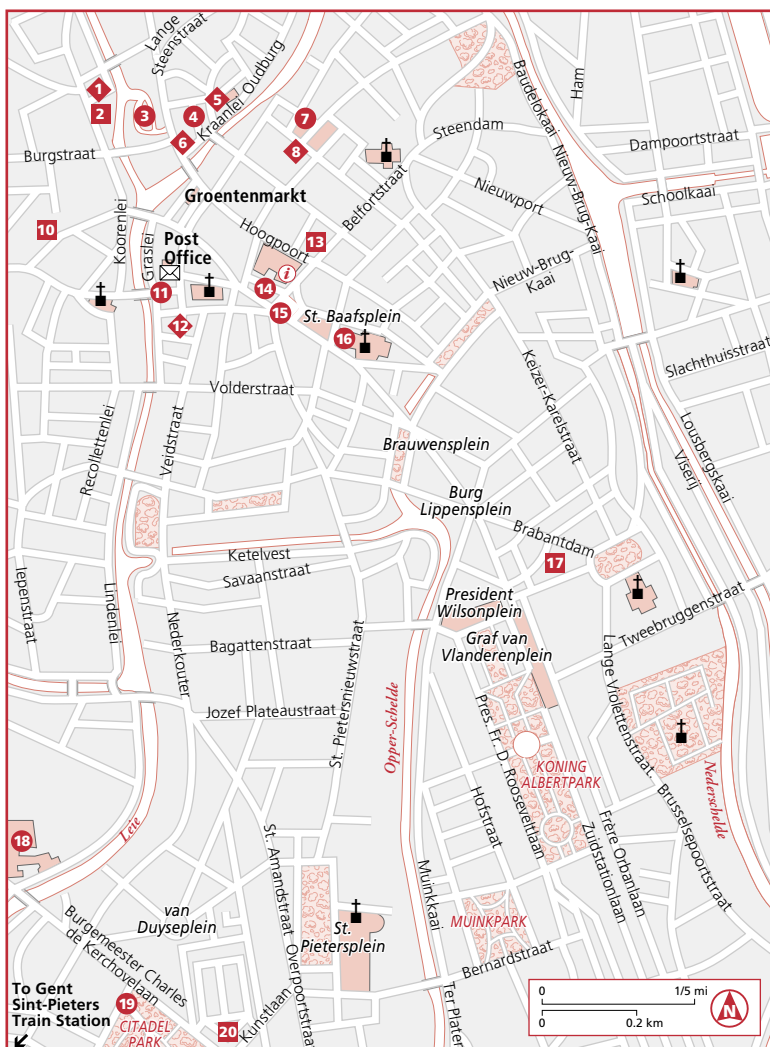
Ghent's historic monuments have not all been prettified. Some of them look downright gray and forbidding which, oddly enough, gives them a more authentic feel. The Castle of the Counts of Flanders was actually *meant* to look gray and forbidding, since the citizens of Ghent were so often in revolt against its overlord.

This is a city to be seen on foot. Indeed, only by walking its streets, gazing at its gabled guild houses and private mansions, and stopping on one of its bridges to look down at the canal below, can you begin to get a sense of the extraordinary vigor of the people who have lived here over the centuries.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

First of all: The "Three Towers of Ghent" you often hear referred to are **St. Bavo's Cathedral**, the **Belfry**, and **St. Nicholas's Church**, which form a virtually straight line pointing towards St. Michael's Bridge.

Belfort en Lakenhalle (Belfry and Cloth Hall) ★★ Just across the square from the cathedral, the Cloth Hall and Belfry tower above it together form a glorious medieval ensemble. The Cloth Hall dates from 1425 and was the gathering place of wool and cloth merchants. The Belfry holds the great bells that have rung out Ghent's civic pride down through the centuries, the most beloved being a 1315 giant bell known as Roeland, destroyed by Charles V in 1540 as a punishment for Ghent's latest act of insubordination. No fewer than 37 of the 54 bells that now make up the huge carillon are from the remains of Roeland. The massive Triomphante, cast in 1660 to replace the favorite, now rests in a small park at the foot of the Belfry, still bearing the crack it sustained in 1914.



ATTRACTIONS ●

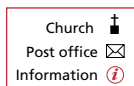
- Belfry and Cloth Hall 15
- Bijloke Archaeological Museum 18
- Fine Arts Museum 19
- Graslei 11
- Gravensteen 3
- Het Huis van Alijn 4
- St. Bavo's Cathedral 16
- Stadhuis 14
- Vrijdagmarkt 7

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Adoma 20
- Eden 17
- Erasmus 10
- Gravensteen 2
- Sofitel Gent Belfort 13

DINING ◆

- Amadeus 5
- Brasserie Pakhuis 12
- Jan Breydel 1
- Keizershof 8
- 't Buikske Vol 6



Take the elevator to the Belfry's upper gallery, 66m (215 ft.) high, to see both the bells and a fantastic panoramic view of the city. A great iron chest was kept in the Belfry's *Secret* to hold the all-important charters that spelled out privileges the guilds and the burghers of medieval Ghent wrested from the counts of Flanders.

Sint-Baafsplein. 🕒 **09/223-99-22.** Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.75€ (\$2.20) seniors/students, 0.90€ (\$1.15) children 7–12, children under 7 free. Mid-Mar to mid-Nov daily 10am–12:30pm and 2–5:30pm; free guided tours Easter vacations and May–Sept Tues–Sun 2:10, 3:10, 4:10pm.

Gravensteen (Castle of the Counts) “Grim” is the word that springs to mind when you first see this fortress, crouching like a gray stone lion over the city. The lugubrious Gravensteen was clearly designed by the counts of Flanders to send a message to rebellion-inclined Gentenaars. It's safe to say that the castle's very appearance did much to instill the awe and fear necessary to keep the people of Ghent in line. It was built by Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, shortly after he returned from the Crusades in 1180 with images of similar crusader castles in Syria fixed firmly in his mind. If the castle's walls (2m/6 ft. thick), battlements, and turrets failed to intimidate attackers, the count could always turn to a well-equipped torture chamber inside. You can view relics of that chamber—a small guillotine, spiked iron collars, racks, branding irons, thumb screws, and a special kind of pitchfork designed to make certain that people being burned at the stake stayed in the flames—in a small museum in the castle. On a happier note, if you climb to the ramparts of the high building in the center, the donjon, your reward is a great view of Ghent's rooftops and towers.

Sint-Veerplein. 🕒 **09/225-93-06.** Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, free for children under 12. Apr–Sept daily 9am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 9am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, Dec 25–26.

Sint-Baafskathedraal (St. Bavo's Cathedral) ★★ Even if you see nothing else in Ghent, you shouldn't miss this massive cathedral. Don't be put off by its rather unimpressive exterior, an uncertain mixture of Romanesque, Gothic, and baroque architecture. The interior is filled with priceless paintings, sculptures, screens, memorials, and carved tombs. About midway along the vaulted nave is a remarkable pulpit in white marble entwined with oak, reminiscent of Bernini. St. Bavo's showpiece is the 24-panel altarpiece *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, completed by Jan van Eyck in 1432. Van Eyck's luminous use of oils and naturalistic portrayal of nature and people represented a giant step away from the rigid style of Gothic religious art. But besides its importance in the history of art, the *Mystic Lamb* is spellbinding in its own right. The work was commissioned for this very chapel by a wealthy alderman in 1420. The original artist was Jan's brother Hubert van Eyck, but the piece was completed by Jan after Hubert's death in 1426.

During the period of closure of the city's Museum of Fine Arts (see below), Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Bearing of the Cross* will be exhibited in the cathedral crypt. Other art treasures in the cathedral include Rubens's restored *The Conversion of St. Bavo* (1624), in the Rubens Chapel on the semicircular ambulatory behind the high altar.

Sint-Baafsplein. 🕒 **09/269-20-45.** Cathedral, free admission. *Mystic Lamb* chapel and Crypt 3€ (\$3.75) adults (includes audio guide in English), 1.50€ (\$1.90) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Cathedral Apr–Oct daily 8:30am–6pm; Nov–March daily 8:30am–5pm; closed to tourist visits morning of Sun and religious holidays, and during services. *Mystic Lamb* Chapel and Crypt Apr–Oct Mon–Sat 9:30am–4:45pm, Sun 1–4:30pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Sat 10:30am–3:45pm, Sun 1–3:30pm.

OTHER MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Bijlokeuseum Weapons, uniforms, clothing, and household items from the everyday life of years past are on view, in a 14th-century former Cistercian abbey. Authentic works of art of Ghent and Flanders are exhibited inside the “House of the Abbess,” an exhibit space within the museum.

Godshuizenlaan 2 (south of the center). ☎ 09/225-11-06. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, children under 12 free. Thurs 10am–1pm and 2–6pm, Sun 2–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2, Dec 25–26.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Fine Arts Museum) ★ This fine museum houses both ancient and modern art masterpieces. Highlights include works by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and Théodore Géricault, along with such moderns as James Ensor, Theo van Rysselberghe, George Minne, and Constant Permeke. **Note:** The museum is closed for renovations until 2006; during the period of closure, exhibits from the collection will be mounted at the nearby Leopold Barracks, Charles de Kerchovelaan 187A.

Citadelpark (near the rail station). ☎ 09/240-07-00. www.mskgent.be. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.20€ (\$1.50) seniors and ages 12–25, free for children under 12; free admission Sun 10am–1pm. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2, Dec 25–26.

Het Huis van Alijn (Alijn House) ★ Set in almshouses from the 1300s, Ghent’s fascinating folklore museum in the city center features authentic replicas of typical rooms in homes of the period and in places where crafts and skills such as weaving, metalwork, and carpentry were practiced. A marionette theater presents performances on specified days of the week (check with the museum for current schedules).

Kraanlei 65. ☎ 09/269-23-50. www.huisvanalijn.be. Museum 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.75€ (\$2.20) seniors and children 6–18, free for children under 6. Marionette theater 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Ghent’s large **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** ★, Botermarkt/Hoogpoort (☎ 09/223-99-22), turns a rather plain Renaissance profile to Botermarkt, and an almost garishly ornamented Gothic face to Hoogpoort. Its schizophrenic appearance probably came about because its construction, started in 1518, was interrupted by Charles V, began again at the end of that century, was halted once more in the early 1600s, and wasn’t completed until the 18th century. The changing public tastes and available monies of those years are reflected in the building’s styles. In its Pacificatiezaal (Pacification Room), the Pacification of Ghent was signed in 1567. This document declared to the world the repudiation by the Low Countries provinces of Spanish Habsburg rule and their intention to permit freedom of religion within their boundaries. The Town Hall can be visited on guided tours (May–Oct Mon–Thurs 3pm) that depart from the tourist office in the Belfry cellar.

Graslei ★★, a beautiful canal-side street, is home to a solid row of towering, gabled guild houses built between the 1200s and 1600s, when the neighboring waterway formed the city’s harbor. To fully appreciate their majesty, walk across the bridge over the Leie to **Korenlei** on the opposite bank and view them as a whole, then return to stroll past each, conjuring up in your imagination the craftsmen, tradesmen, and merchants for whom these buildings were the very core of commercial and civil existence.

The building at no. 1 was the House of the Free Boatmen, from the 1500s; no. 2, the Annex House of the Grain Measurers, from the 1600s; no. 3, the

House of the Receiver of the Staple (Customs), from the 1600s; no. 4, the Staple Warehouse, from the 1200s; no. 5, the Main House of the Grain Measurers, from the 1500s; no. 6, the House of the Free Masons, from the 1500s; and no. 7, the House of the Boatmen. The dramas that unfolded within the walls of each are enough to fill a library of books based on Ghent's independence of spirit. This is an ideal spot for leisurely exploration and for snapping a picture that captures the essence of Ghent.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS

The tourist office can arrange qualified guides for private **walking tours**, at a charge of 50€ (\$63) for the first 2 hours (Mon–Fri), and 25€ (\$31) for each additional hour. Also ask them about organized group-walking tours sometimes conducted during summer months at a fee of 6€ (\$7.50) for adults, and free for children under 12 (admission to see *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* included).

A tour that should be a part of every visitor's itinerary is a **boat ride** ★ along the canals. Open and covered boats, which feature a narrative commentary in several languages, leave the Graslei and Korenlei every 30 minutes from 10am to 7pm, April to October. The trip lasts about 35 minutes, with fares of 5€ (\$6.25) for adults and 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children under 12.

On certain days during July and August you can also take a **boat trip from Ghent to Bruges** and back, at 25€ (\$31) for adults, 19€ (\$24) for children 12 and under. Contact **Rederij Dewaele** (☎ 09/223-88-53), or **Benelux-Gent-Watertoerist** (☎ 09/282-92-48).

From Easter to October, **horse-drawn carriages** (☎ 09/227-62-46) depart from Sint-Baafsplein and Korenlei from 10am to 6pm for half-hour rides that cost 25€ (\$31).

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

Gravensteen ★★ You enter this lovely mansion, built in 1865 as the home of a Ghent textile baron, through the old carriageway (made up of ornamented pillars and an impressive wall niche occupied by a marble statue), which sets the tone for what you find inside. The elegant, high-ceilinged parlor is a sophisticated blend of pastels, gracious modern furnishings, and antiques, with a small bar tucked into one corner. The rooms are attractive and comfortably furnished. Those in front look out on the moated castle, while those to the back have city views. There's a top-floor lookout, with windows offering magnificent views of the city. Afternoon tea is available. There's no dining room, but plenty of good restaurants are within easy walking distance. Some rooms have air-conditioning.

Jan Breydelstraat 35 (a short walk from Graslei and the Castle of the Counts), 9000 Gent. ☎ 09/225-11-50. Fax 09/225-18-50. www.gravensteen.be. 45 units. 135€–145€ (\$169–\$181) double; 197€ (\$246) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 5€ (\$6.25). **Amenities:** Bar; laundry service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Sofitel Gent Belfort ★ The hotel has an enviable location just across the road from the Town Hall and within easy distance of the city's premier tourist attractions. The rooms have all the facilities and services expected by a demanding international business and tourist clientele. The hotel is bright and modern and has been designed to fit at least partly into its venerable surroundings. Belgian cuisine and international dishes are served in the Van Artevelde Brasserie.

Hoogpoort 63, 9000 Gent. ☎ 09/233-33-31. Fax 09/233-11-02. www.sofitel.com. 127 units. 245€ (\$306) double; 415€ (\$519) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 5€ (\$6.25). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian/international); bar; health club; concierge; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

MODERATE TO INEXPENSIVE

Adoma The facilities and atmosphere at this renovated hotel have taken a big leap forward, yet the rates remain reasonable. Rooms are spacious and brightly decorated, with modern furnishings. You'll find staying here to be a comfortable, if not luxurious, experience.

Sint-Denijslaan 19 (behind Sint-Pieters rail station), 9000 Gent. ☎ 09/222-65-50. Fax 09/245-09-37. www.hotel-adoma.be. 15 units. 58€–100€ (\$73–\$125) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV.

Eden ★ Not far from the center, this is a nice hotel in its price range. The decor is pleasantly modern, and each room has a tapestry on the wall. Although most bathrooms are small, each has at least a toilet and shower, and some rooms have full bathrooms.

Zuidstationstraat 24, 9000 Gent. ☎ 09/223-51-51. Fax 09/233-34-57. 28 units. 70€–95€ (\$88–\$119) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV.

Erasmus ★★ Each room is different in this converted 16th-century house, and all are plush, furnished with antiques and knickknacks. Rooms have high oak-beam ceilings, and bathrooms are modern. Some rooms have leaded-glass windows, some overlook a carefully manicured inner garden, and some have elaborate marble fireplaces. Breakfast is served in an impressive room that would have pleased the counts of Flanders.

Poel 25, 9000 Gent. ☎ 09/224-21-95. Fax 09/232-42-41. 11 units. 99€–130€ (\$124–\$163) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. *Amenities:* Bar. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE EXPENSIVE

Jan Breydel ★★ SEAFOOD/FLEMISH High honors go to this exquisite restaurant on a quaint street near the Castle of the Counts. Its interior is a garden delight of greenery, white napery, and light woods. Proprietors Louis and Pat Hellebaut see to it that dishes issued from their kitchen are as light as the setting, with delicate sauces and seasonings enhancing fresh ingredients. Seafood and regional specialties like the traditional Ghent souplike fish stew *waterzooï* are all superb. In summertime you can dine on an outdoors terrace beside the confluence of the Leie River and the Lieve canal, and next to a pretty little garden called Appelbrug Parkje.

Jan Breydelstraat 10 (opposite Design Museum Gent). ☎ 09/225-62-87. Main courses 18€–32€ (\$23–\$40); fixed-price menus 32€–50€ (\$40–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–10pm; Mon 7–10pm.

MODERATE

Brasserie Pakhuis ★★ FLEMISH/CONTINENTAL In a town where the Middle Ages are big, this place is almost modern and certainly hip. In a vast, beautifully restored 19th-century warehouse down a narrow lane, it's replete with painted cast-iron pillars, soaring wrought-iron balconies, oak and marble tables with specially designed table settings, and a granite mosaic floor. Although maybe too conscious of its own sense of style, Pakhuis (which means "warehouse" in Dutch) is all stocked up in matters of taste. The oyster and seafood platters are notable, and you won't go wrong with meat-based offerings like baked ham in a mustard sauce, or Flemish favorites like *waterzooï* (chicken stew) and *garnaalkroketten* (shrimp croquettes). Outside of lunch and dinner times, you can join the local smart-set for afternoon tea or for a late-night drink at the curving oak-and-riveted-copper bar.

Schuurkenstraat 4 (off Veldstraat). www.pakhuis.be. ☎ 09/223-55-55. Main courses 11€–19€ (\$13–\$24); fixed-price menus 23€–28€ (\$28–\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight.

Keizershof ★★ BELGIAN/CONTINENTAL Convivial and trendy, this retiring yet far-from-shy place on the garish market square has an attractively informal ambience and a positive price/quality ratio. Behind its narrow, hard-to-spot facade, even a capacity crowd of 150 diners can seem sparsely dispersed at the plain wood tables on multiple floors around a central stairwell. The decor beneath the timber ceiling beams is spare, tastefully tattered, and speckled with paintings by local artists. Service for office workers doing lunch is fast but not furious; in the evenings you're expected to linger. In summertime you can dine alfresco in a courtyard at the back. Despite being modern in tone and to an extent in cuisine, offering plenty of salads and other light fare, Keizershof is too smart to let you miss out on traditional Belgian standbys like *Gentse stoverij* (Ghent stew) and *mosselen* (mussels).

Vrijdagmarkt 47. ☎ 09/223-44-66. www.keizershof.net. Main courses 9€–17€ (\$11–\$21); fixed-price menus 14€–20€ (\$18–\$25). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

't Buikske Vol ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This is one of the city's gems, thanks to chef Peter Vyncke's insistence on the best ingredients, served in a cozy, intimate atmosphere. In recent times he has done even better, delivering the same quality at lower prices. It isn't open much, but when it is, it's busy.

Kraanlei 17. ☎ 09/225-18-80. www.buikskevol.com. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 14€–25€ (\$18–\$31); fixed-price menus 27€–42€ (\$34–\$52). AE, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri noon–2pm and 7–10pm; Sat 7–10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Amadeus ★ RIBS/CONTINENTAL Sure, there are vegetarian and fish plates, but all Ghent comes here for the all-you-can-eat spareribs dinner: a slab of cooked ribs served on a tray with a choice of sauces and a baked potato. If you're up to it, you can order another and another and another. A bottle of wine is on the table, and you pay for what you drink from it. The decor is sumptuously Art Nouveau with burnished wood, mirrors, and colored glass, and the ambience is relaxed.

Plotersgracht 8. ☎ 09/225-13-85. Spareribs dinner 19€ (\$23). MC, V. Daily 6pm–midnight.

GHENT AFTER DARK THE PERFORMING ARTS

From October to mid-June, international opera is performed in the 19th-century **De Vlaamse Opera**, Schouwburgstraat 3 (☎ 09/225-24-25). Ghent venues for those marvelous Belgian puppet shows are the folklore museum **Het Huis van Aaljn**, Kraanlei 65 (☎ 09/269-23-50); and **Teater Taptoe**, Forelstraat 91C (☎ 09/223-67-58).

BARS & TAVERNS

In typical Flemish fashion, Ghent's favorite after-dark entertainment is frequenting atmospheric cafes and taverns. You should have a memorable evening in any one you choose. **De Witte Leeuw**, Graslei 6 (☎ 09/233-37-33), has a 17th-century setting and more than 300 varieties of beer. At the Old Flemish tavern **Dulle Griet**, Vrijdagmarkt 50 (☎ 09/224-24-55), also known as **Bieracademie**, you'll be asked to deposit one of your shoes before being given a potent Kwak beer in the too-collectible glass with a wood frame that allows the glass to stand up—you, too, might need artificial support if you drink too many of this or any of the other 250 different beers in stock. The smallest building on Graslei, the former Toll House, is now a nice little tavern called **Het Tolhuisje**, Graslei 10 (☎ 09/224-30-90).

Groentenmarkt, near the Gravensteen, makes for a pretty good pub-crawl in an easily navigable area. In an old canal house, **Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant**, Groentenmarkt 9 (☎ 09/225-06-80), has more than 100 different Belgian beers, including locally made Stopken. Of all the gin joints in town, **'t Dreupelkot**, Groentenmarkt 12 (☎ 09/224-21-20), has to be the best. Ask owner Paul to recommend one of his 100 or so varieties of *jenever* (a stiff spirit similar to gin), served in tiny (but deadly) little glassfuls. Or walk straight in and boldly go for a 64-proof Jonge Hertekamp or a 72-proof Pekèt de Houyeu; if they don't knock you down, you may be up for an 8-year-old 100-proof Filliers Oude Graanjenever or a 104-proof Hoogspanning. Across the tramlines, **Het Galgenhuisje**, Groentenmarkt 5 (☎ 09/233-42-51), the oldest drinking spot in town, is a tiny and, perforce, intimate place popular with students. It has a fine restaurant, 't Galgenkelder, downstairs in the cellar.

2 Antwerp ★★

48km (30 miles) N of Brussels; 51km (31 miles) NE of Ghent

Antwerp (Antwerpen) is one of western Europe's most hidden gems. Most people think of it only as a port and center of the diamond trade. Yet it is also easy-going, stylish, and filled with the monuments of a wealthy medieval and Renaissance period. Given that the city boasts a magnificent cathedral, a fine arts museum full of Flemish masterpieces, a maze of medieval streets in the town center, and a vibrant nightlife and cultural scene, it's amazing that Antwerp (pop. 450,000) has been relatively neglected by tourists. Suffice it to say that Amsterdammers head for Antwerp when they want to have a good time in a Low Countries' Golden Age city.

As home to the world's fifth largest port, Antwerp has all the liveliness, sophistication, and occasional seediness that you would expect. It is also the acknowledged "Diamond Center of the World," the leading market for cut diamonds and second only to London as an outlet for raw and industrial diamonds. The diamond business is worth a sparkling \$23 billion a year, which swamps Amsterdam's \$1 billion—though you would never guess as much from the noise the Dutch city makes about its jewels and the discreet silence maintained by the Belgians.

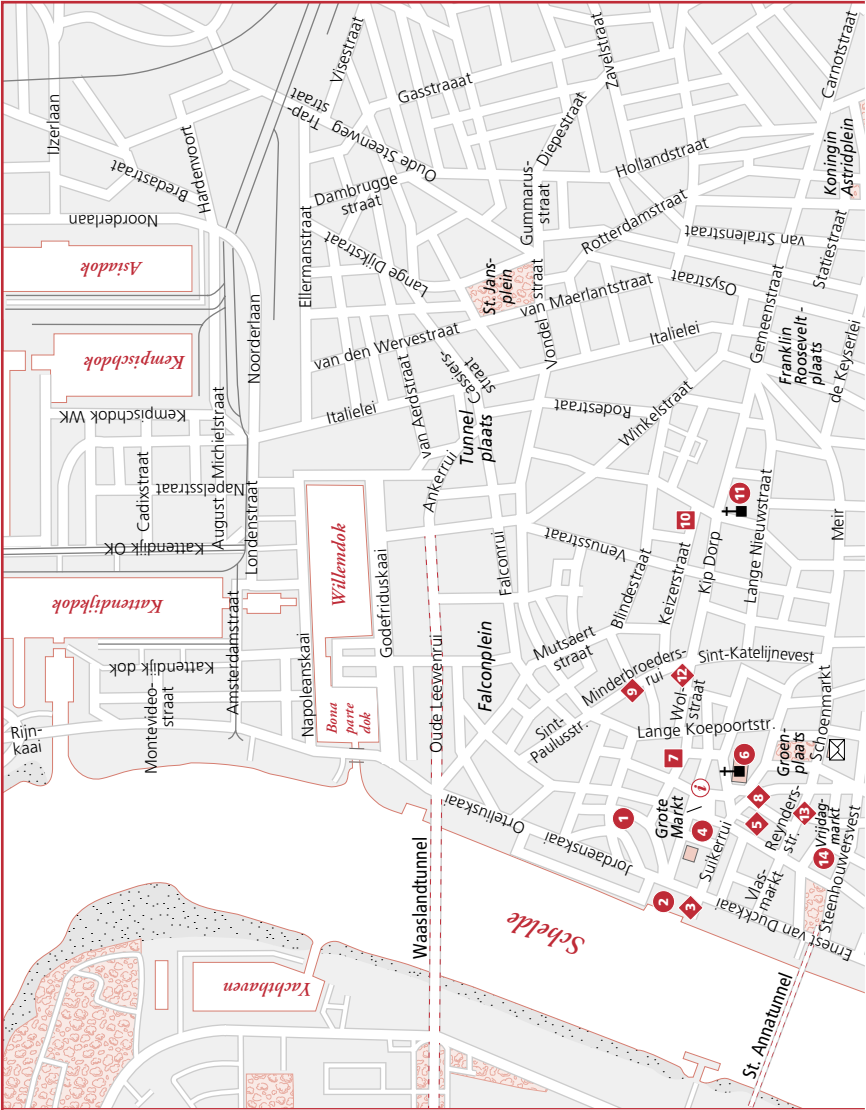
ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **Brussels National Airport** is the main international airport for Antwerp (see "Orientation," in chapter 4). Antwerp's **Deurne Airport** (☎ 03/285-65-00) is 7km (4½ miles) east of the city; a few scheduled international flights arrive at Deurne. City bus service runs between the main road outside the airport and Pelikaanstraat in the city proper. Taxi fare to the city center is around 12€ (\$15).

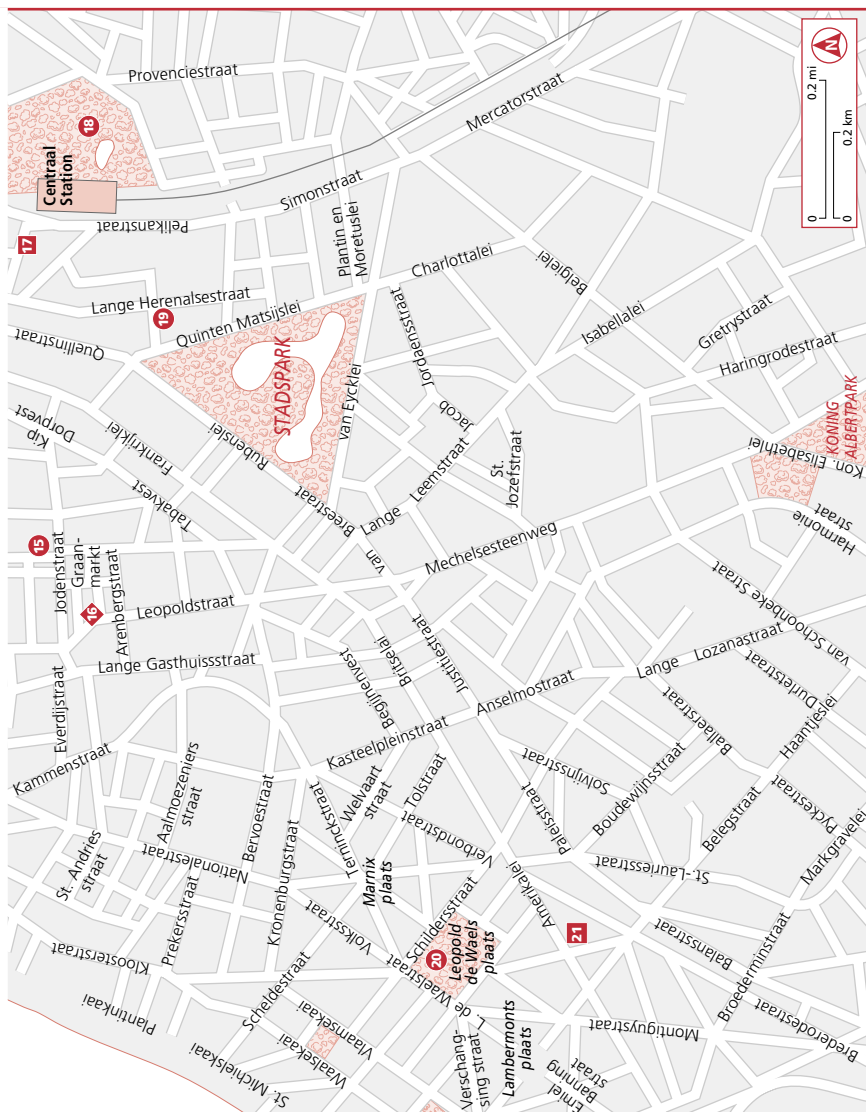
By Train Antwerp's two rail stations are **Centraal Station**, 1.5km (1 mile) east of the Grote Markt, on the edge of the city center, in an area that's currently the focus of a great deal of construction activity; and **Berchem**, 4km (2½ miles) south of the city center. Antwerp is on the **Thalys** high-speed train network that connects Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam (and Cologne via Brussels). Most Thalys trains stop at Berchem, but a few serve Centraal Station. Reservations are required for Thalys. There are coin-operated luggage lockers at Centraal Station. For schedule and fare information, and for all train reservations, call ☎ 02/528-28-28.

By Bus Most long-distance buses arrive and depart from the **bus station** on Franklin Rooseveltplaats, a short distance northwest of Centraal Station.

Antwerp



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 - Diamond Museum **19**
 - Antwerp Zoo **18**
 - Cathedral of Our Lady **6**
 - De Steen **2**
 - Plantin-Moretus Museum **14**
 - Royal Museum of Fine Arts **20**
 - Rubens House **15**
 - Sint-Jacobskerk **11**
 - Stadhuis **4**
 - Vleeshuis **1**



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Alfa De Keyser 17
- Prinse 10
- Rubens-Grote Markt 7
- Rubenshof 21

DINING ◆

- De Foyer 16
- De Manie 12
- La Pérouse 3
- Pottenbrug 9
- Rooden Hoed 8
- Sir Anthony van Dijk 5
- 't Fornuis 13



Church

Information

Post office

By Car Major highways connecting to Antwerp's R1 Ring Expressway are A1/E19 from Brussels via Mechelen, and from Amsterdam; A12 from Brussels via Laeken; A14/E17 from Ghent; and N49 from Knokke, Bruges, and Zeebrugge, bypassing Ghent.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Antwerpen**, Grote Markt 13, 2000 Antwerpen (☎ 03/232-01-03; fax 03/231-19-17; www.visitantwerpen.be; tram: 2, 3, 4, 8, or 15). The office is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:45pm, Sunday and holidays from 9am to 4:45pm. An **Info Desk** at Koningin Astridplein 26, outside Centraal Station, is open the same hours as the main tourist office.

GETTING AROUND Antwerp is a good city for pedestrians, its major sightseeing attractions easily reached from one major street, which changes its name as it goes along. Besides walking, trams are the best way to get around the city; a single fare is 1.20€ (\$1.50). The most useful trams for tourists are lines 2 and 15 that run between Groenplaats, near the cathedral, and to Centraal Station. Public transportation information is available from a kiosk inside Centraal Station, and by calling ☎ 070/22-02-00.

The numbers to call for a taxi are ☎ 03/646-83-83 and 03/238-38-38. Taxis cannot be hailed on the street but can be found at stands. The fare for the first kilometer or part thereof is 2.50€ (\$3.15) between 6am and 10pm, and 4.50€ (\$5.65) from 10pm to 6am; each additional kilometer costs 1.05€ (\$1.30) throughout the day or night.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The most colorful part of Antwerp is the medieval town center that fans out from the Grote Markt in a warren of winding streets. South of the town center is a fascinating district of shipping warehouses renovated into trendy bars, restaurants, and art galleries. Head to the streets around Vlaamsekaai and Waalsekaai.

Antwerp is a good walking city. Its major sightseeing attractions are easily reached from one major street that changes its name as it goes along: Italiëlei, Frankrijklei, Britselei, and Amerikalei. Most sights are within easy walking distance of the town center, but if the cobblestone streets start to wear through your shoes, you can always hop onto a tram.

Warning: The area around Centraal Station, east of De Keyserlei and Koningin Astridplein, is somewhat seedy and has drug and prostitution problems.

Note: For many of the museums and churches in Antwerp (including some of those reviewed below), you can get information on the Web by visiting their common sites, respectively www.museum.antwerpen.be and www.topa.be.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen (Antwerp Royal Museum of Fine Arts) ★★☆☆☆ Housed in this impressive neoclassical building is the KMSKA's collection of paintings by Flemish masters that is second to none in the world. The marble entrance hall has frescoes painted by Rubens and is alone just about worth the price of admission. Among them are more Rubens

Impressions

This goodly ancient City methinks looks like a disconsolate Widow, or rather some super-annuated Virgin that hath lost her Lover . . .

—James Howell (1619)

masterpieces in one place than anywhere else. To see them, pass through the ground-floor exhibitions of more modern artists' canvases (including works by Ensor, Magritte, Permeke, and Delvaux) and ascend to the second floor, where you find Rubens, Jan van Eyck, Roger van der Weyden, Dirck Bouts, Hans Memling, the Brueghel family, Rembrandt, and Hals. All told, these walls hold paintings spanning 5 centuries.

Leopold de Waelplaats 2. ☎ 03/238-78-09. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors and students, free for children under 18. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Dec 25.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal (Cathedral of Our Lady) ★★☆☆ A masterpiece of Brabant Gothic architecture, this towering edifice, the largest church in the Low Countries, is simply stunning. Begun in 1352 and completed by around 1520, it stands on the site of a 10th-century chapel dedicated to the Virgin that grew to be a church in the Romanesque style. There are seven aisles and 125 pillars, but of the original design's five towers, only one was completed. This one is the tallest church spire in the Low Countries, 123m (403 ft.) high, and the idea that the designers could have planned to construct five such behemoths is a graphic indication of the wealth and power of Antwerp at that time.

The cathedral's history includes a destructive fire in 1533, devastation by iconoclasts during the religious wars of the 16th century, deconsecration by anticlerical French revolutionaries in 1794 (resulting in the removal of its Rubens paintings), and a slow rebirth that began after Napoléon's defeat in 1815. Its interior embellishment is a mix of baroque and neoclassical. Today, the cathedral houses four Rubens masterpieces, all of them altar pieces: *The Raising of the Cross* (1609–10), *The Descent From the Cross* (1611–14), *The Resurrection* (1612), and the *Assumption of the Virgin* (1626). Nicolas Rombouts's *Last Supper* (1503), an impressive stained-glass window, is also outstanding. Among many other notable works of art is a superb *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1350) in Carrara marble, by the anonymous Master of the Maasland marble Madonnas. During July and August, the cathedral bells peal out in a carillon concert on Sunday from 3 to 4pm and on Monday from 8 to 9pm.

Handschoenmarkt (off of the Grote Markt). ☎ 03/213-99-51. www.dekathedraal.be. Admission 2€ (\$2.50), free for children under 12. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat and the day preceding a religious holiday 10am–3pm, Sun and religious holidays 1–4pm. Closed to tourist visits during services. Metro: Groenplaats.

Rubenshuis (Rubens House) ★★☆☆ Touch Antwerp's cultural heart at the house where Antwerp's most illustrious son, the artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), lived and worked. A visit here is essential if you are fully to appreciate what you see elsewhere in the city. Far from being the stereotypical starving artist, Rubens amassed a tidy fortune from his paintings that allowed him to build this impressive mansion in 1610, along what was then a canal, when he was 33. Today you can stroll past the baroque portico into its reconstructed period rooms and through a Renaissance garden, and come away with a good idea of the lifestyle of a patrician Flemish gentleman of that era. Examples of Rubens's works, and others by master painters who were his contemporaries, are scattered throughout. In the dining room, look for a self-portrait painted when he was 47 years old, and in another room a portrait of Anthony van Dyck as a boy. Rubens collected Roman sculpture, and some of the pieces in his sculpture gallery appear—reproduced in amazing detail—in his paintings. Don't just stay inside the house: The superb, restored ornamental garden from 1615 is well worth a stroll around, and a nice place to take a breather in spring and summer.

Wapper 9–11 (a short walk east of the center). ☎ 03/201-15-55. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and children under 19. Tues–Sun (also Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, Dec 25–26. Tram: 2, 3, or 15 to Meir; 4, 7, or 8 to Meirbrug/Katelijnenvest; 12 or 24 to Frankrijklei.

AROUND THE GROTE MARKT

A lively 16th-century square lined with outdoor cafe and restaurant terraces, the Grote Markt, though not quite as dramatic as Brussels's Grand-Place, is no less the focus of the city's everyday life, and is generally less crowded than the capital's square. The fountain in the center recalls the legend of Druon and Brabo.

Stadhuis (City Hall) ★ The Renaissance City Hall, designed by Cornelius Floris and built in 1561–65, is an outstanding example of the Flemish mannerism that replaced the formerly supreme Gothic style. It was burned down by the Spanish in 1576, and rebuilt as you see it now. Look for the frescoes by Leys, an important 19th-century painter; some interesting murals; and, in the burgo-master's chamber, an impressive 16th-century fireplace.

Grote Markt. ☎ 03/221-13-33. Guided tours 1€ (\$1.25). Mon–Wed and Fri–Sat 11am, 2pm, and 3pm (council business permitting).

Vleeshuis (Butcher's Hall) Around the square and in the surrounding streets are excellent examples of 16th-century guild houses. One worth a visit is this magnificent Gothic structure. A short walk from the Stadhuis, it now functions as a museum of archaeology, ceramics, arms, religious art, sculpture, musical instruments, coins, and medieval furnishings. The collections give a good general idea of daily life in Antwerp during the 16th century, as do the historical paintings (look for the striking *The Spanish Fury*, picturing Antwerp's darkest hour). There's also an Egyptian section.

Vleeshouwersstraat 38–40. ☎ 03/233-64-04. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1.25€ (\$1.55) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and children under 19. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, Dec 25–26.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

De Steen ★ Always referred to simply as “The Steen,” this medieval fortress on the banks of the Scheldt dates from the early 13th century, making this Antwerp's oldest building. You can walk into the courtyard even when the museum is closed. The glowering fortress has served a number of purposes over the centuries. Today it houses the **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum (National Maritime Museum)** ★★. There's an extensive library on river navigation and almost every nautical subject, as well as exhibits about the development of the port and maritime history in general. The most eye-catching are models of old-time sailing ships, like those of the Belgian East India Company clippers. Next to the museum there's an interesting industrial archaeological division with the remains of the old Antwerp port; this division is open from Easter to November 1.

Steenplein 1 (at the Scheldt River). ☎ 03/201-93-40. www.museum.antwerpen.be/scheepvaartmuseum. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) seniors, people of disability and companion/children under 19 free. Tues–Sun (also Easter Mon, Pentecost Mon) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, Dec 25–26. Metro: Groenplaats.

MoMu ★ Based on the collection of the shuttered Textile and Costume Museum Vrieselhof, the exhibits of the Antwerp Fashion Museum consists of clothing, lace, embroidery, fabrics, and tools for textile processing dating back to the 16th century, complemented with pieces by contemporary Belgian designers.

MoMu aims to combine a varied exhibits policy, with publications, a scientific library and spacious public reading room, lectures, conferences, workshops, and movies. The location of MoMu ties in closely with this vision. Together with the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI) and the renowned fashion department of the Antwerp Royal Academy of Fine Arts, MoMu is housed in the beautifully restored 19th-century ModeNatie building, in the cultural and historic center of town.

Nationalestraat 28. ☎ 03/470-27-70. www.momu.be. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults; 4€ (\$5) students, seniors, and children 12–18; free for children under 12. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm (1st and 3rd Thurs of month 9pm). Closed Jan 1, July 21, Aug 15, Dec 25. Tram: 2 or 8.

Plantin-Moretus Museum ★ In the late 1500s, Christoffle Plantin established an influential printing workshop in this stately patrician mansion in the city center. Its output included an astonishing multilanguage (Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Aramaic) edition of the Bible and translations of other great works of literature. Plantin's name survives in today's publishing world as a widely used typeface. His grandson, Balthasar Moretus, was a contemporary and close friend of Rubens, who illustrated many of the books published by the Plantin-Moretus workshop and also painted the family portraits you see displayed here. The museum's exhibits include an antique *Librorium Prohibitorum*, a catalog of books proscribed by the church as being unfit for pious consumption.

Vrijdagmarkt 22. ☎ 03/221-14-50. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and children under 19. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, Dec 25–26.

Sint-Jacobskerk (St. James's Church) ★ This flamboyant Gothic church with a baroque interior is the final resting place of Peter Paul Rubens. His vault is in the Rubens Chapel, one of seven chapels bordering the opulent semicircular ambulatory behind the high altar. Several of Rubens's works are here, as well as some by van Dyck and other prominent artists. Rubens is joined in his eternal slumber by a glittering collection of Antwerp's one-time high and mighty, and by a glittering collection of gold and silver and religious objects.

Lange Nieuwstraat 73–75 (a short walk east of the city center, north of the Rubens House). ☎ 03/225-04-14. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) students, free for children under 12. Apr–Oct daily 2–5pm; Nov–Mar Wed–Mon 2–5pm. Closed to tourist visits during services.

Zoo Antwerpen ★ *Kids* This fine (but expensive) 25-acre zoo is a great place to take the kids. Its large collection of animals from around the world roam through spaces bounded for the most part by artificial reproductions of natural barriers. There's an aquarium, winter garden, Egyptian temple (which houses elephants), anthropoid house, museum of natural history, deer parks, Kongo peacock habitat, and planetarium. The zoo is something of an Art Nouveau masterpiece, though whether or not the animals appreciate this is hard to tell.

Koningin Astridplein 26 (just east of Centraal Station). ☎ 03/202-45-40. www.zooantwerpen.be. Admission 14€ (\$18) adults, 9.50€ (\$12) seniors and children 3–11, free for children under 3. Daily from 10am; closing time: Jan–Feb and Nov–Dec 4:45pm; Mar–Apr and Oct 5:30pm; May–June and Sept 6pm; July–Aug 7pm. Metro: Centraal Station.

ANTWERP'S PORT

When you come down to it, if there were no Scheldt River, there would be no Antwerp. The city's prime location just above the point where the river meets the tidal Scheldt Estuary made it an important Gallo-Roman port in the 2nd

century B.C. For many centuries after that, Antwerp attracted a bevy of covetous invaders. Antwerp was a trading station of the powerful medieval Hanseatic League, but unlike Bruges, did not have the status of a full-fledged league *Kontor*. In the port's early days, ships moored beside the city center; nowadays the port has moved some 13km (8 miles) downstream to the huge excavated Zandvliet docks that jam up against the Dutch border.

The port is well worth a visit, if only to appreciate its vast size. The entire harbor/dock complex covers 65 sq. km (25 sq. miles). Each year, 16,000 ships visit, transporting 100 million metric tons of cargo. Port enterprises employ 57,000 people and add more than \$6 billion to the national economy.

ORGANIZED TOURS

WALKING TOURS From July to September, a daily guided tour of the city center, in English (and French), departs at 2pm from the tourist office; the cost is 6€ (\$7.50) for adults and 3€ (\$3.75) for accompanied children under 12. The tourist office can also arrange for a qualified guide to accompany you on private walking tours around the city at a set rate of 50€ (\$63) for the first 2 hours and 25€ (\$31) for each additional hour. There are also clearly marked self-guided walks, with brochures available from the tourist office.

BY BOAT Do take a cruise around Antwerp's awesome harbor, which handles 16,000 ships and 100 million tons of cargo a year. Most departures are from the Steen waterfront on the Scheldt. **Flandria Line** (☎ 03/231-31-00) runs a 2½-hour harbor cruise for 13€ (\$16) for adults and 7€ (\$8.75) for children. In July and August, there's a delightful harbor dinner cruise from 8 to 10:30pm, for 50€ (\$63) for adults and 30€ (\$38) for children. A 50-minute excursion on the river is less interesting but still worthwhile, with half-hourly departures during summer months. The cost is 7€ (\$8.75) for adults and 4€ (\$5) for children.

BY BUS The **Antwerp Diamond Bus** is a double-decker bus that tours the city's main tourist areas and sights on a regular circuit. You can hop on and hop off at various points on the tour. Tickets, valid for 24 hours, are 10€ (\$13) for adults, 9€ (\$11) for seniors and students, and 5€ (\$6.25) for children.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE TO MODERATE

Rubens-Grote Markt ★★ Only steps away from the Grote Markt, this comfortable hotel combines the classical elegance of a 16th-century mansion with plush, modern furnishings. The spacious rooms are individually decorated. Shady rooms are perked up with bright, tropical colors, and sunny rooms have more muted tones. Some of the rooms overlook an enclosed garden where breakfast is served in the summer.

Port in a Storm

The maritime approaches to Antwerp harbor are all through Dutch territory, and they need to be constantly dredged if it is to continue handling deep-draught vessels. In this solitary instance, the Dutch, whose dredging skills are world-renowned, are slow and unenthusiastic practitioners of the art. But to hear them tell it, this has nothing to do with keeping Rotterdam's nose ahead of Antwerp's in a competitive world.

The Diamond Quarter

The raw facts and figures are sparkling enough: Some 85% of the world's rough diamonds, 50% of its cut diamonds, and 40% of its industrial diamonds are traded here annually—together they're valued at more than \$12.5 billion and account for roughly 7% of total Belgian exports. The diamond cutters of Antwerp are world renowned for their skill, which you can admire in the Diamond Quarter, a surprisingly down-at-heels-looking area, only steps away from Centraal Station. More than 12,000 expert cutters and polishers are at work in the Diamond Quarter, at 380 workshops, serving 1,500 firms and 3,500 brokers and merchants. The trade is supervised by Antwerp's Hoge Raad voor Diamant (Diamond High Council).

In addition to perusing the shops and visiting a workshop (see "Shopping," below), a good place to get close to the city's diamond trade is the **Diamantmuseum Provincie Antwerpen (Diamond Museum Province of Antwerp)**, Koningin Astridplein 19–23 (☎ 03/202-48-90; www.diamantmuseum.be; Metro: Centraal Station). Exhibits trace the history, geology, mining, and cutting of diamonds. Diamond-cutting and polishing demonstrations are on Saturday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30pm. The museum is open Thursday to Tuesday from 10am to 5:30pm. Admission is 6€ (\$7.50) for adults, 4€ (\$5) for seniors and ages 12 to 26, and free for children under 12.

Oude Beurs 29 (1 block north of the Grote Markt), 2000 Antwerpen. ☎ 03/222-48-48. Fax 03/225-19-40. www.hotelrubensantwerp.be. 36 units. 145€–255€ (\$164–\$556) double; 445€ (\$556) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ (\$19). Tram: 10, 11 to Wolstraat. **Amenities:** Bar; limited room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Alfa de Keyser ★ This well-located, seven-story, modern hotel has nicely furnished rooms. Some are modern in style, decorated with a pastel color scheme, while others are more classic in tone (done in warmer, wine-red colors). The front lobby is dark and quiet, with plants, a piano, and luxurious sofas. Guests can enjoy the fine Chagall restaurant and Paint Pot bar.

De Keyserlei 66–70 (beside Centraal Station), 2018 Antwerpen. ☎ 03/206-74-60. Fax 03/232-39-70. www.nh-hotels.com. 123 units. 110€–200€ (\$138–\$250) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: Centraal Station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; heated indoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Prinse ★ This efficient hotel offers coolly modern rooms in a restored 16th-century residence. Although some might find the black leather-and-wood style a bit impersonal, the hotel has a pleasant terrace and is on a quiet street between Centraal Station and the town center.

Keizerstraat 63, 2000 Antwerpen. ☎ 03/226-40-50. Fax 03/225-11-48. www.hotelprinse.be. 33 units. 112€–137€ (\$140–\$171). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ (\$10). Tram: Meir. *In room:* TV.

INEXPENSIVE

Rubenshof ★★ This small family hotel used to be a residence of the Belgian cardinal—perhaps that explains the heavenly atmosphere. The place has a remarkably beautiful interior, with painted ceilings, chandeliers, and a great deal of ornamentation, some of it Art Nouveau. The guest rooms are somewhat plainer than the public spaces, but they're still comfortably and adequately furnished.

Amerikalei 115–117 (across from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts). ☎ 03/237-07-89. Fax 03/248-25-94. www.rubenshof.be. 22 units (14 with bathroom). 40€ (\$50) double without bathroom; 65€ (\$81) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 12, 24 to Brederodestraat. In room: No phone.

WHERE TO DINE
VERY EXPENSIVE

't Fornuis ★★ FRENCH Behind the heavy doors of a 16th-century stone house, this Michelin two-star restaurant offers the finest dining in town in an intimate room furnished in oak. Chef Johan Segers comes to your table to explain each succulent dish. Although you could hardly go wrong, the sole with rhubarb is particularly outstanding. Guests are also invited to visit the superb wine cellar, which contains 4,000 bottles of wine.

Reyndersstraat 24. ☎ 03/233-62-70. Reservations required. Main courses 22€–52€ (\$28–\$65). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 7–10pm.

EXPENSIVE

De Manie ★ FRENCH This bright, modern restaurant comes up with such originals as an appetizer of quail salad with goat cheese and artichoke, and baked goose liver with bilberries and honey, as well as innovative main dishes. Filet of hare with cranberries, chicory, and juniper sauce, and grilled wood pigeon with gratinéed Brussels sprouts, are both typical of menu specialties, which change every 6 months. The food is excellent, and the setting is very relaxing.

Hendrik Conscienceplein 3 (near Sint-Katelijnevest). ☎ 03/232-64-38. Main courses 24€–32€ (\$30–\$40); fixed-price menus 24€–46€ (\$30–\$58). AE, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm; Sun 6:30–9:30pm. Metro: Groenplaats.

La Pérouse FRENCH This floating restaurant is moored at the foot of the Suikerkui (during Aug, it abandons its purveyance of fine cuisine to take on full-time sightseeing voyages). The *waterzooï de poussin* is a model of how this thick, creamy stew should be prepared. An excellent fish dish is the *gegrilde zeeduivel met saffraan, jonge prei en geplette aardappel met wijngaardslakken* (grilled monkfish with saffron, young leek, and mashed potatoes with crushed vine leaves). Other specialties include lobster salad and steak.

Steenplein. ☎ 03/470-23-40. www.laperouse.be. Reservations required. Main courses 24€–40€ (\$30–\$50); fixed-price menus 48€–58€ (\$60–\$73). AE, V. Tues–Sat noon–midnight. Closed Aug. Bus: 1.

MODERATE

Pottenbrug ★ FLEMISH/ITALIAN The casual, relaxed atmosphere in this place, where you eat in cozy proximity to fellow diners, works well with the timber floorboards, the stove in full view, and a menu chalked on boards. The formula has changed little since Philip and Brigitte De Naeyer opened a quarter-century ago, even while the area has gone from seedy to chic, and it still appeals to a similar, arty clientele. But the menu, though it still offers traditional Flemish dishes with Italian accents, has moved with the times. Among the best choices are the *parelhoen met balsamico* (stuffed guinea-fowl in a balsamic sauce),

the simple but refreshing *zomerse pastasla van de chef* (chef's summer pasta salad), and salmon or lobster accompanied by fresh pasta and cherry butter. An unusual and delicious dessert choice is the *olijfolieijs met witte truffelchocolade* (olive-oil ice cream and white truffle chocolate).

Minderbroedersrui 38. ☎ 03/231-51-47. www.pottenbrug.com. Main courses 14€–19€ (\$18–\$24); *dagschotel* 13€ (\$16). AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm and 6:30–10pm; Sat 6:30–11pm. Metro: Groenplaats.

Rooden Hoed ★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This pleasant, old-fashioned restaurant is the oldest in Antwerp, having been in business for more than 250 years. Renovated in the summer of 2002, it serves good, hearty food, a mix of old-style regional cuisine and trendy new forms, at moderate prices. Mussels, a delicious *choucroute d'Alsace* (sausages with sauerkraut and mashed potatoes), chicken *waterzooï*, and fish specialties are all featured on the menu. Try an aperitif, or a snack, in the medieval cellar under the restaurant.

Oude Koornmarkt 25 (near the Cathedral). ☎ 03/233-28-44. www.roodenhoed.be. Main courses 12€–20€ (\$15–\$25); fixed-price menus 25€–40€ (\$31–\$50). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

Sir Anthony van Dijck ★★ BELGIAN/CLASSIC FRENCH A location amid the delightful 16th-century Vlaeykensgang courtyard's jumble of cafes, restaurants, and antique apartments all but guarantees a pleasant atmosphere here. This used to be a Michelin Star-rated restaurant, until owner and chef Marc Paesbrugge got tired of staying on the Michelin treadmill and chose to do something less stressful and more fun. Reopened as a notably relaxed brasserie-restaurant, in a sparsely elegant setting flooded with light from the old-world courtyard, it retains a commitment to good food.

Oude Koornmarkt 16. ☎ 03/231-61-70. www.siranthonyvandijck.be. Main courses 17€–28€ (\$21–\$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–1:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

INEXPENSIVE

De Foyer ★ INTERNATIONAL This magnificent brasserie is the foyer of the 19th-century Bourla Theater, and now one of Antwerp's most popular dining addresses. With its ornately painted dome, potted palms, red velvet drapes, and marble columns, you would expect prices to be a lot higher than they are. The daily lunch buffet is a bargain considering that it includes an array of fish and vegetable salads, soup, several hot dishes, cheese, and pastries. At least try to stop in for tea or drinks, if only to bask in the opulence.

Komedieplaats 18. ☎ 03/233-55-17. www.defoyer.be. Reservations recommended on weekends. Light meals 7.50€–15€ (\$9.40–\$19). Lunch buffet 18€ (\$23). MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–midnight; Sat 11am–midnight; Sun 11am–6pm.

SHOPPING

Antwerp yields not an inch to Brussels in the style wars—in fact, Antwerp is the more fashion conscious of the two. During the '80s and '90s, youthful local fashion designers, graduates of the city's Fine Arts Academy, made a major and enduring impact within Belgium, and established a substantial international reputation.

Expensive, upmarket shops, boutiques, and department stores abound in De Keyserlei and the Meir. For haute couture, go to Leopoldstraat; for lace, the streets surrounding the cathedral; for books, Hoogstraat; for electronics and antiques, Minderbroedersrui; and for diamonds, Appelmannsstraat and nearby streets, all near Centraal Station.

WHERE TO SHOP

A top Belgian fashion designer keeps shop at **Ann Demeulemeester's** (★ ★, Verlatstraat 38 (☎ 03/216-01-33; tram: 8 to Leopold de Waelplaats), in front of the Royal Fine Arts Museum. Demeulemeester, one of the “Antwerp Six,” turned down an offer from Naomi Campbell to model her clothes on the grounds that Campbell, though admittedly beautiful, was glamorous rather than elegant. This is the only place in the world where you can buy her complete lines of clothes, shoes, and accessories for both men and women. Space for displaying them is not a problem, at this former seaman's academy, a 19th-century listed building. It's open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 7pm.

Treat your feet to shoes by Anne Demeulemeester, and other top Flemish designers Dries Van Noten and Dirk Bikkembergs, at **Cocodrillo**, Schuttershofstraat 9A (☎ 03/233-20-93). **Gozo**, Steenhouwersvest 63 (☎ 03/226-24-58), serves up chic, affordable women's fashion, including Belgian designer Olivier Strelli's moderately priced 22 Octobre line.

For diamonds, visit the glittering jewelry and gold stores of the **Diamond Quarter**, around Centraal Station. At **Diamondland**, Appelmansstraat 33A (☎ 03/229-29-90; www.diamondland.be; Metro: Centraal Station), it's fascinating to watch expert cutters and polishers transform undistinguished stones into gems of glittering beauty—the “Antwerp cut” is said to give them more sparkle. This luxurious showplace, the city's biggest, provides a firsthand look at the process on a guided tour of its workrooms, and you can take home a souvenir of lasting value for a price considerably lower than you'd pay elsewhere (tax-free for residents of countries outside the European Union). The shop is open normal business hours Monday to Saturday, and also on Sunday and holidays April to October.

MARKETS

Antwerp's famed street markets are fun as well as good bargain-hunting territory. If you're in town on a Saturday from April to September, shop for a steal (that'll be the day) at the **Antiques Market**, Lijnwaadmarkt, Saturdays from Easter to October, from 10am to 6pm. The outstanding **Bird Market** is a general market that features live animals, plants, textiles, and foodstuffs; it takes place Sunday mornings in Oude Vaartplaats near the City Theater. At the **Friday Market**, on Wednesday and Friday mornings on Vrijdagmarkt facing the Plantin-Moretus Museum, household goods and secondhand furniture are put on public auction.

ANTWERP AFTER DARK

Antwerp is as lively after dark as it is busy during the day. To check what's going on while you're in the city, pick up a copy of *Antwerpen*, a monthly publication available at the tourist office.

Main entertainment areas are Grote Markt and Groenplaats, which both contain concentrations of bars, cafes, and theaters; High Town (Hoogstraat, Pelgrimstraat, Pieter Potstraat, and vicinity) for jazz clubs and bistros; Stadswaag for jazz and punk; and the Centraal Station area for discos, nightclubs, and gay bars. The red-light district here, concentrated in Riverside Quarter, is much seedier and less tourist-oriented than the one in Amsterdam.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Antwerp takes pride in being a citadel of Flemish culture. Two of the region's stellar companies are based here: the **Vlaamse Opera** (Flanders Opera),

The Belgian Muppets

Take the kids to the delightful **Van Campen Royal Puppet Theater**, Lange Nieuwstraat 3 (☎ 03/237-37-16), where the plot lines are always easy to understand (even if the language isn't).

Frankrijklei 3 (☎ 03/233-66-85); and the **Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen (Royal Flanders Ballet)**, Kattendijkdok-Westkaai 16 (☎ 03/234-34-38).

To house its vibrant cultural life, the city has no shortage of performance venues. Top of the line for theater and classical music is the **Stadsschouwburg**, Theaterplein 1 (☎ 03/227-03-06). For music and ballet, there's the classically orientated **Queen Elisabeth Concert Hall**, Koningin Astridplein 23–24 (☎ 03/203-56-00); and the more modernist **deSingel**, Desguinlei 25 (☎ 03/248-28-28).

MUSIC CLUBS

Along De Keyserlei and its side streets, there's a conglomeration of disco and strip bars—some very classy, others (obvious at a glance) frankly seedy or vulgar. If you're looking for a respectable disco, check the area between Groenplaats and Grote Markt. Look out for **De Blokhut**, Lange Herentalsestraat 6 (☎ 03/226-90-79); **Le Caveau**, Frankrijklei 18 (☎ 03/231-53-42); **Grippy's**, De Keyserlei 19–21 (☎ 03/233-19-22); **Hans Christian Andersen**, De Keyserlei 25 (☎ 03/226-48-63); and **Café d'Anvers**, Verversrui 15 (☎ 03/226-38-70).

BARS

No city watering-hole has a better outlook than **De Engel** ★, Grote Markt 3 (☎ 03/233-12-52), an old-style cafe in the main square, beside the fountain-sculpture of Silvius Brabo, where a *bolleke* (little ball) of Antwerp's very own De Koninck beer becomes a work of liquid art. **Paeters Vaetje**, Blauwmoezelstraat 1 (☎ 03/231-84-76), below the cathedral's soaring spire, is a great place for listening to the Monday evening carillon concert, and serves up 100 different brews. Get the abbey habit at **De Groote Witte Arend (The Great White Eagle)**, Reyndersstraat 12–18 (☎ 03/226-31-90), a cafe in a 17th-century former monastery, where customers are serenaded by classical music. Go underground to **De Pelgrom**, Pelgrimstraat 15 (☎ 03/234-08-09), in a candlelit, brick-arched cellar, where you can get convivial at long wood benches. A huge selection of beer, including virtually every Belgian brand, is displayed behind glass and served at candlelit tables in **Kulminator**, Vleminckveld 32 (☎ 03/232-45-38). Hot and cool at the same time, **Het Zottekot**, Vlaamse Kaai 21 (☎ 03/237-99-07), a wide step away from old-Antwerp style, is a wild, youth-oriented den where anything can happen—and generally does.

An altogether different kind of drinking experience is to be had at **De Vagant** ★, Reijndersstraat 25 (☎ 03/233-15-38). It deals exclusively in *jenever*, and has 220 varieties of this stiff grain spirit. An upstairs restaurant specializes in dishes with *jenever*-based sauces and its walls are a gallery of *jenever* memorabilia.

SIDE TRIPS FROM ANTWERP **LIER**

16km (10 miles) SE of Antwerp

A pretty, small town on the banks of the Nete River, Lier (Lierre in French) has canal-side scenes reminiscent of Bruges.

Essentials

GETTING THERE **Trains** for Lier depart hourly from Antwerp Centraal Station. There are buses every half hour or so from the **bus** station in front of Centraal Station, but they take longer. To go by **car**, take N10.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Lier** is in the Stadhuis (Town Hall), Grote Markt 57 (☎ 03/488-38-88; fax 03/488-12-76).

What to See & Do

Don't miss the town's **Zimmertoren (Zimmer Tower)** ⚙️, Zimmerplein (☎ 03/491-13-95), which dates from the 14th century. It's equipped with the remarkable Centenary Clock and Wonder Clock, which were installed by astronomy enthusiast Lodewijk Zimmer to explain "Life, the Universe, and Everything" to his fellow citizens. The clocks show the sun, moon, signs of the zodiac, seasons, tides on the River Nete and, quite possibly, tomorrow's movements on Wall Street. The tower is open daily in July and August from 9am to noon and 1 to 6pm; the rest of the year it closes at 4pm. Admission is 1.75€ (\$2.20) for adults and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

If you have time, visit also the **Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum)**, Florent van Cauwenberghstraat 14 (☎ 03/491-13-96), just off the Grote Markt in the town center. Its art collection includes paintings by Rubens, Jan and Pieter Brueghel, David Teniers the Younger, and local artist Isidore Opsomer. The museum is open April to October, Saturday to Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 5:30pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

HASSELT

77km (48 miles) SE of Antwerp

The heart of Belgium's potent *jenever* industry, Hasselt is a center for touring the eastern reaches of the Kempen moorland.

Essentials

GETTING THERE The town is easily reached by hourly **train** from Antwerp, or by a leisurely **drive** east on N10 and N2.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Hasselt** is at Lombaardstraat 3 (☎ 011/23-95-40; fax 011/22-50-23; www.hasselt.be).

What to See & Do

Centuries of the loving care devoted to the fiery drink *jenever* are recalled in the exhibits of the **Nationaal Jenevermuseum (National Jenever Museum)**, Witte Nonnenstraat 19 (☎ 011/24-11-44). These include its distillation, bottling, labeling and, of course, drinking. The *jenever* has the last word in a free sample that rounds off the visit with an appropriate glow of gratitude. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm; November to March, Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 12 to 18, and free for children under 12.

A nearby attraction, which is especially interesting for children, is the **Domein Bokrijk (Bokrijk Estate)** ⚔️ (☎ 011/26-53-00), 8km (5 miles) northeast of town. On the grounds of the big wooded estate is the **Openluchtmuseum (Open-Air Museum)**, consisting of old houses that provide detailed reconstructions of everyday Flemish life in pre-modern times. In some, craftspeople work at traditional trades, making the illusion that you have been transported back to a simpler age easier to sustain. Although all of the buildings and village sites are

clearly marked, I suggest you buy the English-language guide, which is an education in itself. In addition, the estate incorporates a big nature reserve. The museum is open April to September daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission Monday to Saturday is 6€ (\$7.50) for adults, 5€ (\$6.25) for seniors, 3€ (\$3.75) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6; Sunday 7€ (\$8.75) for adults, 6€ (\$7.50) for seniors, 4€ (\$5) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6. There is regular bus service from Hasselt, and train service from Brussels via Hasselt (Bokrijk has its own rail station). By car, take N75 from Hasselt.

TONGEREN

88km (55 miles) SE of Antwerp

Belgium's oldest town (Tongres in French), with a history dating back to Roman times, is at the eastern end of the Kempen moorland, close to the Dutch border. Ambiorix, chief of the ancient Eburones, whipped Julius Caesar and two Roman legions here, earning himself an appropriately martial statue in the town's Grote Markt.

Essentials

GETTING THERE There is frequent **train** service from Antwerp to Tongeren via Hasselt. By **car**, take N20 southeast from Hasselt.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Tongeren** is at Stadhuisplein 9, 3700 Tongeren (☎ **012/39-02-55**; fax 012/39-11-43; www.tongeren.be).

What to See & Do

Tongeren is home to the imposing **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwebasiliek (Basilica of Our Lady)** ⚔, a Gothic church with a Brabantine tower and a Romanesque cloister. Its rich *schatkamer* (treasury) contains rare religious objects from the Merovingian era (6th–8th century A.D.) up to the 18th century. The basilica is open daily from 9am to 4pm (the treasury Apr–Sept). Admission to the basilica is free; to the treasury 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults; 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors, students, and children ages 12 to 18; 0.50€ (65¢) for children ages 5 to 12; and free for children under 5.

Also worth a visit is the **Gallo-Romeins Museum (Gallo-Roman Museum)** ⚔, Kielenstraat 15 (☎ **012/67-03-33**), which contains 18,000 artifacts from prehistory through the Roman and Merovingian periods. The Roman period, when the town was known as Atuatuca Tungrorum, is especially well-represented, and includes huge and important collections of relics from its cemetery and the surrounding countryside. From the province of Limburg alone, there are collections of Roman-era pottery, glassware, bronze articles, terra-cotta, and sculptures. These are organized by theme to illustrate everyday life both in the country and in the city, and include exhibits on religious practices and traditions. The museum is open Monday from noon to 5pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. It's closed on January 1 and December 25. Admission is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for seniors and students, 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

The Belgian Coast & Ypres

Belgium's beaches are among the best in northern Europe. The country's 70km (44-mile) North Sea coastline is one continuous vista of fine white sand backed by dunes and dotted with seaside resorts. Unfortunately, to enjoy that vista you have to keep your eyes tightly focused on the beaches. Let your gaze drift inland, and it immediately bumps up against a line of hotels, restaurants, and apartment blocks that sarcastic critics have dubbed the Atlantic Wall (after Hitler's World War II coastal fortifications). Except for De Haan, each of the seacoast's resort towns is encumbered with an unattractive density of accommodations and other commercial developments that virtually neutralize the coast's natural beauty.

Despite that, most visitors seem relaxed about the situation. Even those who regret the marred natural surroundings find compensation in the superb food, good shopping, and general holiday-making hustle and bustle that the beach resorts offer. Kids love the place. For adults, the Belgian coast offers several different kinds of holiday—sea, sand, and sun; high-flying casino and nightclub action; an exercise in sheer gustatory gluttony; or

a series of seaside sightseeing expeditions. With judicious planning, it's possible to cover all these options in an incredibly short amount of time.

The beaches stretch back as much as 500m (1,626 ft.) at low tide, and their gently sloping decline into the sea makes for some of the safest swimming in Europe—although the authorities warn against swimming along isolated stretches. Just remember that this is the North Sea, not the Caribbean—instead of turquoise and sun-warmed, the water is usually gray and pretty darn cold. You can also skim along the beach on wind-blown sail carts (there's no shortage of wind), pedal beach buggies, or join the ever-hopeful sun worshippers in search of the perfect tan.

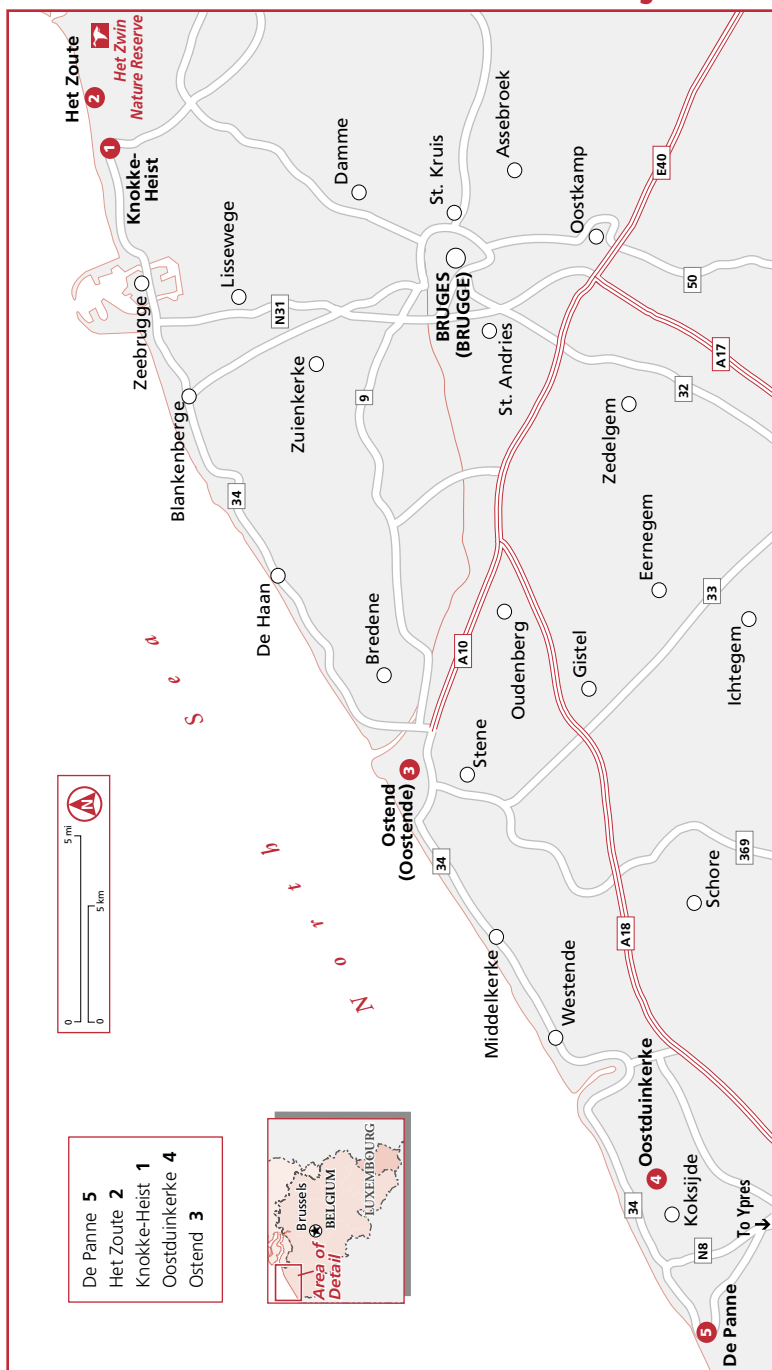
Accommodations can be hard to come by in July and August, despite the presence of thousands of holiday homes, apartments, and private homes offering bed and breakfast. You should plan well in advance to reserve for this period, either through the local tourist office or directly with your chosen lodging. Don't worry too much if you can't do this—you'll always be able to get something, but it might not be what you want, where you want, and at the price you want.

1 Ostend ★★

110km (69 miles) NW of Brussels; 20km (12 miles) W of Bruges

The Queen of the Coast's glitter has faded since its 19th-century heyday as a royal vacation spot and prestigious European watering hole, but plenty of reasons remain to justify a visit to Ostend (Oostende in Dutch; Ostende in French). Great sandy beaches, a casino, a racetrack, art museums, a spa, good shopping, an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool, outdoor pools filled with

The Belgian Coast



Moments Tracks Along the Coast

You won't need a car for sightseeing on the Belgian coast if you take the marvelous **Kusttram (Coast Tram)** (☎ 070/22-02-00), which runs the entire length of the coast, with departures every 10 to 20 minutes in summer, and every 30 minutes in winter. The Coast Tram is not only a great way to get around, it's an attraction in its own right. Charges vary from point to point; the full distance—from Knokke-Heist to De Panne (a 2-hr. ride)—costs 3.50€ (\$4.40). Special 1- and 3-day unlimited-travel tickets are 5€ (\$6.25) and 8€ (\$10), respectively. With one of these tickets, up to four children under 12 can ride free in addition to the ticket-holder.

heated seawater, sailing and windsurfing, and last but by no means least, a legitimate reputation of being a seafood cornucopia, all draw visitors to Belgium's most popular beach resort.

A good base for coastal touring thanks to a location at the midpoint of Belgium's North Sea coast, Ostend (pop. 70,000) has been attracting seawater enthusiasts since 1784, when the town council allowed Englishman William Hesketh to set up a drinks kiosk on the beach. Later, he introduced mobile beach huts that were hauled into the water by horses.

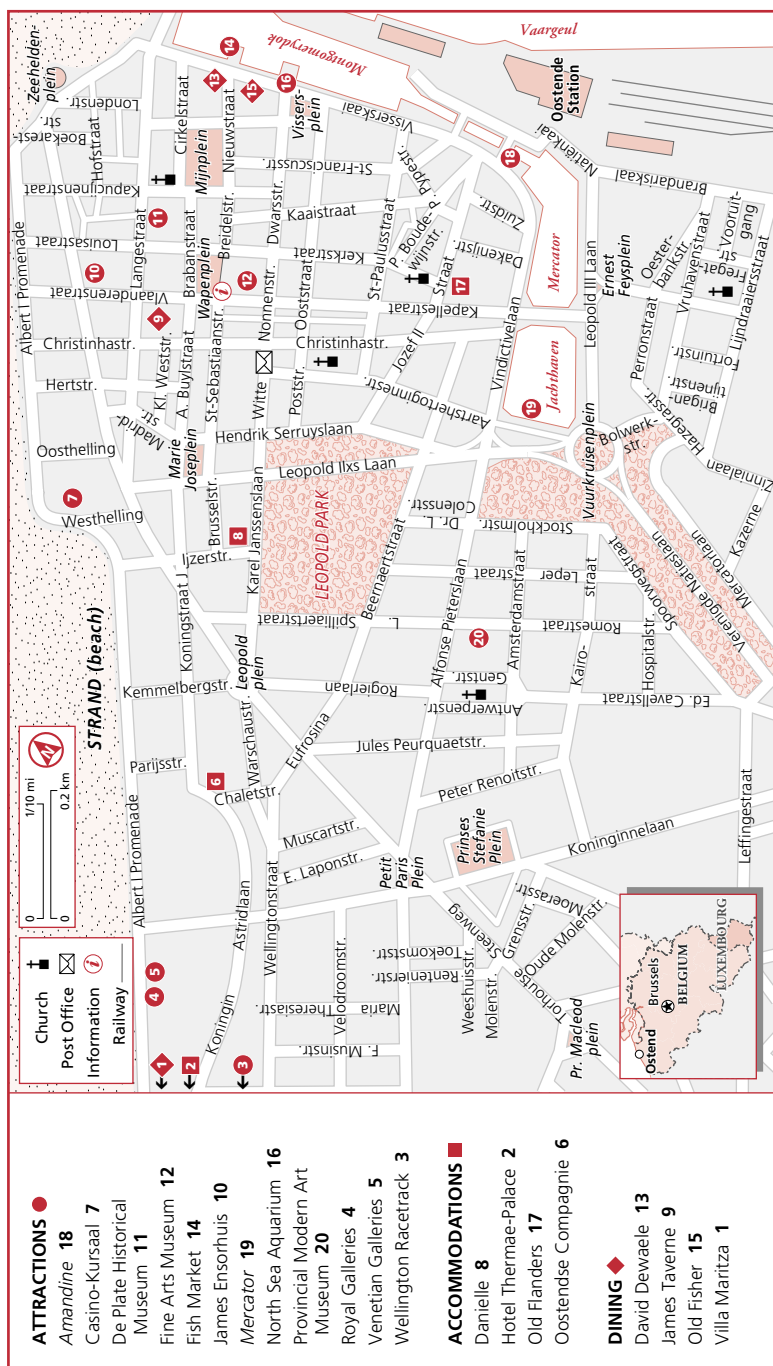
Before World War II, the elevated Albert I Promenade and Zeedijk that together parallel the entire length of the 6km (4 miles) of beach were lined with elegant seaside villas, including holiday homes of European royalty. Wartime destruction and post-war "improvements" brought down many of these fine old houses. From the debris sprung character-free modern hotels and apartment buildings. This lively recreational haven is very much a people's queen now, welcoming all income levels, and has little of the posh exterior that's so much a part of Knokke-Heist and Het Zoute, further up the coast.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains depart hourly from Brussels for the 70-minute trip, and from Bruges at least every half-hour for the 15-minute trip to **Oostende Station**, Stationsplein (☎ 059/70-15-17), an extravagant neo-baroque edifice from 1913 next to the harbor. The **Kusttram (Coast Tram)** has fast, frequent service connecting all the coast resorts (see "Tracks Along the Coast," above). By car from Brussels and Bruges, take A10/E40 west; from the other coast resorts, take the N34 coast road.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Oostende**, Monacoplein 2, 8400 Oostende (☎ 059/70-11-99; fax 059/70-34-77; www.toerisme-oostende.be). The office is open May to October, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 7pm, and Sunday from 10am to 7pm; November to April, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. A **tourist information booth** at the rail station is open July to August, daily from 9am to 1pm and 4 to 7:30pm.

GETTING AROUND Most points of interest in the town are sufficiently close together to reach on foot; or, you can rent a bike from the rail station for 9€ (\$11) a day. **De Lijn** bus lines 5, 6, and 39 go along the seafront to the west; if you want to get to points farther along the coast, in either direction, take the **Coast Tram** from a stop next to the rail station; for bus and tram information, call (☎ 070/22-02-00). You can pick up a **taxi** from ranks at the rail station and the Casino-Kursaal, or call **Taxibond** (☎ 059/70-27-27).



WHAT TO SEE & DO

With its Albert I Promenade and Zeedijk, which together form a kind of Boardwalk, along with its casino and beaches, Ostend is the nearest thing Belgium has to Atlantic City. But there's culture here, too, in notable art museums and links with modern artists.

The vast, neo-Gothic **Sint-Petrus-en Pauluskerk (St. Peter and Paul Church)**, from 1907, in Sint-Petrus-en-Paulusplein, has a suite of stained-glass windows and a memorial chapel dedicated to Belgium's first queen, Marie-Louise of Orléans, who died in Ostend in 1850.

Carillon concerts ring periodically through the summer from the belfry tower of the **Stedelijk Feest-en Kultuurpaleis (Municipal Festival and Culture Palace)**, in Wapenplein. From June to September there are concerts at the painted wrought-iron bandstand from 1895 on the same square.

The long beach west of the harbor has stretches that are under lifeguard surveillance in summertime from 10:30am to 6:30pm, and some stretches where swimming is not permitted at any time. Look for the signs that indicate both of these, and for the green, yellow, or red flags that tell you whether the sea conditions permit swimming.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Heemkundig Museum De Plate (De Plate Folklore Museum) Housed in the once dilapidated but now restored 19th-century summer residence of King Léopold I, the museum has interesting displays of Neolithic and Roman artifacts excavated in the vicinity, in addition to exhibits depicting the native dress, folklore, and history of Ostend. There's a re-created fisherman's pub, a fisherman's home, and an old tobacco shop. The Marine section deals with shipbuilding and fishing boats. Also, since the town had been, until recently, a port for the scheduled sea connection with England since 1846, there are exhibits on the Ostend–Dover ferry service.

Langestraat 69 (close to Wapenplein). ☎ 059/80-53-35. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, free for children under 15. Sat 10am–noon and 2–5pm; school holidays Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5pm.

James Ensorhuis (James Ensor House) ★ The house where Anglo-Belgian artist James Ensor (1860–1949) lived between 1916 and his death has been transformed into a museum of his life, restored to its condition when his aunt kept a ground-floor shells-and-souvenir shop here. Ensor's studio and lounge are on the second floor. If you're familiar with his paintings, you'll recognize some of the furnishings and views from the windows, but only reproductions are displayed. Born in Ostend, the son of a Belgian mother and an English father, and little understood or appreciated during his lifetime for his fantastical, hallucinatory, and sexually ambiguous visions, the pre-Expressionist painter is now considered a founder of modern art. *The Entry of Christ into Brussels* (1889), first exhibited publicly in 1929 and now in California's Getty Museum, is his most famous work, but Ostend appreciates him just as much for his carnival masks inspired by the town's Dead Rat Ball. Ensor is buried in the churchyard at Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Duinenkerk (Our Lady of the Dunes Church), in Dorpstraat.

Vlaanderenstraat 27 (off Wapenplein). ☎ 059/80-53-35. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, free for children under 17. June–Sept Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5pm; Nov–May Sat–Sun 2–5pm. Closed Oct.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Fine Arts Museum) ★★ Paintings by native sons James Ensor, Jan de Clerck, Constant Permeke, and Léon Spilliaert are

Fun Fact Fat Matilde

A reclining statue of a large and generously endowed nude woman, just outside the town's Léopold Park (which has a floral clock comprised of 20,000 flowering plants), is formally entitled *De Zee* (The Sea), but she is known locally as *Dikke Mathille* (Fat Matilda).

featured in this museum on the second floor of the Municipal Festival and Culture Palace in the town center. It also displays works by Belgian Impressionists.

Stedelijk Feest en Kultuurpaleis, Wapenplein. ☎ 059/80-53-35. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children 14–18, free for children under 14. Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5pm.

Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst (Provincial Modern Art Museum) ★ The Museum of Modern Art, known by its initials, PMMK, is set in a former department-store building in the town center. Its collection of more than 1,500 items, including paintings, sculpture, graphics, video, and film, gives a complete picture of modern art in Belgium from its very beginnings up to the present. There are also frequent international exhibitions, a children's museum, a workshop for youngsters, slide shows, and educational projects. The museum has excellent facilities for visitors with disabilities. The Art Café is a pleasant setting for a light lunch or the four-course business lunch.

Romestraat 11. ☎ 059/50-81-18. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children 16–18, free for children under 16. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm.

LEISURE ATTRACTIONS

Casino-Kursaal Oostende ★ One of Europe's largest casinos, the Kursaal's has an opulent interior replete with concert hall, panoramic rooftop restaurant (5pm–midnight), dance hall and, of course, gaming rooms, where you can play roulette, blackjack, and punto banco. The concert hall—which conductor Herbert von Karajan once said had the finest acoustics in the world—often is a venue for symphonic concerts, operettas, and ballet. There's been a casino at this spot since 1852, which itself replaced one in another location from 1837, but the elegant original was unlucky enough to occupy a prime spot for a concrete bunker in Adolf Hitler's Atlantic Wall coast defenses. You could be forgiven for thinking that the recently restored 1953 postmodern replacement isn't much of an improvement over the bunker.

Monacoplein. ☎ 059/70-51-11. Admission 4€ (\$5); passport required. Gaming rooms daily 3pm–7am.

Wellington Renbaan (Wellington Racetrack) The only racetrack on the coast, a post–World War II successor to an 1856 original, is just across from the seafront at the end of the Royal Arcades. There's a grass track for flat and hurdle racing and a lava track for the trotters. The tourist office can furnish a detailed schedule of races.

Koningin Astridlaan. ☎ 059/80-60-55. Admission to grandstand seats 12€ (\$15) Mon–Fri, 15€ (\$19) Sat–Sun and holidays. Free admission to the field opposite the grandstand. May–Sept; call for race times.

ROYAL OSTEND

Made fashionable by King Léopold I's decision to establish a holiday residence here in 1834, Ostend soon became a magnet for blue-blooded vacationers from Britain and the Continent. You can still view remnants of this vanished glory scattered around town. The **Venetiaanse Gaanderijen (Venetian Galleries)**, now an

Impressions

"You had some fun there, I suppose?" I put in, thinking of—well, of Ostend in August.

"Fun! A filthy hole I call it . . . there was nothing to do on shore."

—*The Riddle of the Sands*, Erskine Childers (1903)

Ostend is now one of the most fashionable and cosmopolitan watering-places in Europe.

—Baedeker Belgium and Holland (1905)

exhibits hall, is on the seafront Albert I Promenade. The **Koninklijke Gaanderijen (Royal Galleries)**, 400m (1,300 ft.) long, from 1906, also built under Léopold II's tutelage, connected the Royal Villa with the racetrack. They protected the king and his entourage from sun, wind, and rain, during their promenades. In 1930, the Thermae Palace (see "Where to Stay," below) was built at its center.

At the entrance to Venetian Galleries, you can view a sympathetic bronze sculpture from 2000 of Belgium's King Baudouin (1951–93) that, when compared with the resort's haughty sculptures of King Léopold I (1831–65) and King Léopold II (1865–1909), shows how times have changed for the royal family. **Léopold I**, the first king of the Belgians, adopts a heroic nationalistic pose in an equestrian sculpture on Léopold I Plein; and **Léopold II**, a pompous imperialistic pose in an equestrian sculpture on the seafront Zeedijk at the Venetian Galleries (see above). **Baudouin**, in keeping with his image as the "people's king," is depicted strolling in Ostend, wearing a raincoat.

The summer residence of Léopold I, a surprisingly ordinary-looking town house at Langestraat 69, having been abandoned by the royals and fallen into a crestfallen state, has been restored and houses the town's folklore museum (see "The Top Attractions," above). Its waterfront replacement, from 1954, is now the Oostendse Compagnie hotel (see "Where to Stay," below).

Léopold II earned a reputation for allowing the royal libido free rein. He supposedly stashed one of his mistresses, a Hungarian baroness, at the **Villa Maritza**, Albert I Promenade 76, one of a group of three surviving 19th-century waterfront villas, now an upscale restaurant (see "Where to Dine," below).

OTHER ATTRACTIONS/NAUTICAL STUFF

Unsurprisingly, there's a lot of sea-related stuff to see and do in Ostend. Kids will likely appreciate a ramble through the **Driemaster Mercator (Three-Master Mercator)**, Jachthaven Mercator (☎ 059/70-56-54), moored in a dock facing the rail station. Formerly a Belgian merchant marine training ship, the Mercator, a white-painted, three-masted schooner, is now a floating maritime museum. The ship is open May, June, and September, daily from 9am to noon and 1 to 6pm; July and August, daily from 9am to 7pm; in other months the open hours are uncertain, and you should call ahead. Admission (audio guide included) is 3.75€ (\$4.70) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for seniors, 1.80€ (\$2.25) for children ages 5 to 14, and free for children under 5.

Another interesting old boat is the **IJslandvaarder (Iceland Fishing Boat) Amandine**. Launched in 1961, she was the last Ostend trawler to work the rich fishing grounds off Iceland, and now sits in a dry basin with a plastic "sea," as a museum of the history and traditions of Belgium's Icelandic fishery.

You need to be up early to watch the stands at the **Vistrap (Fish Market)**, on *Visserkskaai*, being loaded with North Sea fish fresh off the boats from the previous night's catch. Sole, plaice, whiting, cod, bream, brill, eels, and shrimp are the main species on view and for sale.

Popular, if not exactly overwhelming, the **Noordzeeaquarium (North Sea Aquarium)**, *Visserkskaai* (☎ 059/50-08-76), by the old fishing harbor, features a nice display of North Sea flora and fauna, including fish, mollusks, crustaceans, polyps, anemones, and interesting shell and seaweed collections. It's open April to May, Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm, and weekends from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; June to September, Monday to Friday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2–6pm, and weekends from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; October to March, weekends from 10am–noon and 2–6pm. Admission is 2.75€ (\$3.45) for adults, and 1.75€ (\$2.20) for children under 15.

The vast, neo-Gothic **Sint-Petrus-en Pauluskerk (St. Peter and Paul Church)**, from 1907, in *Sint-Petrus-en-Paulusplein*, has a suite of stained-glass windows and a memorial chapel dedicated to Belgium's first queen, Marie-Louise of Orléans, who died in Ostend in 1850.

Belgium had a short-lived trading company designed to compete with the Dutch and British East India companies. **The Oostendse Compagnie (Ostend Company)** was founded in 1722, but survived the hostility of its two powerful rivals only until 1727. The company's former headquarters on *Wapenplein* have recently been restored.

ORGANIZED TOURS

Horse and Carriage tours (☎ 059/80-53-59) depart from beside the harbor on *Visserkskaai*. For guided walking tours, contact the tourist office (see above).

WHERE TO STAY

Daniëlle ★ Under its new owners, the modern *Daniëlle* has been kitted out with new furnishings and decor in each guest room. These add to the attraction of a hotel in a convenient location, close to the beach and casino. All the rooms are individually decorated, but the unifying themes are bright colors and light wood furnishings.

IJzerstraat 5, 8400 Oostende. ☎ 059/70-63-49. Fax 059/70-63-49. 24 units. 65€–75€ (\$81–\$94) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); babysitting. *In room:* TV.

Old Flanders ★★ This centrally located hotel has a cozy, country-house atmosphere. Guest rooms are modern and extensively furnished; each has a floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall wardrobe-and-shelves unit, on which the television stands. The bar has a cozy, antique feel, with a decor featuring a model sailboat and a model trawler and paintings of country scenes on the walls. The restaurant also has an elegant look, with a marble mantel surrounding the fireplace, a timbered ceiling, and brick arches.

Jozef II Straat 49, 8400 Oostende. ☎ 059/80-66-03. Fax 059/80-16-95. 15 units. 68€–84€ (\$85–\$105) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ (\$10). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; babysitting. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Fun Fact Wild Life

Belgium's first naturist beach opened in 2001, at *Bredene-aan-Zee*, 2km (1 mile) east of Ostend, prompting a sudden surge in binocular-toting "bird-watchers" on this stretch of the seacoast.

Fun Fact **Gaye Old Time**

Marvin Gaye's 1982 classic soul torch song *Sexual Healing*, a million-selling Grammy winner, was written during an 18-month retreat in 1981 and 1982 the troubled singer took in the unlikely haven of Ostend.

Oostendse Compagnie ★★☆☆ One of the best hotels on the seacoast, this excellent small hotel in a former royal villa retains an atmosphere of “home,” though admittedly it’s home on a grand scale. A pretty terrace and garden face the sea; floor-length windows with the same view line the drawing room; and the dining room is known for its excellent kitchen. The guest rooms are beautifully furnished, much like those in a private home, and the two suites provide such perfect comfort and beauty that they’ll tempt you to settle in for a long spell. This is a very popular place, so book as far ahead as possible. The French—with a dash of Asian influence—Au Vigneron restaurant has a sea view and is very popular locally.

Koningstraat 79, 8400 Oostende (on the beachfront near the casino; entrance at rear). ☎ 059/70-48-16. Fax 059/80-53-16. 15 units. 125€–160€ (\$156–\$200) double; 185€–245€ (\$231–\$306) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Oct and Mar 1–15. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; lounge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Thermae Palace ★★☆☆ This slightly old-fashioned Art Deco hotel just off the beachfront is an integral part of the sprawling thermal-baths complex. Constructed in the 1930s, the building is still a prominent local landmark today—a reminder of Ostend’s previous glory as an exclusive resort. The hotel has comfortable, attractive, fairly standard guest rooms, many with a sea view. The French restaurant Périgord serves high-quality cuisine; the Paddock bistro is more casual.

Koningin Astridlaan 7, 8400 Oostende. ☎ 059/80-66-44. Fax 059/80-52-74. 128 units. 125€–175€ (\$156–\$219) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French/Belgian); bar; lounge; concierge; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Diners pile into Ostend with fish on their mind. Visserskaai (Fishermen’s Wharf), along the harbor, is lined with fish restaurants and is the most obvious setting for both sit-down dining in restaurants and for great snacks from water-side fish stalls. None of these eateries are bad, though most are aimed squarely at the tourist market (the two reviewed below are among exceptions). You also find fine restaurants along the seafront Albert I Promenade and at spots hidden away in the old town. With 250 eateries at hand, you won’t be likely to complain about lack of choice.

David Dewaele ★★☆☆ SEAFOOD/FRENCH This family-owned restaurant has a strong local following. Chef Dewaele has worked for the highly regarded De Karmeliet in Bruges and the Sea Grill in Brussels. The exterior looks vaguely like a low ship’s cabin on the outside; and a marine theme is maintained in the bright, elegant interior, with a decor of seashells, sailing ship photographs, and other nautical tokens. Most fish comes fresh from the North Sea and from the market across the street, with the more exotic red mullet and sea bass coming in from France. If you have breath enough, you can ask for *tongfilets met tomatenfonds en broodkruim van sjalotten* (sole filets on a base of tomato and crusted shallots). You can also choose meat menu dishes like *pigeon de Bresse*.

Visserskaai 39 (opposite Fish Market). ☎ 059/70-42-26. Main courses 17€–35€ (\$21–\$44); fixed-price menus 27€–50€ (\$34–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. July–Aug daily noon–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm; Sept–June Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm.

James Taverne ★★ *Finds* TRADITIONAL FLEMISH When Belgium's ace chefs, like Pierre Wynants from Brussels's *Comme Chez Soi*, wash up (so to speak) in Ostend, chances are you'll find them at this Old Flemish tavern in an Art Deco shopping gallery. Each will likely be tucking into a plate of two home-made *garnaalkroketten* (shrimp croquettes), accompanied by two slices of lemon and a sprig of crisply fried parsley, washed down with a glass of local Wieze beer. The Knaeps family has been serving these (and other traditional Flemish dishes) since 1954 and has a Zen-like faith in the humble North Sea shrimp, caught overnight, cooked in seawater on the boat, and eaten within the day on the sea-coast. They taste heavenly. The James's cozy and friendly atmosphere, along with a decor of marine paintings, antiques, and old photographs of both James Ensor and Ostend, are equally memorable.

James Ensor Galerij 34 (off Vlaanderenstraat). ☎ 059/70-52-45. Main courses 9.50€–18€ (\$12–\$22). Wed–Mon 10am–10pm.

Old Fisher ★ SEAFOOD/BELGIAN The Slegers family has produced one of the most consistently best seafood restaurants on the Fishermen's Wharf, which is about as physically close to fresh seafood as you can possibly get. Attentive service complements a tranquil setting of wood-paneled and mirrored walls, a stucco ceiling, and fine table linens; the place is posh enough to be a step up from the crowd without making hang-loose vacationers seem out of place. Menu items include an excellent bouillabaisse (fish soup); mussels, shrimps, and prawns in a range of dishes; and accomplished renditions of local standbys such as *sole Ostendaise* and turbot. You can also choose from a limited meat menu.

Visserskaai 34 (opposite Fish Market). ☎ 059/50-17-68. Main courses 18€–32€ (\$23–\$40); fixed-price menu 20€ (\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. July–Aug Thurs–Tues noon–2:15pm and 6–9:45pm; Sept–June Thurs–Mon noon–2:15pm and 6–9:45pm, Tues noon–2:15pm.

Villa Maritza ★★ SEAFOOD This exquisite restaurant is housed in a seaside villa built in 1885 that was once the holiday home of an eponymous Hungarian baroness (reputedly one of footloose King Léopold II's mistresses). Of the many ornate old mansions that once lined the shore, this is one of the few that survived World War II bombings and the far more destructive operations of post-war "developers." Inside, Ostend native Jacques Ghaye has created a sophisticated restaurant with an elegant cuisine. Seafood specialties vary with the season; all of them are culinary delights, but especially good options are the lobster with mixed vegetables and saffron, the lobster with red-wine sauce, and the pan-fried sole with green asparagus.

Albert I Promenade 76. ☎ 059/50-88-08. Main courses 14€–36€ (\$18–\$45); fixed-price menus 53€–65€ (\$66–\$81). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm; Sun 7–9:30pm.

AFTER DARK

Should you want no more than a quiet drink in the evening, visit the Old Flemish-style **Café Rubens**, Visserskaai 44 (☎ 059/80-85-08), or one of the cafes with sidewalk terraces around Wapenplein. For late-night dance clubs, cabarets, and bars, head for Langestraat, which runs east from Monacoplein, in front of the Casino-Kursaal. And there's the Casino itself, of course (see earlier in this chapter). Or take the kids for an ice cream at **George's Tearoom**, Adolf Buylstraat 15 (☎ 059/70-29-25).

2 Knokke-Heist ★

24km (14 miles) NE of Bruges; 35km (21 miles) NE of Ostend

Knokke is fashionable—not as exclusive as it once was, but still fashionable. You can tell by the very look of the place; its main shopping street features upscale jewelers, art galleries, and sporting shops adorned with internationally famous designer names (some designer collections have actually been shown here before Paris!). **Heist**, snuggled up close to the Dutch border, attracts average-income (*classy* average-income) families.

The winding residential streets of the nearby suburb **Het Zoute** also fairly shriek “money,” and it’s big money—the lovely villas proclaim owners of both wealth and what they at any rate consider exquisite taste. Whether or not you fit easily into this moneyed environment, a drive, cycle, or walk through Het Zoute provides a glimpse of the wealthy lifestyle of its inhabitants—and if that doesn’t grab you as a worthwhile way to spend 15 minutes, you can pass right through and arrive at Het Zwin Nature Reserve, where the birds have worse manners but more grace.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There’s frequent train and bus service from Bruges. To get here from Ostend and other seafront resorts, take the **Coast Tram** (see earlier in this chapter). The combination rail/bus/tram stations are at the south end of Lippenslaan, the main street. By car from Bruges, take N31 north. N34 runs the entire length of the coast, connecting all the resort towns.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Knokke-Heist** is at Zeedijk 660, Lichttorenplein, 8300 Knokke-Heist (☎ **050/63-03-80**; fax 050/63-03-90; toerisme@knokke-heist.be).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

This area’s list of attractions is topped by its fine beaches, where all manner of sea-side sports are available. Beach activities range from half-hour sea trips in amphibious vessels launched right from the beach to sandcastle-building competitions and kite flying. In Knokke itself you can take a 30-minute ride through the streets in the **miniature train** that departs from Van Bunneplein at the promenade.

Tips Great Green Way

Getting outside Knokke-Heist, you should enjoy driving or cycling the 48km (30-mile) *Riante Polderoute*, a signposted route that begins in the resort and takes you through wooded parks, past the Zwin reserve, into polder farm country and along canals, to Damme.

For a completely different kind of fun, head to **Knokke Casino**, Zeedijk 509 (☎ **050/63-05-05**), across from the Albertstrand beach. This place, which dates from the 1920s, is the epitome of elegance, with plush gaming rooms, nostalgic bits of Art Deco, and glittering chandeliers illuminating a festive, dressed-to-the-nines clientele. There are two nightclubs, and a ballroom that features leading European entertainers. The magnificent Salle Magritte dining room is a tribute to surrealist painter René Magritte, whose

paintings have been transformed into gigantic murals that adorn the walls. Despite all the glitter, there’s a cosmopolitan relaxation about the casino that makes it fun and well worth a visit. You’ll need to be decked out in dressy attire and bring your passport. The entrance fee is 4€ (\$5).

A Great (Small) Nature Reserve

It was along this stretch of coast that the Zwin River estuary once met the sea and made Bruges a leading European port. After fickle fate silted up the river (leaving Bruges to settle into a land-locked prominence of quite another sort), the old riverbed turned into a salty, sandy marshland. It's now **Het Zwin Nature Reserve** ★ (☎ 050/60-70-86), east of Het Zoute. The reserve covers just 150 hectares (370 acres), but it's one of the most important remaining wetland breeding zones for birds on the northwest coast of Europe, and one of the Belgian sea-coast's last scraps of coastal wilderness. Among the approximately 100 migratory and indigenous species that enjoy the reserve's facilities are avocets, storks, snipes, plovers, geese, and ducks. The spongy soil here nurtures an amazing variety of vegetation, making the reserve a lovely place to explore, especially in summer, when it's tinged with lavender. There's an aviary near the entrance as well as a nice restaurant, Châlet du Zwin, and a well-stocked bookshop. The reserve is open from Easter to September daily from 9am to 7pm; and from October to the week before Easter, Thursday to Tuesday from 9am to 5pm. Entrance is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults and 3€ (\$3.75) for children under 13. There's a 2-hour guided tour every Sunday and Thursday morning starting at 10am.

A cure for all your ills may be awaiting you at **Thalassa Zeecentrum** ★, a combination spa, fitness center, and gymnasium in the Hotel La Réserve, Elizabethlaan 158 (☎ 050/61-06-06). In the "thermal institute," you can indulge in hot sea-mud baths and a number of other seawater treatments, work out on a wide variety of exercise equipment, or simply swim in the seawater pool, or laze in the sauna. If you're a guest at the hotel, admission to the fitness club comes with your room rate; others pay 9€ (\$11) plus charges based on any additional treatments, which range from 31€ to 65€ (\$39–\$81).

Golfers have come to the right place. The **Royal Zoute Golf Club**, Caddiespad, Knokke (☎ 050/60-12-27), has two 18-hole courses beside the dunes and accepts visiting players. Membership is 95€ (\$119) for a weekend, and 148€ (\$185) for a week.

WHERE TO STAY

Cosmipolis ★ This elegant small hotel a block from the beach rubs elbows with upper-stratosphere shops in Het Zoute. Its guest rooms have recently been refurbished in bright colors, with tartan-style curtains. There's a moderately priced restaurant and an attractive bar. Three of the rooms have kitchenettes. Most of the rooms have balconies.

Kustlaan 353, 8300 Het Zoute. ☎ 050/61-16-17. Fax 050/62-04-05. www.cosmipolishotel.be. 26 units. 144€–148€ (\$180–\$185) double; 195€–215€ (\$244–\$269) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ (\$13). **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, minibar, hair dryer.

La Réserve ★ Although this hotel near the beachfront is quite large, it manages to maintain a comfortable, almost country, air. It's also the home of Knokke's important health spa, the Thalassa Zeecentrum (see above). The guest

Tips The Sea on a Plate

Many seacoast restaurants specialize in seafood, fresh off the boats from catches landed daily at the fishing harbor and prepared by coastal chefs who have a long tradition of treating the fruits of the sea with respect. Local specialties include *sole à l'Ostendaise* (Ostend sole), *waterzooï op Oostendse wijze* (a creamy, soup-like fish stew), gray North Sea *garnaalen* (shrimp), and *garnaalkrokette* (croquettes made with those shrimp).

rooms, 80 with balconies, are spacious, modern, and comfortable. The hotel has a very good restaurant, La Sirène, and a lounge bar.

Elizabethtaan 158–160 (facing the casino), 8300 Knokke-Albertstrand (in the town center across from the casino). ☎ 050/61-06-06. Fax 050/60-37-06. 112 units. 175€–225€ (\$219–\$281) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; lounge; indoor pool; tennis courts; health club and sauna. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Parkhotel The family-run Parkhotel is just 2 blocks from the beach. Its guest rooms are well appointed and are furnished in a bright, modern style.

Elizabethtaan 204, 8301 Duinbergen. ☎ 050/60-09-01. Fax 050/62-36-08. 12 units. 78€–98€ (\$98–\$123) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Aquilon ★ SEAFOOD This ground-floor restaurant on Albertplein in the city center is the most outstanding and most elegant in the area. Allow plenty of time to savor such specialties as veal with mushrooms and truffles or lobster Marguerite.

Elizabethtaan 6. ☎ 050/60-12-74. Reservations required. Main courses 15€–27€ (\$19–\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2pm and 6:30–9pm (open Wed during school holidays).

Panier d'Or SEAFOOD/BELGIAN Seafood stars at this seaside restaurant, a medium-size place with traditional decor and long benches along the wall. The fish soup is a local legend. Standard menu items include lobster, cod, sole, and North Sea shrimp, but if you're feeling aristocratic, try the caviar.

Zeedijk 659. ☎ 050/60-31-89. Main courses 8.50€–15€ (\$11–\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2:30pm; Fri–Sun 6:30–9pm.

Ter Dijken FRENCH/BELGIAN This elegant, classically decorated restaurant has a solid reputation on the coast. The wide-ranging menu emphasizes seafood. Turbot, grilled lobster, and Iranian caviar are excellent seafood choices, while lamb cutlet is the best choice among the meats. A fireplace adds to the atmosphere.

Kalvekeetdijk 137. ☎ 050/60-80-23. Main courses 19€–33€ (\$23–\$41); fixed-price menu 57€ (\$71). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 10am–3pm and 6–10pm.

3 Oostduinkerke

20km (12 miles) SW of Ostend

Oostduinkerke and the neighboring resorts of **Koksijde-Bad** and **Sint-Idesbald**, with 8km (5 miles) of beach between them, are family oriented yet also hold much to interest art- and nature-lovers.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Ostend has the nearest **rail** station on the line from Brussels via Ghent and Bruges to the seacoast. There is frequent **Coast Tram** service from Ostend. By **car**, take N34, which runs along the coast.

VISITOR INFORMATION The local tourist office is at Zeelaan 24, 8670 Koksijde (☎ 058/53-30-55; fax 058/52-25-77; www.koksijde.be).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Oostduinkerke's chief attraction is its beautiful wide **beach** ★, the site of a very special activity you find nowhere else along the coast: on days when the weather is reasonable, a group of stalwart, yellow-slickered, oilskin-clad gentlemen mount sturdy horses and wade into the surf at low tide to drag vast nets behind them, ensnaring large quantities of delicious *garnaalen*—tiny but tasty gray shrimp that thrive in the North Sea. These are the **shrimp fishermen of Oostduinkerke**, and they follow a tradition that dates back centuries. Much of their catch goes into the kitchens of cafes owned by these same horsemen, but if you go to the National Fishery Museum's next-door neighbor, **De Peerdevisser** cafe, soon after the fishermen return, you can purchase the just-caught, just-boiled delicacies by the sackful.

Sand-yachting—a form of overland sailing in a sailboat with wheels—is popular at Oostduinkerke. There are several places on the beach where you can rent the colorful vehicles and participate in the fun. Other beach activities include various summer festivals (get a list from the tourist office to see what's on during your visit), **sandcastle competitions**, and **horseback riding** on the strand. Horses can be rented from **Hacienda**, Weststraat 9 (☎ 058/51-69-50), for 18€ (\$23) for 1½ hours.

Oostduinkerke's beach is backed by impressive sand dunes, one of which, De Hoge Blekker, is the highest dune in the country, at over 30m (100 ft.). Both **dune hiking** and **climbing** are popular. Free guided **walking tours** are conducted from mid-June to mid-September, leaving at 9am from the foot of the Hoge Blekker and at 2:30pm from the Hotel La Péniche.

Duinenabdij (Abbey of the Dunes) ★ During much of the 12th century, this Cistercian abbey was a center of culture for the region. The abbey lay in ruins for several centuries, but excavations begun in 1949 have revealed archaeological artifacts that shed considerable light on coastal history and the development of this settlement. A small museum on the site presents interesting exhibits displaying these findings. Near the abbey, the large abbey farmstead (Ten Bogaerde) includes a 12th-century barn that is now an agricultural school. It's typical of the large farm holdings of the ancient abbeys.

Koninklijke Prinslaan 8, Koksijde. ☎ 058/51-19-33. Admission 3.25€ (\$4.05) adults, 1.75€ (\$2.20) children under 13. Daily 9am–noon and 1:30–5pm.

Nationaal Visserijmuseum (National Fishery Museum) This museum has maps of sea routes followed by local fishing fleets and also displays fishing implements used through the centuries, sea paintings, a fishing-harbor model, a North Sea aquarium, and a wonderful collection of fishing-boat models from A.D. 800 to the present. The interior of a typical fisherman's tavern is another highlight.

Pastoor Schmitzstraat 5 (in a small park at the rear of the Town Hall), Oostduinkerke. ☎ 058/51-24-68. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) students, 1€ (\$1.25) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Sept–June Tues–Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm; July–Aug daily 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

Paul Delvaux Museum ★ The nephew of internationally famous surrealist artist Paul Delvaux has turned a Flemish farmhouse into a modernized museum

displaying his uncle's works. Delvaux's adulation of the undraped female form is conveyed in many of the paintings, as is his love of trains and railway stations (though it's hard to see the connection).

Paul Delvauxlaan 42, Sint-Idesbald. ☎ 058/52-12-29. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 4€ (\$5) students and children. July–Aug daily 10:30am–6:30pm; Apr–June and Sept–Dec Tues–Sun 10:30am–5:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Grand Hotel Gauquie This big rambling hotel is in a charming old building about 50m (162 ft.) from the sea. The rooms, though far from lavishly equipped, are clean and comfortable. This place offers good value for people who aim to spend most of their time at a seaside resort out-of-doors.

Léopold II Laan 251, 8670 Oostduinkerke. ☎ 058/51-10-88. Fax 058/52-29-36. 64 units, 48 with bathroom. 48€–67€ (\$60–\$84). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* No phone.

Hotel Terlinck This modern hotel in the center of Koksijde offers a friendly welcome and a high level of comfort. Many rooms have a sea view, and all are furnished in a bright, contemporary style. The fine restaurant is popular locally.

Zeedijk 294 (at Terlinckplein), 8670 Koksijde. ☎ 058/52-00-00. Fax 058/51-76-15. 37 units. 85€–115€ (\$106–\$144) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood). *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Bécassine ★ SEAFOOD This is a homey kind of place that serves great food at very reasonable prices—but only as complete four- or five-course menus, not a la carte. Tasty North Sea shrimp is the star of the show. Try it in shrimp soup or stuffed in potatoes and pastries. The bouillabaisse is great, too. There are only seven tables here.

Rozenlaan 20, Oostduinkerke. ☎ 058/52-11-00. Fixed-price menus 30€–45€ (\$38–\$56). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Tues noon–2pm and 7–9pm.

4 De Panne

26km (16 miles) SW of Ostend; 7km (4 miles) SW of Oostduinkerke

De Panne, near Dunkirk, is Belgium's closest coastal point to France and England. During World War I, it was here that King Albert I clung to Belgian resistance against German occupying forces. But its most famous moment came in 1940, during World War II, when its sandy beach was the site of the massive evacuation of beleaguered Allied forces carried out by a makeshift armada of small craft gathered from boat owners around England. When "the miracle of Dunkirk" was over, almost all the soldiers were saved, and the 13km (7½-mile) stretch of beach between Dunkirk and De Panne was a mass of military litter. It's a little-recognized fact that the British commander, Lord Gort, was not headquartered in Dunkirk but here in De Panne.

Today, that wide beach—.5km (¼ mile) at low tide—and spectacular sand dunes bring hordes of visitors to De Panne each year. The dunes are made all the more beautiful by wooded areas that turn them into a wonderland of greenery banding the white sands of the beach and the gray sea beyond.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Ostend has the nearest **rail** station on the direct line from Brussels via Ghent and Bruges to the coast. There's also a rail station just south of the town at Adinkerke–De Panne for local trains from Bruges and Ypres. De Panne is the southern terminus of the **coast tram** line that extends

north to Knokke-Heist. By **car**, take the N34 coast road from any of the coastal resorts; from Bruges, Ghent, and Brussels, take E40 to Veurne and then go north a short distance on N8.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **De Panne Tourist Office** is at Stadhuis (Town Hall) Zeelaan 21, 8660 De Panne (☎ 058/42-18-18; fax 058/42-16-17; www.depanne.be). During summer months, there's an **information desk** on the Zeedijk promenade (☎ 058/42-18-19). Both offices can furnish a series of beautifully illustrated informative brochures on the dunes and forest areas. They organize special **guided tours** periodically during summer months.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

A stroll through De Panne's tree-lined residential streets, with rows of delightful Art Nouveau villas left over from another era, and traditional fishermen's cottages still in use (on Veurnestraat), is a delight. But outdoors recreation is what people come to De Panne for. With all those dunes to explore and the beach for sunning, swimming, horseback riding, and sand-yachting, no one's ever short of things to do.

NATURE RESERVES

Four nature areas around De Panne are all free and open daily. The most important, **Natuurreservat Westhoek (Westhoek Nature Reserve)** ★★, 340 hectares (840 acres) on the western edge of De Panne, is the largest dunes landscape on the Belgian coast. Although vacation developments squeeze right up against its boundary, once you are immersed in this broad vista of sand, called locally "the Sahara," you find it hard to believe it's in the same country as the overdeveloped seacoast. Vegetation varies from full-grown trees to scrubby shrubs. In the springtime, wild flowers blossom among the sands; in winter, shallow rainwater pools accumulate. The sand dunes change both their shape and position constantly when contrary winds move the grains beneath your feet imperceptibly.

You're obliged to tour on four signposted footpaths, because tramping on the dunes causes erosion, scares off nesting birds, and damages the fragile life-support system of rare indigenous plants, including orchids—sadly, many visitors ignore this stipulation. Archaeologists have found traces of a Roman saltworks, and at a closed animal reserve are Shetland ponies, Highland cattle, and wild horses, in an attempt to mimic the scene from a century ago. The dunes continue across the border into France, in an additional 225 hectares (555 acres) called Les Dunes de Perroquet. For a guided tour of the Westhoek, which costs 2€ (\$2.50), contact De Panne Tourist Office (see above). To the east of De Panne is the 60-hectare (150-acre) **Natuurreservat Oosthoek (Oosthoek Nature Reserve)**, which has more dunes and woods.

The 93-hectare (230-acre) **Domein Cabour (Cabour Estate)**, straddling the French border, is another area that provides interesting walks. There are frequent

Moments **Sand-Yachting at De Panne**

Just like at Oostduinkerke, the long wide beaches, firm sand, and frequent high winds at De Panne make for ideal conditions for sand-yachting. Rental companies on the beach outfit you in a wet suit and a crash helmet, give a few rudimentary tips on how to handle the vehicles, push you out into the wind—and off you go. The yachts are unwieldy to handle at first, and heavier than they look, so maintaining stability can be difficult until you get the hang of it. But once you do, it's exhilarating.

guided tours during summer months (check with the tourist office for schedules). **Calmeynbos (Calmeyn Wood)**, which covers only 45 hectares (110 acres), is the loving legacy of one man, Maurice Calmeyn, who in 1903 began to plant trees here in order to preserve the dunes. Some 25 varieties of his trees are thriving today.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Plopsaland Kids It's instant enchantment for children at this adventure park, where a multitude of delightful attractions will appeal to the whole family. There's Elfira (a fairy-tale wonderland), the animal park, a jungle fantasy parrot show, a water symphony, Carioca (all sorts of playground activities), and Phantom Guild, with three different fun fairs filled with rides.

De Pannelaan 68, Adinkerke. ☎ **058/42-02-02**. www.plopsaland.be. Admission July–Aug, 23€ (\$29); Apr–June and Sept, 21€ (\$26), children under 1m (3 ft. 3in.) free. Apr to 1st week Sept daily 10am–5pm; rest of Sept Wed and weekends 10am–5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Donny This modern hotel is casual but still quite classy. It's in a scenic setting of dunes about 150m (492 ft.) from the beach. Some of the rooms have balconies facing the sea, and all are comfortably furnished in a style that complements the contemporary look of the building.

Donnylaan 17. ☎ **058/41-18-00**. Fax 058/42-09-78. 35 units. 75€–125€ (\$94–\$156) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood); bar; lounge; outdoor pool; health club. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Le Fox ★★ FRENCH/SEAFOOD Although a bit pricey, this is the best restaurant in town. The Buyens family has upheld the stellar reputation of its Michelin-star establishment into a second generation, with son Stéphane now at the helm in the kitchen. Most menu items change seasonally, but a strong contingent of seafood offerings is fairly stable. Turbot with a variety of minced mushrooms and a fennel-and-tomato ragout is a good choice; so are salmon-and-asparagus fondue, and one of the French regional meat courses. Unlike most restaurants along the coast, Le Fox leaves mussels off the menu but amply makes up for this omission with

oysters, scampi, langoustines (spiny lobster), and shrimp. Thoughtfully selected French wines from admirable wineries fill the wine cellar. The rustic interior has an open fire.

In the Hostellerie Le Fox, Walckierstraat 2 (off the seafont). ☎ **058/41-28-55**. Main courses 25€–49€ (\$31–\$61); fixed-price menus 50€–125€ (\$63–\$156). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun noon–2:30pm; Tues–Sun 7–9:45pm.

5 Ypres ★

110km (69 miles) W of Brussels; 45km (28 miles) SW of Bruges

Ypres (Ieper in Dutch), set among the low, gentle slopes of the West Flanders *Heuvelland* (Hill Country), owed its early prosperity to a textile industry that peaked in the 13th century. Over the centuries, the handsome town was victimized by one war after another and became a ghost of its former self. By far

Tips Cheap Eats

On Nieuwpoortlaan in De Panne there's a row of fast-food places that sell mussels and *frites* (fries) from 5€ (\$6.25).

the most devastating was World War I (1914–18)—the “war to end all wars”—when hardly a brick was left standing after 4 years of violent bombardments.

Many visitors come to Ypres (pronounced *ee-pruh*) to pay homage to those who fell on the surrounding battlefields and rest peacefully buried in the many military cemeteries that lie on the green breast of the Heuvelland. Homage could also be paid to the determined citizens who have rebuilt, brick by brick, the most important of the town's medieval buildings exactly as they were, carefully following original plans still in existence. This accounts for the pristine look of venerable monuments, in place of the moldering stonework you might expect.

Because it lies in a corner of Belgium that's awkward to reach, some visitors combine a visit to Ypres with a trip to Bruges or the nearby seacoast resorts.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart hourly from Bruges. Look out for the Dutch name, Ieper, on the station name board. The trip takes around 1 hour and you may need to change trains at Kortrijk. Going by **bus** from Bruges is a bad option unless you have time to take in every haystack and hamlet along the way. By **car** from Bruges take A17/E403 south to the Kortrijk interchange, then A19 west; from the coast at De Panne, take N8 south.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Ieper** is at Lakenhalle, Grote Markt, 8900 Ieper (☎ **057/23-92-00**; fax 057/22-85-89; www.ieper.be). The office is open April to September, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, and Sunday from 10am to 6pm; October to March, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND Sights in the town are easily reached on foot, though if you are arriving by train you can save time by taking a **De Lijn** (☎ **070/22-02-00**) bus to the Grote Markt from the bus station adjoining the rail station. Taxis often are available at the rail station, or call **Taxi Leo** (☎ **057/20-04-13**). You can rent bikes at the station for 9€ (\$11) daily.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The gabled guild houses and patrician mansions around the Grote Markt are occupied now mostly by restaurants, cafes, and hotels. At the western end of this main central square, Ypres's medieval wealth is reflected in its extravagant Gothic **Lakenhalle (Cloth Hall)** ★★. The original, constructed between 1250 and 1304 along the Ieperlee River, which has long since been banished underground, was blown to bits between 1914 and 1918 and rebuilt with painstaking care in subsequent decades, though the work wasn't finished until 1967. Gilded statues adorn the roof, and a statue of Our Lady of Thyne, the patron of Ypres, stands over the main entrance, the Donkerpoort. Inside, the spacious first-floor halls where wool and cloth were once sold are now used for exhibits; the second-floor storage space houses the superb In Flanders Fields Museum (see below).

From the center of the Lakenhalle, the **Belfort (Belfry)**, which has four corner turrets and a spire and encloses a 49-bell carillon, soars 70m (228 ft.). You get a fine view over the town from here, provided you're willing and able to climb 264 interior steps to the upper gallery. Carillon concerts chime out on Saturday from 11am to noon and Sunday from 4 to 5pm.

A Flemish Renaissance extension at the eastern end, the arcaded Nieuwerck from 1619 to 1624, houses Ypres's **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**. You can visit the council chamber and view its fine stained-glass window Monday to Friday from 8:30 to 11:45am when the council is not in session. Admission is free.

The graceful spire of 13th-century Gothic **Sint-Martenskathedraal (St. Martin's Cathedral)** in St Maartensplein is a town landmark. Inside is the tomb of the Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), a bishop of Ypres whose doctrine of predestination, called Jansenism, rocked the Catholic church and was condemned as heretical by the pope in 1642. Britain's armed forces donated the superb stained-glass rose window in honor of Belgium's King Albert I, the World War I "soldier king." Note the eight alabaster statues on the baptistery chapel screen. The cathedral is open to visitors daily from 8am to 8pm, except during services (when it's open to worshippers). Admission is free.

Behind St Martin's, the Celtic cross **Munster Memorial** honors Irish soldiers killed in World War I. Across the way, British and Commonwealth veterans made the Anglican **St. George's Memorial Church**, Elverdingestraat (☎ 057/21-56-85), from 1929, a shrine to the memory of their fallen comrades. Wall-mounted banners and pew kneelers decorated with colorful corps and regimental badges add an almost festive air to what might otherwise be a somber scene. The church is open daily from 9:30am to dusk (4pm in winter). Admission is free.

At Meensepoort (Menen Gate), on the famous marble arch of the **Missing Memorial** ★, you can read the names of 54,896 British troops who fell around Ypres between 1914 and August 15, 1917 and who have no known grave. Every evening at 8 o'clock, traffic through the gate is stopped while Ypres firefighters in dress uniform sound the plaintive notes of *The Last Post* on silver bugles donated by the British Legion, in a brief but moving ceremony that dates from 1928. Adjacent to this, the **Australian Memorial** honors the more than 43,000 Aussies killed in the Ypres salient.

The impressive 17th-century **ramparts** designed by the French military engineer Vauban, fronted by a moat that once surrounded the town, are among the few structures not demolished during World War I. You can reach them via stairs at the Menen Gate and walk around a pleasant park to **Rijselsepoort (Lille Gate)** to visit **Ramparts Cemetery**, a British war cemetery with a beautiful green lawn and just 193 headstones. Next to Rijselsepoort at Rijselsestraat 204 is a timber **house** from 1575; streets hereabouts are lined with reconstructed 17th-century facades.

A STANDOUT WAR (OR PEACE) MUSEUM

In Flanders Fields Museum ★★ "War is hell" is the clear message of this superb interactive museum. You "experience" the Great War through the eyes of the ordinary soldiers and civilians who did so without the quote marks, and get an idea of the events of those 4 dreadful years. No series of dry and dusty historical exhibits, it is as much a peace museum as a war museum—it could scarcely be otherwise, considering the awesome slaughter on all sides that took place on the battlefields around the town, which makes any talk about winners and losers, or of glory, seem obscene. The museum won the 2000 Museum Award of the Council of Europe for its innovative presentation.

Lakenhalle, Grote Markt 34. ☎ 057/23-92-00. www.inflandersfields.be. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) children 7–15, free for children under 7. Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar Tues–Sun 10am–5pm (closed for 3 weeks after New Year's).

OTHER SIGHTS

The fine arts **Merghelynck Museum**, Arthur Merghelynckstraat 2A (☎ 057/22-85-84), in a rococo and neoclassical manor house from 1744, is furnished with Louis XV and XVI antiques. Its elegant rooms house a collection of silverware and Chinese and Japanese porcelain. Even the coach house is pressed into service, to exhibit items associated with the town's medieval cloth trade. A highlight of the

Tips Carnival Time

Every 3 years on the second Sunday in May, Ypres celebrates a colorful pageant, the **Kattestoet (Procession of the Cats)** ★★, when hundreds of cats are thrown by the town jester from the Belfry to the crowds of people down below—outraged cat lovers can simmer down; these days the flying felines are fluffy toys. The custom originated centuries ago when the great Lakenhalle attracted thousands of mice, and cats by the hundreds were imported to eliminate them. Once the cloth was sold, the cats themselves became a problem. After due consideration, officials came up with the brilliant solution of flinging them from the Belfry. That tradition evolved into the revelry of today's lively carnival and procession. The next Kattestoet is in 2006.

collection is a beautiful painting, *The Vanity of Riches* (ca. 1637–38), attributed tentatively in part to Rubens, and equally tentatively believed to have been commissioned by Ypres's heretical Bishop Jansenius. It contains images depicting expensive objects and implying their transitory nature. The museum is open by appointment only, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children ages 7 to 15, and free for children under 7.

The **Godshuis Belle Museum**, Rijselsestraat 38 (☎ 057/22-85-84), in an almshouse from 1276, counts among its treasures the *Virgin and Child* by the anonymous Master of 1420. Other exhibits include religious paintings from the 16th to the 19th centuries, by artists such as Nicolaas Van de Velde and Gilles Lamoot. In addition, you can view pewter, lace, and furniture. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, free for children under 15.

In the Sint-Jan Godshuis, a rebuilt almshouse from 1270, the **Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum)**, Ieperleestraat 31 (☎ 057/22-85-82), recounts the town's history through paintings, antique maps, and sculpture. A fine arts section has sculpture, silverware, porcelain, and more. The museum is open April to October Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm; November to March Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children ages 7 to 15, and free for children under 7.

GUIDED TOURS

Local companies **Flanders Battlefield Tour** (☎ 057/36-04-60) and **Salient Tours** (☎ 0475/91-02-23) run minibus tours of the battlefields and memorials, departing from the Grote Markt or the Menen Gate, and ranging from 2 hours to half a day. The tourist office can sell you a package for the In Flanders Fields Route, a self-guided tour of 80km (50 miles) on signposted roads that covers all the main sights.

For a less ambitious, 1- to 2-hour self-guided tour by car, head out of town through the Menen Gate and take N8 to Canadalaan, close to Bellewaerde Park (see below), at the end of which is a preserved stretch of trenches complete with shell holes and shattered trees in **Sanctuary Wood**. Amazingly, there is almost no other remaining sign of that vast network of muddy, waterlogged trenches—the once-tortured landscape has been reclaimed by agriculture and nature. Nearby stands the **Canadian Monument** on **Hill 62**.

All Quiet on the Western Front

In the gently rolling countryside around the town, you can visit no fewer than 185 tranquil and often beautiful World War I military cemeteries. To visitors from Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Ypres is a place of pilgrimage, just as the Battle of the Bulge memorials in the Ardennes (see chapter 9) are places of pilgrimage to many Americans. Like the Somme and Verdun in France, Ypres—"Wipers," as the Tommies called it—was one of the slaughterhouses on the Western Front. Between 1914 and 1918, in the few square miles of the Ypres Salient, 250,000 soldiers from Britain and its empire, and from France and Belgium, were killed, along with an equal number of Germans; the tally of wounded on all sides reached 1.2 million.

Perhaps the most poignant tribute to the dead was penned by Canadian Lt.-Col. John McCrae, in his poem *In Flanders Fields* (1915):

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow,
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved. And now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

In addition to the daily attrition of 4 years of trench warfare, four great battles were fought in the salient. During the Second Ypres, in 1915, Canadian troops became the first-ever victims of chemical warfare, when a cloud of deadly green chlorine gas drifted over no-man's-land from the German lines. The greatest battle was the 6-month-long Third Ypres, in 1917, better known as the Battle of Passchendaele after the village east of Ypres that was its focus; its Flemish name is Passendale and it was called "Passiondale" by the British and Commonwealth troops, who sustained 400,000 casualties to capture the village.

To the descendants of the young men swept away by shells, bullets, and poison gas, Ypres can never be forgotten. Each spring, the blood-red poppies bloom in wild profusion in Flanders fields, and each year tens of thousands of visitors come to Ypres to keep vigil with the fallen.

From here, return to N8. Then, take N332 and N303 through Zonnebeke in the direction of Passendale, to the **Tyne Cot Commonwealth Military Cemetery** and its 12,000 graves surmounted by a Cross of Remembrance in white Portland stone. Finally, to be evenhanded, head west from Zonnebeke to the far side of Langemark and the 44,000 graves at the **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof (German Military Cemetery)**. N313 from Langemark takes you straight back into Ypres.

WHERE TO STAY

Old Tom This small, family-owned hotel has a prime location in the center of town and reasonable rates. With only nine rooms, it fills up fast in summer. The

building has plenty of antique style and the guest rooms are comfortable and nicely, if plainly, furnished. A cafe-restaurant on the first-floor has an outdoor terrace and serves regional specialties, like eels, in addition to common Flemish menu dishes.

Grote Markt 8, 8900 Ieper. ☎ 057/20-15-41. Fax 057/21-91-20. www.oldtom.be. 9 units. 65€ (\$81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Flemish); bar. *In room:* TV.

Regina ★ This small, neo-Gothic-style hotel seems like a page from the town's rich history, combined with modern guest rooms and a popular restaurant that serves fine regional cuisine. The guest rooms are stylishly furnished and equipped, and some have a view of the Lakenhalle and the Grote Markt fountain.

Grote Markt 45, 8900 Ieper. ☎ 057/21-88-88. Fax 057/21-90-20. www.hotelregina.be. 17 units. 80€–110€ (\$100–\$138) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Flemish); bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

De Waterpoort ★ FLEMISH You'll find this stylish restaurant, which is in the north of town, beyond the moat. Decorated in a spare, modern style, it is quite different from the traditional type of eatery common in Ypres. It has a light, open dining room and a garden with a nice alfresco terrace and a play area for children. The menu offers seafood and updated versions of Flemish dishes, some of them cooked on an open grill, as well as a fine Australian entrecôte steak and vegetarian options.

43 Brugseweg (6 blocks north of Grote Markt on Diksmuidestraat and Arthur Stoffelstraat). ☎ 057/20-54-52. Main courses 8.50€–17€ (\$11–\$21); fixed-price menu 25€ (\$31). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Sat and Mon–Tues noon–3pm; Thurs–Tues 6–10pm.

Ter Posterie ★ FLEMISH This traditional cafe-restaurant, down a narrow alleyway off Arthur Merghelynckstraat, serves basic Flemish fare. Look out for mussels in season, sole, and steak with french fries. These are accompanied by no less than 250 different Belgian beers, including the local—and expensive—Poperings Hommelbier, and all six of Belgium's Trappist beers, among them Westmalle Dubbel, the only Trappist beer that's on tap. You can dine and drink outdoors in the courtyard when the weather's fine. The plainly furnished interior is convivial when it's busy but can seem somewhat gloomy out of season.

Rijselestraat 57 (off Grote Markt). ☎ 057/20-05-80. Main courses 8€–20€ (\$10–\$25). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 11am–2am.

A Great Theme Park

If you are traveling with children, you may be glad to escape to the peaceable, if not exactly tranquil, pursuits of **Bellewaerde Park** ★, Meenseweg 497, Ieper-Zillebeke (☎ 057/46-86-86). This theme park, owned by the U.S. Six Flags corporation, combines familiar white-knuckle rides like the Screaming Eagle with a wildlife reserve, various re-created natural environments, and a zone called Pepinoland for the tiniest tots. Ironically, Bellewaerde is set in what was once the wasteland of the World War I front lines. The park is open April to June, daily from 10am to 6pm (7pm weekends); July daily from 10am to 7pm; August daily from 10am to 9pm; September to mid-October, weekends from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 24€ (\$30) for adults, 21€ (\$26) for seniors, 19€ (\$23) for children ages 3 to 11, and free for children under 3.

Liège, the Meuse Valley & Hainaut

The steep-sided valley of the Meuse River has long been an important tourist area. The river rises in northern France, takes an L-shaped course through Belgium, then crosses into Holland, where its name changes to the Maas before it finally slides into the North Sea at Rotterdam. Along its Belgian banks are historic towns, beautifully situated châteaux and abbeys, casinos, striking scenery—and aging industrial plants with smokestacks that spoil some of the views, particularly around Liège.

It's best to do the Meuse Valley as a driving tour, beginning at Liège and heading upstream along the river to Namur, Huy, and Dinant. But it's quite possible to tour by train and bus,

thanks to frequent and fast connections. In that case, you should base yourself in Liège or Namur.

From Dinant, you can head east into the Ardennes (see chapter 9), or instead go west across Hainaut, the “Green Province” that stretches along most of Belgium's border with France. There's no longer much coal mining in the Borinage countryside around Mons, and peaceful farmlands still exist as they have for centuries. Much of the landscape is lush and verdant. The province has a rich history and is the repository of great art treasures from the past. The art center of Tournai, and Mons, the site of many antiquities and museums, draw visitors like magnets, as do the province's lovely lakes.

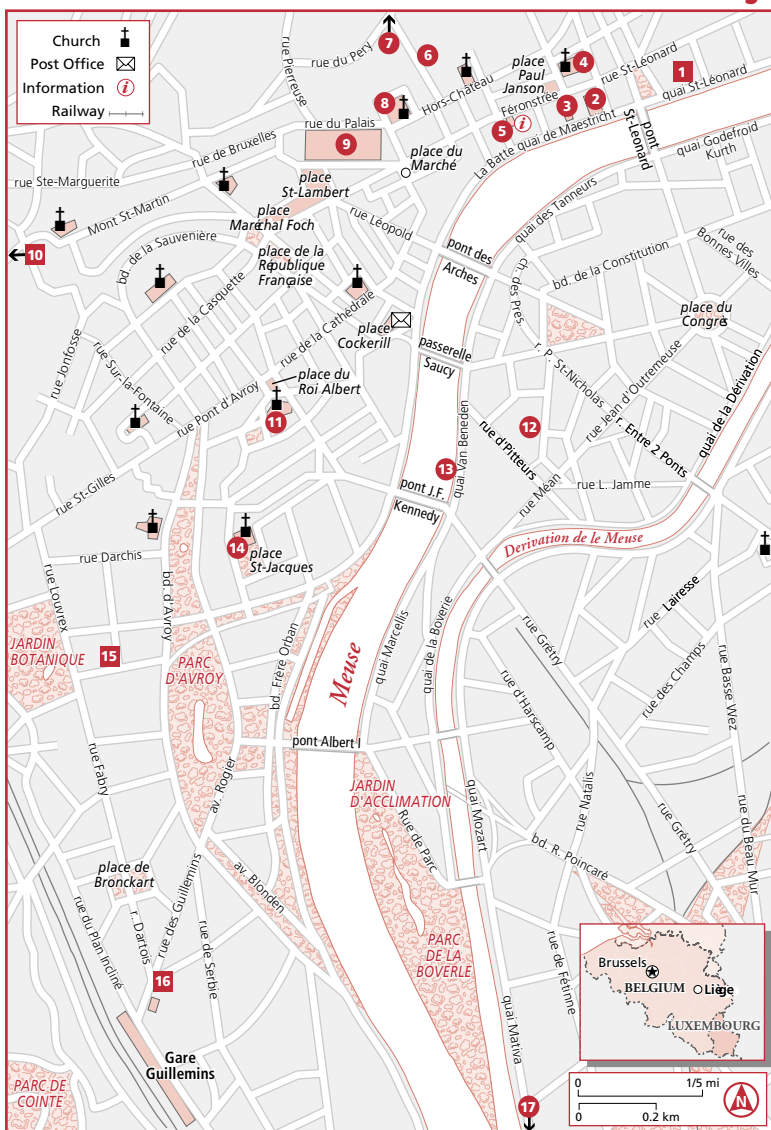
1 Liège ★

89km (55 miles) SE of Brussels; 27km (17 miles) NE of Huy; 54km (33 miles) NE of Namur

Fervent, lively Liège (pop. 160,000) is known as *La Cité Ardente* (the Passionate City). Nowadays it exudes in part the aura of an aging industrial gloom, but that seems to fade next to its gracefully down-at-the-heels 19th-century monuments, and remnants from the time of its powerful ruling prince-bishops. Liège has always had an independent spirit. Its 12th-century charter decreed that the *peuvre homme en sa maison est roi* (the poor man in his home is king)—an attitude that is still vividly alive in Liège today. The city straddles the Meuse, with a backdrop of Ardennes foothills.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There's frequent train service to Liège from Brussels, and from Antwerp, Maastricht, Cologne, and Luxembourg; and on the Thalys high-speed train, via Brussels, from Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. The main railway station is **Gare Guillemins**, rue des Guillemins (☎ 04/229-21-11), just south of the city center. The smaller, more centrally located Liège Palais station, on rue de Bruxelles, is used by some local and connecting trains. The main bus station is



ATTRACTIONS ●

Aquarium and Zoological Museum **13**
 Arms Museum **3**
 Church of St. Bartholomew **4**
 Church of St. Jacques **14**
 The Citadel **7**
 Curtius Museum **2**

Liège Cathedral **11**

Montagne de Bueren **6**
 Museum of Walloon Art **5**
 Museum of Walloon Life **8**
 Palace of the Prince-Bishops **9**
 Tchanchès Museum **12**
 Val Saint-Lambert
 Crystal Factory **17**

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

Bedford **1**
 Comfort Inn l'Univers **16**
 Le Campanile **10**
 Le Cygne d'Argent **15**

Fun Fact **The Town Mascot**

Liège's most beloved symbol is Tchantchès (François in Walloon dialect), a puppet who has been the spokesman of the streets since the 1850s. He's usually dressed in a blue smock, patched trousers, tasseled floppy hat, and red scarf, and he's constantly either grumbling or espousing every noble cause in sight—the personification of your average, everyday Liégeois.

outside Gare Guillemins. Regional **buses** arrive from other places along the Meuse, such as Namur and Dinant (and Maastricht in Holland), and from points in the Ardennes, like Spa. For bus information, call ☎ **04/361-91-11**. By **car** from Brussels, take A3/E40 east; from Namur, take either A15/E42 or the more scenic riverside N90.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Office de Tourisme**, En Féronstrée 92, 4000 Liège (☎ **04/221-92-21**; fax 04/221-92-22), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 10am to 4pm, and Sunday from 10am to 2pm. The office has brochures outlining self-guided walking tours, and during the summer it can supply a qualified guide to accompany you for a modest fee.

CITY LAYOUT The **Old City**, which has most of Liège's sightseeing attractions, and nighttime entertainment in the student-filled **Carré** district, is on the west bank of the Meuse, and bounded by rue de l'Université, boulevard de la Sauvenière, and rue Pont-d'Avroy. On the east bank, the **Outremeuse** (other side of the Meuse) has a big choice of lively bars, discothèques, and cabarets. Along the riverbanks are tree-lined walkways.

GETTING AROUND Sightseeing highlights in the Old City are close together, so central Liège makes for easy walking. The downside for pedestrians is that traffic is frenetic. **Buses** are useful for getting to sights outside the Old City. City buses cost 1.50€ (\$1.90) for a ride. You can buy discounted six-ride and 24-hour tickets from ticket booths at major route stops, at the rail stations, and from drivers. The bus system is excellent and not too hard to figure out, as important stops have maps of the network. Place Saint-Lambert, an important interchange point, is reached from Gare Guillemins by lines 1, 2, 3, or 4. For bus information, call ☎ **04/361-11-11**.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Most of the places you'll want to see lie along a 3km (2-mile) route, easily covered on foot. Monumental **place Saint-Lambert** and neighboring **place du Marché**, surrounded by buildings in the Mosan Renaissance style, are the hub of Liège's daily life. This is where you find the 1698 **Perron Fountain**, the symbol of freedom to the liberty-loving populace; and the 18th-century **Town Hall (Hôtel de Ville)**, which has sculptures by Delcour in its lobby. French-inspired local revolutionaries in 1795 destroyed the sumptuous Gothic Cathédrale St-Lambert (St. Lambert's Cathedral) in place Saint-Lambert, a symbol of the prince-bishopric's hated *ancien régime*. Only its outline is preserved in modern paving. Archaeological excavation in the square has revealed the foundations of a Roman villa and traces of the early medieval city, from around the 7th century.

The prince-bishops, who ruled the city and the surrounding territory from 980 to 1794, constructed for themselves the largest secular Gothic structure in the world: the **Palais des Prince-Evêques (Palace of the Prince-Bishops)**,

in place Saint-Lambert. Of primary interest are the two inner courtyards, one lined with 60 carved columns depicting the follies of human nature, and the other housing an ornamental garden. Today this historic building is Liège's Palais de Justice (Palace of Justice), housing courtrooms and lawyers' offices. The council chambers of the palace, which are hung with gorgeous Brussels tapestries, are not normally open to visitors, but it's sometimes possible to arrange a guided tour through the tourist office. You can visit the courtyards Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. Admission is free.

Tip: For a feel of **Old Liège**, stroll through the narrow, twisting streets and stairways on Mont St-Martin, which are all lined with fine old houses.

MUSEUMS

Musée d'Armes (Arms Museum) Manufacturing weapons has been a major industry in Liège for centuries, due in part to the city's position as a neutral city-state at an important crossroads between the great powers, and today the FN company's small arms, guns, and munitions are favored around the world. This museum displays more than 3,000 prime historic examples, including a prehistoric stone ax and muzzle-loaded firearms of the 15th century. The exhibits are housed in a private mansion that hosted Napoléon when he visited in 1803.

Quai de Maestricht 8 (on the river, north of place St-Lambert). ☎ 04/221-94-00. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Mon, Wed, Thurs-Sat 10am-1pm and 2-5pm; Sun 10am-1pm.

Musée Curtius (Curtius Museum) ★ The archaeological and crafts collections housed in this turreted redbrick mansion, the city's most prestigious privately built edifice, constructed in the early 1600s by local arms manufacturer Jean Curtius, trace the history of the Meuse region from the Gallo-Roman and Frankish eras through the medieval period and on into the 18th century. They present a remarkable glimpse of the breathtaking riches of this city's past. Coins, jewelry, swords, and hundreds of other artifacts tell the continuing story. One room holds the relics of Bishop Notger of the 900s, whose *Evangelary* (prayer book) is covered with exquisitely carved ivory. There are portraits of the prince-bishops, some of their richly embroidered vestments, and furniture and works of art from homes of wealthy Liégeois.

Also housed here is the **Musée de Verre (Glass Museum)**, with fine examples of Venetian, Phoenician, Roman, Chinese, and Belgian glassware.

Quai de Maestricht (on the river, north of place St-Lambert). ☎ 04/221-94-04. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Mon, Wed, Thurs-Sat 10am-1pm and 2-5pm; Sun 10am-1pm.

Musée de l'Art Wallon (Museum of Walloon Art) ★ Small but impressive, the collection of the works of Walloon (French-speaking Belgian) artists and sculptors extends from the 16th century to the present. Paul Delvaux's *L'Homme de la Rue* is one of the premier works, and many other well-known, and not-so-well-known, Walloon artists from the 16th to the 21st century are represented, including Constant Meunier, Antoine Wiertz, Félicien Rops, René Magritte, Roger Somville, and Pierre Alechinsky.

En Féronstrée 86 (by the river in the center). ☎ 04/221-92-31. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children. Tues-Sat 1-6pm; Sun 11am-4:30pm.

Musée de la Vie Wallonne (Museum of Walloon Life) ★★ An incredible array of exhibits bring to life the days of 19th-century Walloons and their rich contemporary traditions and customs, housed in a 17th-century Franciscan convent. The collection affords the unusual opportunity of viewing in one place examples

of popular art, crafts, recreation, and even the workings of a coal mine, which is reproduced in the building's basement. Here, too, is a marvelous puppet collection, which includes the beloved Tchantchès (his main "home" is the Museum Tchantchès, but he also is represented here), and a representation of another local hero, if not perhaps one quite so beloved, the Emperor Charlemagne.

Cour des Mineurs (in the city center, north of place St-Lambert). ☎ 04/223-60-94. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40) adults, 1.80€ (\$2.25) children 6–18, free for children under 6. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 10am–4pm.

Musée Tchantchès (Tchantchès Museum) *(Kids)* If you or your children have fallen under the spell of the city's favorite puppet (see "The Town Mascot," above), come here to find a marvelous collection of his cohorts and their costumes, and to discover the remarkable history of this character, the intimate of emperors and bishops. Liège marionette-theater developed during the 19th century, the puppets having a limited range of gesture and movement that makes them particularly easy for children to appreciate. And the more important the character, the bigger the puppet. From mid-September to Easter, there are frequent marionette performances; call ahead for schedules. You may also want a look at the statue of Tchantchès in place de l'Yser.

Rue Surllet 56, Outremeuse. ☎ 04/342-75-75. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Tues and Thurs 2–4pm. Closed July.

SIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Cathédral de Liège (Liège Cathedral) ★ Except during church services, you can ask the sacristan to show you the cathedral's priceless treasures. These include a white-marble-and-oak pulpit and the 13th-century polychrome *Madonna and Child* by the high altar. The treasury in the cloisters holds a small but exquisite collection that includes the gold reliquary that was Charles the Bold's gift of penance after he wiped out the city and every able-bodied man in it in 1468. This masterpiece, the work of Charles's personal court jeweler, shows a repentant Charles kneeling as St. George looks on. Nearby, a bas-relief depicting the Crucifixion is said to contain a piece of the True Cross. Also impressive

The Belgian Rome

The prince-bishops of Liège combined the roles both of head of state and head of the church, but they were churchmen first and foremost—and unencumbered by the dynastic fixation of monarchs with blood lines to perpetuate.

Notger, at the end of the 10th century, was the first prince-bishop. Of Germanic origin, he had been an adviser to the Holy Roman Emperor and liked to keep up appearances in his new career. He constructed churches and other religious edifices, surrounded the city with a defensive wall, and in general acted to enhance the city-state's prestige. Thanks to Notger, Liège became a center of art, culture, and religion that fully deserved to be dubbed "Rome Beyond the Alps." A medieval chronicler commented that the city "owed Notger to Christ and the rest to Notger."

The prince-bishopric was finally abolished with the help of the French revolutionary army in 1794.

is the bust reliquary of St. Lambert, which dates from the early 1500s and holds the saint's skull.

Rue Bonne Fortune 6. ☎ 04/232-61-32. Free admission to Cathedral. Treasury, 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children 6–18, free for children under 6. Daily 2–5pm.

Eglise St-Barthélemy (Church of St. Bartholomew) ★ This twin-towered Romanesque church dates from 1108. Its **Fonts Baptismaux (Baptismal Font)** ★ is counted among “Belgium’s Magnificent Seven,” the country’s most important historical treasures. The big copper-and-brass font, cast in the early 1100s by master metalsmith Renier de Huy, rests on the backs of 10 sculpted oxen and is surrounded by five biblical scenes. This is considered a masterpiece of Mosan Art, a style that flourished in the Meuse Valley during the Middle Ages.

Place St-Barthélemy. ☎ 04/221-89-44. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Mon–Sat 10am–noon and 2–5pm; Sun 2–5pm.

Eglise St-Jacques (Church of St. Jacques) A felicitous mixture of architectural styles, the church has an exterior in the Gothic Flamboyant style, a Romanesque narthex, and a Renaissance porch. Its intricately designed vaulted ceiling makes this one of the most beautiful interiors in Liège.

Place St-Jacques 8 (south of the Cathedral of St-Paul). ☎ 04/222-14-41. Free admission. Mid-Sept to mid-June (except Easter vacation) Mon–Sat 8am–noon, Sun 10am–noon; Easter vacation and mid-June to mid-Sept Sun–Fri 10am–noon and 2–6pm, Sat 10am–noon and 2–4:15pm.

OTHER SIGHTS

Aquarium et Musée de Zoologie (Aquarium and Zoological Museum) ★ *Kids* Though owned by the University of Liège and housed in the university’s neoclassical Zoological Institute, the **Aquarium** is no dry academic institution. Its attractively presented displays of the underwater world bring together some 2,500 examples from 250 marine species. The exhibits cover a lot of ground—or water—in their 46 display tanks. Pride of place, for younger visitors at any rate, goes to the 4,420-gallon shark tank. The Salle des Coraux (Coral Room) contains beautiful specimens collected from Australia’s Great Barrier Reef by a university expedition in 1966–67. The **Zoological Museum** on the same premises has some 20,000 exhibits, including the skeleton of a 19m (62-ft.) whale. Also here you can see the mural *La Genèse (Genesis)* (1960) by celebrated Belgian artist Paul Delvaux, which depicts a kind of Garden of Eden scene, with the smoke of volcanoes staining the skies of Creation.

Quai Van Beneden 22 (beside the Meuse at Pont Kennedy). ☎ 04/366-50-21. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 4.50€ (\$5.65) seniors and children 13–18, 3.50€ (\$4.40) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Sept–June (except Easter school vacation) Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat–Sun and holidays 10:30am–6pm; Easter school vacation and July–Aug Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat–Sun and holidays 10:30am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 24–25, 31.

Val Saint-Lambert Crystal Factory ★ This place would be interesting enough if only to watch the company’s craftsmen at work making the renowned hand-blown crystal that bears the Val Saint-Lambert label. But you’ll also find the remains of a 13th-century Cistercian abbey, a 16th-century Mosan Renaissance-style house, and examples of industrial archaeology from the 18th and 19th centuries. At an on-site shop you can buy recently made pieces (the sales pitch is low-key), including slightly flawed examples at a considerable price reduction. You can also visit the **Musée du Cristal (Crystal Museum)** and wander around the site.

Rue de Val 245, Seraing (southwest of Liège, beside the Meuse, on N90). ☎ 04/337-39-60. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 5–16, free for children under 5. Daily 9am–5pm.

THE CITADEL

For superb views of the city and the broad, curving Meuse, climb the 353 steps of the **Montagne de Beuren**, which ascends from rue Hors-Château. At the top of the hill, commanding a panoramic view of the city, is the site of the **Citadelle (Citadel)**, which has been the setting for more than its share of the bloodier side of Liège's history. It was here on October 29, 1468, that 600 citizens made a heroic but ill-considered assault on Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy, who had installed one of his cousins as prince-bishop, thereby sparking a revolt, and was encamped with his Burgundian troops. They penetrated almost to Charles's tent before being beaten off and massacred to the man. Charles ordered the city's complete destruction, a task that continued for several weeks and left only the churches standing.

In 1830, a decisive battle in Belgium's fight for independence took place here; in 1914 locals held German forces at bay here long enough for the French to regroup and go on to the vitally important Battle of the Marne; and, in 1940, it was here that invading German troops met with typically stubborn resistance from the city's defenders. The Citadel Hospital now stands on the site.

ORGANIZED TOURS

From May to September, there are **cruises** on the Meuse (sailing schedules and points of departure are available from the tourist office).

WHERE TO STAY

Bedford This modern, high-rise hotel, equipped to the latest business standards, has a good location beside the Meuse and front-room windows that overlook the river. The city center is just a 10-minute walk away. Guest rooms have comfortable armchairs along with firm beds.

Quai St-Léonard 36, 4000 Liège. ☎ 04/228-81-11. Fax 04/227-45-75. 149 units. 230€ (\$288) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; concierge; secretarial services; room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Comfort Inn l'Univers ★ There's good value for the dollar in this medium-size hotel, where the guest rooms are modest in decor but quite comfortable. Though there's no restaurant on the premises, several are within walking distance. A major renovation program, including all-new bathrooms, has recently been completed.

Rue des Guillemins 116 (close to Gare Guillemins), 4000 Liège. ☎ 04/254-55-55. Fax 04/254-55-00. www.comfortinn.com. 51 units. 90€ (\$113) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 5€ (\$6.25). *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Le Campanile Guest rooms are spacious and comfortable, if not much inflected with character, at this modern hotel, which has a reputation for its good quality/price ratio. All have en suite bathrooms. This is a good choice if you're touring by car, as it's just 200m (645 ft.) from an expressway ramp—but also just 5 minutes by bus to the city center.

Rue Jules de Laminne, 4000 Liège. ☎ 04/224-02-77. Fax 04/224-03-80. 50 units. 65€ (\$81) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian/Continental); bar; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport.

Le Cygne d'Argent A nice, homey atmosphere distinguishes this small hotel. The guest rooms vary in size, and all are nicely furnished and decorated in traditional style.

Rue Beecman 49 (close to Gare Guillemins), 4000 Liège. ☎ 04/223-70-01. Fax 04/222-49-66. 23 units. 80€ (\$100) double. AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Local Heroes

The Liégeois are especially fond of their *boudin blanc de Liège* (white sausage); *grives* (thrushes) and goose; *boulet frites avec sirop de Liège* (meatballs in a sauce made from pear and apple syrup, served with french fries); *tarte au riz* (rice flan); *bouquette* (a kind of pancake); *bottes aux carottes ou au chou* (a kind of stew made with potatoes, cabbage or carrots, and meat such as pork or sausage); and *salade liégeoise* (potatoes, onions, bacon pieces, vinegar, and beans).

WHERE TO DINE

Liège has a great diversity of restaurants. One reason is the variety of ethnic communities in the city. Italian, Spanish, Turkish, North African, Greek, and other immigrants have settled here and brought their favorite dishes with them. Another is the continuing popularity of Walloon cuisine (see “Local Heroes,” above), regional specialties that reflect the convivial lifestyle of the inhabitants.

Au Vieux Liège ★ SEAFOOD/CONTINENTAL This marvelous restaurant is in the city center in a four-story 16th-century town house furnished with antiques of that era. Dinner is by candlelight, and the waiters wear formal attire; but the food outshines even the excellent setting. Almost any fish dish is a good choice, but there’s also more experimental fare including rare-cooked *escargots niçoises* (snails) and lobster ravioli. More conventional diners can stick with Irish steak with bacon or grilled salmon.

Quai de la Goffe 41. ☎ 04/223-77-48. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 17€–27€ (\$21–\$34); *menu du saison* 35€ (\$44). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:45pm and 6:30–9:45pm.

Chez Rabah (aka Le Méchoui) ★ NORTH AFRICAN This restaurant has a rambling, informal setting, with open wood grills in two rooms, and Arabic ornamentation that includes a gigantic brass teapot. The menu has just a handful of main options, such as couscous (the couscous royal is ace), mushrooms, and salad, with variations provided by grilled meats, including spicy sausage, and by scampi. Honey-suffused desserts lie in wait to tempt your sweet tooth. Friendly waitstaff ensure a constant supply of scented fruit tea, and you can drink little-known but surprisingly good Moroccan wines, in addition to French ones. If this restaurant is full, as it often is on weekends, similar North African eateries are close by.

Ch. des Prés 15 (Outremeuse). ☎ 04/343-38-56. Main courses 9.50€–15€ (\$12–\$18); fixed-price menus 24€ (\$30). MC, V. Daily 6pm–dawn.

Le Bruit Qui Court FRENCH/BELGIAN An imposing 19th-century building, formerly a bank, confers a certain class on this establishment, which is matched by the refined cuisine. Light menu dishes, such as salads and quiches, predominate and mix flavors in a manner that often is unexpected. By contrast, you can dine in the ground-floor strong room, behind the original heavily armored door.

Bd. de la Sauvenière 142. ☎ 04/232-18-18. Main courses 9.50€–20€ (\$12–\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8am–midnight; Fri–Sat 8am–2am; Sun 6pm–midnight.

Le Tchantchès WALLOON Named after the local folk hero, this is one of the best addresses in town for plain Liège specialties, such as grilled *boudin* sausage with potatoes, the warm *salad liégeoise*, and the world-famous (in Liège) meatballs with french fries in syrup. The beer glasses hanging above the bar

counter are “mail boxes”—every regular has his or her own glass in which other *habituels*, and you if you so desire, can leave messages.

En Grande Beche 35 (Outremeuse). ☎ 04/343-39-31. Main courses 7€–12€ (\$8.75–\$14). V. Mon–Sat 6pm–midnight.

Mamé Vi Cou ★ WALLOON “Mamé Vi Cou” is Walloon dialect for “A Nice Old Lady,” and though I would never call Madame Dupagne old, her welcome is certainly nice enough. Her character-filled, oak-beamed restaurant is a Liège institution, serving traditional Walloon specialties such as pigs’ kidneys flamed in *Pekèt* (Belgian gin), chicken in beer, and hot black pudding with acid cherries.

Rue de la Wache 9. ☎ 04/223-71-81. Main courses 11€–20€ (\$13–\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6:30–11:30pm.

SHOPPING

On Sunday mornings, what is said to be the oldest **street market** ★ in Europe—and surely one of the most colorful—is strung out for about a mile along quai de la Batte on the city side of the Meuse. You’ll find brass, clothes, flowers, food-stuffs, jewelry, birds, animals, books, radios, and . . . the list is simply endless. Shoppers from as far away as Holland and Germany join sightseers from overseas, and what seems to be at least half the population of Liège. If you’re anywhere near Liège on a Sunday, plan to check out this marvelous shopping hodgepodge, even if only for the people-watching.

Tip: You’ll find good shopping in the several small pedestrian-only streets off place Saint-Lambert in the Old City.

LIEGE AFTER DARK

A short way from place Cathédrale, the pedestrians-only Carré district is the most animated part of town, a place for shopping during the day and stepping out after dark until the wee small hours.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

The highly acclaimed **Opéra Royal de Wallonie** performs at the Théâtre Royal de Liège, rue des Dominicains 1 (☎ 04/223-59-10). The Théâtre Royal de LAC, near the Church of St. Jacques, presents concerts by the city’s excellent philharmonic orchestra, and operas, operettas, and ballets. Concerts also are performed at the **Conservatoire Royal du Musique**, bd. Piercot 27–29. For schedules and prices of current performances, contact **Infor-Spectacles**, En Feronstrée 92 (☎ 04/222-11-11), Monday to Friday from 11am to 6pm.

Theaters staging puppet shows performed by the **Théâtre des Marionnettes** ★ (in dialect, but easy to follow) are at the Museum of Walloon Life (see earlier in

The Prolific Touch of Georges Simenon

Liège will always be associated with one of the 20th century’s most prolific and popular authors. Georges Simenon (1903–89), creator of the famed Paris police Inspector Maigret, was born in the city in 1903 at rue Léopold 24. He grew up here and did his first writing for the local newspaper, the *Gazette de Liège*. Though he left later to live in Paris and Switzerland, he never forgot his roots, and the atmosphere of Maigret’s Paris owes a clear debt to the grim streets of Liège’s Outremeuse district.

The Liège tourist office has marked out a Simenon itinerary, on which you can visit places associated with the author.

Finds A Unique Château

Presided over by Comte Guy van den Steen de Jehay, the beautiful **Château de Jehay**  (Jehay-Bodegnée; ☎ 085/31-17-16) houses a remarkable private museum of humankind's past in the Meuse Valley. Artist, sculptor, and ironwright, and with a keen interest in archaeology, the count is often on hand as visitors roam through the castle that has belonged to his family since the late 1600s, and admire its lawns and gardens, beautified with sculptures and Italian fountains. Moats reflect a checkerboard pattern of light and dark stone, and round towers at each end of a central rectangular block. Inside, the rooms are filled with paintings, tapestries, lace from the private collections of the prince-bishops of Liège, silver and gold pieces, jewels, porcelain and glass, antique furniture, and family heirlooms. A chapel adorns a small islet. The château is open from Saturday to Sun, and holidays in July and August. Hours are from 2 to 6pm. Admission is 7€ (\$8.75) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for children from 6 to 18, and free for children under 6. Detour off N17 Liège–Huy to Amay; turn left at Amay toward Tongeren (Tongres).

this chapter), the Tchantchès Museum (see earlier in this chapter), and the Al Botroule Museum, rue Hocheporte 3 (☎ 04/223-05-76). Liégeois wit is especially apparent in the puppets' appearance; each puppet is sized according to its historical importance—for example, a huge Charles the Bold is attended by Lilliputian archers (though just how important Charles would have been without those archers is debatable!).

CAFES, TAVERNS & OTHER NIGHTSPOTS

When the sun goes down (and even when it's up), the Liégeois head for their pick of the city's hundreds of **cafes** and **taverns** to quaff Belgium's famous beers and engage in their favorite entertainment—good conversation. If a quiet evening of the same appeals to you, you'll have no problem finding a locale. Two of the best are the **British Pub**, rue Tête-de-Bœuf 14 (☎ 04/343-39-31); and **Tchantchès**, En Grande-Bèche 35 (☎ 04/221-05-70) in Outremeuse. **Café Lequet**, quai sur Meuse 17 (☎ 04/222-21-34), a popular cafe/brasserie, is the place to encounter local characters speaking the Walloon dialect, in particular during the Sunday La Batte street market (see above).

La Notte, rue Tête de Bœuf 10 (☎ 04/223-07-32), close to place Cathédrale, has a group of eclectic musicians who seem equally at home with rock, samba, and French *chanson française ou de la variété, mais toujours avec talent*. If you are a musician, they'll let you pick up an instrument and do your own thing. Thursday is jazz evening. **Le Pot au Lait**, rue Sœur de Hasque 9 (☎ 04/222-07-94), close to the university, is always pretty animated and also is a cybercafe.

If beer is your pleasure, you can't go far wrong at **Le Vaudrée II**, rue St-Gilles 149 (☎ 04/223-18-80), which has a choice of more than 1,000 from around the world, including 700 from Belgium. And should you feel hungry, don't miss their delicious *pavé sur pierre* (a tender beef filet roasted on a hot stone) and the variety of dishes served in beer sauces.

In spite of having such a beer cornucopia right on their doorstep, the city's imbibers are just as likely to favor the stiff Belgian perfumed grain liquor, or gin, commonly called *jenever*, and in Wallonia, *genièvre* or *pekêt*. The table-topper in

this league is the **Maison du Pekêt**, rue du Stalon 4 (☎ 04/250-67-83), a traditional old cafe off place Saint-Lambert, which has 200 varieties of *genièvre* on its drinks list. The local favorite is Pekêt des Houyeux. In the same building, behind the cafe, is the restaurant **Amon Nanesse**, which dishes up Liège specialties.

For livelier nighttime fun, there are numerous nightspots in the Carré and along rue Roture in Outremeuse. Some good examples include **La Chapelle**, place St-Denis (☎ 04/223-26-85); **Palace Club**, place St-Paul 8 (☎ 04/223-40-53); **Le Premier**, rue du Pot d'Or (☎ 04/222-28-46); and **Les Trois Frères**, rue d'Amay 3 (☎ 04/223-07-44).

2 Huy

27km (17 miles) SW of Liège; 27km (17 miles) NE of Namur

The drive from Liège to Namur follows the Meuse River. Once you move beyond the industrial outskirts of Liège, the scenery along the river evolves into a picturesque landscape with small towns every few miles and one of the many castles of the Meuse Valley never far away.

The charming small town of Huy (pop. 18,000) on the Meuse began as a thriving center for tin, copper, and wine merchants and has a long tradition of local metalwork. Its charter was granted in 1066. Its most famous native son, Renier de Huy, was the 12th-century goldsmith who designed the baptismal font in Liège's Church of St-Barthélemy. Today, pewter is the alloy of choice, and Huy's shops are filled with lovely pewter bowls, goblets, pitchers, and other items. The town has several notable examples of the 16th- and 17th-century architectural style known as Mosan Renaissance.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent train service from Liège to Huy's **Gare du Nord**, place Zenobe Gramme (☎ 085/21-36-55). Across the square is the **bus station**. For bus information, call ☎ 081/23-35-55. By **car** from Liège, take N90 southwest.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tourist Office** is at quai de Namur 1, 4500 Huy (☎ 085/21-29-15; fax 085/23-29-44; www.huy.be). It's open Easter to June and September to mid-October, Monday to Friday from 8am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm, and weekends from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm; July to August, Monday to Friday from 8am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6pm, and weekends from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm; mid-October to the week before Easter, Monday to Friday from 8am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Huy is dominated by a hilltop Citadel, the **Fort de Huy**, chaussée Napoléon (☎ 085/21-53-34), which affords a marvelous view of the town, the river below, and the Roi Baudouin suspension bridge. The fort was built in 1818 on the site of earlier castles and forts that date back to the Gallo-Roman period at the very least. In World War II the Nazis used it as a concentration camp, and a museum on the site tells that tale and that of the Belgian Resistance. You can reach the fort on foot or by cable car (☎ 085/21-18-82) from the riverside at the corner of rue d'Amérique and rue d'Arsin. Cable-car fare is 4€ (\$5) for a one-way ticket and 6€ (\$7.50) round-trip for adults; and 2€ (\$2.50) one-way

and 3€ (\$3.75) round-trip for children. The fort is open from July to August, daily from 10am to 8pm; April to June and September, Monday to Friday from 10am to 6pm, and weekends from 10am to 7pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, and 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children.

The **Musée Communal (Town Museum)**, rue Vankeerberghen 20 (☎ 085/23-24-35), in a 17th-century former monastery of the Friars Minor, displays local metalwork and glass objects. Its finest single piece is the wooden crucifix known as the *Beau Dieu de Huy* (Good Lord of Huy), from 1240. The museum is open April to September, daily from 2 to 6pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children.

In the Grand-Place, a beautiful 18th-century copper fountain known as **Li Bassinia** stands in front of the elegant neoclassical **Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** from the same period—with any luck you'll be on hand when its carillon rings out *Brave Liégeois*, as it does every hour.

The vast 14th-century Gothic **Collégiale (Collegiate Church) Notre-Dame** ✨, parvis Théoduin de Bavière (☎ 085/21-29-15), is famed for its magnificent stained-glass windows, including Li Rondia, a beautiful Gothic rose window, and other stained windows in the choir. Its **Trésor (Treasury)** contains the Romanesque reliquaries of St. Domitien and St. Mengold, and many items in chiseled copper. The Treasury is open Saturday to Thursday from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm (except during services). Admission to the church is free; visiting the Treasury is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults and free for children.

Huy's quaint, enchanting little streets are great for walking. Take note of the stone bas-reliefs on tiny arcaded rue des Cloîtres that runs along the side of the church. For a stroll through history, start in Grand-Place and walk down rue des Rôtisseurs, rue des Augustins, and rue Vierset-Godin.

For a more mobile excursion, take a **river cruise** on the boat *Val Mosan* (☎ 085/21-29-15), which sails from quai de Namur in front of the tourist office. Departures May to June and September are daily at 2, 3, and 4:30pm; July to August Monday to Sunday at 2, 3, and 4:30pm, and on Sunday also at 5:30pm. Tickets are 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for children.

Kids High Times

A welcome break for children can be had at the **Mont Mosan Leisure Park**, plaine de la Sarte (☎ 085/23-29-96), in the eastern suburbs, reachable by road and by the cable car to the Fort de Huy, referred to above. The park has sea lions, rides, games, and a resident clown. It's open from Easter to the end of October daily from 10am to 8pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) per person.

3 Namur ✨

56km (35 miles) SE of Brussels; 27km (17 miles) SW of Huy; 54km (33 miles) SW of Liège

A handsome riverside town (pop. 40,000) at the confluence of the Meuse and Sambre rivers, the bustling capital of Belgium's French-speaking Wallonia region has fine museums and churches, a casino, and an abundance of cafes and restaurants. Many of the best eateries and drinkeries are to be found along the narrow, atmospheric alleyways of Le Corbeil, the old quarter of rows of 17th-century brick homes, squeezed into the angle where the Sambre flows into the Meuse.

The entire town is dominated by its brooding hilltop **Citadel**, evidence of the strategic importance attached to Namur in centuries past.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are on average two trains an hour from Huy and Liège, and one an hour direct from Brussels, to **Namur station**, square Léopold (☎ 081/25-22-22). The **bus station** is just out front (☎ 081/25-35-55). By **car** from Liège, take N90 southwest via Huy; from Brussels, A4/E411 southeast.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Office de Tourisme**, Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall), rue de Fer 42, 5000 Namur (☎ 081/24-64-44; fax 081/24-65-54) is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6pm. There are also two smaller **Tourist Information Centers**, one adjacent to the rail station in square Léopold (☎ 081/24-64-49); and one at the confluence of the rivers Meuse and Sambre, at place du Grognon (☎ 081/24-64-48).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Cathédral de St-Aubain (St. Aubain's Cathedral) ★ The domed cathedral dates from 1751, designed by its Italian architect in the light, ethereal, Renaissance style of his native land, with columns, pilasters, cornices, vessels, and balustrades. It was built on the site of a 1047 collegiate church of the same name that became the cathedral of the Namur diocese in 1559, and the old church's belfry still survives in the existing structure. In the **Musée Diocésain (Diocesan Museum)**, place du Chapitre 1 (☎ 081/22-21-64), on the left as you leave the cathedral, is a small but impressive collection of ecclesiastical relics, gold plate, and sculptures.

Place St-Aubain. ☎ 081/22-03-20. Free admission to church; admission to Diocesan Museum 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Museum open Easter–Oct, Tues–Sat 10am–noon and 2:30–6pm, Sun 2:30–6pm; Nov to Easter Sunday, Tues–Sun 2:30–4:30pm.

Citadelle (Citadel) ★★ To reach the hilltop Citadel, you can take either a *téléferique* (cable car) that departs from rue Notre-Dame, or one of two scenic drives, route Merveilleuse and route des Panoramas, that wind up the steep cliff-side. There has been a fortification atop this bluff since Celtic times, but the Dutch are responsible for the Citadel's present shape. Today the structure is part of a 16-acre wooded estate that includes museums, children's play parks, restaurants, cafes, and craft shops. Visitors are shown a film on the Citadel's history and given a tour of the fortifications. The intriguing underground caverns can be explored (by torchlight) with a guide on a 45-minute tour. There's an interesting museum in the forest. A small excursion train runs through the extensive grounds on a 30-minute round-trip.

Rte. Merveilleuse 8. ☎ 081/22-68-29. Admission to Citadel and museums 6.50€ (\$8.15) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) each for the 1st 2 children, thereafter 2€ (\$2.50) per child from the same family. *Téléferique*: 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children. June–Sept daily 11am–5pm; Easter–May Sat–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm.

Couvent des Soeurs de Notre-Dame (Convent of the Sisters of Notre-Dame) ★ The convent in the center of town holds Namur's richest prize, the treasures of the Oignies Priory. These feature the work of 13th-century master goldsmith Brother Hugo of Oignies. The jewel-studded crosses and reliquaries he created are decorated with forest motifs and hunting scenes.

Rue Julie-Billiart 17. ☎ 081/23-04-49. Admission 1.50€ (\$1.90). Tues–Sat 10am–noon and 2–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Closed Dec 11–27.

Musée Archéologique (Archaeological Museum) This museum, in the 15th-century Renaissance style, was a former meat market on the banks of the

Sambre. It displays important remains of the life and times of the Meuse Valley, from prehistoric times through the Celtic, Roman, and Frank periods into the Middle Ages. The collection includes glassware and pottery from the Roman period, jewelry and coins, and a relief map of the city dating from 1750.

Rue du Pont. ☎ **081/23-16-31**. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children, free for children under 6. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10:40am–5pm.

Musée Félicien Rops (Félicien Rops Museum) ★ Namur sometimes seems unsure of what to make of one of its best-known sons, the bizarre and erotic 19th-century painter and engraver Félicien Rops. His museum is tucked away in a narrow side street, near the artist's birthplace in the old quarter of town—but inside, exposure is the name of the game. The perfection of Rops's soft-ground etchings and drypoint work is internationally recognized, and he is indisputably one of the most outstanding engravers of the late 19th century. Some important examples of his work on display are *Pornokrates*, *Mors Syphilitica*, and *The Beach at Heist*.

Rue Fumal 12. ☎ **081/22-01-10**. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children. July–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Sept–June Tues–Sun 10am–5pm.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS

From May to October, the Namur Tourist Office organizes a program of **guided tours** of the old town, the Citadel, and the riverside. These 1½-hour tours leave from the Tourist Information Center at place du Grognon (see “Visitor Information,” above) at 11:15am and 2:15pm. The cost is 6€ (\$7.50) for adults and 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children 14 and under.

A variety of **river cruise** options is available from Namur, including trips to Dinant and Wépion, other tours of the Meuse and Sambre rivers, and a cruise called “Namur by Night.” All of them depart from the junction of the Meuse and Sambre rivers, beside boulevard Baron Louis Huart. The cruise company is based in nearby Dinant (see below); call ☎ **082/22-23-15** for information.

NAMUR AFTER DARK

Gamble the night away over the roulette and blackjack tables of the **Casino de Namur**, av. Baron de Moreau 1 (☎ **081/22-30-21**). There's also a fine French restaurant here, the Casino Club. Jackets and ties are required for men. The casino is open daily from 2pm to dawn.

NEARBY PLACES OF INTEREST

Abbaie de Maredsous (Maredsous Abbey) ★ The twin towers of the neo-Gothic Benedictine abbey stand out clearly above the rugged, forested countryside outside the village of Denée. It is famed for its own beer, cheese, and bread, all of which can be consumed by visitors in a giant cafe on the grounds—and all of which are consumed in copious quantities at busy times. The abbey's third abbot, Dom Columba Marmion of Dublin, appointed in 1909, was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

Near Denée. ☎ **082/69-81-11**. Admission free. Daily 9am–6pm. From Annevoie, take N932 for 4.8km (3 miles), then turn left on N971.

Jardins d'Annevoie (Annevoie Gardens) ★★ The ornamental gardens and fountains here, and the 18th-century château they surround, together make a splendid display that should top every regional sightseeing list. Annevoie is sometimes called the “Belgian Versailles,” and though these gardens indeed share similarities with their French cousins, they are also reminiscent of Italian and

Moments **Strawberry Fields**

A few kilometers beyond Namur lies Wépion, a sleepy riverside village at the heart of Belgium's strawberry-growing district, and the country's self-appointed "Strawberry Capital." Wépion's **Musée de la Fraise (Strawberry Museum)** is devoted to the fruit and, in summertime, you can buy strawberries from local kiosks.

English gardens, yet possess their own unique qualities. The fountains, waterfalls, lagoons, and canals are all engineered without the use of any artificial power. No throbbing pump or other machinery intrudes on their tranquillity and beauty. The grounds were originally laid out in the mid-1700s by a member of the de Montpellier family and have been tended and added to by successive generations. The present owner, Jean de Montpellier, lives here with his family. Inside the château are fine architectural details in the woodwork, stuccos, fireplaces, and family chapel. In addition to a gift shop, there's a full-service restaurant and a rustic cafe, decorated with ancient farming implements, that serves snacks.

Rte. des Jardins, Annevoie-Rouillon. ☎ **082/61-15-55.** Gardens and château 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 3.75€ (\$4.70) children; gardens only 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children; château only 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children. Gardens Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–6:30pm. Château July–Aug daily 9:30am–1pm and 1:30 to 6:30pm; Apr–June and Sept weekends and holidays same hours.

WHERE TO STAY

Le Beau Vallon ★ *Finds* A character-rich property, this *chambre d'hôtes* in an elegant 17th-century *château-ferme* (manor-farm) occupies a tranquil setting outside Wépion, the "village of strawberries," in a narrow, wooded valley, the Beau Vallon, beside the Meuse River. The house was partly restored in 1870, and the proprietors are continuing this process as fast as they can. The guest rooms are furnished in a comfortable, modern style. The hosts, Marie-Jeanne and Denis de Ribaucourt, ensure that their guests feel at home, and many return time after time. In part this is because of a tradition of hospitality the de Ribaucourts maintain by, among other things, serving guests a glass of wine or a bottle of local *Blanche* de Namur beer at a garden table beside the pool. An 18-hole golf course is just across the road.

Chemin du Beau Vallon 38 (off N92 between Wépion and Profondeville), 5100 Wépion. ☎/fax **081/41-15-91.** 5 units. 50€–65€ (\$63–\$81) double. **Amenities:** Pool; golf course nearby. *In room:* No phone.

Les Tanneurs ★ This luxuriously appointed hotel occupies a refurbished, characterful old building close to the confluence of the rivers Meuse and Sambre. The buildings in this area were almost falling down from neglect a few years ago, but an imaginative restoration program has re-created an old-world atmosphere. The guest rooms are individually decorated with an effective mix of antiques and modern fittings. Several have recently been fully renovated. The French restaurant, *L'Espièglerie*, has a strong local reputation.

Rue des Tanneries 13, 5000 Namur. ☎ **081/23-19-99.** Fax 081/26-14-32. 22 units. 70€–210€ (\$88–\$263) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French/steakhouse). *In room:* TV, minibar.

Novotel Namur This is an excellent hotel in a garden setting, in the village known as Belgium's "Strawberry Capital." The airy guest rooms are furnished in modern style with bright colors, and most of them have been fully refurbished in recent years.

Chaussée de Dinant 1149 (less than 5km/3 miles from Namur), 5100 Wépion. ☎ 800/NOVOTEL or 081/46-08-11. Fax 081/46-19-90. www.hotelweb.fr. 110 units. 105€ (\$131) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Take E411 Brussels–Luxembourg to Exit 14. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; indoor pool; outdoor pool; golf course nearby; children's play area. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Brasserie Henry's Bar ★★ FRENCH/BELGIAN This trendy brasserie in one of Namur's nicest squares is a good place to get a feel for the new Namurois style. It's pretty informal, yet things are still done with a touch of class, and the food is excellent. A good bet is the *medaillons de sole, sauce onctueuse au champagne* (sole filets in a champagne sauce). You can pick up nine Normandy oysters, or go for Belgian specialties such as *asperges à la flamande* (asparagus in the Flemish style) and *waterzooï* (a souplike Flemish stew, traditionally made with freshwater fish but more often these days with chicken, and generally known as *waterzooï op Gentse wijzelwaterzooï* in the style of Ghent). In addition to the long and elegant main dining room, there's a plant-bedecked outdoor terrace at the back.

Place St-Aubin 3 (just outside the Cathedral of St. Aubin). ☎ 081/22-02-04. Main courses 6.50€–18€ (\$8.15–\$22); fixed-price menus 21€–27€ (\$26–\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–1am.

Château de Namur ★ FRENCH In this area, there's no more refined place to dine than the magnificent Château de Namur, a restaurant whose location up in the Citadel Park overlooking the town has made it especially popular. You'll eat in an arched dining room with lots of light. Try their *truite au bleu* (oven-baked trout), a moderately priced specialty.

Av. de l'Ermitage 1. ☎ 081/74-26-30. Main courses 12€–20€ (\$15–\$25); fixed-price menus 25€–40€ (\$31–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm.

Grand Café des Galeries Saint-Loup BELGIAN/FRENCH This superb brasserie-style grand cafe has tables on two levels; the upper level has galleries on a wrought-iron-bordered balcony as well as a long, long L-shaped bar. The kitchen specializes in regional cuisine—try the *magret de canard* (filet of duck) with honey and orange.

Rue du Collège 25–27. ☎ 081/23-11-01. Main courses 7.50€–14€ (\$9.40–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 9am–1am; Sat–Sun 9am–2am.

La Petite Fugue ★ FRENCH This intimately atmospheric little place at the heart of old Namur, in a converted 18th-century presbytery, has an interior typical of bourgeois Namur houses of the time, with a wood staircase and all-wood fixtures and fittings. Try the salmon filet with cabbage, potatoes, and mushrooms, or the lobster in a Chablis butter sauce. Prices are reasonable considering the superb food and service (the three-course menu seems an especially good deal), and the restaurant's 20 or so places fill up fast during its short open hours. There's a good wine selection and some good advice to go with it.

Place Chanoine Descamps 5. ☎ 081/23-13-20. Main courses 8.50€–16€ (\$11–\$19); fixed-price menu 23€ (\$29). MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–1:30pm and 7–9:30pm; Sat 7–9:30pm; Sun noon–2:30pm.

4 Dinant ★

23km (14 miles) S of Namur

A busy riverside resort town 23km south of Namur, Dinant has suffered from history's turmoil. In the 1400s, in reprisal for a rebellion, the duke of Burgundy demolished the town completely and drowned more than 800 of its citizens, tied together in pairs and thrown from the Citadel into the Meuse. And in World

Sax Appeal

Most people would call New Orleans the spiritual home of jazz. But Dinant can lay claim to at least part of that heritage, for it was here in 1814 that Adolphe Sax, inventor of the saxophone, was born. Sax was a prolific instrument maker and designer. In 1838, he developed the bass clarinet, which was based on some of the same principles he later used for the saxophone. The first saxophone was probably made in 1841 or 1842, and the first recorded reference to it was in a newspaper article by the composer Hector Berlioz, a close friend of Sax's. Sax patented his new instrument in 1846.

The saxophone was a controversial instrument from the start, never gaining wide acceptance in the orchestra, despite the support of Berlioz and a few other composers such as Saint-Saëns and Massenet. Sax's saxophone class at the Paris Conservatory closed in the 1870s. Sax himself went bankrupt, and in 1894 died a saddened man. Salvation for the instrument came in the 1920s and '30s, as the saxophone became increasingly popular in jazz, big band, and even military music. The composer, looking down from the great sax jam in the sky, must have felt vindicated when in 1996 his brainchild celebrated its 150th anniversary. His hometown, Dinant, was a throbbing, foot-tapping center of the festivities.

War I, in a chilling replay of that 15th-century tragedy, the German army executed nearly 700 citizens when its troops were fired on in the town. A reminder of Dinant's military past is never far from view, for the Citadel from 1530 that crowns a bluff 100m (325 ft.) high dominates the skyline.

Despite all the bloodshed, the town developed such skill in working hammered copper that its engravings were widely sought after as early as the 13th century. Charles the Bold put a stop to such artistry when he razed the town, but in recent years the skill has once more come back to life, and you see fine examples of engravings in town shops.

Just outside town is **Abbaye de Leffe (Leffe Abbey)**, one of several Belgian abbeys that combine their spiritual calling with brewing beer.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are on average two trains an hour to Dinant from Namur and regular bus service. The **rail** and **bus** stations are at rue de la Station on the west bank of the Meuse. By **car** from Namur, take N92 south.

VISITOR INFORMATION The tourist office is at av. Cadoux 8, 5500 Dinant (☎ 082/22-28-70; fax 082/22-77-88; www.dinant-tourisme.be). The office is open in summer daily from 9am to 7pm; winter daily from 9am to 5pm (winter open hours may be shorter on occasion).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Citadelle (Citadel) ★ The 16th-century Citadel, perched on a cliff high above the town and river, can be reached by car or cable car. Alternatively, if

you're feeling particularly energetic or can't turn down the challenge, you can climb the 400 steep steps leading to the bluff top and a spectacular view. The **Weapons Museum (Musée d'Armes)** and **War Museum (Musée de Guerre)** inside are interesting, and there's an audiovisual historical presentation in three languages (including English). But when all is said and done, it's the view that takes your breath away.

Chemin du Fort. ☎ 082/22-36-70. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) children (includes the cable-car fare). Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct–Dec and Feb–Mar Sat–Thurs 10am–5:30pm; Jan Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm.

Collégiale Notre-Dame (Church of Our Lady) This riverside collegiate church looks impressively old, but in fact it was rebuilt twice within the last 80 years, after both World War I and World War II. Nevertheless, the church is notable enough. Its big, bulbous spire, which originally dates from 1697, is a majestic sight beneath the looming presence of the Citadel.

Place Astrid. ☎ 082/22-28-70. Free admission. Open daily.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS

Dinant is the best place on the Meuse for cruising, along the scenic reaches of the Meuse upstream and downstream from the town. River cruise options are offered by **Croisières Mosanes**, bd. Winston Churchill, Quai 5 (☎ 082/22-23-15). From 45 minutes to 3½ hours in duration, these operate Easter to October. Boats depart from the quay beside the road bridge in the center of town.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel de la Couronne ★ This pleasant, classic-style family hotel, built after the war, stands right in the center of town and features comfortable and attractive rooms and a good, moderately priced restaurant and tavern. The traditional decor and furnishings lend a homey feeling to the place.

Rue Adolphe-Sax 1, 5500 Dinant. ☎ 082/22-24-41. Fax 082/22-70-31. 25 units. 65€ (\$81) double; 95€ (\$119) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar. *In room:* TV.

L'Auberge de Bouvignes ★ This is a lovely, rustic, country-style inn, right on the banks of the Meuse. The six charming guest rooms are decorated in blue or pink and brightened with lots of flowers and photogravures (etched images from photographic negatives) of scenes along the river. Rooms at the front have a fine view of the Meuse.

Rue Fétis 112, rte. de Namur (3.2 km/2 miles from Dinant center), 5500 Dinant. ☎ 082/61-16-00. 6 units. 80€ (\$100) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Restaurant Thermidor ★ FRENCH This old-fashioned, family-run place in the town center is widely considered the best restaurant in Dinant. Specialties include *truite au bleu* (oven-baked trout) and a terrific country-style *pâté de canard* (duck pâté). You should also try the grilled kidneys with mustard sauce, a local favorite.

Rue de la Station 3. ☎ 082/22-31-35. Main courses 11€–21€ (\$14–\$26). AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm; Wed–Sun 6–10pm.

5 Mons ★

51km (32 miles) SW of Brussels; 66km (41 miles) W of Namur; 43km (27 miles) SE of Tournai

The administrative capital of Hainaut began life as a fortified Roman camp built by Julius Caesar's legions, and today is home to SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe). Between those military bookends of history, it has fitted in a rich and eventful past. The Roman camp, set in a landscape of rolling hills (*mons* means "mount" in Latin), became a town when St. Waudru, daughter of a local nobleman, founded a convent here in the 600s. Mons was fortified in the 12th century by Count Baldwin IV of Flanders and Hainaut, founder of the Latin Empire of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (and whose memory is reviled throughout the Christian Orthodox world as the leader of the army that in 1204 captured and looted the capital of the Byzantine Empire), and again by the Dutch in the early 1800s. Its present character reflects more recent history as a center of industrialization and coal mining.

Mons makes an easy day trip from Brussels.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Train** service is hourly from Brussels. The station is on place Léopold, a short walk west from the town center. To get to Mons by **car** from Brussels, take E19; from Tournai, take E42.

VISITOR INFORMATION The tourist office is at Grand-Place 22, 7000 Mons (☎ **065/33-55-80**; fax 065/35-63-36; www.mons.be). The office is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm (5:30pm in winter), and Sunday from 1 to 6pm (5:30pm in winter).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Almost everything you'll want to see is either in, or no more than a short walk from, the Grand-Place, which is lined by fine historical buildings and surrounded by steep, cobbled streets. You don't even have to walk—you can step on and off the free **Mons Intra Muros** minibuses. Two routes, Line A and Line B, run between the station and the Grand-Place every 6 minutes (every 3 min. on joint sections) daily from 7am to 9pm. If you're here when the weather is good, be sure to fit in some time at a sidewalk cafe on the Grand-Place.

The first thing you're likely to notice about Mons is the **Beffroi (Belfry)**, which sits at the highest point in the town. Don't worry if you feel an irresistible urge to giggle at your first sight of this tower; it *does* look a bit comical, and as Victor Hugo remarked, somewhat like "an enormous coffee pot, flanked below

Tips The Ducasse Festival on Trinity Sunday

Each year on Trinity Sunday (the eighth Sun after Easter), Mons erupts in a burst of vivid color, mock drama, and general revelry, when it celebrates the **Ducasse de la Trinité Festival** ★. This begins with the Procession of the Golden Coach, when that vehicle from 1780 is drawn through the streets by a team of white horses, followed by richly dressed girls, and clerics bearing a gilded copper reliquary that holds the skull of St. Waudru. There follows a mock battle between St. George and the Dragon (known here as the *Lumeçon*). The evening performance of the Pageant of Mons by 2,000 musicians, singers, and actors brings the day to a close.



belly-level by four medium-size teapots.” And don’t be perplexed if you hear the tower referred to as *le château*—it sits near the site of an old castle of the counts of Hainaut, and even though the castle was demolished in 1866, local people have never broken the habit of using the old designation.

A short distance from the Belfry is the **Chapel de St-Calixte** (☎ 065/35-12-08), the oldest structure in town, dating from 1051. The chapel holds the **Musée du Château des Comtes (Museum of the Castle of the Counts)**, which contains relics, models, and archaeological finds. It’s open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for students, and free for children under 13.

The remarkable Gothic **Collegiate Church of St. Waudru** ⚔ from 1450 honors the daughter of the count of Hainaut whose 7th-century convent marked the beginning of Mons. The church stands below the Belfry, a little to the west. Inside its vast vaulted space are 16th-century sculptures and wall carvings by

Mons-born artist Jacques Du Broeuck. Around the choir, a series of 16th-century stained-glass windows depict biblical scenes. At the entrance of the church, the **Car d'Or (Golden Coach)** waits for its annual spring outing (see box “The Ducasse Festival on Trinity Sunday,” above).

The centerpiece of the **Grand-Place** is the 15th-century **Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)**. Access is by a free guided tour from the tourist office, July to August daily at 2:30pm (at other times by prior arrangement with the tourist office). As you go through its main entrance, look to the left and perhaps stop to rub the head of “the monkey of the Grand-Garde,” an iron monkey that’s been granting good luck since the 15th century. Needless to say, by this time he has a very shiny pate. Inside the Town Hall are interesting tapestries and paintings.

The Town Hall courtyard is occupied by the **Jardin du Mayeur (Mayor’s Garden)**, with fountains, trees, flowers, and plants that make it a good place to relax for a time.

Musée des Arts Decoratifs (Museum of Decorative Arts) François Duesberg This museum, which is housed in the 19th-century former National Bank of Belgium building, has a fine collection of objects from 1775 to 1825, including exotic clocks, gilded bronzes, porcelain, crockery, gold, and silverwork. In addition, it displays the contents of the old Ceramic Museum—more than 3,000 pieces of fine porcelain from the 17th to the 19th century.

Sq. Franklin Roosevelt 12 (entrance rue de la Houssière 2). ☎ 065/36-31-64. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults; 2.50€ (\$3.15) seniors, students, and children 13–18; free for children under 13. Tues, Thurs, Sat–Sun 2–7pm.

Musée des Beaux-Arts (Museum of Fine Arts) ★ Despite its name, this museum in a side street off the Grand-Place occupies a remarkably ugly modern building. It emphasizes 19th- and 20th-century paintings and sculpture from Mons and Hainaut, but also displays older 15th- and 16th-century works such as the *Ecce Homo* by Dirck Bouts and *La Mort* by Jan Provost. At press time, the museum was closed for renovations until early 2006.

Rue Neuve 8 (beside the Jardin du Mayeur). ☎ 065/40-53-06. Admission (prices current when the museum closed for renovation; likely to increase when it reopens) 2€ (\$2.50) adults; 1€ (\$1.25) seniors, students, and children 13–18; free for children under 13. Tues–Sat noon–6pm; Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

Musée Chanoine Puissant (Chanoine Puissant Museum) At this 16th-century lodging house, Le Vieux Logis, part of an old abbey, you can view a rich collection of Gothic and Renaissance furnishings collected by Canon Edmond Puissant between 1880 and 1934. Nearby, viewed as part of the same tour, is the restored 13th-century **Chapelle de Ste-Marguerite (Chapel of St. Margaret)**, with beautiful examples of religious art.

Rue Notre-Dame-Debonnaire 22 and rue des Sars (near the station). ☎ 065/33-66-70. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults; 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors, students, and children 13–18; free for children under 13. Tues–Sat noon–6pm; Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

Musée du Folklore (Folklore Museum) This 17th-century former convent hospital in the town center houses interesting collections of antique furniture, as well as folk and craft objects. The displays are organized according to themes, such as public welfare among the poor, religious observances, weights and measures, and Mons’s Procession of the Golden Coach (see box “The Ducasse Festival on Trinity Sunday,” above).

Rue Neuve 8, in the Maison Jean Lescarts. ☎ 065/31-43-57. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults; 1.25€ (\$1.55) seniors, students, and children 13–18; free for children under 13. Tues–Sat noon–6pm; Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

Fighting Talk

Mons has an important place in British military history, as the site of a stiff World War I battle on August 23 and 24, 1914. The greatly outnumbered British Expeditionary Force absorbed the pile-driver blows of the Kaiser's invading army, holding up the Germans on their advance to Paris.

Musées du Centenaire (Centenary Museums) ★ The main quadrangle of Mons Town Hall is bordered by a cluster of three museums, collectively known as the Centenary Museums. Outside stands a prehistoric stone. The **Musée de Guerre (War Museum)** displays its sobering collection of relics from World Wars I and II on two floors, as well as exhibits on Mons's role in the wars. The **Numismatic Museum (Musée de Numismatique)** has more than 13,000 coins and medals. The **Musée d'Archéologie (Archaeological Museum)** contains exhibits that are based on local prehistory of the Gallo-Roman and Frankish periods.

Grand-Place. ☎ 065/33-52-13. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults; 1.50€ (\$1.90) children 13–18; free for seniors, students, and children under 13. Tues–Sat noon–6pm; Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

NEARBY PLACES OF INTEREST

Grand-Hornu ★ This monument of industrial archaeology is also a memorial to an idealistic—or paternalistic—employer. Mine-owner Henri de Gorge (1774–1832) built the complex between 1810 and 1830 in neoclassical style, and attached to it some 450 well-designed and well-equipped houses for his workers. Fallen into disuse and dereliction, Le Grand-Hornu was bought in the 1970s by a local architect and restored. It is a fascinating place, an unlikely mixture of antiquarian sensibility and gritty industrial reality that showcases the Victorian entrepreneurial tradition at its best.

Rue Ste-Louise 82, Hornu (13km/8 miles southwest of Mons). ☎ 065/65-21-21. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) students, free for children under 6. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm.

Maison Van Gogh (Van Gogh House) ★ During his days as a none-too-successful church missionary, the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh lived in 1879 and 1880 in this miner's house in the Borinage coal-mining district. He preached the gospel to the mining families, painting and drawing them and the bleak countryside. The house has been restored as a monument, with documents and an audiovisual presentation.

Rue du Pavillon 3, Cuesmes (3km/2 miles south of Mons). ☎ 065/35-56-11. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults; 1.25€ (\$1.55) seniors, students, and children 12–18; free for children under 12. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm.

A NEARBY CASTLE

Château de Beloeil (Beloeil Castle) ★★ Beloeil Castle, the ancestral home of the prince de Ligne, has been called, with some justification, the “Versailles of Belgium.” It is, quite simply, magnificent. The castle sits amid French-style gardens in its own park, on the shores of a huge ornamental lake. For more than a thousand years, the de Ligne family has been intimately involved with the history of Europe. And for all that time, they have lived in the grand style that pervades these vast rooms, filled with priceless antiques, paintings by the masters, historical mementos (there's even a lock of Marie Antoinette's hair), and more than 20,000 books, many of them rare editions.

Beloeil village (22km/14 miles northwest of Mons). ☎ 069/68-94-26. Admission 9€ (\$11) adults, 4€ (\$5) children. Apr–May Sat–Sun 1–6pm; June–Sept daily 10am–6pm.

THE HAINAUT LAKES

Among several lakes in Hainaut are the artificial lakes of the **Barrages de l'Eau d'Heure** ⚡ at Boussu-lez-Walcourt in the Botte de Hainaut (Hainaut's Boot), south of Charleroi, off N798. The **Plate Taille** is Belgium's largest lake, covering 350 hectares (867 acres), and the entire area has been developed as a watersports center, with designated zones for windsurfing, jet-skiing, scuba diving, sailing, and water-skiing. For information on the ecology of the area, go to the **Visitor Center** (☎ 071/50-92-92) beside the Plate Taille Dam, which is open Easter to October, daily from 10am to 6pm (7pm July–Aug). Admission is 5.50€ (\$6.90) for adults, 4.50€ (\$5.65) for seniors and children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

Farther south, near Chimay, is the **Etangs de Virelles (Lakes of Virelles)** nature reserve, 100 hectares (247 acres) of natural lakes, wetlands, and forest. There are guided walking tours of the reserve, and observation points for watching bird life. The **Visitor Center**, rue du Lac, Virelles-lez-Chimay (☎ 060/21-13-36), has an exhibit and audiovisual presentation. It's open May to September, daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel la Forêt This is one of the city's larger hotels, a little way out of town in quiet, rural surroundings. The guest rooms are nicely appointed, with peaceful views of woodlands and fields, and the lobby and other public spaces have a warm, inviting look.

Chaussée Bruneault 3 (off N56), 7000 Masnuy-St-Jean. ☎ 065/72-36-85. Fax 065/72-41-44. 52 units. 110€–160€ (\$138–\$200) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* TV.

Infotel The centrally located Infotel, a welcome addition to Mons's hotel scene, has pretty guest rooms with little extra-comfort touches—wooden furnishings offset by sky-blue curtains and salmon-pink walls, for example. The hotel offers a concierge, daytime room service, and laundry and dry-cleaning service.

Rue d'Havré 32, 7000 Mons. ☎ 065/40-18-30. Fax 065/35-62-24. syc@infonie.be. 25 units. 90€–130€ (\$113–\$163) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Concierge; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Devos ⚡ FRENCH/BELGIAN One of Mons's best restaurants, Michelin star-rated, occupies a courtyard setting just off the Grand-Place. Seafood dishes are a specialty, and beef and veal are good backups. The chef will also prepare a delicious roast duckling with black cherries if you request it when booking. Try some of the menu items cooked *à la bière* (in beer).

Rue de la Coupe 7 (off Grand-Place). ☎ 065/35-13-35. Main courses 15€–23€ (\$19–\$29); fixed-price menu 55€ (\$69). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm; Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat 7–9:30pm. Closed 1 week in Feb, 3 weeks from mid-July.

No Maison BELGIAN Thinking up a less promising name for a restaurant would be a tough proposition, but “no” is likely to become “yes” once you've tried it. A simple enough place, on three floors of an old patrician house, with a fine view over the Grand-Place from window tables, No focuses on Belgian and Mons specialties, such as *escavêche Montoise* (eel). Dark wood paneling is offset by colorful paintings of local festivals.

Grand-Place 21. ☎ 065/34-74-74. Main courses 9.50€–15€ (\$12–\$18); *plat du jour* 8€ (\$10); *menu Montoise* 22€ (\$28). MC, V. Daily 10am–2am.

6 Tournai ★★

72km (45 miles) SW of Brussels; 43km (27 miles) NW of Mons

During medieval and Renaissance times, Tournai, a historic and beautiful town that's the second oldest in Belgium (after Tongeren), maintained a position of prominence in Europe as an ecclesiastical center. Its importance in even more ancient centuries was forgotten, however, until 1653, when a workman, quite by chance, opened the tomb of Childeric, king of the Franks—whose son, Clovis, founded the Merovingian dynasty that ruled for nearly 3 centuries. This led to the discovery that Tournai's predecessor at this major crossroads on the River Scheldt, an early Roman settlement known as Tornacum, was the first capital of the Frankish empire. The tomb also yielded breathtaking royal treasures—the best of which, sadly, are now in Paris.

In World War II, a full 60% of the town's buildings were destroyed—it can only be deemed a miracle that the great cathedral emerged with little damage. Tournai still has magnificent works of art and architecture, the legacy of its painters, sculptors, goldsmiths, tapestry weavers, and porcelain craftsmen. Today, Tournai greets you with glorious monuments that are once more intact, and with its past recaptured so completely that the scars of conflict are scarcely visible.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There's good train service from Brussels, a 1½-hour ride. The **station** is on the northern edge of town, on boulevard des Nerviens. By **car** from Brussels, Tournai is less than an hour's drive on A8/E429.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Centre de Tourisme**, Vieux Marché-aux-Poteries 14, 7500 Tournai (☎ 069/22-20-45; fax 069/21-62-21; www.tournai.be), faces the Belfry. The center is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 7pm, and weekends from 10am to noon and 3 to 6pm.

SPECIAL EVENTS Tournai celebrates with splendid pageantry the Nativity of Our Lady on the second Sunday in September, with the religious **Procession of Tournai** through the city. On the **Days of the Four Parades**, during the second weekend in June, episodes from Tournai's history are reenacted in a series of folklore processions and events.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

For some idea of how Tournai looked back in medieval times, take a stroll along rue Barre St-Brice on the opposite side of the Scheldt (Escaut) River from the city center. **Pont des Troux (Bridge of Holes)** on quai Sakharov is an appropriate name for this 13th-century bridge over the Scheldt. It has taken its lumps from any number of battles and sieges since then—most recently in 1944, when it was blown up. The bridge and its two anchoring towers once formed part of the city's defensive walls. Another defensive military work, the 24m-high (80-ft.) **Tour Henry VIII**, in rue du Rempart, named for the notorious English king

Moments Still Standing

Although you can't go inside, you can at least peruse in Tournai the exteriors of what are said to be some of the oldest private houses still in existence in Europe. Nos. 10 and 12 rue Barre Saint-Brice date from 1175. In the same neighborhood, 13th-century **Gothic houses** line rue des Jésuites.

of the six wives fame, dates from the period of the English occupation of the town from 1512 to 1518.

Beffroi (Belfry) The Belfry of Tournai, a UNESCO World Heritage site, dates from the late 1100s, making it the oldest in Belgium. If you're up to it, you can climb the 265 steps to the top of this 72m (236-ft.) tower for a glorious view of the town and surrounding countryside. The Belfry's 44-bell carillon plays Saturday-morning concerts.

Grand-Place. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15). Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.

Cathédrale Notre-Dame (Cathedral of Our Lady) ★★☆☆ This magnificent five-towered cathedral is one of the most striking examples of Romanesque architecture in Europe, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Completed in the late 1100s, it's not the first place of worship to stand on this spot. There was a church here as early as A.D. 761, and it's thought there was a pagan temple before that. The 8th-century church was replaced by another in 850, which Viking raiders burned to the ground in 881. After fire again destroyed the replacement church in 1060, it was rebuilt by 1089 and became a place of refuge for a plague-stricken population. On September 14, 1090, after the dreaded disease had abated, the bishop led a great procession through the cathedral to honor Our Lady, who was credited with miraculous cures of sick pilgrims who had poured into the cathedral to pray before her statue. Since then, the **Procession of Tournai** has taken place every year, except in 1559 when Calvinists broke into the cathedral in a destructive orgy.

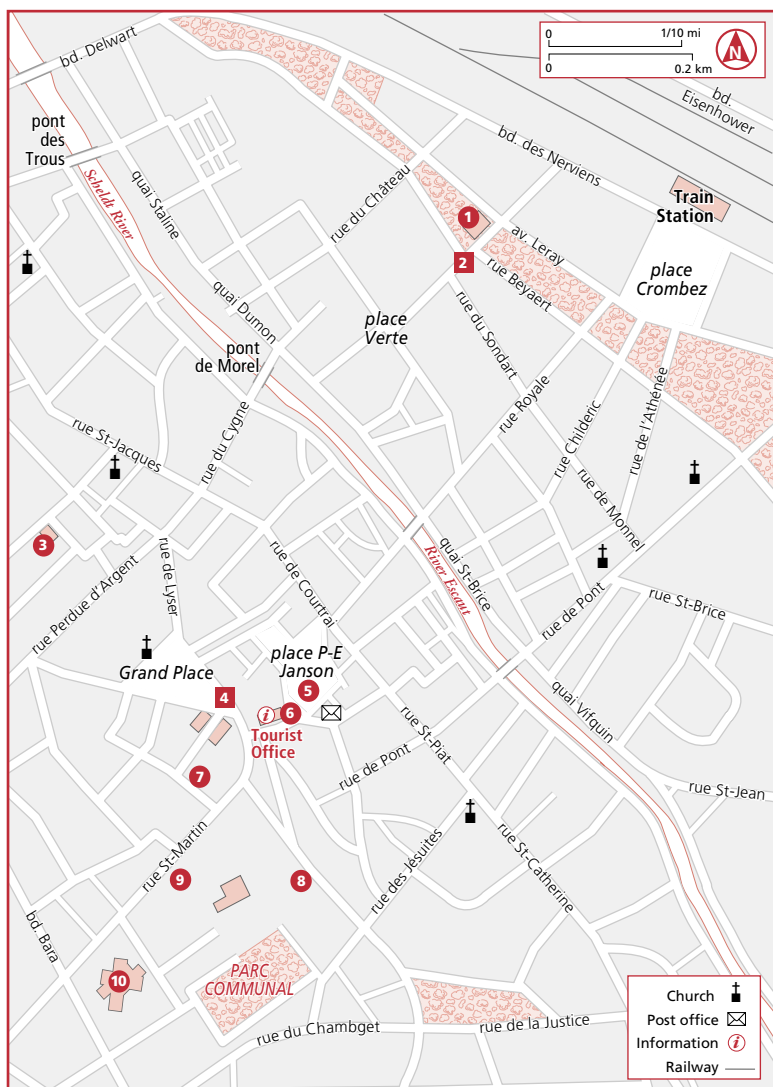
The classical Romanesque style was, in the eyes of a 13th-century bishop, hopelessly old-fashioned compared to the Gothic buildings that were then appearing all over Europe. He ordered stained-glass windows and had the Romanesque choir replaced by a Gothic one. Before the money ran out, he had created a soaring, graceful choir adjoining the long, low Romanesque nave, which never did get its Gothic face-lift. Amazingly, there is no sense of disharmony, but rather a sort of compatible marriage of the two styles.

Paintings by Rubens and Jordaens adorn the interior, along with 700-year-old murals, a Renaissance pulpit, and a “rose window” of stained glass. Even these wonders pale before the display in the **Trésor (Treasury)**, which houses a vast collection of priceless religious relics and antiquities. The centerpiece is **La Chasse de Notre-Dame**, a reliquary with a beautiful gold-sculpted covering created by Nicholas of Verdun in 1205; this object takes the place of honor in the Procession of Tournai. Other treasures include 15th-century tapestries (one 22m/72 ft. long!), a jewel-encrusted 10th-century Byzantine cross, and a 14th-century ivory statue of the Virgin.

Place de l'Evêché (just off the Grand-Place). ☎ 069/22-31-91. Free admission to Cathedral; Treasury 1€ (\$1.25). Cathedral: Apr–Oct and Nov–Mar daily 9am–noon and 2–6pm; Treasury: Apr–Oct Mon–Sat 10:15–11:45am and 2–5:45pm, Sun 2–4:45pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Sat 10:15–11:45am and 2–3:45pm, Sun 2–3:45pm.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Museum of Decorative Arts) This museum features examples of the exquisite porcelain and china made in Tournai in the 18th century, including the dinner service for the duc d'Orléans, as well as displays of fine silverware and historical coins.

Rue St-Martin 50. ☎ 069/22-40-69. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) students. Wed–Sun 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Belfry 6
- Cathédrale de Notre-Dame
(Cathedral of Our Lady of Tournai) 5
- Decorative Arts Museum 9
- Fine Arts Museum 10
- Folklore Museum 7
- Museum of History and Archaeology 3
- Tapestry Museum 8
- Tower of Henry VIII 1



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Aux Armes de Tournai 2
- L'Europe 4

Musée des Beaux-Arts (Museum of Fine Arts) 🌟 It's hard to say which is more impressive: this museum's 700 works of art, or the building dating from 1928 that houses them. The marvelous, star-shaped white stone structure was designed by noted Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta. Its interior is illuminated by natural light. The art collection contains such outstanding works as *Virgin and Child* by 15th-century native son Roger de La Pasture, better known as Roger van der Weyden; and Edouard Manet's *Argenteuil* and *At Father Lathuillès*. Other artists represented include Brueghel the Younger, James Ensor, Henri de Braekeleer, and Sir Anthony van Dyck.

Enclos St-Martin (off rue St-Martin). ☎ 069/22-20-43. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults (includes audio guide), 1.50€ (\$1.90) students. Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.

Musée du Folklore (Folklore Museum) 🌟 This museum preserves the atmosphere of Tournai in times gone by. Two marvelous 17th-century buildings in the city center, complete with gables and mullioned windows, provide just the right setting for a series of authentic re-creations of an ancient farmhouse, a tavern, a weaver's workroom, a blacksmith's forge, and many other old buildings. One fast-food stall shows how french fries were dispensed at the turn of the 20th century.

Réduit des Sions. ☎ 069/22-40-69. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) students. Wed–Mon 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.

Musée d'Histoire et d'Archéologie (Museum of History and Archaeology)

This museum, in a 17th-century pawnshop in the city center, features a collection of Tournai relics covering virtually every period in its history. The Merovingian section features items recovered in and around the tomb of Childeric, including the skeletons of horses that were sacrificed during the 5th-century Frankish king's funeral. There's also a fine collection of glassware from the Gallo-Roman period of the 1st to the 4th century.

Rue des Carmes 8. ☎ 069/22-16-72. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) students. Wed–Sun 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.

Musée de la Tapisserie (Tapestry Museum) In the late Middle Ages, Tournai was one of the great European centers of tapestry making, and this museum reflects that heritage. Several historical tapestries are on display, but interestingly, the museum focuses more on contemporary works, including pieces by top modern Belgian artists like Roger Somville.

Place Reine Astrid 9. ☎ 069/23-42-85. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) students. Wed–Sun 10am–noon and 2–5:30pm.

Hit by the Wild Geese

At the Battle of Fontenoy, fought near Tournai on May 11, 1745, a French army under Count Maurice de Saxe routed an army of British, Dutch, Austrians, and Hanoverians led by England's duke of Cumberland (who would earn the epithet "Butcher Cumberland" in Scotland in the following year, for his army's bayoneting of wounded Highlanders after the Battle of Culloden). There might be a certain shared Celtic satisfaction taken from the fact that at Fontenoy, the "Wild Geese," a brigade of Irish mercenaries in the French service, delivered the knockout blow.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS

From April to the end of August, **horse-drawn carriages** are available to take you through the cobblestone streets of Tournai. They leave from the Grand-Place; a 30-minute ride for one to five people costs 18€ (\$23).

The **Tournai from the River** boat cruise on the Scheldt lasts about an hour and departs from the dock at Pont des Troues from May to August, Tuesday to Sunday at 11am, 2:30pm, and 4:15pm. Fares are 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) for seniors and students, and 1.80€ (\$2.25) for children under 7.

WHERE TO STAY

Aux Armes de Tournai This small hotel is conveniently located in the center of town. It offers comfortable rooms with attractive decor and furnishings.

Place de Lille 24, 7500 Tournai. ☎ 069/22-67-23. 15 units. 45€–55€ (\$56–\$69) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian).

L'Europe This hotel right in the central square follows the rustic style common in Tournai, with antique paintings and lots of flowers in the public spaces. The guest rooms, plain but comfortable, are more modern in their furnishings, and some of them overlook the Grand-Place.

Grand-Place 36, 7500 Tournai. ☎ 069/22-40-67. Fax 069/23-52-38. 8 units. 65€ (\$81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Charles Quint ★ BELGIAN This popular, graceful restaurant is nearly always crowded at lunch, and deservedly so. Its kitchen produces excellent fish, fowl, and meat dishes. Try the *foie de canard au chicon* (duck liver with chicory) or the exceptional beef filet with onions and bacon. The restaurant is in Art Deco style, with mixed brown and orange colors, and is located in the city center overlooking the Belfry.

Grand-Place 3. ☎ 069/22-14-41. Main courses 14€–24€ (\$17–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed noon–2:30pm; Fri–Tues 7–10:30pm.

Le Pressoir CONTINENTAL This elegant restaurant is in the 17th-century former winepress of Tournai Cathedral. It retains as much of its antique ambience as possible in its interior fittings and silver tableware. The setting is subdued and sophisticated, and the fare is mouthwatering. Look for the duck and fish specialties, as well as such dishes as grilled lobster with fresh herbs, oven-baked turbot with fried shallots, and kidney with orange sauce and herbs.

Marché aux Poteries 2. ☎ 069/22-35-13. Main courses 11€–23€ (\$14–\$28); fixed-price menu 11€ (\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–2:30pm; Fri–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

The Ardennes

A scenic and gastronomic delight, the Ardennes is a welcome respite from sightseeing centered around ceaseless museum-hopping. That's not to say there are no worthwhile museums, but with the change in landscape comes a shift in emphasis, away from treasures hoarded indoors and toward the outdoor riches of bracing air, scenic winding mountain roads, sparkling streams, and tranquil lakes. Add a sprinkling of pretty resort towns, mostly nestled in steep, winding river valleys, and old country inns that provide the ultimate in comfort without losing one whit of their unique character, and you pretty much have the essence of the Ardennes.

For the lover of the great outdoors, the region offers a cornucopia of possibilities (though the landscape is one of hills, rather than genuine mountains):

biking, canoeing, fishing, golf, hunting, horseback riding, skiing, swimming, tennis, and more. Tourist offices can point the way to any necessary rental equipment, and there will always be contingents of local enthusiasts to share the fun.

Recommending an itinerary for the Ardennes is difficult: This is a country for rambling. I don't think you can do better than to follow your nose. Sooner or later you'll bump into some biggish place like La Roche-en-Ardenne, Spa, Bouillon, Bastogne, or Durbuy where you can join other wanderers. If you stick to the back roads, you'll have fun getting lost among all the stone villages and farmhouses for which the region is justly famed. Many of these were rebuilt after the destruction of the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944–45.

1 Bouillon

60km (38 miles) SE of Dinant

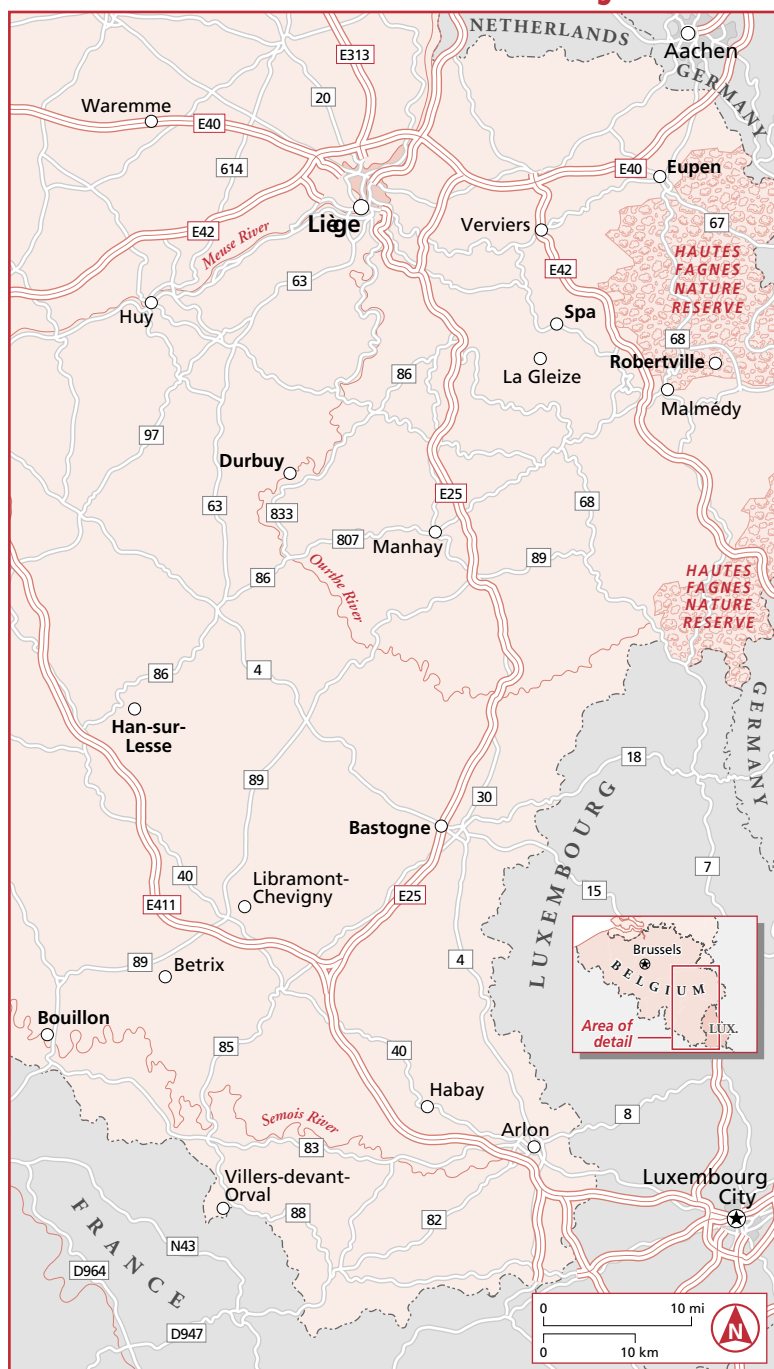
The little town sits at a strategic bend in the Semois River, where for centuries it guarded the major route from the Eifel to Champagne. In addition to a spectacular location in the plunging river valley, Bouillon boasts the country's finest medieval castle. The awesome 10th-century feudal castle of Godefroy de Bouillon, leader of the First Crusade to the Holy Land, still stands over the town today, crouching like a great stone dragon on a steep bluff. Bouillon today is a scenic and gastronomic stronghold—where better to try bouillon than in the place that gave it its name?

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent **bus** service from Libramont **rail** station. For bus information, call ☎ **061/46-62-57**. By **car** from Dinant, take N95 southeast, then N89 south to Bouillon.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Syndicat d'Initiative** is at Château Fort, BP 13, 6830 Bouillon (☎ **061/46-62-57**; fax 061/46-82-85), below the castle.

The Belgian Ardennes



The office is open March to November daily from 10am to 5pm; December to February Monday to Friday from 1 to 5pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Château de Bouillon (Bouillon Castle) ★★ This massive, sprawling castle, once home to Duke Godefroy de Bouillon, is the town's highly visible and dramatic centerpiece, floodlit every night during summer months. The worthy de Bouillon actually put the castle in hock in order to raise funds for his great venture, the First Crusade (see "Duke of Hazards," below). The mortgaged castle passed by default into the hands of the prince-bishops of Liège, who continued to hold it for 6 centuries. After the 15th century, it was conquered and reconquered several times, as local rulers and invading forces fought over this strategic spot. Within the castle's thick walls, life during its turbulent history will come alive as you walk through the ruins and visit the old prisons and gallows and the so-called Hall of Justice.

Rue des Hautes-Voies 33. ☎ 061/46-62-57. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Combined tickets for Bouillon Castle and Ducal Museum 8€ (\$10) adults, 4€ (\$5) children 6–12. Jan Sat–Sun 10am–5pm; Feb and Dec Mon–Fri 1–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5pm; Mar and Oct–Nov daily 10am–5pm; Apr–June and Sept daily 10am–6pm; July–Aug daily 9:30am–7pm.

Musée Ducal (Ducal Museum) ★ This museum, in an 18th-century house, contains exhibits on the region's archaeology, iron industry, and folklore. It also includes the Godfrey of Bouillon Museum, which holds souvenirs of the Crusades and of gallant Godfrey, including a model of Godfrey's tomb in Jerusalem and armor, weapons, and religious objects of the period.

Rue du Petit 1. ☎ 061/46-41-89. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Combined tickets for Bouillon Castle and Ducal Museum 8€ (\$10) adults, 4€ (\$5) children 6–12. July–Aug daily 9:30am–7pm; Sept–Oct and Apr–June daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Dec and mid-Jan to Mar Sat–Sun noon–5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Aux Armes de Bouillon This large hotel in the town center has nicely appointed guest rooms. It offers an indoor heated swimming pool, as well as a private garden, sauna, whirlpool, and sun lamp. There's a bar and a moderately priced restaurant on the premises.

Rue de la Station 9–15, 6830 Bouillon. ☎ 061/46-60-79. Fax 061/46-60-84. 60 units. 65€–110€ (\$81–\$138) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; lounge; heated indoor pool; sauna. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE NEARBY

Auberge du Moulin Hideux ★ This country inn set beside an old water mill, with wooded hills almost at its doorstep, is one of Belgium's prettiest. Inside there's a warm, subdued sophistication to the decor. A focal point for guests is the crackling log fire, which is surrounded by luxurious leather furniture and touches of brass to complete the lounge scene. The glassed-in bar is decorated with plants.

The Ardennes on a Plate

Food lovers should know that this region is the home of that delicately smoked Ardennes ham (*jambon d'Ardenne*) so proudly served all over Belgium, and of other regional specialties, including game and fresh trout and pike. The Ardennes is famed for its wealth of gourmet restaurants, many in country inns where the innkeeper doubles as a fine chef.

Duke of Hazards

Godfrey of Bouillon, duke of Lower Lorraine, was just 15 when in 1076 he inherited his lands, castle, and title. He was soon fighting for them and for his life against powerful local lords who wanted all four, and who thought that up against a callow youth they would easily get them. Godfrey proved them wrong in a war that culminated in a siege of Bouillon Castle in 1086, from which he emerged victorious.

In 1095, Pope Urban II called for an “armed pilgrimage” to liberate Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks and to ensure safe passage for Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land. Duke Godfrey was one of the first to answer the call, mortgaging his castle to the prince-bishop of Liège to finance an expedition. In August 1096, he was in the saddle, leading a contingent of the Crusader army converging on the Holy Land. Godfrey cut a bloody swath through Turkey, Syria, and Palestine. One of his stratagems was to display the heads of enemies killed in previous battles, a sight that had a gratifyingly demoralizing effect on each new force he encountered. By June 1099, Godfrey stood before the walls of Jerusalem at the head of the combined Christian army.

On July 15, the Crusaders took the Holy City by storm and massacred its Moslem inhabitants. Setting aside his armor, Godfrey put on a linen robe and prayed barefoot at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Offered the title King of Jerusalem, he refused it saying he “would not wear a crown of gold in the city where Our Lord had worn a crown of thorns.” He accepted instead the title of Defender of the Holy Sepulcher. Godfrey did not long survive to enjoy his victory. He died in 1100 and was buried in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Latin inscription on his tomb reads: “Here lies the renowned Godfrey of Bouillon, who brought this whole region under Christian sway. May his soul rest in the peace of Christ.”

Back in Bouillon, the prince-bishop of Liège called in the mortgage and pocketed Bouillon Castle.

The 12 guest rooms are appointed with the same sense of style. Extras include beautiful forest walks and horse riding trails nearby. The hotel's notable restaurant serves meals that feature lamb, saddle of pork, game, and fish delicacies such as baby lobsters (which are kept in a tank out in the garden). Everything is cooked to order, so be prepared to wait a bit for your dinner—your patience will be rewarded.

Rte. de Dohan 1 (4km/2½ miles from Bouillon), 6831 Noirefontaine. ☎ 061/46-70-15. Fax 061/46-72-81. 12 units. 190€ (\$238) double; 250€ (\$313) suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; lounge; heated indoor pool; tennis courts. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Hostellerie du Prieuré des Conques ★ This is a great spot to enjoy perfect tranquillity on the edge of an Ardennes forest, in an atmospheric inn on the banks of the Semois River. This hotel is set in what was once a 7th-century convent (although the oldest remains go back only as far as the 12th c.). It overlooks green lawns, rose gardens, and the Semois River. The charming guest rooms are

individual in shape and character—some have alcoves, some peek from beneath the eaves—and their comfort rates just as high as their charm. The vaulted main dining room is warmed by an open fire, and any overflow of diners spills into a bevy of smaller rooms, also vaulted.

Rue de Conques 179 (Florenville), 6820 Ste-Cécile. ☎ 061/41-14-17. Fax 061/41-27-03. 18 units. 110€–160€ (\$138–\$200) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Take N884 about 23km (14 miles) from Bouillon. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

A SIDE TRIP TO ORVAL ★

A handful of monks administer the impressive **Abbaye d'Orval (Orval Abbey)**, Villers-devant-Orval (☎ 061/31-16-61; www.orval.be), set in a forest. The serene and fascinating abbey dates back to the coming of the first Cistercians in 1110, though much was left in ruins after a destructive visit from the French in 1793. Today the complex includes the old ruins as well as a church, its gardens, and a brewery that produces one of Belgium's finest beers. A visit to the abbey is an exercise in serenity, since there is now little to suggest the enormous power its Cistercian monks wielded in past centuries. The old ruins are fascinating. Legend has it that somewhere in the web of underground passages that connected the abbey to seven nearby lakes, a vast treasure lies hidden. The abbey is open daily: March to May and October, from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5:30pm; June to September, from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6:30pm; November to February, from 10:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5:30pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 7 to 14, and free for children under 7. To get here by car from Bouillon, take the country road 27km (17 miles) southeast through Florenville.

2 Bastogne ★ & Han-sur-Lesse

These two towns offer dramatically different experiences, while sharing the scenic beauty and fresh air that are the Ardennes's strongest suit.

BASTOGNE

70km (44 miles) S of Liège

For most Americans, Bastogne is a place of pilgrimage. It was here, during the fierce Battle of the Bulge in the bitter winter of 1944–45, that the American 101st Airborne Division held superior numbers of German troops at bay until weather conditions improved and Allied reinforcements could be brought in. Without the valiance of the 101st and its heroic leader, Brig. Gen. Anthony MacAuliffe, Hitler might have turned the tide of World War II. Outnumbered and cut off from any support, MacAuliffe answered German demands for surrender with a single word that has become legend: "Nuts!"

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Bastogne makes a good day trip from almost any point in the Ardennes, but it's a little out of the way to use as a base for exploring. There are regular **buses** from Liège and other towns—take the Liège–Athus bus from Libramont rail station. By **car** from Liège, take Exit 53 or 54 off the A26/E25 Liège–Luxembourg City Expressway.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Syndicat d'Initiative** is at place MacAuliffe, 6600 Bastogne (☎ 061/21-27-11; fax 061/21-27-25; www.bastogne-tourisme.be). The office is open daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1 to 5:30pm.

EXPLORING BASTOGNE

American Memorial & Bastogne Historical Center ★★ A visit to the Historical Center will lay the groundwork for a better appreciation of the great battle fought here in December 1944. General MacAuliffe of the 101st Airborne Division and his opponent, Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel of the Fifth Panzer Army, both gave advice in putting together the film, dioramas, and commentary that tell the story of the siege of Bastogne. Afterwards, visitors can climb to the gigantic star-shaped memorial. Key points of the battlefield are clearly posted for those interested in retracing the course of the fighting.

Colline du Mardasson (1.6km/1 mile outside Bastogne). ☎ 061/21-14-13. www.bastognehistoricalcenter.be. Admission 8.50€ (\$11) adults; 7€ (\$8.75) seniors and visitors with disabilities; 6€ (\$7.50) children 8–12; free for children under 8. July–Aug daily 9am–6pm; May, June, Sept daily 10am–5pm; Feb–Apr and Oct–Dec daily 10am–4:30pm. Closed Jan and Dec 24–25, 31.

HAN-SUR-LESSE

40km (25 miles) NW of Bastogne; 25km (16 miles) SE of Dinant

This is a particularly good stop for those traveling with children, though the two places described below are very interesting for adults as well.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** from Namur and Liège stop at nearby Jemelle, from where a **bus** service connects with Han-sur-Lesse. By **car** from Dinant, take N94 southeast to its junction with N86, then go northeast on this road for the last few miles.

VISITOR INFORMATION The local tourist office is at Place Théo Lannoy, 5580 Han-sur-Lesse (☎ 084/37-75-96; fax 084/37-75-76). The office is open in summer daily from 1:30 to 5:30pm; in winter Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Grottes de Han (Caves of Han) ★ *Kids* Of the several cave complexes in the Ardennes, this one is probably the most spectacular and worth visiting. Only about one-fifth of the cave is open to the general public, though other parts are accessible to experienced speleologists. Guides take visitors on an hour-long tour to see the stalagmites and stalactites, marvel at the sometimes bizarre and sometimes graceful shapes taken on by the limestone rock of the caves, and listen to the echo in the great subterranean chambers carved out by the Lesse River. The highlight is a boat trip on an underground river.

Rue des Grottes 46. ☎ 084/37-72-12. www.grotte-de-han.be. Admission (guided tours only) 11€ (\$14) adults, 10€ (\$13) seniors, 6.50€ (\$8) children 3–12, free for children under 3. Mar and Nov Sat–Sun 11:30am, 1pm, 2:30pm, and 4:30pm; Apr and Sept–Oct daily 10am–noon and 1:30–4:30pm; May–June daily 9:30–11:30am and 1–4:30pm (to 5pm weekends in May, to 5:30pm weekends in June); July–Aug daily 9:30–11:30am and 1–6pm.

Réserve d'Animaux Sauvages (Wildlife Reserve) ★ *Kids* The Wildlife Reserve, which is part of the same tourist complex as the Grottes, gives you a breath of fresh air after the damp and chilly caves. You can take a guided tour by train through the scenic Massif du Boine estate, where you may see wild boars, wild horses, stags, fallow deer, wolves, bison, ibex, chamois, tarpans, lynx, brown bears, and other animals—many of them native to the area, but some imported.

The Battle of the Bulge

Hitler aimed his last great offensive squarely at the Americans, because he believed that if he hit them hard enough, their easygoing, multi-ethnic, citizen army would fall apart and run. By mid-December 1944 he had assembled his last reserves of men, tanks, and guns, including the elite SS Panzer divisions, in the hilly, misty Eifel region of Germany, opposite the thinly held American lines in the Ardennes. In one of the great failures of military intelligence, the American high command didn't know they were there.

On the morning of December 16, the German forces came charging out of the forests. Their aim was far-reaching: to smash straight through the American line, cross the Meuse River before Allied reinforcements had time to intervene, capture Brussels and the vital port of Antwerp, split the American army from the British and Canadians, and break the Allied coalition.

The Führer's ambition outstripped his means, but in the Ardennes he had overwhelming strength for the attack: 300,000 against 80,000 on the first day. A few of the hard-hit American defenders did "bug out," but most held their ground until forced back or overrun. Savage struggles all across the Ardennes in Belgium and Luxembourg propelled the names of obscure towns, villages, and places into the history books: Rocherath and Krinkelt, the Elsenborn Ridge, Malmédy, Stavelot, Trois Ponts, La Gleize, Sankt-Vith, the Skyline Drive, Clervaux, Wiltz, and, of course, Bastogne. The action came to be called the Battle of the Bulge, after the shape the front took as German forces pushed through the middle of the Ardennes.

The lightly armed U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions were rushed in to stem the German armored tide until heavier reinforcements could be brought to bear. While the 82nd fought no-quarter battles with SS

Departures from rue Joseph Lamotte 2, Han-sur-Lesse. ☎ 084/37-72-12. Admission (guided tours only) 8€ (\$10) adults, 7.20€ (\$9) seniors, 4€ (\$5) children 3–12, free for children under 3. Mar and Nov Sat–Sun 11:30am, 1pm, 2:30pm, and 4:30pm; Apr and Sept–Oct daily 10am–noon and 1:30–4:30pm; May–June daily 9:30–11:30am and 1–4:30pm (to 5pm weekends in May, to 5:30pm weekends in June); July–Aug daily 9:30–11:30am and 1–6pm.

3 Durbuy ★

31km (19 miles) S of Liège

Durbuy makes an ideal touring base. A tiny, quaint, medieval town on a bend in the river, with narrow, twisting streets lined with pretty, flower-trimmed stone houses, it has an 11th-century castle to complete the scene.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE In July and August only, there is one **bus** to Durbuy a day from Barvaux **rail** station. By **car** from Liège, take Exit 48 west from A26/E25.

troops who had massacred American prisoners and murdered Belgian civilians, the 101st found itself cut off in Bastogne, holding the vital road junction there.

On December 26, the enemy spearhead was destroyed just a few miles short of the Meuse. General George S. Patton's Third Army, counterattacking from the south, relieved Bastogne. Further weeks of heavy fighting pushed the German army back to its start line. Hitler's great gamble had failed, with German casualties above 100,000 out of 500,000 engaged.

The victors were the ordinary GIs who, in the depths of winter, outnumbered, and faced with a surprise offensive by a still powerful foe, had refuted Hitler's contemptuous opinion of them in the only way that mattered. The price of victory was 81,000 American casualties out of 600,000 engaged: 19,000 killed, 47,000 wounded, and 15,000 captured. Memorials all over the Ardennes bear witness to their courage and sacrifice.

Those of the fallen not repatriated, or still lying somewhere among the Ardennes forests, rest at the military cemeteries of **Neuville-en-Condroz** and **Henri-Chapelle**. Both are U.S. soil, donated in perpetuity by the people of Belgium. So many names on the long rows of white crosses and Stars of David on the carefully tended lawns; and so many "known but to God."

If you want to know more, read *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (William Morrow, 1984), by Charles B. MacDonald. A company commander with the 2nd Infantry Division, MacDonald fought in the Ardennes and later became a U.S. Army historian. His book skillfully melds the strategic picture and the tactical ebb and flow with up-close-and-personal experiences of the men who did the fighting, the bleeding, and the dying.

VISITOR INFORMATION The local tourist office is at Place aux Foires 25, 6940 Durbuy (☎ 086/21-24-28; fax 086/21-36-80; www.durbuyinfo.be).

EXPLORING DURBUY

The village is pretty (though the main square is a big parking lot) without having any particularly outstanding sights. Wander around to peruse its medieval stone-built buildings, many of which house artists and craftspeople; or take a walk by the plunging valley of the Ourthe River or into the nearby forests. You get fine views of the town from scenic overlooks in the surrounding hills, and good exercise getting to them in the first place. Besides all that, there's crazy golf for the kids. Shops abound, selling antiques, pottery, handmade jewelry, and locally produced artisanal food and drink, including chocolates, liqueur, and beer.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE IN DURBUY

Hostellerie le Sanglier des Ardennes ★★ ★ This stellar, centrally located hotel overlooking a shallow gorge offers comfortable rooms replete with old-fashioned charm. Those in the back overlook the Ourthe River; those in the

Skiing the Ardennes

It may not be the Alps, and it sure ain't the Rockies, but Belgium's Ardennes region can be something of a skier's paradise—so long as the snow shows up. Therein lies the problem. In the low Ardennes hills—the highest point is a mere 694m (2,256 ft.) above sea level—snow's appearance is often brief and unpredictable. Some years it stays away altogether. Still, when the thermometer starts dropping, ski aficionados in Belgium take serious notice. Skiing is particularly popular on weekends.

Although there are some downhill slopes, cross-country is more usual. Traversing the gentle wooded hills or the high plateau of the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve can be a memorable experience. The main ski zones lie in the north of the Ardennes, around Botrange, Robertville, Bütgenbach, Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, La Roche-en-Ardenne, and Bastogne. Parts of Luxembourg and the neighboring Eifel district of Germany also offer good facilities.

For further information, contact **Ardennes et Meuse Tourisme**, rue de l'Eglise 15, 6980 La Roche-en-Ardenne (☎ 084/41-19-81).

front have a postcard-pretty view of the old town, with mountains in the background. The restaurant on the ground floor is internationally famous. In this cozy spot overlooking the Ourthe River on the main street in the town center, master chef Maurice Caerdinael creates internationally acclaimed classic dishes. Fish straight from the river outside come to the table full flavored, with subtle sauces or seasonings that add to their delicacy. Regional specialties such as game and the famed smoked *jambon* (ham) take on new dimensions after passing through this extraordinary kitchen. The superb wine cellar also reflects the chef's expertise. There's a covered terrace for outdoor dining.

Rue Comte Théodule d'Ursel 14, 6940 Durbuy. ☎ 086/21-32-62. Fax 086/21-24-65. 45 units. 110€–240€ (\$138–\$300) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Le Clos des Récollets This hotel is situated in the heart of the old village, in a pedestrian zone fronted by 17th-century buildings. The structure dates from the 17th century, but has 18th-century modifications. The interior conserves the style of the period, with oak doors, oil paintings, and wooden furnishings. Illumination is provided by candle, as much as possible. The guest rooms are rather plainly furnished, but quite comfortable. On the premises is a good, moderately priced restaurant, with umbrella tables on a terrace for outdoor dining. Menu items include game in season, such as pheasant, and lobster stew with vegetables.

Rue de la Prévôté, 6940 Durbuy. ☎ 086/21-12-71. Fax 086/21-36-85. 10 units. 80€ (\$100) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar.

4 Spa

28km (17 miles) SE of Liège

To uncover the origin of mineral springs, you need to go straight to the source. Where better to begin than Spa? The town virtually floats on some of the

healthiest H₂O ever to gurggle up to the surface and has been a bustling resort ever since a medieval blacksmith from other parts bought up the land holding these wondrous springs. The town that grew up around them has catered to the likes of Charles II of England, Montaigne, the queen of Sweden, and Czar Peter the Great of Russia. So universally was its name equated with the miracles of thermal springs and mineral waters that the word “spa” is now applied to health and fitness centers of every description.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, *curistes* came from all over Europe to take the waters, gamble their money in the casino founded in 1763 (and said to be the world’s oldest) and, like Victor Hugo, stroll on the forested Promenade des Artistes just outside town. Nowadays, visitors also come flooding in for the Formula One motor race at the nearby Spa-Francorchamps circuit, which surely is the most scenic racetrack in the world.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There’s frequent train service to Spa from Liège, but you have to change at Verviers. For **train** information, call ☎ 04/361-11-11. Buses leave regularly from in front of Verviers rail station. For **bus** information, call ☎ 04/361-94-44. By **car** from Liège, take A26/E25 southeast to Exit 46, then follow the signs for Remouchamps, and from there take N697 east.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Spa Tourist Office** is at place Royale 41, 4900 Spa (☎ 087/79-53-53; fax 087/79-53-54; www.spa-info.be), in the 19th-century Pavillon des Petits-Jeux. The office is open April to September, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, weekends from 10am to 6pm; October to March, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 5pm, Sunday from 1 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Visitors continue to gather in Spa both for the healing treatments and for its lively action at the **Grand Casino**, rue Royale 4 (☎ 087/77-20-52), in the center of town. If you’re here for the “cures,” head for the ornate mineral baths, the **Thermes de Spa** ♣, place Royale 2 (☎ 087/77-25-60). There, they can tell you everything you need to know about thermal cures, walking cures, drinking cures (not the alcoholic kind!), and more. The baths are open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1:30 to 4:30pm, Saturday from 8:30am to noon.

Another attraction in town is the **Pouhon Pierre le Grand (Peter the Great Spring)**, place Pierre le Grand (☎ 087/79-53-53), in what was formerly a winter garden and is now a small art gallery. The pavilion was built in the elegant Belle Epoque style, with lots of wrought iron and windows combining to give it a light, airy feel. The pavilion usually hosts small-scale exhibits and is open April to October, daily from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 1:30 to 5pm, weekends from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm.

There are numerous springs in the countryside around Spa, and at some of them you can draw as much water as you like for free (bring your own container). The water is said to be very healthy and full of iron, but most of it smells remarkably bad. To visit these springs, get a free description of the *Route des Fontaines* from the tourist office.

On Sunday, there’s a flea market (8am–2pm) in the wrought-iron Galerie Léopold II arcade, behind the tourist office.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel la Heid des Pairs ★ This villa outside the center of town is surrounded by lawns dotted with ancient trees. It was built for Baron Nagelmackers, whose family founded the Orient Express. The ambience is still that of a private home. The comfortable drawing room and homey guest rooms furnished with a mixture of period and functional pieces give the inn a welcoming, homey feel. These touches begin with fruit and sweets in your room on arrival. Three of the rooms have private balconies; you can elect to have your breakfast served there or on the terrace downstairs.

Av. Professor-Henrijean 143, 4900 Spa. ☎ 087/77-43-46. Fax 087/77-06-44. www.heiddespairs.be. 7 units. 80€–140€ (\$100–\$175) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Lounge; outdoor pool. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

L'Auberge This attractive hotel in the town center opens onto a small square. Older rooms are comfortable and homey and look out through casement windows to the town outside. There are also tastefully furnished luxury suites, with bedroom, large living room, fully equipped kitchen, and bathroom. Each can accommodate up to four people. The hotel's ground floor houses a good restaurant.

Place du Monument 4, 4900 Spa. ☎ 087/77-44-10. Fax 087/77-48-40. 17 units. 52€–68€ (\$65–\$85) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian). *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

A la Retraite de l'Empereur FRENCH This beautifully rustic restaurant, in a long stone building set right on the main street of a tiny village, has won several prestigious awards for its classic French cuisine. Specialties include game (in season) and lobster, as well as other good seafood selections, including a mixed seafood dish of cod, salmon, mussels, scampi, and clams. The chef's specialty is corn-fed chicken in Bourgogne vinegar. House wines are inexpensive. The drive out through tranquil, rolling countryside is a delight.

About 8km (5 miles) from Spa, Basse Desnié 842, La Reid. ☎ 087/37-62-15. Reservations required. Main courses 15€–27€ (\$19–\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2pm and 7–9pm. Closed last 3 weeks in July, and 3 weeks Dec–Jan.

Brasserie du Grand Maur ★ FRENCH/BELGIAN A 200-year-old building with creaky wooden floorboards and a cozy, U-shaped dining room is the graceful setting for a variety of seafood and regional dishes. You read the menu from a board that the owners stand beside your table, and choose from a wide-ranging, well-considered wine list—at prices, though, that can easily double your bill. Fresh lobster emerges from a big tank in the lobby, joining oysters, sole, and cod among seafood dishes; if the lobster is too expensive as a main course, you can at least taste it in the excellent and inexpensive lobster *bisque* (soup). The *pâté de foie gras* (duck-liver pâté) is excellent, as is the *côte d'agneau d'Ecosse* (Scottish side of lamb). There's a separate small bar for your aperitif and postprandial *pousse-café*. In summer you can dine on a garden terrace.

Rue Xhrouet 41 (behind Pouhon Pierre le Grand). ☎ 087/77-36-16. Main courses 14€–26€ (\$18–\$33); fixed-price menu 39€ (\$49). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun noon–2pm and 6:30–11pm.

MORE DINING OPTIONS

If you walk the 10km (6-mile) Route des Fontaines that connects the mineral springs in the countryside around Spa, you'll find rustic little restaurants conveniently located about 10 steps from each spring—you'd almost think it had been planned that way. The first spring on the route, the Fontaine de Barisart, has the

least interesting eatery, a blocky, cafeteria-style place with all the charm of a missile silo. After that, things pick up. **La Géronstère** (☎ 087/77-03-72) is a stone-built farmhouse-style building that stocks good snacks, beside the Fontaine de la Géronstère; **La Sauvenière** (☎ 087/77-42-04), also stone-built and in a farmhouse style, is beside the Fontaine de la Sauvenière and the adjacent Fontaine de Groesbeeck; and the Italian **La Fontaine du Tonnelet** ☘ (☎ 087/77-26-03), in a red-and-white pavilion, its interior decorated in the style of a Tuscan villa, is beside the Fontaine du Tonnelet. Back in Spa, if you're in a hurry, the **Chalet du Parc** (☎ 087/77-22-84), in the Parc de Sept Heures behind the tourist office, is a good place for a snack in the open air if the weather is fine.

5 The Amblève Valley

LA GLEIZE

14km (9 miles) S of Spa

Sad to relate, but the main claim to fame of this village—other than a scenic location—is that it got blown to bits during the December 1944 Battle of the Bulge. The fighting here was as important to the eventual U.S. victory in the Ardennes as the better-known struggle at Bastogne. La Gleize is on N633.

Spearheading the entire German offensive, *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, a powerful battle group from the 1st SS Panzer Division (*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*), under Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, broke through the thin American front in the Losheim Gap. Peiper's tanks and armored infantry smashed up rear-echelon units, then drove west through Stavelot to Trois Ponts, where an American engineer detachment blew up the vital bridges over the Amblève in its face. After penetrating deeper into the Amblève valley, the battle group was finally brought to bay at La Gleize, cut off, and pounded relentlessly by artillery. Just 800 of Peiper's 6,000-strong force, minus all of their tanks and other heavy equipment, made it back to German lines.

Musée Décembre 1944 (December 1944 Museum) ☘☘ There is no shortage of museums in the Ardennes to record its dark winter of World War II. This, one of the best, focuses on the battle waged by troops of the 82nd Airborne, 30th Infantry, and 3rd Armored divisions to eliminate *Kampfgruppe Peiper*. That battle reached its climax at La Gleize. In an old, rebuilt presbytery, signposted off the main street, are 15 dioramas stocked with 80 uniformed mannequins representing soldiers from both sides, along with military equipment, photographs, maps, and a half-hour film in four languages, including English, on the bitter fighting in and around La Gleize during which the village was entirely destroyed.

A rare German Royal Tiger tank, a shot-and-shell-scarred 68-ton behemoth with a high-velocity 88mm cannon, stands guard outside, having been liberated from its original allegiance. Few American weapons could dent a Royal Tiger, far

Impressions

No one could say they enjoyed being here during the Battle of the Ardennes. None of us wanted to be here. But we had a job to do. We hope that what happened here will not be forgotten, because we don't want a new generation to go through the same experience.

—Battle of the Bulge veteran Don Lassen, 82nd Airborne Division

less knock one out, and a close-up view of this beast gives you some idea why. Historian and Bulge veteran Capt. Charles B. MacDonald recalled: "A Tiger advancing with machine-guns blazing or 88 blasting was a near-paralyzing sight."

Rue de l'Eglise 7. (C) 080/78-51-91. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 5–10, free for children under 5. Easter to late Nov, Christmas, and Carnival school vacations daily 10am–6pm.

6 The Ostkantone ★★

There can be few more scenic places in western Europe than the rugged frontier where Belgium meets Holland, Germany, and Luxembourg. The dense pine forests of the Eifel–Ardennes region alternate with rolling hills and deeply gouged river valleys, creating an outdoor playground for ramblers, cyclists, and canoeists. Wherever there is open space, it is taken up by rich arable farmland and livestock-filled meadows. Known as the East Cantons (*Ostkantone* in German; *Cantons de l'Est* in French), this district in the east of Belgium is home to the country's German-speaking minority. Of its population of 100,000, two-thirds speak German and the remainder French. The whole area is sparsely populated and wonderfully scenic, with no end in sight of hills, forests, and streams. Outdoor pursuits are a way of life here.

EUPEN

20km (12 miles) NE of Spa; 34km (21 miles) E of Liège

This handsome little town (pop. 17,000) is the capital of the East Cantons. It houses the German-speaking minority's local parliament, a prime minister, and a German-language television and radio station. The entire East Cantons district is a popular vacation zone and has an extensive array of hotels, guesthouses, and camping sites. Many people prefer to stay in the countryside, but for those who like the amenities of a small town, Eupen has some good lodging possibilities.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are hourly **trains** to Eupen from Brussels and Liège, some direct and some involving a change at Verviers. By **car** from Liège, take Exit 38 off A3/E40.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Verkehrsamt Eupen** is at Marktplatz 7, 4700 Eupen (C) 087/55-34-50; fax 087/55-66-39). For information about the East Cantons in general, contact **Verkehrsamt der Ostkantone**, Mühlenbachstrasse 2, 4780 Sankt-Vith (C) 080/22-76-64; fax 080/22-65-39; www.eastbelgium.com).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The **Exekutive (Parliament)** of the East Cantons, Klötzerban 32 (C) 087/55-34-50), is in a handsome patrician mansion dating from 1761. Guided tours are free, but you can only make one by prior arrangement.

The baroque **Sankt-Nikolaus Pfarrkirche (Church of St. Nicholas)**, Marktplatz (C) 087/74-20-62), incorporating part of a 14th-century church, dates mainly from 1720 to 1726. Its two bulbous spires from the late 1890s have become symbols of the town, and the Aachen style of the exterior contrasting with an interior design typical of Liège reflects Eupen's position on the frontier between the German and the Belgian cities. The church is open daily; admission is free.

WHERE TO STAY

Ambassador Hotel Bosten ★ This hotel occupies a good location on the eastern edge of town, beside the road that leads uphill to Hertogenwald Forest and Hautes Fagnes National Park. Nearby is a park with a fountain. The modern

Hautes Fagnes: A Great National Park

Eupen's main tourist value—aside from its hotels, restaurants, cafes, and shops—is that it is a gateway to the wide green yonder. Outside the town lies the Hertogenwald Forest, with many marked walking and riding trails. Beyond the forest, in the direction of Malmédy, is Belgium's largest national park, **Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve** ★★, a high, boggy moorland plateau with unique subalpine flora, fauna, and microclimate. You can access the reserve through Baraque-Michel and Mont-Rigi, though it's closed for some weeks in spring because of the breeding season for birds, foxes, and other animals, and may be closed on occasion in summer due to the increased fire risk. At all other times you must stick to the boardwalks and signposted paths. A hike amid the stark beauty of the Hautes Fagnes (Höhes Venn in German) in the dead of winter is a memorable experience—but be aware that the subalpine climate can suddenly change to subarctic, so only do this if you are properly clad and equipped.

For the complete lowdown on the Hautes Fagnes, visit the **Centre Nature de Botrange** (☎ 080/44-03-00), signposted off the road to Sourbrodt, which documents the history and ecology of the reserve. The center is open daily from 10am to 6pm; admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children 6 to 18, free for children under 6. Close by is the **Signal de Botrange**, a tower that marks the less-than-dizzying highest point in Belgium, 694m (2,276 ft.) above sea level.

guest rooms are comfortable and well equipped, each with a balcony. The decor is warm, with peach-colored walls and lush floral patterns on the curtains and bedcovers. The hotel's classic French restaurant, *Le Gourmet*, is highly regarded in the East Cantons.

Haasstrasse 77–81, 4700 Eupen. ☎ 087/74-08-00. Fax 087/74-48-41. 30 units. 95€–160€ (\$119–\$200) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ (\$10). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Rathaus Hotel ★ Don't be put off by the name, which sounds just like "Rat House" in English. In German, "Rathaus" means Town Hall (come to think of it, the expression in English might have a certain validity). This fine hotel faces the flower-bedecked Town Hall, and offers a friendly welcome in the white-marble reception area. All guest rooms have private bathrooms and hair dryers, and some have a balcony. Decor and furnishings are simple but bright and clean, with pine beds covered by colorful quilts, pine furnishings, gray carpeting, and walls adorned with floral paintings. There's no in-house restaurant, but the neighboring Italian restaurant *La Luna* does a pretty good job of filling in.

Rathausplatz 13, 4700 Eupen. ☎ 087/74-28-12. Fax 087/74-46-64. 18 units. 80€ (\$100) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Fiasko ★ CONTINENTAL Despite the name, this family-owned restaurant is absolutely not a fiasco. Small and intimate, with attentive, friendly service, it brings a touch of adventure to an area where, when it comes to cuisine, devotion

to tradition is more usual. There's room for just 26 diners at a handful of tables in a setting of timber beams and bare brick walls. The menu, handwritten on plates (and the drinks list on empty wine bottles), changes weekly depending on what's fresh at local markets, and seasonally to track Belgian manias such as the spring asparagus crop and the autumn game hunt in the Ardennes. But there are always likely to be items like steak filet with a cognac-and-cream sauce and potato gratin; *magret de canard au porto* (duck breast in a port-wine sauce) with vegetables of the day and pasta; and locally fished (or farmed) trout.

Bergstrasse 28 (at Am Clown). ☎ 087/55-25-50. Main courses 12€–19€ (\$15–\$24). AE, MC, V. Wed–Sun noon–2:30pm and 6–10:30pm.

Le Mont-Rigi ★ BELGIAN A few miles out of Eupen on the Malmédy road, this stone-built brasserie-restaurant is blessed with one of the finest outdoor terraces imaginable. It looks southward over the high, wide moorland bordered by forests of the Fagne de la Poleûr and acts as a sun trap in good weather. The place can get busy with hikers and day-trippers, especially on weekends in summer and during the winter ski season, but at other times it can be very quiet, which accounts for an uncertain but early closing time. Meals range from simple snacks of cheese and cold cuts, through the ubiquitous Belgian *steak-frites*, to lavish game dishes in season. Apart from on the terrace, you can eat either in the convivial main area at no-frills wooden tables, or in the formal restaurant section, where there are napkins and proper table settings.

Rte. de Botrange 135, Mont-Rigi (at Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve). ☎ 080/44-48-44. Main courses 6.50€–13€ (\$8–\$16); *menu du jour* 9.95€–17€ (\$12–\$21). MC, V. Tues–Sun 10am–8pm or 9pm (depending on custom).

ROBERTVILLE

20km (12 miles) S of Eupen; 18km (11 miles) E of Spa

Beyond the Hautes Fagnes, in the direction of the German border, is **Lac de Robertville**, a 153-acre lake outside Robertville village that's a popular area for swimming and watersports in summer.

Burg Reinhardstein (Castle Reinhardstein) ★ This is the very image of a fairy-tale castle, though it's perhaps a little more homey than formidable in appearance. Nevertheless, its battlemented towers stand on a rugged rocky outcrop overlooking a forest and a plunging stream. The castle used to belong to the Metternich family. After having tumbled into near ruin, it was saved from total destruction by a Belgian castle enthusiast, the late Prof. Jean Overloop, and fully restored. Now you can tour its towers and chambers in the company of guides who have inherited Overloop's love for the place.

Ovifat-Robertville (signposted from the village). ☎ 080/44-68-68. Admission (guided tours only) 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 6–14, free for children under 6. June, Sept Sun 2:15 and 5:15pm; July–Aug Tues, Thurs, Sat 3:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel des Bains ★ This fine hotel sits on the shores of Lac de Robertville, near Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve. Its rooms are stylish yet cozy, with twin beds and an all-round sense of good taste. The hotel restaurant's classic French cuisine is served with a light, delicate touch. Pike from the lake comes poached and served on lettuce with a white butter sauce—the choice when it's available.

Lac de Robertville, Waimès. ☎ 080/67-95-71. Fax 080/67-81-43. 14 units. 95€–130€ (\$119–\$163). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, V. Free parking. A short way from Spa on E5 to Exit A27, signposted MALMÉDY-WAIMÈS. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Gallant Stand

East of Robertville, in the center of a rotary on the road between the villages of Bütgenbach and Büllingen, stands a tall marble column inscribed with a big red numeral "1." It marks the spot where, in December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, the U.S. 1st Infantry Division (the Big Red One) stood in the way of the German 12th SS Panzer Division (*Hitler-Jugend*), which was trying to force a passage onto the high ground. "We fight and die here," battalion commander Lt. Col. Derrill M. Daniel told his men. Many of them did just that, but the storm troopers never did get past them.

Planning Your Trip to Holland

This chapter deals with the practicalities of a visit to Holland—and above all else, Holland is a practical country. Rail and bus connections are excellent. And whether you choose to drive or use the excellent Dutch public

transportation system, getting around within the country is a simple matter. For information that covers the Benelux countries in general, see chapter 2.

1 The Regions in Brief

The Netherlands might be a small country, but in Amsterdam it boasts one of Europe's most memorable cities. Around Amsterdam, the old and historic province of Holland, now divided into northern and southern sections, is the economic powerhouse of the nation, and its most heavily populated region. Beyond these are three more or less natural divisions—the northern, central, and southern Netherlands—which share some characteristics but have enough variation to differentiate them.

AMSTERDAM The national capital, this easygoing, prosperous city, full of canals, bridges, and world-class museums, and enveloped in the afterglow of its 17th-century Golden Age, is the natural focus of a visit to the Netherlands. Amsterdam has been drawn to a human scale. Few skyscrapers mar the clarity of the sky, and the populace mostly walks or bikes from place to place. The historic center recalls Amsterdam's Golden Age as the command post of a vast trading network and colonial empire, when wealthy merchants constructed gabled residences along neatly laid-out canals. A delicious irony is that the placid old structures also host brothels, smoke shops, and some extravagant nightlife.

NOORD-HOLLAND You can think of North Holland province as the environs of Amsterdam, because the capital is within easy reach of anywhere in the region. **Haarlem** is a graceful town of winding canals and medieval neighborhoods that also holds several fine museums. A visit to the beautiful little village of **Zaanse Schans**, on the banks of the Zaan River, 24km (15 miles) north of Amsterdam, also makes a great short excursion. Among many other options, you can make day trips to brash **Zandvoort** on the North Sea coast and to the traditional IJsselmeer lakeside villages of **Volendam** and **Marken**.

ZUID-HOLLAND The country's most important province, South Holland contains an awesome amount of potential interest for visitors. Starting with the political capital, **The Hague**, a graceful city separated from the North Sea only by its seacoast resort of Scheveningen, is far more than politics. Leading-edge-obsessed **Rotterdam**, which sits on the delta where the Rhine, Maas, and Waal rivers meet the North Sea, is far more than a great port. **Delft** is the town of the famous blue-and-white porcelain; the cradle of the Dutch Republic and the traditional burial place of the royal family; and the birthplace and inspiration

of the 17th-century master of light and subtle emotion, painter Jan Vermeer. Famous for its associations with the Pilgrim Fathers, **Leiden** was the birthplace of the Dutch tulip trade, and of the painters Rembrandt and Jan Steen, and it is the home of the oldest university in the country. **Gouda**, famous for its cheese, is almost as interesting in other respects as Delft and Leiden.

FRIESLAND, GRONINGEN & DRENTHE Sparsely populated and even to a degree isolated though they are, each of the three northern Dutch provinces has a different character. Something of a place apart, with its own language, traditions, and national history, lake-filled Friesland is a vacation area par excellence. In particularly cold winters, skaters come from all over to take part in the famous *Elfstedentocht* (Eleven Cities Tour), an ice-skating extravaganza. Groningen has its bustling university city of the same name, and Drenthe, Holland's beautiful "green province," is dotted with prehistoric monuments.

UTRECHT, GELDERLAND, OVERIJSEL & FLEVOLAND Stretching through the heartland, the four central provinces cover a tolerable variety of scenery. The three Great Rivers of the Netherlands—the **Rhine**, **Maas**, and **Waal**—flow through or near here, leaving along their courses the country's greatest natural division: the lands to the north and south of these waterways. If it weren't for the forests in Gelderland and Utrecht, most of Holland's countryside would consist of the flat green fields dotted with farmhouses so often depicted on the canvases of Dutch masters. Overijssel is barely touched by tourism, and Flevoland, built on land reclaimed from the **IJsselmeer** lake (the former *Zuiderzee*) in recent decades, has only existed as a province since 1986.

ZEELAND, NOORD-BRABANT & LIMBURG Way down south, these three provinces consider themselves the Burgundian part of the Netherlands, packed to their borders with southern charm (though the Zeelanders are a mite too busy keeping their heads above water for too much in the way of frivolity). Coastal Zeeland, the part of Holland most threatened by ever-present danger from the sea, is protected by the massive dams and barriers of the **Delta Works**, behind which shelter a great many coast resorts (and seafood restaurants). Noord-Brabant has most of the marshy **Biesbosch National Park** on its territory, as well as the forward-looking city of **Eindhoven**, home base of the giant Philips electronics corporation. **Maastricht**, a city that many Dutch consider the most lively after Amsterdam, and the country's highest "mountain," a peak that ascends a whole 321m (1,053 ft.), are both in the southeast province of Limburg.

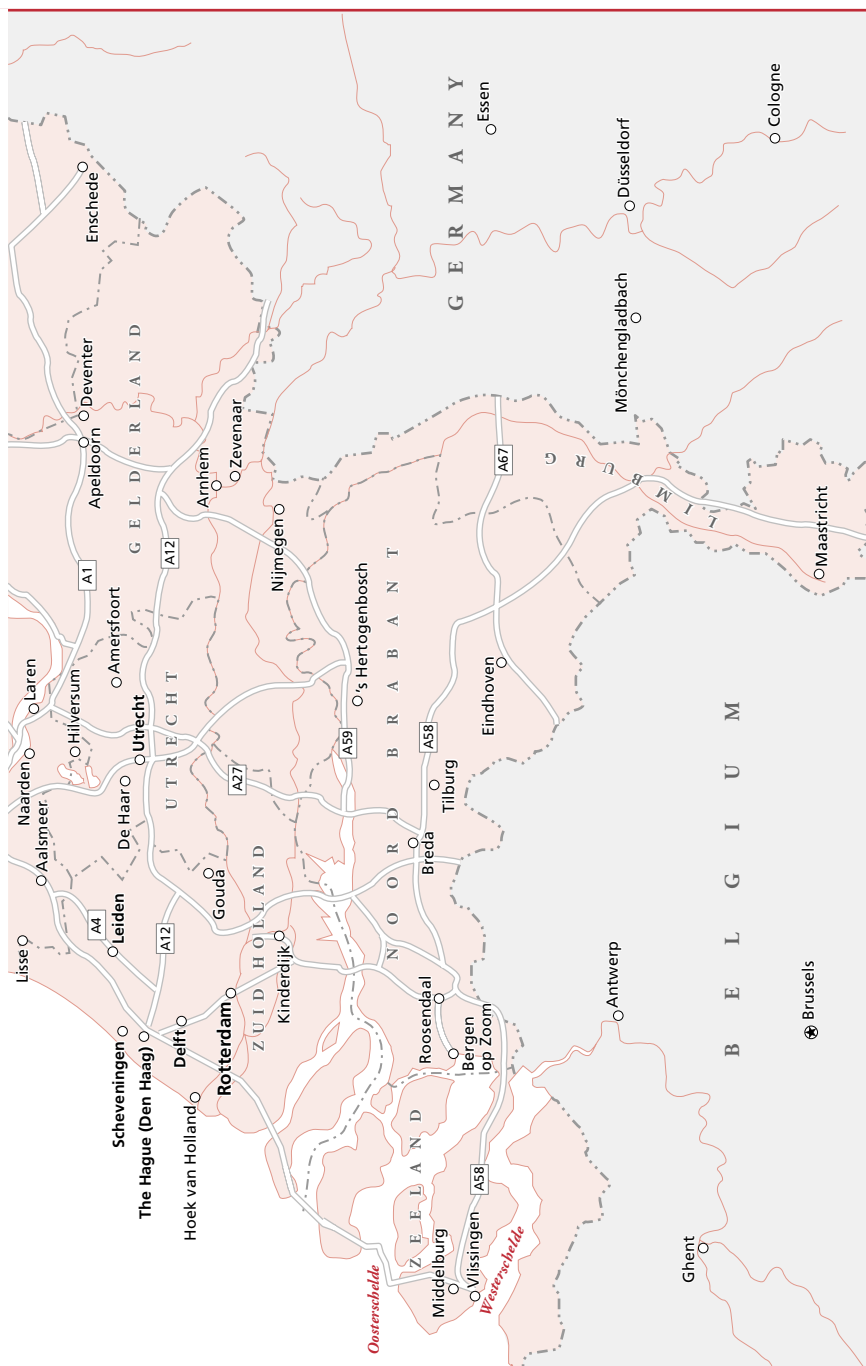
2 Visitor Information & Money

VISITOR INFORMATION

International addresses for the Netherlands Board of Tourism are given in "Visitor Information," in chapter 2.

In Holland, you find one of the most efficient, best organized tourist organizations you're likely to meet up with anywhere. The **Vereniging voor Vreemdelingenverkeer** (**Association for Tourist Traffic**), known simply as the **VVV** (pronounced *fay-fay-fay*), operates more than 400 offices in cities, towns, and villages around the country. VVV offices can book accommodations for you, help with travel arrangements, tell you what's going on where, and . . . well, if there's anything they can't do, I have yet to discover it! Look for a blue-and-white sign (often triangular in shape) bearing the letters VVV. The umbrella organization for the VVV offices is the **Netherlands Board of Tourism (NBT)**,





Vlietweg 15, Postbus 458, 2260 MG Leidschendam (☎ 070/371-5705; fax 070/320-1654; www.visitholland.com).

Anywhere you travel in the Netherlands, you can expect to find a local VVV office, usually either near the rail station or on the town's main square. If you're driving, you'll see blue-and-white VVV signs posted along major routes into town to direct you to the office. VVV offices are open during regular business hours,

The Euro

Holland's currency is the euro (see "Currency," in chapter 2).

including Saturday in many places; hours are invariably extended in cities and large towns, and during the busy spring and summer seasons.

For tourist information when you arrive at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and to make hotel reservations, go to the **Holland Tourist Information (HTi)** desk in Schiphol Plaza (☎ 0900/400-4040), open daily from 7am to 10pm.

ON THE WEB

The official site from the Netherlands Board of Tourism, www.visitholland.com, has useful advice. The most comprehensive site is VVV Amsterdam's www.visitamsterdam.nl. For a tighter focus on places to see and be seen, try www.amsterdamhotspots.nl. One of the best virtual tours of Amsterdam on the Net is www.channels.nl—the images are clear, you can direct your own tour, and you can chat with others about Amsterdam. Visitors give their impressions of restaurants, hotels, museums, and hash houses.

For information on many of the country's museums, go to www.hollandmuseums.nl. To book a hotel online, visit www.go-amsterdam.org. Good eating-out info is available from www.specialbite.nl.

MONEY

CURRENCY EXCHANGE The best options for changing money are the VVV tourist offices, banks and, if you carry American Express traveler's checks, **American Express**. Other fair-dealing options are the **Grenswisselkantoor (GWK)** exchanges at Schiphol Airport, some international border crossings, and main rail stations. These organizations can provide cash advances for holders of American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, and Visa credit and charge cards. GWK can arrange money transfers through **Western Union**. Hotels and *bureaux de change* (currency-exchange offices), which are open regular hours plus evenings and weekends, often charge a low commission (or none at all), but may give a low exchange rate.

CREDIT CARDS These are almost universally accepted by hotels, restaurants, shops, and gas stations; for travel by plane, train, and even by some taxis. The smaller the business, the less likely it is to accept credit cards.

ATMS Cash machines are widespread in Dutch cities and towns, and you might even find them in some villages. They accept bank cards and credit cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks.

See also "Money," in chapter 2.

3 When to Go

"In season" in Holland means from mid-April to mid-October. The peak of the tourist season is July and August, when the weather is at its finest. Weather,

however, is never really extreme at any time of year; and if you're one of the growing numbers who favor shoulder- or off-season travel, you'll find Holland every bit as attractive during those months. Not only are airlines, hotels, and restaurants cheaper and less crowded during this time (with more relaxed and personalized service), but some very appealing events are going on. Holland's bulb fields burst with color from mid-April to mid-May; September usually has a few weeks of late summery weather; and there are even sunny spells in winter, when brilliant and crisp weather often alternates with dramatic clouded skies.

CLIMATE

Holland has a maritime climate, which means that there are few extremes in temperature in summer or winter. Summer temperatures average about 67°F (19°C); the winter average is 35°F (2°C). Winters, moderated a touch by the North Sea and the fading warmth of the Gulf Stream, most often are rainy (it's driest Feb–May).

July and August are the best months to soak up some rays on sidewalk cafe terraces, dine at an outdoors restaurant in the evening, and head for the beach. September usually has a few weeks of fine late-summer weather; and there are even sunny spells in winter, when brilliant, crisp weather alternates with clouded skies.

Although the temperature doesn't always linger long below freezing in winter, remember that much of Holland is below sea level, making fog, mist, and dampness your too-frequent companions. This damp chill often seems to cut through to your very bones, so you'll want to layer yourself in Gore-Tex or something similar in the colder months. There are, however, plenty of bright but cold days in winter, and if the temperature falls far enough, canals, rivers, and lakes freeze to become sparkling highways and playgrounds for ice-skaters. Throughout the year, you can also expect some rain.

Some pointers on being prepared for Holland's often unpredictable weather: First, invest in a fold-up umbrella and hope you never have to use it; likewise, carry a raincoat (with a wool liner for winter). Second, pack a sweater or two (even in July) and be prepared to layer your clothing at any time of year. Don't worry: You're allowed to leave room in your luggage for T-shirts, skimpy tops, and sneakers.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Holland are January 1 (New Year's Day); Good Friday; Easter Sunday and Monday; April 30 (*Koningsinnedag*/Queen's Day); Ascension Day; Pentecost Sunday and Monday; and December 25 (Christmas) and December 26. The dates for Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost change each year.

In addition, there are two Remembrance Days related to World War II, neither of which is an official holiday, though you may find some shops closed: May 4, *Herdenkingsdag* (Memorial Day), honors all those who died in the war; and May 5 celebrates *Bevrijdingsdag* (Liberation Day).

Impressions

We can walk on water and see the lands we made with our own hands.

—Historian Herman Pleij (on skating frozen waterways in winter), *National Geographic*, January 1998

HOLLAND CALENDAR OF EVENTS

One of the biggest and most eagerly awaited events in Holland is the *Elfstedentocht*, the 11-city race in which skaters compete over a 202km (125-mile) course through Friesland province. The first race was run in 1909, and it has been run only 13 times since. Perhaps the weather and ice conditions will allow the race to be held when you are visiting. If so, it's well worth going out of your way to see—or even to take part in. Contact VVV Friesland (☎ 0900/202-4060).

January

Film Festival Rotterdam. More than 300 indie films are screened at theaters around town. Contact (☎ 010/411-8080; www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com). January 26 to February 6, 2005; similar dates in 2006.

February

Carnival, Maastricht and Den Bosch ('s-Hertogenbosch). Contact VVV Maastricht (☎ 043/325-2121) and VVV Den Bosch (☎ 0900/112-2334). Seven weeks before Easter.

March

Windmill Days, Zaanse Schans. All four working windmills at this re-created old village and open-air museum in the Zaanstreek, just north of Amsterdam, are open to the public. Contact VVV Zaanstreek/Waterland (☎ 075/616-2221). March to October.

The European Fine Art Fair, Maastricht. Top-rated international art and antiques fair at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Center (MECC). Art dealers from around the world present their finest objects. Jewelry, silver, carpets, Egyptian and classical antiquities, and 20th-century art are among the items on view. Contact ☎ 0411/645-090; www.tefaf.com. March 4 to 13, 2005; March 10 to 19, 2006.

Opening of Keukenhof, Lisse. The greatest flower show on earth blooms with a spectacular display of tulips and narcissi, daffodils and hyacinths, bluebells, crocuses, lilies, amaryllis, and many other flowers at this 70-acre garden in the heart of the bulb country. There's said to

be nearly eight million flowers. Contact ☎ 025/246-5555; www.keukenhof.nl. Late March to late May.

April

National Museum Weekend. A weekend during which most museums in the Netherlands offer free or reduced admission and have special exhibits. April 9 to 10, 2005; April 8 to 9, 2006.

Bloemencorso van de Bollenstreek (Bulb District Flower Parade). Floats keyed to a different floral theme each year parade from Noordwijk, through Sassenheim, Lisse, and Bennebroek, to Haarlem. Call ☎ 0252/434-710. First Saturday after April 19: April 23, 2005; April 22, 2006.

Koninginnedag (Queen's Day). Countrywide celebration honoring the queen's official birthday, with parades, street fairs, and street entertainment. Throughout Holland, but best in Amsterdam. April 30.

May

Herdenkingsdag (Memorial Day). Countrywide observance for victims of World War II, principally marked by 2 minutes of silence at 8pm. May 4.

Bevrijdingsdag (Liberation Day). Commemorates the end of World War II and Holland's liberation from Nazi occupation. Throughout the country, but best in Amsterdam. May 5.

National Windmill Day, throughout Holland. Around two-thirds of the country's almost 1,000 working windmills spin their sails and are open to the public. Contact

Vereniging de Hollandsche Molen (☎ 020/623-8703). Second Saturday in May: May 14, 2005; May 13, 2006.

National Cycling Day, throughout Holland. On this day, Dutch people get on their bikes and pedal. So what else is new? Second Saturday in May: May 14, 2005; May 13, 2006.

Vlaggetjesdag (Flag Day), Scheveningen. The fishing port of The Hague opens the herring season with a race to bring the first herring back for Queen Beatrix. Contact **VVV Scheveningen** (☎ 0900/340-3505). May 30.

June

Holland Festival, Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. Each year, these four cities join forces to present a cultural buffet of music, opera, theater, film, and dance. The schedule includes all the major Dutch companies and visiting companies and soloists from around the world. Contact **Stichting Holland Festival** (☎ 020/530-7110; www.hollandfestival.nl). Throughout June.

Oerol Festival, Terschelling. Open-air performances by international theater companies on this island in the Wadden Sea. There was some doubt about financing for future events, so it's wise to check that the festival is continuing. Contact **VVV Terschelling** (☎ 056/244-3000; www.oerol.nl). June 10 to 19, 2005; similar dates in 2006.

July

North Sea Jazz Festival, The Hague. One of the world's leading gatherings of top international jazz (and blues) musicians unfolds over 3 concert-packed days at the giant Nederlands Congres Centrum. Last-minute tickets are scarce, so book as far ahead as you can. From

2006, the festival will relocate to the Ahoy venue in Rotterdam. Contact ☎ 015/215-7756; www.northseajazz.nl. July 8 to 10, 2005; July 7 to 9, 2006 (probable dates).

Skûtsjesilen, the Frisian Lakes and the IJsselmeer. Sailing races with traditional Frisian sailing ships, called *skûtsjes*. Contact **VVV Friesland** (☎ 0900/202-4060). July 30 to August 12, 2005; July 29 to August 11, 2006.

Summer Fireworks Displays. Scheveningen Pier. Contact **VVV Scheveningen** (☎ 0900/340-3505). Mid-July to mid-August, every Friday at 11pm.

August

Amsterdam Pride. This is a big event in Europe's most gay-friendly city. A crowd of as many as 250,000 people turns out to watch the highlight Boat Parade's display of 100 or so outrageously decorated boats cruising on the canals. In addition, there are street discos, open-air theater performances, a sports program, and a film festival. Contact **Gay Business Amsterdam** (☎ 020/620-8807; www.amsterdampride.nl). August 4 to 7, 2005 (Boat Parade Aug 6); August 3 to 6, 2006 (Boat Parade Aug 5)—dates for 2006 not confirmed at press time.

Grachten Festival, Prinsengracht Canal. A 5-day festival of chamber music that plays at various intimate and atmospheric venues along the city's canals. Part of the festival is the exuberant Prinsengracht Concert, during which classical music floats from an open pontoon moored on the Prinsengracht in front of the Hotel Pulitzer Amsterdam, at Prinsengracht 315–331. Contact **Stichting Grachtenfestival** (☎ 020/421-4542; www.grachtenfestival.nl). August 17 to 21, 2005 (Prinsengracht Concert Aug 20); August 16 to 20, 2006

(Prinsengracht Concert Aug 19)—the dates for 2006 were probable, but still provisional at press time.

Holland Festival of Early Music, Utrecht. Concerts of music from the Middle Ages to the Romantic era. Contact **Organisatie Oude Muziek** (☎ 030/230-3830; www.oudemuziek.nl). September 4, 2005; similar dates likely in 2006.

Uitmarkt, Amsterdam previews the cultural season with this open market of information and free performances at impromptu outdoor venues, and at theaters and concert halls. Both professional and amateur groups take part in the shows, which run the gamut of music, opera, dance, theater, and cabaret. Contact **Amsterdam Uitmarkt** (☎ 020/626-2656; www.uitmarkt.nl). Last weekend in August: August 26 to 28, 2005; August 25 to 27, 2006.

11 Steden Fiets 4 Daagse (11 Cities 4 Days Bicycle Tour), Friesland. The bicycling version of the famous Elfstedentocht ice-skating race through Friesland province (see introduction to the “Calendar of Events,” above), based on the idea that roads and bikes are more reliable than frozen canals and skates. Contact **VVV Friesland** (☎ 0900/202-4060). End of August.

September

Bloemencorso Aalsmeer. Every year on the first Saturday in September, the Dam in Amsterdam is the final destination for the Flower Parade that originates in Aalsmeer. The parade features a large number of floats that carry a variety of in-season flowers (so no tulips). The parade follows an established route and ends at the Dam. Call ☎ 0297/325-100. First Saturday in September: September 3, 2005; September 2, 2006.

Open Monumentendag. A chance to see historical buildings all over

the country that are not usually open to the public. Contact **Vereniging Open Monumentendag** (☎ 020/470-1170). Second Saturday in September: September 10, 2005; September 9, 2006.

State Opening of Parliament, The Hague. Queen Beatrix rides in a splendid gold coach to the Knights’ Hall in The Hague to open the legislative session. Contact **VVV Den Haag** (☎ 0900/340-3505). Third Tuesday in September.

October

Leidens Ontzet, Leiden. Procession commemorating the anniversary of the raising of the 1574 Spanish siege. *Haring en witte brood* (herring and white bread) are distributed, just as they were on that day. Contact **VVV Leiden** (☎ 0900/222-2333). October 3 (Oct 4 when the 3rd is a Sun).

November

International Horti Fair, Aalsmeer. The largest exhibit of autumn-blooming flowers in the Netherlands takes place in the town that’s home to the world’s biggest flower auction. Contact ☎ 0297/344-033; www.hortifair.nl. November 2 to 5, 2005; November 1 to 4, 2006.

Sinterklaas Arrives. Holland’s equivalent of Santa Claus (St. Nicholas) launches the Christmas season when he arrives in towns across Holland. Accompanied by black-painted assistants, called *Zwarte Piet* (Black Peter), who hand out sweets to kids along the way, he goes in stately procession. Contact local VVV offices. Third Saturday in November: November 19, 2005; November 18, 2006.

December

St. Nicholas’s Eve. Traditional day in Holland for exchanging Christmas gifts. December 5.

Gouda bij Kaarslicht (Gouda by Candlelight), Gouda. All the electric

lights are turned off around the Markt, and Gouda's main square, the 15th-century Town Hall, and a giant Christmas tree are all lit up by thousands of candles. It makes a

beautiful sight. Contact **VVV Gouda** (☎ 0900/468-3288). Tuesday evening before Christmas: December 20, 2005; December 19, 2006.

4 Getting Around

Holland is so compact it makes for easy sightseeing. Roads and expressways are excellent, and the rail network is one of Europe's finest. For public transportation information, call ☎ 0900/9292.

BY TRAIN

All major tourist destinations in Holland are within 2½ hours of Amsterdam via **Nederlandse Spoorwegen/NS** (☎ 0900/9292; www.ns.nl), Holland's national rail system. Generally spotlessly clean and on time, these trains are a good way to travel with the Dutch, who use them even for short journeys to the next town up the line. In addition to Amsterdam, other destinations easily reached by train from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol include The Hague (40 min.), Rotterdam (45 min.), and Utrecht (40 min.). The trains run so often that you can usually just go to the station and wait for the next one—your wait will be short. At even the smallest stations, there is half-hour service in both directions, and major destination points have between four and eight trains an hour in both directions. Service begins as early as 5am (slightly later on Sun and holidays) and runs until around 1am. A special Night Train runs between Utrecht and Rotterdam, via Amsterdam, Schiphol, Leiden, and The Hague.

If all or most of your travel will be by rail, consider investing in one of the NS special programs, such as **Zomertour (Summer Tour)**, or **Holland Rail Pass**. For instance, the Summer Tour pass, available between July 1 and September 9, permits unlimited 3-day travel in second class for one or two persons, over 10 consecutive days. **Zomertour Plus (Summer Tour Plus)** allows you to use other public transportation modes as well, such as the tram, bus, and Metro. The price ranges from and is 49€ (\$61) for the basic pass for one, to 84€ (\$105) for the Plus option for two (these were the 2004 rates, and the price is likely to rise by 10% a year).

In addition, there are hundreds of bargain-day and weekend fares called **Railldee**, for trips to specific destinations, including picturesque walking and biking routes. These handy combination tickets include admission to attractions,

Tips Money-Savers

One way to save money, and not just on admission to museums and attractions, is to buy one—or more—of the visitor passes offered by some city and province VVV tourist offices, like the **Amsterdam Pass** (see "Your Passport to Amsterdam," in chapter 11).

Remember that many museums and other attractions offer reduced admission to seniors, students, and children.

Should you happen to be in the Netherlands on **National Museum Weekend** (Apr 9–10, 2005; Apr 8–9, 2006), you're in luck. Most museums in the country have free admission at this time, and others charge greatly reduced admission.

maps, reduced hotel rates (if so desired), lunch packs, and bicycle hire. The family excursion fares are especially attractive. For information, pick up the *Erop Uit!* booklet, published by NS and available at tourist offices or major rail stations.

Dutch Railways has some handy arrangements for **bicycle**; you can pick up a bike at one station and drop it off at another.

BY BUS

Regional bus service is usually slow because buses stop at so many places en route, and you may have to change at an intermediate town or city on the way. Traveling by train is definitely faster, but it is possible (and cheap) to travel long distances using the bus. A *strippenkaart* is a combined multi-journey public transport ticket costing 6.40€ (\$8) for 15 strips and 18.90€ (\$24) for 45 strips; fares are based on a zone system, and your ticket is stamped by the driver for the number of zones plus one extra strip.

BY CAR

Driving is easy in Holland except, as in most countries, in the cities and towns, where traffic congestion can be ulcer-inducing. Outside the cities, however, both major expressways and local roads are excellent; they're well planned (as you'd expect from the efficient Dutch), well maintained, and well signposted. They're also often jam-packed with traffic, particularly during the twice-daily rush hours, so avoid these times if possible.

Surprisingly enough, the biggest problem on the roads is the other drivers: Many Dutch people cast off their usual social skills and conscience when they get behind the wheel of a vehicle and become as bad-tempered, erratic, and downright dangerous as, well, as the Belgians, whose roadway recklessness is infamous. This is most visible in their life-threatening practice of roaring up behind you in the fast passing lane of an expressway, and sitting there, millimeters from your tail, trying to force a passage, occasionally further enlivening the experience by flashing their headlights, until they all but push you out of the way. Some victims of this practice flip on their own lights so that the aggressors think they are actually braking—but doing this can have unpredictable consequences. The best thing is to ignore the menace as much as you can, complete your own passing maneuver in your own time, signal, and move over smoothly to an inside lane.

RENTALS Rental cars with automatic transmission and power steering are available from rental desks at Schiphol Airport and from offices in cities and towns around the country (airport pickup and drop-off is also available in most cases). All the top international firms are represented: **Avis** (☎ 020/683-6061), **Budget** (☎ 020/612-6066), **Europcar** (☎ 020/683-2123), and **Hertz** (☎ 020/612-2441). Expect to pay from 60€ (\$75) a day, and 200€ (\$250) a week, including insurance and other charges, and for unlimited mileage.

GASOLINE At this writing, *benzine* (gas) is around 1.20€ (\$1.50) a liter (.26 gal.), but remember that this is likely to fluctuate.

DRIVING RULES To drive in the Netherlands, U.S. citizens need only a valid passport, a U.S. driver's license, and registration for the car you drive. The minimum age for drivers is 18. The speed limit is 120kmph (75 mph) on expressways; 100kmph (60 mph) on some marked stretches of expressway near cities; 50kmph (30 mph) in cities and urban areas; and 80kmph (48 mph) in the outskirts of towns and cities. Lower limits might be posted. Traffic approaching from the

right has the right of way, unless the road you are on has signposts with an orange diamond. Pedestrians on the crosswalks always have the right of way. Watch out for bikers, who are vulnerable road users but don't always act like it.

ROAD MAPS Adequate road maps for Holland, and street maps for major cities, are available from local VVV tourist information offices. Road maps are also published by the **ANWB** and **KNAC** motoring organizations, and by various private concerns—among them the excellent Michelin map nos. 210 and 211, which cover the country and are available from bookstores and some news vendors.

BREAKDOWNS/ASSISTANCE If you're a member of a national automobile club, like the American Automobile Association, you are automatically entitled to the services of **ANWB Royal Dutch Touring Club**. This organization sponsors a fleet of yellow *Wegenwacht* (☎ 080/000-0888) vans, a sort of repair shop on wheels that you see patrolling the highways. There are special yellow call boxes on all major roads to bring them to your assistance. Emergency call boxes marked *Politie* will bring the police on the double.

BY PLANE

Because Holland is so small, you really need to fly from one city to another only if you're extremely pressed for time (and even then you might get there quicker by car or by train). But if fly you must, one or the other of the KLM subsidiaries, **KLM Cityhopper** and **KLM Exel** (☎ 020/474-7474; www.klm.nl), serves Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Eindhoven, Maastricht, Groningen, and Enschede.

BY BIKE

Holland has 16 million people and 11 million bikes, so you better believe the Dutch are born in the saddle. To fully engage in the Dutch experience, you positively have to climb aboard a bike and head out into the wide green yonder. You can rent bikes at many railway stations around the country to tour the local highlights. The tourism authorities have marked out many biking tour routes and have published descriptive booklets and maps, available from VVV offices.

Biking in Holland is safe, easy, and pleasant. Almost all roads have designated bike paths, often separated from the road by a screen of trees or bushes, and there are separate traffic lights and signs for bikers. (Mopeds, called *brommers* in Holland, and motor-scooters also use the bike paths.) One thing that can prove an unpleasant surprise for those who think an absence of hills makes for easy riding is that in a totally flat landscape, nothing blocks the wind—which is fine when the wind is behind you and not so fine when it's blowing in your face.

FAST FACTS: Holland

Airport See "Orientation," in chapter 11.

American Express See "Fast Facts: Amsterdam," in chapter 11.

Business Hours Banks are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm (some stay open until 5pm). Some banks also open on late-hour shopping nights and Saturday. Stores generally are open Monday from 10 or 11am to 6pm, Tuesday to Friday from 8:30 or 9am to 5 or 6pm, and Saturday to 4 or 5pm. Some stores close for lunch, and nearly all have one full closing day

or one morning or afternoon when they're closed—signs are prominently posted announcing closing times. Many stores, especially in the larger towns, have late hours on Thursday and/or Friday evening. In the cities, shops along the main streets are open on Sunday.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," above.

Climate See "When to Go," earlier in this chapter.

Currency See "Money," in chapter 2.

Currency Exchange See "Money," earlier in this chapter.

Driving Rules See "Getting Around," above.

Drugs The use of controlled narcotic drugs is officially illegal in the Netherlands, but Amsterdam and some other local authorities permit the sale in licensed premises of up to 5 grams (.2 oz.) of hashish or marijuana for personal consumption, and possession of 30 grams (1.2 oz.) for personal use. Not every local authority in the Netherlands is as liberal-minded as Amsterdam when it comes to smoking pot—and Amsterdam is not so tolerant that you should just light up on the street, in cafes, and on trams and trains (though enough dopey people do). The possession and use of hard drugs like heroin, cocaine, and ecstasy is an offense, and the police have swept most of the downtown heroin-shooting galleries away from the tourist centers, but even in these cases the drug abusers are considered a medical and social problem rather than a purely law-enforcement issue. On the other hand, peddling drugs is a serious offense.

Drugstores For such items as toothpaste, deodorant, and razor blades, go to a *drogerij* (drugstore) or a supermarket. See also "Pharmacies," below.

Electricity The Netherlands runs on 220 volts electricity (North America uses 110 volts). So you need to take with you a small voltage transformer and a European-style adapter plug (available in drug and appliance stores and by mail order) that plugs into the round-holed European electrical outlet.

Embassies & Consulates **U.S.:** Lange Voorhout 102, Den Haag (☎ 070/310-9209). **U.K.:** Lange Voorhout 10, Den Haag (☎ 070/364-5800). **Australia:** Carnegielaan 4, Den Haag (☎ 070/310-8200). **Canada:** Sophialaan 7, Den Haag (☎ 070/311-1600). **Ireland:** Dr. Kuiperstraat 9, Den Haag (☎ 070/363-0993). **New Zealand:** Carnegielaan 10, Den Haag (☎ 070/346-9324). For the U.S. and U.K. consulates in Amsterdam, see "Fast Facts: Amsterdam," in chapter 11.

Emergencies For police assistance, an ambulance, or the fire department, call ☎ 112.

Holidays See "When to Go," earlier in this chapter.

Language Dutch people speak Dutch, of course, but English is the second language of the Netherlands and is taught in schools from the early grades, with the result that nearly everyone speaks fluently. You may speak English in Amsterdam almost as freely as you do at home, particularly to anyone in the business of providing tourist services, whether cab driver, hotel receptionist, waitperson, or store assistant.

Mail Postage for a postcard or ordinary letter to the U.S., Canada, Aus`

Pharmacies In the Netherlands a pharmacy is called an *apotheek*, and sells both prescription and non-prescription medicines. Regular open hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm. Pharmacies post details of nearby all-night and Sunday pharmacies on their doors.

Police In an emergency, call ☎ **112**.

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Restrooms Maybe you better sit down for this one. The most important thing to remember about public toilets in Holland—apart from calling them *toiletten* (*twa-lett-en*) or “the WC” (*Vay-say*) and not restrooms or comfort stations—is not the usual Male/Female (*Heeren/Dames*) distinction (important though that is), but to *pay the person who sits at the entrance*. He or she has a saucer where you put your money. If you don’t, you might have a visitor in the inner sanctum while you’re transacting your business. Even if you have paid, in busy places the attendant may have forgotten your face by the time you emerge and will then pursue you out of the toilet and along the street. It’s tiresome, but toilets usually cost only about 0.30€ (40¢), and the attendant generally ensures that they are clean.

Safety See “Health & Safety,” in chapter 2.

Taxes There’s a value-added tax (BTW) of 6% on hotel and restaurant bills (19% on beer, wine, and liquor), and 6% or 19% (the amount depends on the product) on purchases. This tax is always included in the price. People resident outside the European Union can shop tax-free in the Netherlands. Shops that offer tax-free shopping advertise with a Holland Tax-Free Shopping sign in the window, and they provide you with the form you need to recover value-added tax (VAT) when you leave the European Union. Refunds are available only when you spend more than 137€ (\$171) in a store.

Telephone The country code for the Netherlands is **31**. When calling Holland from abroad, you do not use the initial **0** in the area code. For example, if you’re calling an Amsterdam number (area code **020**) from outside Holland, you dial the international access code (which is **011** when calling from North America, and **00** from elsewhere in Europe) and then **31-20**, followed by the subscriber number. You only dial the initial **0** of the area code if you’re calling within Holland.

When making local calls in Holland, you won’t need to use the area codes shown in this book. You do need to use an area code between towns and cities. The two main formats for Dutch phone numbers are: For cities and large towns, a three-digit area code followed by a seven-digit number; and for small towns and villages a four-digit area code followed by a six-digit number.

For operator assistance: Call ☎ **0800/0410**. For information inside Holland, dial ☎ **0900/8008**; for international information, dial ☎ **0900/8418** for multiple numbers, and **118** for a maximum one number per call. Numbers beginning with 0800 within Holland are toll-free, but calling a 1-800 number in the United States from Holland is not toll-free. In fact, it costs the same as an overseas call. Watch out for the special Dutch numbers that begin with 0900. Calls to these are charged at a higher rate than ordinary

local calls. Depending who you call, they can cost up to .90€ (\$1.15) a minute.

To make international calls from the Netherlands, first dial **00** and then the country code. To call the United States or Canada, dial **00** (the international access code) + **1** (the country code) + the area code + the number. For example, if you want to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you dial 00-1-202-588-7800. Other country codes are: United Kingdom, **44**; Ireland, **353**; Australia, **61**; New Zealand, **64**. International calls, per minute, cost: **U.S. and Canada:** 0.30€ (40¢); **U.K. and Ireland:** 0.33€ (40¢); **Australia and New Zealand:** 0.40€ (50¢).

You can use pay phones with either a KPN or a Telfort *telekaart* (phone card)—but note that neither company's card works with the other company's phones—which are 5€ (\$6.25), 10€ (\$13), and 25€ (\$31) from post offices, train ticket counters, VVV tourist information offices, some tobacconists, and newsstands. Some pay phones take credit cards. Some pay phones take coins of 0.20€, 0.50€, and 1€. Use smaller coins whenever possible, at least until you are connected with the right person, as no change is given from an individual coin, and once the call has begun, excess coins will not be returned when you hang up. Both local and long-distance calls from a pay phone are 0.30€ (40¢) a minute. Calls placed through your hotel switchboard or dialed direct from your room phone are usually more than twice the standard rate.

In the Dutch telephone system, there's a sustained dial tone, and a beep-beep sound for a busy signal. Should there be no answer, hang up and the coin comes back to you. On both card and coin phones, a digital reading tracks your decreasing deposit so you know when to add another card or more coins. To make additional calls when you still have a coin or card inserted, briefly break the connection, and you will get a new dial tone for another call.

To charge a call to your calling card, call: **AT&T** (☎ 0800/022-9111); **MCI** (☎ 0800/022-9122); **Sprint** (☎ 0800/022-9119); **Canada Direct** (☎ 0800/022-9116); or **British Telecom** (☎ 0800/022-9944).

Time Zone Holland is on Central European Time (CET), which is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) plus 1 hour. Amsterdam is normally 6 hours ahead of New York (Eastern Standard Time) and 9 hours ahead of Los Angeles (Pacific Standard Time). Clocks are moved ahead 1 hour each year at the end of March and back 1 hour at the end of September.

Tipping The Dutch government requires that all taxes and service charges be included in the published prices of hotels, restaurants, cafes, discos, nightclubs, salons/barbershops, and sightseeing companies. Even taxi fare includes taxes and a standard 15% service charge. To be absolutely sure in a restaurant, for example, that tax and service are included, look for the words *inclusief BTW en service* (BTW is the abbreviation for the Dutch words that mean value-added tax), or ask the waiter. The Dutch are so accustomed to having these charges included that many restaurants have stopped spelling it out. Tips for extra service are always appreciated but not necessary.

Dutch waiters and hotel staff often conveniently “forget” that a service charge and a tip are in effect the same thing. If you query them on this,

they'll likely tell you a tip is not included in the bill—true, since it's not called a tip but a service charge. The customer pays 15% service (in most restaurants) whether they liked the service or not. Most Dutch people either don't add a further tip at all, or they leave a minimal amount. Being human, waitstaff and other service personnel do appreciate tips. They know that foreigners often leave generous ones, and they want to encourage this practice.

To tip like the Dutch (no, seriously!), in a cafe or snack bar, leave some small change; in a restaurant, leave 1€ to 2€ (\$1.25–\$2.50), and up to a generous 5€ (\$6.25) or 10% if you think the service was particularly good; for expensive tabs and in expensive places, you may want to leave more—or maybe less! An informal survey (I asked a taxi driver) reveals that Americans and British are the best tippers; the worst are the Dutch themselves.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, Metro, and train services throughout the country, call ☎ **0900/9292**.

Water The water from the faucet in Holland is safe to drink. Many people drink bottled mineral water, called generically *spa* even though not all of it is the Belgian Spa brand.

Amsterdam

Live-and-let-live, easygoing, liberal, and tolerant are just some of the tags Amsterdam is most often labeled with—for good reason. For centuries the city has been a magnet for the oppressed and persecuted, particularly in the 17th century, when it became a haven for Jewish and Protestant refugees from various Catholic countries. That tradition of tolerance has continued into the 21st century.

In the 1960s the city became the hippie capital of Europe, and in the 1990s Amsterdam and Holland took leading roles in liberalizing laws against homosexuality, even sanctioning gay marriages. Similar pragmatic liberal attitudes help explain the existence of Amsterdam's Red Light District, which is as much a popular city attraction as the Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum, and the Anne Frankhuis.

It is surprising, though, how many people today still think of Holland's capital as caught in some rose-tinted time warp of free love, free drugs, free everything. The heady heydays of the 1960s and 1970s—if they ever really existed to the extent that legend and the soft-focus afterglow of memory would have us believe—have given

way to new-millennium realities. The city government has worked assiduously to transform Amsterdam from a hippie haven to a cosmopolitan international business center, and there seems little doubt it is succeeding.

Fortunately, it is not succeeding all the way. Amsterdam is still different. Its citizens, bubbling along tolerably happily in their multiracial melting pot, are not so easily poured into the restrictive molds dictated by trade and industry. Not only do free thinking and free living still have their places, they are the watchwords by which Amsterdam lives its collective life. Don't kid yourself, though. All this free living is fueled by the wealth a successful economy generates, not by the combustion of semilegal exotic substances.

For all its modern prosperity, Old Amsterdam still has magic. The city will soon capture you in its spell—especially at night, when the more than 1,200 bridges spanning the nearly 200 canals are lit with a zillion tiny lights that give them a fairy-tale appearance; and in the morning, when the cityscape slowly unfolds through a mysterious mist to reveal its treasures.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

BY PLANE For details on air travel to Holland, see chapter 2. The country's main international airport is **Amsterdam Airport Schiphol** (☎ 0900/0141 for general and flight information; www.schiphol.nl), 13km (8 miles) southwest of the city center. Schiphol is one of the easiest airports in the world to figure out. After you deplane, moving sidewalks will take you to the main terminal building, where you pass through Customs. **Holland Tourist Information** has a booth in Schiphol Plaza at Schiphol Airport.

Trains leave from Schiphol Station, downstairs from Schiphol Plaza, for Amsterdam's Centraal Station. Departures range from one per hour at night to six per hour at peak times. The one-way fare is 3.20€ (\$4), and the trip takes 20 minutes.

The **Connexxion Hotel Bus** (☎ 0900/9292) shuttles between the airport and Amsterdam, serving 16 top hotels directly and many more that are close to these stops. The fare is 8.50€ (\$11) one-way and 13€ (\$16) round-trip to the contracted hotels, and 11€ (\$13) one-way and 19€ (\$24) round-trip to noncontracted hotels. Check at the Connexxion Desk inside Schiphol Plaza for information—their clerks can tell you which shuttle stop is closest to your lodgings.

Taxis operating from the airport are metered and charge around 45€ (\$56) to the city center.

BY TRAIN Trains arrive at **Centraal Station**, built on an artificial island along the IJ waterway. Centraal Station is the point of origin for most of the city's trams (streetcars) and a departure point for canal-boat tours, bike ferries across the IJ, taxis, water taxis, and the Museum Boat. It also houses a desk of the VVV Amsterdam tourist information organization and the GWK Bureau de Change. Schedule and fare information on travel in Holland are available from the large information office inside the station; recorded information is also available by dialing ☎ 0900/9292. Or visit www.9292ov.nl, for destinations in the Netherlands, and call ☎ 0900/9296 for international travel. Each phone service costs 0.90€ (\$1.15) per minute.

Tram stops are located on either side of the main station exit. Or you can head for the **taxi stand** in front of the station. (For details on transportation within the city, see "Getting Around," below.)

BY BUS International coaches arrive at the main bus terminal opposite Centraal Station or at the Amstel Bus Station, which is outside Amstel rail station (Metro: Amstel). From the rail station, there are direct Metro connections to Centraal Station; for the Leidseplein area, take the Metro toward Centraal Station, but get out at the Weesperplein station, then go aboveground to take tram nos. 6, 7, or 10.

BY CAR European expressways E19, E35, E231, and E22 reach Amsterdam from Belgium and/or Germany.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Amsterdam's tourist information organization, **VVV Amsterdam** (☎ 0900/400-4040 Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; fax 020/625-2869; www.visitamsterdam.nl)—where you can also reserve hotel rooms—has offices on platform 2 inside Centraal Station, and opposite the station at Stationsplein 10 (tram for both: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 16, 17, 24, or 25); and at Leidseplein 1 (tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), on the corner of Leidsestraat. For telephone information, call ☎ 0900/400-4040 Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm (handle this number with caution, as it costs 0.55€/70¢ per min.). VVV Amsterdam will help you with almost any question about the city and can provide brochures, maps, and the like. There are also separate desks for reserving hotel rooms. The offices are open from 9am to 5pm outside the peak season and on a varying longer schedule as the season proceeds, including Sunday and late evening. Be sure to pick up a copy of the VVV's *Amsterdam Day by Day* for 2€ (\$2.50). This monthly magazine is full of details about the month's art exhibits, concerts, and theater performances, and lists restaurants, bars, dance clubs, and more.

Human Statistics

Amsterdam has a population of 736,000. By 2010, the native Dutch residents are expected to be in a minority for the first time, outnumbered by ethnic minorities and foreign residents. The Old City, inside the arc of the Singelgracht canal, covers an area of 8 sq. km (3 sq. miles), containing 44,000 dwellings that house 80,000 people. The residents share this central space with 8,000 historical monuments, 2,000 shops, 1,500 cafes and restaurants, and 200 hotels. Every working day, more than two-thirds of a million people pour into the center by public transportation, bike, and car.

If you're interested in cultural events and are under age 26, go by the **Amsterdam Uit Buro (AUB) Ticketshop**, at the corner of Leidseplein and Marnixstraat (☎ 0900/0191; www.uitburo.nl; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), and pick up a **Cultural Youth Pass (CJP)** for 13€ (\$16). This pass will grant you free admission to most museums and discounts on most cultural events. The AUB is open Monday to Wednesday, Thursday from 10am to 9pm, Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm.

CITY LAYOUT

Amsterdam's center is small enough that its residents think of it as a village. Finding your way around can be confusing, however, until you get the hang of it. The concentric rings of major canals are the city center's defining characteristic, along with several important squares that act as focal points.

A map is essential. All you need to know is that in Dutch *-straat* means street, *-gracht* means canal, *-plein* means square, *-markt* means "market" or "market square," *-dijk* means "dike," and *-laan* means boulevard, all of which are used as suffixes attached directly to the name of the thoroughfare (for example, Princes' Canal becomes *Prinsengracht*, one word).

STREET MAPS **Surrland/N.V. Falkplan's** Amsterdam Tourist Map is among the handiest and is available from news vendors. It sells for 7.95€ (\$10). VVV offices have several other maps available, including the small but detailed VVV Amsterdam map, which is 3.50€ (\$4.30).

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

For touring purposes, the city of Amsterdam can be divided into six major neighborhoods and four lesser outlying districts.

The Old Center This is the oldest part of the city, around the Dam and the Centraal Railway Station. It includes the major downtown shopping areas and such attractions as the Royal Palace, the Amsterdam Historical Museum, and the canal-boat piers.

The Canal Belt The semicircular, multistrand necklace of waterways built around the old part of the city during the 17th century includes elegant gabled houses, many restau-

rants, antiques shops, and small hotels, plus such sightseeing attractions as the Anne Frankhuis and the canal-house museums.

Around Leidseplein The city's most happening nightlife square and its immediate surroundings cover such a small area that it could have been included under "The Canal Belt." But so distinctive is it that it demands to be picked out and highlighted on its own. In addition to performance venues,

movie theaters, bars, and cafes, there are plenty of good hotels and restaurants in this oftentimes frenetically busy area.

Around Rembrandtplein Like Leidseplein, but on a somewhat reduced scale, this square is the focus for a swatch of hotels, restaurants, cafes, and nightlife venues that's lively enough to justify picking it out from its surroundings.

The Jordaan This nest of small streets and canals lies west of the city center, beyond the major canals. Once a working-class neighborhood, it's now fast becoming a fashionable residential area with a growing number of upscale boutiques and restaurants. Still, its indigenous residents are alive and well and show no sign of succumbing to the temptations of the gentrification going on around them.

Museumplein & Vondelpark A gracious residential area surrounds the three major museums of art: the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum, and the modern art Stedelijk Museum (the last-named has been rehoused temporarily in the TPG Post building near Centraal Station). The area includes

Vondelpark, the Concertgebouw concert hall, many restaurants and small hotels, and Amsterdam's most elegant shopping streets, P. C. Hooftstraat and Van Baerlestraat.

Amsterdam East This is another residential area on the far bank of the Amstel River, the location of such sightseeing attractions as the maritime and tropical museums, and Artis, the local zoo.

Amsterdam South The most prestigious modern residential area of Amsterdam is the site of a number of hotels, particularly along the Apollolaan, a wide boulevard that the locals have nicknamed the Gold Coast for its wealthy inhabitants and stately mansions.

Amsterdam West The district west of the Singelgracht canal covers a lot of ground but doesn't have much to recommend it in the way of sights and delights.

Amsterdam North On the north bank of the IJ channel, this district has been little more than a dormitory suburb up until now, but there are signs that this is changing and that dining and entertainment possibilities are opening up.

2 Getting Around

When you look at a map of Amsterdam, you may think the city is too large to explore on foot. This isn't true: It's possible to see almost every important sight on a 4-hour walk, and most people should be able to cover the center on foot, though not all at once. Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes, as those charming cobbles get under your soles and on your nerves after a while. When crossing the street, watch out for trams and also bikes, particularly when walking across the bike lanes, which are usually marked in red tarmac.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

FARE INFORMATION & DISCOUNT PASSES There are 11 public transport fare zones in Greater Amsterdam, though tourists rarely travel beyond the city center, zone 5700 (Centrum). The central information and ticket sales point for GVB Amsterdam, the city's public transportation company, is **GVB Tickets & Info**, Stationsplein (☎ **0900/9292**; www.gvb.nl), in front of Centraal Station. Most tickets are valid on buses, trams, and the Metro. A **day ticket** (*dagkaart*) is valid for the entire day of purchase and also the following night,

Frommer's Favorite Amsterdam Experiences

- **Cruising the Canals.** Hop aboard a glass-topped canal boat for a cruise through Amsterdam's beautiful canals and the best possible view of all those gabled Golden Age merchants' houses.
- **Viewing the Masters.** Stand in front of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* at the Rijksmuseum, and other works by Dutch Masters.
- **Visiting with Vincent.** Visit the outstanding Van Gogh Museum, where you can trace the artistic and psychological development of this modern master. Then head next door to the always-challenging modern art of the Stedelijk Museum.
- **Remembering Anne Frank.** Take some time to reflect on the tragic life of this young Jewish girl, amid the surroundings of her World War II hideaway, now the Anne Frankhuis, where she wrote her famous diary.
- **Tiptoeing Through the Tulips.** Pick up a bunch of tulips at the floating Flower Market on the Singel, perhaps to brighten your hotel room.
- **Biking the City.** Rent a bike and join the flow of bikers for one of the classic Amsterdam experiences—but proceed carefully.
- **Enjoying an Evening Concert.** Take in a classical music concert at the Concertgebouw, one of the most acoustically perfect halls in the world.
- **Taking a Walk on the Wild Side.** Stroll through the Red Light District to examine the quaint gabled architecture along its narrow canals—oh, yes, and you might also notice certain ladies watching the world go by through red-fringed windows.
- **Shopping for a Steal.** Pick up bargains at the Waterlooplein Flea Market and the Albert Cuyp Market.
- **Relaxing in a Brown Cafe.** Spend a leisurely evening in a brown cafe, the traditional Amsterdam watering hole.

and can be bought from any bus or tram driver, conductor, or ticket dispenser for 6.30€ (\$7.90). Also available (from the GVB Tickets & Info office and other sales points) are day tickets valid for 2 and 3 days, for 10€ (\$12) and 13€ (\$15).

A **single journey ticket** (*enkeltje*) is 1.60€ (\$2) for one zone and 2.40€ (\$3.20) for two zones. For multiple journeys, buy a **strip card** (*strippenkaart*). An eight-strip card is 6.40€ (\$8) from the driver or conductor. Discount strip cards are available at train and Metro station ticket counters, the GVB ticket office in front of Centraal Station, post offices, and many news vendors, where you pay 6.40€ (\$8) for a card with 15 strips, and 19€ (\$24) for 45 strips. On some trams and for Metro trains you are responsible for stamping the required number of strips for your journey. On buses, the driver does this, and on some trams the conductor.

Children ages 4 to 11 ride on reduced-rate tickets; children 3 and under travel free.

TICKET VALIDATION Bus and tram tickets in Amsterdam must be validated when you board. Be sure to use the ticket-validating machines in the middle and rear of the tram, or visit the conductor at the back, and be sure to keep your ticket with you until it's no longer valid. To use the machine, just fold the ticket at the line and punch in; you don't need to punch in each individual strip—just count down the number of strips you need and punch in the last one. Most Amsterdam trams either have a conductor or operate on the honor system, but teams of roving inspectors do their best to keep everyone honest. The fine for riding without a ticket or not having one properly stamped is 30€ (\$38), plus the fare for the ride, payable on the spot.

BY TRAM & BUS An extensive bus network complements 16 tram routes, 11 of which begin and end at Centraal Station. Most bus/tram shelters have maps that show the entire system. A detailed tram map is available from the VVV or at the offices of GVB/Amsterdam Municipal Transport, Stationsplein. You can also call the transportation information number (☎ **0900/9292**) for assistance.

BY METRO Amsterdam's Metro isn't much compared to the labyrinthine systems of Paris, London, and New York, but there are four lines—nos. 50, 51, 53, and 54—that run partly aboveground and bring people in from the suburbs.

BY TAXI

Officially, you can't hail a cab from the street, but more and more often taxis will stop anyway if you do so. Otherwise, find one of the strategically placed taxi stands sprinkled around the city, marked by their distinctive yellow phone boxes. Alternatively, you can call **Taxi Centrale** (☎ **020/677-7777**). Taxis are metered. Fares—which include a service charge—begin at 2.90€ (\$3.65) when the meter starts. They run up at the rate of 1.80€ (\$2.25) per kilometer, and after 25km, 1.30€ (\$1.65) per kilometer; waiting time is 32€ (\$39) per hour.

ON THE WATER

With all the water in Amsterdam, it makes sense to use it for transportation, and though the options are minimal (with the exception of cruise and excursion traffic), they do exist. As a benefit they offer the unique view of the city from the water.

BY CANAL BOAT In addition to canal tour boats (see “Organized Tours,” later in this chapter), two services bring you to many of the city's top museums and other attractions. The **Canal Bus** company (☎ **020/623-9886**; www.canal.nl) operates three routes—the Green Line, the Red Line, and the Blue Line—with a total of six stops. A day pass, valid until noon next day and including a discount on some museum and attraction admissions, is 14€ (\$18) for adults, 11€ (\$13) for children ages 3 to 12, and free for children under 3. The **Museumboot (Museum Boat)** (☎ **020/530-1090**; www.lovers.nl)—*boot* is pronounced just like “boat”—operates a scheduled service every 30 to 45 minutes from Centraal Station to Prinsengracht, Leidseplein, Museumplein, Herengracht, Muziektheater, and the Eastern Dock area. A day ticket is 14€ (\$18) for adults, 9.50€ (\$12) for children ages 4 to 12, and free for children under 4; after 1pm, tickets are, respectively, 13€ (\$16) and 7.25€ (\$9.05). Tickets include discounted admission to some museums and attractions.

BY WATER TAXI Water taxis do more or less the same thing as landlubber taxis, except that they do it on the water. To order one, call **Watertaxi** at ☎ **020/530-1090**, or pick one up at the landing stage outside Centraal Station (to the

Tips Bicycling in Amsterdam

It takes a while to get used to moving smoothly and safely through the whirl of trams, cars, buses, trucks, fellow bikers, and pedestrians, particularly if you're on a typically ancient and much-battered *stadfiets* (city bike), also known as an *omafiets* (grandmother bike)—the only kind that makes economic sense here, since anything fancier will attract a crowd of people wanting to steal it. It's better to develop your street smarts slowly.

The first rule: Don't argue with trams—they bite back, hard. The second rule: Cross tram tracks perpendicularly so your wheels don't get caught in the grooves, which could pitch you out of the saddle. And the third rule: Don't crash into civilians (pedestrians). That's about it. Like everyone else, you'll likely end up making up the rest of the rules as you go along.

left of the VVV office). Water taxis hold up to eight people and are 60€ (\$75) for 30 minutes, 25€ (\$31) if they need to collect you.

BY FERRY The **IJ ferries** make the 5-minute crossing of the IJ channel to north Amsterdam around the clock—and they're free, which make them ideal micro-cruises for the cash-strapped. Ferries leave from De Ruyterkade, behind Centraal Station.

BY BIKE

Instead of renting a car, follow the Dutch example and rent a bike—there are more than 550,000 on the streets of Amsterdam to keep you company. Bike-rental rates are around 7€ (\$9) per day or 30€ (\$38) per week; a deposit is required. You can rent bikes at Centraal Station when you arrive, or at the following shops, all of which have similar rates. **MacBike** rents a range of bikes, including tandems and six-speed touring bikes. It has branches at either side of Centraal Station, at Stationsplein 12 (☎ 020/624-8391) and Stationsplein 33 (☎ 020/625-3845); at Mr. Visserplein 2 (☎ 020/620-0985), conveniently close to the Muziektheater; and at Marnixstraat 220 (☎ 020/626-6964), a 5-minute walk from Leidseplein. **Damstraat Rent-a-Bike** is in the cellars of the Beurs van Berlage (Berlage's Stock Exchange) near the Dam, at Damstraat 22–24 (☎ 020/625-5029).

Warning: Always lock both your bike frame and one of the wheels to something solid and fixed, because theft is common.

BY CAR

Don't rent a car to get around Amsterdam. You will regret both the expense and the hassle. The city is a jumble of one-way streets, narrow bridges, and no-parking zones. Parking fees are expensive, and street parking is hard to come by. If you are driving and want to avoid parking headaches, leave your car at the free Park & Ride car parks at some of the outer Metro and train stations (directions are indicated with blue-and-white P&R signs on the way). The **Dienst Parkeer-beheer (Parking Management Service; ☎ 020/553-0300)**, with offices around the city, is responsible for the clamping and/or towing of illegally parked cars. The service's staff is efficient, hardworking, and enthusiastic. Outside the

city, driving is a different story and you may want to rent a car to tour the nearby countryside.

RENTALS See “Getting Around,” in chapter 10 for details.

FAST FACTS: Amsterdam

Airport See “Orientation,” earlier in this chapter.

American Express The offices at Damrak 66 (☎ 020/504-7777; tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25) and Van Baerlestraat 39 (☎ 020/673-8550; tram: 2, 3, 5, or 12) are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon. The Damrak office provides currency exchange and books tours; the Van Baerlestraat office only books tours.

ATMs Among the centrally located automated teller machines (ATMs) accessible by cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks, and by the major credit cards and charge cards, are those at **ABN-AMRO Bank**, Dam 2 (tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25) and Leidsestraat 1 (tram: 1, 2, or 5) at Leidseplein; **Rabobank**, Dam 16 (tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25); and **Fortis Bank**, Singel 548 (tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25), at the Flower Market.

Babysitters Many hotels can arrange babysitters. A reliable local organization is **Oppascentrale Kriterion** (☎ 020/624-5848), which has vetted babysitters over 18. Its rates are 5€ (\$6.25) to 6€ (\$7.50) an hour, with extra charges for administration, for Friday and Saturday evening bookings, and for hotels.

Business Hours See “Fast Facts: Holland,” in chapter 10. Thursday is *koopavond* (late shopping evening) in Amsterdam; many stores stay open to 9pm.

Car Rentals See “Getting Around,” in chapter 10 for details.

Currency Exchange The best options for changing money are the VVV tourist offices, banks and, if you carry American Express traveler's checks, **American Express** (see above). Other fair-dealing options are **Thomas Cook**, Damrak 125 (☎ 020/620-3236; tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 29, 24, or 25), Dam 23–25 (☎ 020/625-0922; tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25), and Leidseplein 31A (☎ 020/626-7000; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10); and the **Grenswisselkantoor (GWK)** exchanges at Schiphol Airport (☎ 020/653-5121) and Centraal Station (☎ 020/627-2731). See also “Visitor Information & Money,” in chapter 10.

Doctors & Dentists For 24-hour emergency medical and dental service, call the **Central Medical Service** (☎ 020/592-3434).

Drugs See “Fast Facts: Holland,” in chapter 10.

Drugstores See “Fast Facts: Holland,” in chapter 10. See also “Pharmacies,” below.

Electricity See “Fast Facts: Holland,” in chapter 10.

Embassies & Consulates **U.S. Consulate:** Museumplein 19 (☎ 020/575-5309; tram: 3, 5, 12, or 16), open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1:30 to 3:30pm. **U.K. Consulate-General:** Koningslaan 44 (☎ 020/676-4343; tram: 2), open Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 4pm. For embassies in The Hague, see “Fast Facts: Holland,” in chapter 10.

Emergencies For police assistance, an ambulance, or the fire department, call ☎ 112.

Hospitals Two hospitals with emergency service are the **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe Gasthuis**, Eerste Oosterparkstraat 179 (☎ 020/599-9111; tram: 3, 7, or 10), in Amsterdam Oost; and the giant **Academisch Medisch Centrum (AMC)**, Meibergdreef 9 (☎ 020/566-3333; Metro: Holendrecht), in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Internet Access In the city center, **easyEverything** (www.easyeverything.com) has two locations: Damrak 33 (☎ 020/320-8082; tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 16, 17, 24, or 25); and Reguliersbreestraat 22 (☎ 020/320-6291; tram: 4, 9, or 14). Both are open 24 hours a day and access begins at 1.50€ (\$1.90) an hour. A less crowded choice in a traditional Amsterdam bar is the **Internet Café**, Martelaarsgracht 11 (☎ 020/627-1052; www.internetcafe.nl; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17). It's open Sunday to Thursday from 9am to 1am, Friday to Saturday from 9am to 3am; access is 2.75€ (\$3.45) an hour.

Mail See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10.

Pharmacies See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10. A centrally located pharmacy is **Dam Apotheek**, Damstraat 2 (☎ 020/624-4331; tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25), close to the Nationaal Monument on the Dam.

Police Holland's emergency number to call for the police (*politie*) is ☎ 112. For routine matters, visit a district police office; a centrally located one is at Lijnbaansgracht 219 (☎ 0900/8844; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), just off Leidseplein.

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. The post office at Singel 250–256, on the corner of Raadhuisstraat (☎ 020/556-3311; tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm (Thurs to 8pm), and Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Restrooms See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10. Should you have a toilet emergency in Amsterdam, a comfortable place to find relief is the NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, across the square from the Royal Palace on the Dam. Just breeze in as if you own the "Kras," swing left past the front desk and along the corridor, pass the Winter Garden restaurant, then go up a short stairway.

Safety In Amsterdam, if it isn't bolted to the floor, somebody will try to steal it—and even if it is bolted to the floor somebody will try to steal it. Watch out for pickpockets on trams, buses, and the Metro, and in train and Metro stations. Constant public announcements at Centraal Station and Schiphol Airport warn about pickpockets, and signs on the trams say in a multitude of languages ATTENTION: PICKPOCKETS. Pickpockets and other thieves often wait until you are occupied or distracted—or act to occupy or distract you—before making their move. Consider wearing a money belt. Women should wear their purses crossed over their shoulders so that they hang in front, with the clasps or zippers facing in.

Violence is not unknown to Amsterdam, but it's not at all a violent city. Drug-related crime is prevalent. Most crime, like pickpocketing, is nonviolent, relatively minor, and opportunistic. Stolen bicycles are a big problem

here. Mugging and armed robbery do happen, though incidents are not common.

There are some risky areas, especially in and around the Red Light District. Be leery of walking alone after dark through narrow alleyways and along empty stretches of canal. Don't use ATMs at night in quiet areas. It's wise to stay out of Vondelpark at night, but there are cafes on the edge of the park that are busy until closing time.

The rules about not walking alone in poorly lit and unpopulated areas at night apply especially to women. Although Amsterdam is generally safe, incidents of harassment do occur, and rape is not unknown. Public transportation is usually busy even late at night, so you generally won't have to worry about being alone in a tram or Metro train. If you feel nervous, sit close to the driver where this is possible. Many local women go around by bicycle at night.

Note: Listing some of the possible dangers together like this can give a misleading impression of the threat of crime in Amsterdam. There is no need to be afraid to do the things you want to do. Amsterdammers aren't. Just remember to exercise the usual rules of caution and observation that apply in any big city. Report any crime committed against you to the police, most of whom speak English.

See also "Health & Safety," in chapter 2.

Taxes See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10.

Telephone See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10. The area code for Amsterdam is **020**. When making local calls in Amsterdam, simply leave off the area code and dial only the phone number. If you're calling from within the Netherlands but not in Amsterdam, use **020**. When you're calling from outside the Netherlands, the area code for Amsterdam is **20**.

Tipping See "Fast Facts: Holland," in chapter 10.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, Metro, and train services, call ☎ **0900/9292**.

Useful Phone Numbers Call ☎ **020/460-5858** for tram, bus, and Metro; ☎ **020/557-8544** for trains and stations; and ☎ **020/649-1433** for Schiphol Airport. Don't be optimistic about your chances.

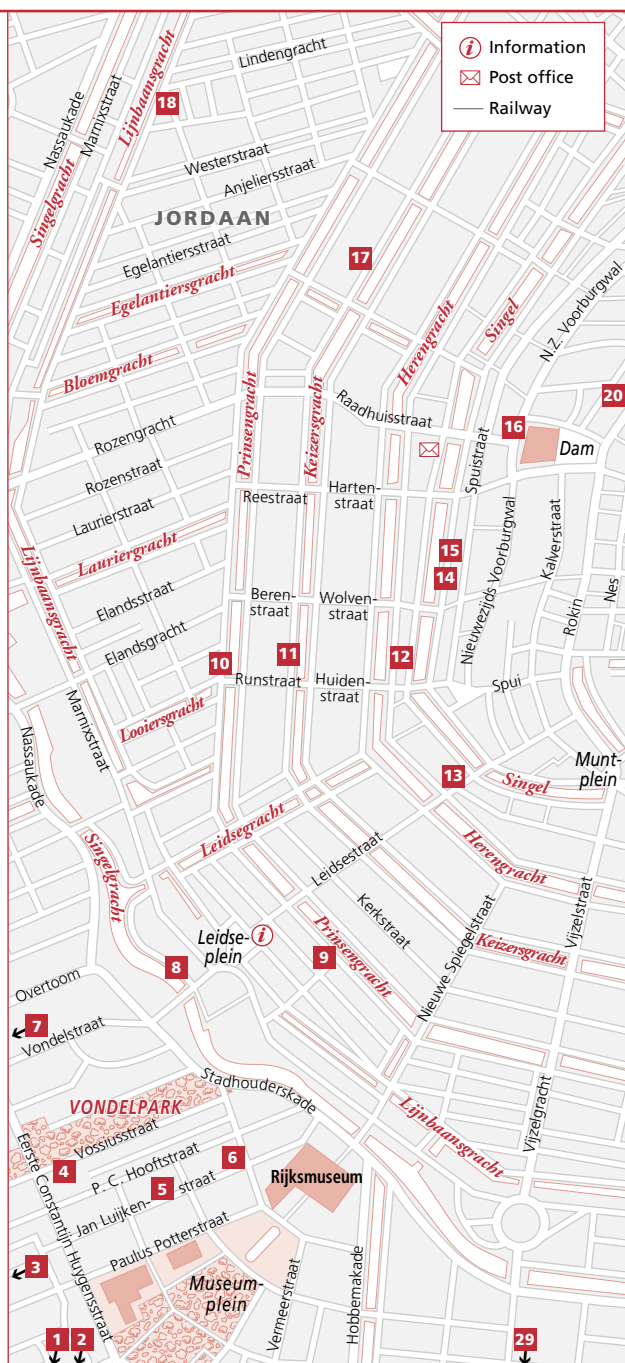
3 Where to Stay

Is your preference old-world charm combined with luxurious quarters? Glitzy modernity with every conceivable amenity? Small family-run hotels where guests become a part of the family circle? A bare-bones room in a dormitory, which frees up scarce dollars for other purposes? Amsterdam has all of these types of rooms, and more.

Many hotels, in all price categories, offer significant rate reductions between November 1 and March 31, with the exception of the Christmas and New Year periods. The city has many charms in the off season, when the calendar is full of cultural events. Many traditional Dutch dishes are offered that aren't available in warm weather; and the streets, cafes, restaurants, and museums are filled more with locals than with visitors.

Where to Stay in Amsterdam

- Acacia **18**
- Agora **13**
- Ambassade **12**
- Amstel Botel **22**
- Amsterdam
Wiechmann **10**
- AMS Toro **3**
- Apollofirst **1**
- Bilderberg Hotel
Jan Luyken **5**
- Bilderberg Garden Hotel **2**
- Blakes Amsterdam **11**
- Bridge Hotel **27**
- Canal House **17**
- Crowne Plaza Amsterdam
American **8**
- De Filosoof **7**
- Die Port van Cleve **16**
- Estheréa **14**
- Hoksbergen **15**
- Hotel Amsterdam **20**
- Hotel Arena **28**
- Hotel de l'Europe **24**
- Lloyd Hotel **23**
- Museumzicht **6**
- NH Schiller **25**
- Orfeo **9**
- Piet Hein **4**
- Seven Bridges **26**
- Sint-Nicolaas **19**
- Van Ostadé
Bicycle Hotel **29**
- Winston **21**





RESERVATIONS If you arrive in Amsterdam without a reservation, VVV Amsterdam is well organized to help you, for a moderate charge of 3€ (\$3.75), plus a refundable room deposit of 3€ (\$3.75). This is a nice reassurance if you prefer to freelance your itinerary, though at busy periods of the year you have to take potluck. They will always find you something, even at the busiest times, but it may not be what, or where, you want. You can reserve by phone, fax, and e-mail with the **Amsterdam Reservation Center** (☎/fax 077/700-0888; www.reservations@amsterdamtourist.nl), which is connected with the VVV Amsterdam tourist information office. In addition, you can reserve a hotel room through the **Netherlands Reservations Center (NRC)**, Nieuwe Gouw 1, 1442 LE, Purmerend, Netherlands (☎ 029/968-9144; fax 029/968-9154; www.hotelres.nl).

IN THE OLD CENTER VERY EXPENSIVE

Hotel de l'Europe ★★ On a stretch of prime riverside real estate in the city center, this elegant, old establishment may be one of the best hotels in the world. Its pastel-red and white facade, at the point where the Amstel River flows into the city's canal network, is an iconic element in the classic view of the city. Built in 1896, the de l'Europe has a grand style and a sense of ease, a smooth combination of aged dignity and modern comfort. Guest rooms and marble bathrooms are spacious and bright, furnished with classic good taste. Some rooms have mini-balconies overlooking the river. The **Excelsior** (see "Where to Dine," later, for details) is one of the toniest restaurants in town. Drinks are served in summer on **La Terrasse**, a great outdoor cafe beside the Amstel, weather permitting.

Nieuwe Doelenstraat 2-8 (facing Muntplein), 1012 CP Amsterdam. ☎ 800/223-6800 in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/531-1777. Fax 020/531-1778. www.leurope.nl. 100 units. 350€–435€ (\$438–\$544) double; from 495€ (\$619) suite; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet and self-parking 40€ (\$50). Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to Muntplein. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French, Continental); 2 bars; heated indoor pool; health club; sauna; concierge; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Die Port van Cleve ★★ Fairly oozing history and charm, this hotel is near the Royal Palace and next to Magna Plaza, a big shopping center in what used to be the city's main post office. The hotel itself is one of the city's oldest, and started out in 1864 as the first Heineken brewery. Over the last 100 years it has accommodated many famous guests. The ornamental facade, complete with turrets and alcoves, is original and has been fully restored. Likewise, the interior has been completely renovated, and the rooms, though relatively small, have been furnished comfortably in modern yet cozy style. You won't eat much more traditionally Dutch than in the Brasserie de Poort, and you can drink in the Bodega de Blauwe Parade watched over by a feast of Delft blue tiles.

Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 176–180 (behind the Royal Palace), 1012 SJ Amsterdam. ☎ 020/622-6429. Fax 020/622-0240. www.dieportvanclave.com. 120 units. 215€–350€ (\$269–\$438) double; from 425€ (\$531) suite; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, 14, or 17 to the Dam. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch/international); 2 bars; cafe; concierge; business center; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive rooms; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Amsterdam ★★ Just 400m (1,308 ft.) from Centraal Station, this hotel, from 1911 and still owned by descendants of the original proprietors, has an 18th-century facade. Its rooms are supermodern, though, featuring thick carpets and ample wardrobe space. The entire hotel underwent a renovation com-

pleted in April 2001. Rooms at the front of the hotel tend to get more light, but are subjected to more street noise; some have balconies. Room service, in-house movies, and laundry and dry-cleaning services are available. The award-winning in-house **De Roode Leeuw** restaurant serves typical Dutch cuisine. The glassed-in heated terrace overlooking the Dam is a pleasant and relaxing spot for a beer (open daily 11am–11:30pm).

Damrak 93–94 (beside the Dam), 1012 LP Amsterdam. ☎ **800/44-UTELL** in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/555-0666. Fax 020/620-4716. www.hotelamsterdam.nl. 79 units. 225€–310€ (\$281–\$388) double; 280€–310€ (\$350–\$388) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); cafe; business center; 24-hr. room service; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Lloyd Hotel ★ Opened in 2004 on the waterfront redevelopment zone of the old steamship docks east of Centraal Station, the Lloyd has returned to the city hotel scene after a long absence and a colorful history. Originally an emigrants' hotel, it opened in 1921 and closed in 1935. By 1999 the building was shabby and decrepit. Since then it has been thoroughly renovated. Just about every room has a different shape, style, and modern decor. The most expensive are the largest and have views on the water or specially designed interiors (or both). Beds are new and mattresses firm, but only a few rooms have king-size doubles. You can “improve” yourself by a visit to the Culturele Ambassade art center, or a glance at one of the modern art works scattered around. The two restaurants, **Snel** and **Sloom**, aim to make it cool to dine in a hotel.

Oostelijke Handelskade 34, 1019 BN Amsterdam (at IJhaven). ☎ **020/561-3636**. Fax 020/561-3600. www.lloydhotel.com. 120 units (106 with bathroom). 140€–300€ (\$175–\$375) double with bathroom; 80€ (\$100) double without bathroom. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ (\$25). Tram: 10, Ultram to Rietlandpark. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Continental); bar; bike rental; secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting. *In room:* TV, dataport.

MODERATE

Sint-Nicolaas ★ Named after Amsterdam's patron saint, this hotel is conveniently near the Centraal Station, in a prominent corner house with a dark facade. It's a typical family hotel with an easygoing atmosphere, and children are welcome. Originally the building was occupied by a factory that manufactured ropes and carpets from sisal imported from the then Dutch colonies. It was converted into a hotel in 1980. The rather basic furnishings are more than compensated for by the ideal location and the Mesker family's friendliness.

Spuistraat 1A (at Nieuwendijk), 1012 SP Amsterdam. ☎ **020/626-1384**. Fax 020/623-0979. www.hotelnicolaas.nl. 24 units. 100€–120€ (\$125–\$150) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17 to Martelaarsgracht. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Amstel Botel ★ *Kids* Where better to experience a city on the water than on a boat-hotel? This moored boat-hotel has 352 beds in cabins on four decks, connected by an elevator. Be sure to ask for a room with a view on the water, not of the uninspiring quay. The bright, modern rooms are no-nonsense but comfortable, the showers small. The hotel is popular largely because of its location and rates, and for that extra something added by sleeping on a boat. To get here, turn left out of Centraal Station, pass the bike rental, and you'll see it floating in front of you.

Oosterdokskade 2–4 (at Centraal Station), 1011 AE Amsterdam. ☎ **020/626-4247**. Fax 020/639-1952. www.amstelbotel.com. 175 units. 87€–92€ (\$109–\$115) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited parking on quay. Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 16, 17, 24, or 25 to Centraal Station. **Amenities:** Concierge; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/in-house movie channel.

Winston ★ The Winston asked local artists to create paintings, photographs, and other works of what you might call art, to bring an element of whimsy to what was a rather bland lodging. It was to be given the character of an artists' hangout and a reputation for being hang-loose and alternative. The proprietors have done a fair job of creating a democratic facility aimed mostly at young people. If you're not keen on being on a busy main route into the city's sin district, this won't be the place for you. The guest rooms are sparsely furnished in a modern style, hold from two to six beds, and are clean and well maintained. Bathrooms are small, but have all the requisite facilities, and most of those rooms that haven't a full bathroom have a shower. The bar is a fun meeting place and has live music on weekends.

Warmoesstraat 129 (off Damrak), 1012 JA Amsterdam. ☎ 020/623-1380. Fax 020/639-2308. www.winston.nl. 69 units, 25 with bathroom. 95€–105€ (\$119–\$131) double with bathroom, 85€ (\$106) double without bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV.

ALONG THE CANAL BELT

VERY EXPENSIVE

Blakes Amsterdam ★★☆☆ The exceptional service at this intimate boutique hotel wins justified raves from its primarily American and British guests, and a splendid location hasn't hurt any. Its Asian-influenced decor is arguably the most stylish in town. Housed in a 17th-century landmark, Blakes began as a theater, and its serene black-and-white lounge still sports the theater's original brick floor. All of the guest rooms and suites have the usual array of luxury amenities and are individually decorated in different colors and themes; room no. 5, for example, is a blue Japanese-style room with a deep soaking tub and traditional sliding screens. The excellent location puts you within walking distance of the Leidseplein, the Museumplein, and the Flower Market. My one complaint: Style here occasionally trumps substance—the water fountain—style sinks in a few of the rooms look grand, but the design makes them somewhat hard to use.

Keizersgracht 384 (at Runstraat), 1016 GB Amsterdam. ☎ 020/530-2010. Fax 020/530-2030. www.blakesamsterdam.com. 41 units. 390€–690€ (\$488–\$863) double; from 990€ (\$1,238) suite; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Asian/international); bar; lounge; bike rental; boat rental; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Ambassade ★★ Perhaps more than any other hotel in Amsterdam, this one, in 10 17th- and 18th-century canal houses on the Herengracht and Singel canals, re-creates the feeling of living in an elegant canal house. The pastel-toned rooms are individually styled and their size and shape vary according to the character of the individual houses. Each year one of the houses is completely renovated. Everyone who stays at the Ambassade enjoys the view each morning with breakfast in the bi-level, chandeliered breakfast room, or each evening in the adjoining parlor, with its Persian rugs and a stately grandfather clock ticking away. To get to some guest rooms, you cope with a typically Dutch steep and skinny staircase, though other rooms are accessible by elevator. For the nimble-footed who can handle the stairs, the reward is a spacious guest room with large multipane windows overlooking the canal. There's a library decorated in Empire style.

Herengracht 341 (near Spui), 1016 AZ Amsterdam. ☎ 020/555-0222. Fax 020/555-0277. www.ambassade-hotel.nl. 59 units. 188€ (\$235) double; 260€–325€ (\$325–\$406) suite; 285€ (\$331) apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui. **Amenities:** Lounge; bicycle rental; 24-hr. room service; massage at nearby float center; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Agora ★ Old-fashioned friendliness is the keynote at this efficiently run and well-maintained lodging, a block from the Flower Market. The hotel occupies a canal house built in 1735 that has been fully restored. Furniture from the 1930s and 1940s mixes with fine mahogany antiques. Bouquets greet you as you enter, and a distinctive color scheme creates an effect of peacefulness and drama at the same time. They have installed an abundance of overstuffed furniture; nearly every room has a puffy armchair you can sink into after a day of sightseeing. Rooms with canal views cost the most, but the extra few euros are worth it, though the hustle and bustle out on the street can make them somewhat noisy by day. The large family room has three windows overlooking the Singel. Those rooms that don't have a canal view look out on a pretty garden. There's no elevator.

Singel 462 (at Koningsplein), 1017 AW Amsterdam. ☎ 020/627-2200. Fax 020/627-2202. www.hotel-
agora.nl. 16 units, 15 with bathroom. 150€ (\$188) double with bathroom; 120€ (\$150) double without bath-
room. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Koningsplein.
In room: TV, hair dryer, safe.

Amsterdam Wiechmann ★ It takes only a moment to feel at home in the antique-adorned Wiechmann, a classic, comfortable, casual sort of place. Besides, the location is one of the best you find in this or any price range: 5 minutes in one direction is the Kalverstraat shopping street; 5 minutes in the other, Leidseplein. Most of the rooms are standard, with good-size twin beds or double beds, and some have big bay windows. Furnishings are elegant, and Oriental rugs grace many of the floors in the public spaces. The higher-priced doubles with views on the canal have antique furnishings, and many have a view of the Prinsengracht. The breakfast room has hardwood floors, lots of greenery, and white linen cloths on the tables. There's no elevator.

Prinsengracht 328–332 (at Looiersgracht), 1016 HX Amsterdam. ☎ 020/626-3321. Fax 020/626-8962.
www.hotelwiechmann.nl. 38 units. 120€–140€ (\$150–\$175) double. Rates include continental breakfast.
MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Prinsengracht. **Amenities:** Bar. In room: TV, safe.

Canal House ★★ A contemporary approach to reestablishing the elegant canal-house atmosphere has been taken by the American proprietor of this small hotel. Three adjoining houses dating from 1630 were gutted and rebuilt to provide private bathrooms and an interior filled with antiques, quilts, and Chinese rugs. Fortunately, it's blessed with an elevator (though one that does not stop at every floor, so you may still have to walk a short distance up or down a (steep) staircase that still has its beautifully carved old balustrade overlooking the back garden, which is illuminated at night. The magnificent breakfast room seems untouched since the 17th century. Plus, on the parlor floor the proprietor has created a cozy Victorian-era saloon. It is, in short, a home away from home.

Keizersgracht 148 (near Leliegracht), 1015 CX Amsterdam. ☎ 020/622-5182. Fax 020/624-1317.
www.canalhouse.nl. 26 units. 140€–190€ (\$175–\$238) double. Rates include continental breakfast. DC,
MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt. **Amenities:** Lounge; limited room serv-
ice. In room: Hair dryer.

Estheréa ★★ *Kids* Owned by the same family since its beginnings, this elegant, not-too-big hotel is built within the walls of neighboring 17th-century canal houses. The family touch shows in careful attention to detail and a breezy but professional approach. It offers the blessed advantage of an elevator, a rarity in these old Amsterdam homes. In the 1930s the proprietors spent a lot of money on wood paneling and other structural additions; recent proprietors have

had the good sense to leave all of it in place. While it will look dated to some, the wood bedsteads and dresser-desks lend warmth to the renovated and upgraded rooms. The room sizes vary considerably according to their location in the canal houses, and a few are quite small. Most of the rooms will accommodate two, but some have more beds, which make them ideal for families.

Singel 305 (near Spui), 1012 WJ Amsterdam. ☎ 020/624-5146. Fax 020/623-9001. www.estherea.nl. 70 units. 166€–280€ (\$208–\$350) double; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; bicycle rental; concierge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Seven Bridges ★★ Proprietors Pierre Keulers and Gunter Glaner have made the Seven Bridges, which gets its name from its view of seven arched bridges, one of Amsterdam's canal-house gems. Each room is individual, with antique furnishings (Art Deco, Biedermeier, Louis XVI, rococo), handmade Italian drapes, hand-painted tiles and wood-tiled floors, and Impressionist art posters. The biggest room, on the first landing, can accommodate up to four, and has a huge bathroom with marble floor, double sinks, a fair-size shower, and a separate area for the lavatory (the sink and shower even have gold-plated taps). The room is enormous, with high ceilings, a big mirror over the fireplace, an Empire onyx table and antique leather armchairs, and an array of potted plants. Attic rooms have sloping ceilings and exposed wood beams. Big, bright basement rooms are done almost entirely in white.

Reguliersgracht 31 (at Keizersgracht), 1017 LK Amsterdam. ☎ 020/623-1329. 8 units. 120€–220€ (\$150–\$275) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 4 to Keizersgracht. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

Hoksbergen ★ *Kids* At a tranquil point on the historic Singel canal, this inexpensive hotel in a 300-year-old canal house is not flashy or elegant, but it's bright and fresh, which makes it appealing to budget-conscious travelers who don't want to swap creature comforts for euros. Its central location makes it easy to get to all the surrounding sights and attractions. Rooms at the front have a canal view. There's no elevator.

Singel 301 (near Spui), 1012 WH Amsterdam. ☎ 020/626-6043. Fax 020/638-3479. www.hotelhoksbergen.com. 14 units. 80€–104€ (\$100–\$130) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui. *In room:* TV.

AROUND LEIDSEPLEIN

VERY EXPENSIVE

Crowne Plaza Amsterdam-American ★★★ A fanciful, castlelike mix of Venetian Gothic and Art Nouveau, the American has been both a prominent landmark and a popular meeting place for Amsterdammers since 1900. While the exterior must always remain a protected architectural treasure of turrets, arches, and balconies, the interior (except that of the cafe, which is also protected) is modern and chic, though at times a bit gaudy. Rooms are subdued, refined, and superbly furnished. While some have a view of the Singelgracht, others overlook kaleidoscopic Leidseplein. They are always pink and bright, which perhaps appeals to the international rock stars who often stay here. The location, in the thick of the action and near many major attractions, is one of the best in town. The famous **Café Americain** is one of the most elegant eateries in Europe (see "Where to Dine," below).

Leidsekaade 97 (at Leidseplein), 1017 PN Amsterdam. ☎ 800/227-6963 in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/556-3000. Fax 020/556-3001. www.amsterdam-american.crowneplaza.com. 174 units. 220€–405€

(\$275–\$506) double; 385€–525€ (\$480–\$588) suite; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10 to Leidseplein. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; exercise room; sauna; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

AROUND REMBRANDTPLEIN EXPENSIVE

NH Schiller Hotel ★★ An Amsterdam gem from 1912, now fully restored, this hotel boasts a blend of Art Nouveau and Art Deco in its public spaces that is reflected in tasteful decor and furnishings in the guest rooms. Its sculpted facade, wrought-iron balconies, and stained-glass windows stand out on the often brash Rembrandtplein. Café Schiller, next door to the hotel, is one of the trendiest watering holes in town. The hotel takes its name from the painter Frits Schiller, who built it in 1912. His outpourings of artistic expression, in the form of 600 portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, are displayed in the halls, rooms, stairwells, and public areas; and their presence fills this hotel with a unique sense of vitality, creativity, and personality. Brasserie Schiller is a gracious oak-paneled dining room and Café Schiller is one of Amsterdam's few permanent sidewalk cafes.

Rembrandtplein 26–36, 1017 CV Amsterdam. ☎ 020/554-0700. Fax 020/626-6831. www.nh-hotels.com. 93 units. 250€ (\$313) double; from 290€ (\$363) suite (add 5% city tax). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 4, 9, or 14 to Rembrandtplein. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); 2 bars; health club; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

IN THE JORDAAN INEXPENSIVE

Acacia ★ Not on one of the major canals, but in the Jordaan, facing a small canal, just a block from the Prinsengracht, the Acacia, shaped like a slice of cake, is run by Hans and Marlene van Vliet, a friendly couple who have worked hard to make their hotel welcoming, clean, and well kept, and are justifiably proud of the result. Simple, clean, and comfortable, the rooms have recently been equipped with new beds, writing tables, and chairs. They all have canal views. Breakfast is served in a triangular breakfast room with windows on two sides, and a nice view of the canal. There's no elevator. Two houseboats for guests on nearby Lijnbaansgracht add an authentic local touch—but what might seem like the earth moving for you may be only the wake from a passing boat roiling the water and setting your houseboat bobbing.

Lindengracht 251 (at Lijnbaansgracht), 1015 KH, Amsterdam. ☎ 020/622-1460. Fax 020/638-0748. www.hotelacacia.nl. 18 units (including houseboats). 80€–90€ (\$100–\$113) double; 95€–110€ (\$119–\$138) houseboat double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V (5% charge). Limited street parking. Tram: 3 or 10 to Marnixplein. *In room:* TV.

AROUND MUSEUMPLEIN & VONDELPARK EXPENSIVE

Bilderberg Hotel Jan Luyken ★★ One block from the Van Gogh Museum and from the elegant Pieter Cornelisz Hooftstraat shopping street, the Jan Luyken is best described as a small hotel with many of the amenities and facilities of a big hotel. Everything here is done with perfect attention to detail. The Jan Luyken maintains a balance between its sophisticated lineup of facilities (double sinks and bidets, elevator, lobby bar with fireplace, and meeting rooms for business) and an intimate and personalized approach that's appropriate to this 19th-century residential neighborhood. That residential feel extends to the guest rooms, which look much more like those in a well-designed home than in

a standard hotel. The proprietors are proud of the atmosphere they've created, and are constantly improving the look of the hotel.

Jan Luijkenstraat 58 (near the Rijksmuseum), 1071 CS Amsterdam. ☎ 800/641-0300 in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/573-0730. Fax 020/676-3841. www.janluiyken.nl. 62 units. 220€–295€ (\$275–\$369) double; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 2 or 5 to Hobbemastraat. **Amenities:** Wine bar; spa; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

MODERATE

AMS Toro On the fringes of Vondelpark in a quiet residential district, this beautiful hotel in a completely renovated mansion dating from 1900 is one of Amsterdam's top moderately priced choices. Both on the inside and the outside, it is as near as you can get in Amsterdam to staying in a country villa. The house is furnished and decorated with taste, combining Louis XIV and Liberty styles and featuring stained-glass windows and Murano chandeliers. The guest rooms are worthy of being featured in *Better Homes & Gardens*. The house also affords guests a private garden and terrace. It's about a 10-minute walk through Vondelpark to Leidseplein.

Koningslaan 64 (off Oranje Nassaulaan), 1075 AG Amsterdam. ☎ 020/673-7223. Fax 020/675-0031. www.ams.nl. 22 units. 150€–200€ (\$188–\$250) double. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 2 to Valeriusplein. **Amenities:** Laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

De Filosoof ★★ *Finds* On a quiet street facing Vondelpark, this hotel might be the very place if you fancy yourself something of a philosopher king or queen. One of the proprietors, a philosophy professor, has chosen posters, painted ceilings, framed quotes, and displayed unusual objects to represent philosophical and cultural themes, and the garden is a kind of grove of academe. Each room is dedicated to a mental maestro—Aristotle, Plato, Goethe, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Marx, and Einstein are among those who get a look-in—or are based on motifs like Eros, the Renaissance, astrology, and women. Rooms in an annex across the street are larger; some open onto a private terrace. Recent all-round improvements in service and facilities have raised the hotel's local rating.

Anna van den Vondelstraat 6 (off Overtoom, at Vondelpark), 1054 GZ Amsterdam. ☎ 020/683-3013. Fax 020/685-3750. www.hotelfilosoof.nl. 38 units. 115€–138€ (\$144–\$173) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1 or 6 to Jan Pieter Heijestraat. **Amenities:** Lounge. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

Piet Hein ★ Facing Vondelpark, and close to the city's most important museums, this appealing, well-kept hotel is in a villa named after a 17th-century Dutch admiral who captured a Spanish silver shipment. Its spacious rooms are well furnished and the staff is charming and professional. Half the rooms overlook the park, two second-floor double rooms have semicircular balconies, and the honeymoon suite has a water bed. The lower-priced rooms are in an annex behind the main hotel. Hair dryers are available on request.

Vossiusstraat 52–53 (off Van Baerlestraat), 1071 AK Amsterdam. ☎ 020/662-7205. Fax 020/662-1526. www.hotelpiethen.com. 65 units. 118€–160€ (\$148–\$200) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 3, 5, or 12 to Van Baerlestraat. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies.

INEXPENSIVE

Museumzicht This hotel in a Victorian house across from the back of the Rijksmuseum is ideal for museum-goers on a budget. The breakfast room commands an excellent view of the museum with its numerous stained-glass

Family-Friendly Hotels

Amstel Botel (p. 245) Although it's more common to find youthful spirits traveling alone or in small groups here, there's no reason why the Amstel Botel wouldn't work for families, and there's the added interest for the kids of being on a ship, even if it isn't going anywhere.

Estheréa (p. 247) Though most of the rooms in this canal-house hotel are rather small, all are tastefully furnished, and a few, ideal for families, are equipped with bunk beds.

Hoksbergen (p. 248) Children under 4 years of age stay free at this centrally located hotel. The simple but comfortable atmosphere is ideal for allowing the kids some informal holiday freedom.

windows. Robin de Jong, the proprietor, has filled the rooms with an eclectic furniture collection, from 1930s English wicker to 1950s pieces. There's no elevator and the staircase up to reception is pretty steep.

Jan Luijkenstraat 22 (near the Rijksmuseum), 1071 CN Amsterdam. ☎ 020/671-2954. Fax 020/671-3597. www.hotelmuseumzicht.nl. 14 units, 3 with bathroom. 95€ (\$119) double with bathroom; 70€ (\$88) double without bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 2 or 5 to Hobbemastraat. *In room:* No phone.

IN AMSTERDAM EAST MODERATE

Bridge Hotel ★★ The bridge in question is the famous Magere Brug (Skinny Bridge) over the Amstel River. The small and tastefully decorated hotel likely provides its guests with more space per euro than any other hotel in town. Its pine-furnished guest rooms seem like studio apartments, with couches, coffee tables, and easy chairs arranged in lounge areas in such a way that there's plenty of room left between them and the beds for you to do your morning exercises. There's no elevator.

Amstel 107-111 (near Theater Carré), 1018 EM Amsterdam. ☎ 020/623-7068. Fax 020/624-1565. www.thebridgehotel.nl. 36 units. 85€-130€ (\$106-\$163) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 6, 7, or 10 to Weesperplein. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV.

Hotel Arena ★ A converted Roman Catholic orphanage from 1890 houses a friendly, stylish, youth-oriented hotel. Monumental marble staircases, cast-iron banisters, stained-glass windows, marble columns, original murals—all have been faithfully restored. Spare modern guest rooms, some sporting timber roof beams and wooden floors, line long, high-ceilinged corridors on two floors. Each room is individually decorated and styled by up-and-coming young Dutch designers. Some are split-level. You still see kids toting backpacks, but they're a better class of backpack than those that clog corridors in the city's hostels and cheap hotels. Hotel guests get discounts on concerts and dance nights in the nightclub called Tonight, in the old orphanage chapel. The Arena is a bit removed from the city center but the traffic is two-way, with youthful revelers heading out here to the nightspot and the outdoor cafe.

's-Gravesandestraat 51 (at Mauritskade), 1092 AA Amsterdam. ☎ 020/850-2410. Fax 020/850-2415. www.hotelarena.nl. 121 units. 100€-175€ (\$125-\$219) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 7 or 10 to Korte 's-Gravesandestraat. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; executive rooms. *In room:* TV.

IN AMSTERDAM SOUTH

EXPENSIVE

Bilderberg Garden Hotel ★★ This is the smallest and most personal five-star hotel in town. Because of its excellent Mangerie de Kersentuin restaurant (see below), the Garden considers itself a “culinary hotel,” an idea that extends to the guest rooms, whose color schemes are salad-green, salmon-pink, cherry-red, and grape-blue—and you can choose whichever suits you best. The rooms themselves are furnished and equipped to the highest standards and with refined taste; only executive rooms have coffeemakers. Bathrooms are in marble, and are equipped with Jacuzzi tubs. The Garden’s spectacular lobby has a wall-to-wall fireplace with

Impressions

I had in my mind's eye a perfect bed in a perfect hostelry hard by the Amstel River.

—Erskine Childers,
The Riddle of the Sands (1903)

a copper-sheathed chimney. The French restaurant **Mangerie de Kersentuin (Cherry Orchard)**, a member of Les Etappes du Bon Goût, has an international reputation and reasonable prices.

Dijsselhofplantsoen 7 (at Apollolaan), 1077 BJ Amsterdam. ☎ 0800/641-03-00 in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/570-5600. Fax 020/570-5654. www.gardenhotel.nl. 124 units. 195€–390€ (\$244–\$488) double; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 5 or 24 to Apollolaan. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Mediterranean); bar; access to nearby health club; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; executive rooms; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Apollofirst ★ The small and very elegant Apollofirst, a family-owned hotel set amid the Amsterdam school architecture of Apollolaan, advertises itself as the “best quarters in town in the town’s best quarter.” Their claim may be debatable, but the Venman family’s justifiable pride in their establishment is not. All the accommodations of this intimate hotel are quiet, spacious, and grandly furnished. Bathrooms are fully tiled. Rooms at the back of the hotel overlook the well-kept gardens of the hotel and its neighbors, and the summer terrace where guests can have a snack or a cocktail. Room service and a laundry and dry-cleaning service are available. The hotel’s elegant **Restaurant Chambertin** is a French *fin de siècle* affair.

Apollolaan 123 (off Minervalaan), 1077 AP Amsterdam. ☎ 020/673-0333. Fax 020/675-0348. www.apollofirst.nl. 40 units. 125€–195€ (\$156–\$244) double; 235€–280€ (\$294–\$350) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 5 or 24 to Apollolaan. **Amenities:** Bar; 24-hr. room service; laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* TV.

INEXPENSIVE

Van Ostade Bicycle Hotel ★★ The young proprietors of this establishment have hit on an interesting idea: They cater to visitors who wish to explore Amsterdam on bikes. They are helpful in planning biking routes through and around the city. You can rent bikes for 5€ (\$6.25) daily, no deposit, and stable your trusty steed indoors. The recently renovated guest rooms have new carpets and plain but comfortable modern furnishings; some have kitchenettes and small balconies, and there are large rooms for families. The hotel is a few blocks from the popular Albert Cuyp street market, in the somewhat raggedy De Pijp neighborhood. Two old bicycles hang 6m (20 ft.) high on the hotel’s facade, and there are always bikes parked in front. There’s no elevator.

Van Ostadestraat 123 (off Ferdinand Bolstraat), Amsterdam 1072 SV. ☎ 020/679-3452. Fax 020/671-5213. www.bicyclehotel.com. 16 units, 8 with bathroom. 70€–99€ (\$88–\$124) double with bathroom; 61€–70€ (\$76–\$88) double without bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Parking 17€ (\$21). Tram: 3, 12, or 25 to Ceintuurbaan-Ferdinand Bolstraat. **Amenities:** Bike rental. *In room:* TV.

FOR GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

INEXPENSIVE

Orfeo One of the city's longest-standing gay lodgings has, for more than 30 years, been providing basic, practical facilities and friendly, helpful service at low rates. The front desk is in a cozy and sociable lounge and there is a marble-floored breakfast room. Only three guest rooms have a full bathroom, some with charming beamed ceilings; others share shower and/or toilet. One of the perks is a small in-house Finnish sauna. The largest concentration of city-center restaurants is right at the doorstep.

Leidsekruisstraat 14 (off Leidseplein), 1017 RH Amsterdam. ☎ 020/623-1347. Fax 020/620-2348. www.hotelorfeo.com. 17 units, 3 with bathroom. 105€–115€ (\$131–\$144) double with bathroom, 67€–79€ (\$85–\$99) double without bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Prinsengracht. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

NEAR THE AIRPORT

VERY EXPENSIVE

Sheraton Amsterdam Airport ★★ You could only be more convenient to the airport by lodging on the runway. There's all the comfort you would expect of a top-flight Sheraton, including soundproof rooms with big, comfortable beds, marble bathrooms with separate shower, and a well-equipped Oasis health club fitness center with pool. That said, the Sheraton is no fount of Dutch tradition. Blocky and modern is the kindest thing I can say about the exterior, which is what you'd expect of a hotel in this location. The inside story is better, with guest rooms that bring a touch of style to their mission of lodging itinerant businesspeople. Room styles range from modern and functional to unashamed luxury in the suites. The **Voyager** restaurant has an international, a la carte menu. The **Dutch Runway Café** serves drinks and delicatessen snacks.

Schiphol Boulevard 101 (outside Schiphol Plaza), 1118 BG Schiphol Airport. ☎ 800/325-3535 in the U.S. and Canada, or 020/316-4300. Fax 020/316-4399. www.sheraton.com/amsterdamair. 408 units. 420€–520€ (\$525–\$650) double; from 890€ (\$1,113) suite; add 5% city tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 30€ (\$38). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (international/Dutch); 2 bars; heated indoor pool; health club; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

4 Where to Dine

If cities get the cuisine they deserve, Amsterdam's ought to be liberal, multiethnic, and adventurous, though still satisfying the sound Dutch insistence on value for each euro spent. Guess what? It is. As a trading city with a true melting-pot character, Amsterdam has absorbed culinary influences from far and wide and rustled them all up to its own collective satisfaction.

Just about any international cuisine type can be found on the city's restaurant roster—in Amsterdam, they say, you can eat in any language. From elegant 17th-century dining rooms, to cozy canal-side bistros, to exuberant taverns with equally exuberant Greek attendants, to exotic Indonesian rooms attended by turbaned waiters, to the *bruine kroegjes* (brown cafes) with their smoke-stained walls and friendly table conversations, the eateries of Amsterdam confront the tourist with the agony of being able to choose only one or two from their vast number each day.

Where to Dine in Amsterdam

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IN THE OLD CENTER

VERY EXPENSIVE

Excelsior ★★ CONTINENTAL One of Amsterdam's most famous restaurants derives its reputation from critically acclaimed cuisine and superb service. It's more than a little formal. Crystal chandeliers, elaborate moldings, crisp linens, fresh bouquets of flowers, and picture windows with great views on the Amstel River help give this refined place a baronial atmosphere. Respectable attire (jackets for men) is required. Try the Excelsior's three-course *menu du théâtre*, which makes fine dining a little more affordable. It includes such choices as smoked eel with dill (a Dutch specialty) or marinated sweetbreads of lamb with salad for starters, filet of halibut with caper sauce or filet of veal with leek sauce as main courses, and desserts such as orange pie with frozen yogurt or raspberry bavaroise with mango sauce.

In the Hotel de l'Europe, Nieuwe Doelenstraat 2–8 (facing Muntplein). ☎ 020/531-1705. www.europe.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 27€–42€ (\$34–\$53); fixed-price menus 60€–78€ (\$75–\$98). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7–11am, 12:30–2:30pm, 7–10:30pm; Sat–Sun 7–11am and 7–10:30pm. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to Muntplein.

EXPENSIVE

De Silveren Spiegel ★ DUTCH/FRENCH The owner of this traditional old restaurant, one of the best known in Amsterdam, has introduced a fresh approach. The two houses—beside the 17th-century, domed Ronde Lutherse Kerk (Round Lutheran Church)—that form the premises were built in 1614 for a wealthy soap-maker, Laurens Jansz Spieghel. It's typically Old Dutch inside, with the bar downstairs and more dining rooms where the bedrooms used to be. The whole place emanates a traditionally Dutch tidiness that's very welcoming. There's a garden in back. The menu has been updated and now offers new, finely prepared seafood and meat dishes, such as baked sole filets with wild spinach, and trilogy of lamb with ratatouille—but just as in the old days, the lamb is Holland's finest, from Texel, and traditional Zaanse mustard is never far away.

Kattengat 4–6 (off Singel). ☎ 020/624-6589. www.desilverenspiegel.nl. Main courses 24€–33€ (\$30–\$41); fixed-price menus 29€–45€ (\$36–\$56). AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17 to Martelaarsgracht.

D'Vijff Vlieghe ★★ MODERN DUTCH Touristy? Yes. The “Five Flies” is a kind of Old Dutch theme park, with nine separate dining rooms in five canal houses decorated with artifacts from Holland's Golden Age. Each room has a different character. For example, the Rembrandt Room has four original etchings by the artist; the Glass Room has a collection of Golden Age handmade glassware; and the Knight's Room is adorned with 16th-century armor and accouterments. The chef is out to convey the culinary excellence inherent in many traditional Dutch recipes and products, in an updated, “New Dutch” form, employing organic ingredients when possible. You can enjoy quite a mouthful by choosing the *geroosterde tamme eend op een bedje van appeltjes en tuinboontjes overgoten met een vinaigrette van rode en groene pepers* (roasted tame duck on a layer of apples and broad beans drizzled with a vinaigrette of red and green peppers).

Spuistraat 294–302 (at Spui; entrance at Vliegendesteeg 1). ☎ 020/530-4060. www.d-vijffvlieghe.com. Main courses 21€–30€ (\$26–\$37); seasonal menu 32€–53€ (\$39–\$66). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30pm–midnight. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

Lucius ★ SEAFOOD Lucius, which means “pike” in Latin, has earned a reputation for fine seafood at fairly reasonable prices. Oysters and lobsters imported

from Norway and Canada are the specialties. The three-course menu is also very popular. Among the half-dozen or so choices featured on the chalkboard menu, you might find fish soup to start, followed by grilled plaice, Dover sole, bass, or John Dory. The spectacular seafood plate includes six oysters, 10 mussels, clams, shrimp, and half a lobster. The long, narrow dining room is cooled by ceiling fans and features an aquarium. In summer, chairs are placed out on the sidewalk.

Spuistraat 247 (near Spui). ☎ 020/624-1831. www.lucius.nl. Main courses 20€–40€ (\$24–\$49); fixed-price menus 35€–42€ (\$44–\$53). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5pm–midnight. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

MODERATE

Haesje Claes ★ DUTCH If you're yearning for a cozy Old Dutch environment and hearty Dutch food at moderate prices, try this inviting place. Lots of nooks and crannies decorated with wood paneling, Delftware, wooden barrels, brocaded benches, and traditional Dutch hanging lamps with fringed covers give an intimate, comfortable feel to the setting. The menu covers a lot of ground, from canapés to caviar, but you have the most luck with Dutch stalwarts ranging from omelets to tournedos. Try *hutspot* (stew), *stampot* (mashed potatoes and cabbage), and various fish stews, including those with IJsselmeer *paling* (eel).

Spuistraat 273–275 (at Spui). ☎ 020/624-9998. www.haesjeclaes.nl. Main courses 13€–20€ (\$17–\$25); tourist menu 20€ (\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10pm. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

In de Waag ★ CONTINENTAL This cafe-restaurant is called In de Waag because it's in the Waag (see, you *can* speak Dutch). And what is the Waag? In the 14th century, this was the Sint-Antoniespoort Gate in the city walls; by the Golden Age, it had become a weigh house: De Waag. Dissections were once carried out on the top floor. Nowadays, dissections are of a culinary nature, as the castlelike structure holds one of Amsterdam's most stylish cafe-restaurants, in an area that's becoming hipper by the minute. It's an indelibly romantic place, the long banquet-style tables ablaze with light from hundreds of candles in the evening. You can mix easily with other diners. The breast of Barbary duck with sesame-cracker and sherry dressing is pretty good, as is the vegetarian Kashmir bread with braised vegetables and coriander-yogurt sauce. You can also drop by for just a coffee or a drink.

Nieuwmarkt 4. ☎ 020/422-7772. www.indewaag.nl. Main courses 17€–24€ (\$21–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 10am–1am; Fri–Sat 10am–2am. Metro: Nieuwmarkt.

Kantjil & de Tijger ★★ INDONESIAN Unlike the many Indonesian restaurants in Holland that wear their ethnic origins on their sleeves, literally, with waitstaff decked out in traditional costume, the Antelope and the Tiger is chic, modern, and cool. Moreover, it attracts customers who like their Indonesian food not only chic, modern, and cool, but good as well. The two bestsellers in this popular place are *nasi goreng Kantjil* (fried rice with pork kabobs, stewed beef, pickled cucumbers, and mixed vegetables) and the 20-item *rijsttafel* for two. Other choices include stewed chicken in soy sauce, tofu omelet, shrimp with coconut dressing, Indonesian pumpkin, and mixed steamed vegetables with peanut-butter sauce. Finish off your meal with the multilayered cinnamon cake or (try this at least once) the coffee with ginger liqueur and whipped cream.

Spuistraat 291–293 (beside Spui). ☎ 020/620-0994. www.kantjil.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 11€–15€ (\$14–\$19); *rijsttafel* 40€–50€ (\$50–\$63) for 2. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 4:30–11pm. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

Lof ★★ Finds CONTINENTAL It's hard to pin down this fashionable, vaguely French/Italian eatery. For one thing, there's no menu. Its youthful chefs

Moments **Secrets of the Rijsttafel**

The Indonesian feast **rijsttafel** is Holland's favorite meal and has been ever since the United East India Company sea captains introduced it to the wealthy burghers of Amsterdam in the 17th century. The rijsttafel (literally "rice table") originated with Dutch plantation overseers in Indonesia, who liked to sample selectively from Indonesian cuisine.

The basic concept of a rijsttafel is to eat a bit of this and a bit of that, blending the flavors and textures. A simple, unadorned bed of rice is the base and the mediator between spicy meats and bland vegetables or fruits, between sweet-and-sour tastes, soft-and-crunchy textures. Although a rijsttafel for one is possible, this feast is better shared by two or by a tableful of people. In the case of a solitary diner or a couple, a 17-dish rijsttafel will be enough food; for four or more, order a 24- or 30-dish rijsttafel and you can experience the total taste treat.

Among the customary dishes and ingredients of a rijsttafel are *loempia* (classic Chinese-style egg rolls); *satay*, or *sateh* (small kabobs of pork, grilled and served with a spicy peanut sauce); *perkedel* (meatballs); *gado-gado* (vegetables in peanut sauce); *daging smoor* (beef in soy sauce); *babi ketjap* (pork in soy sauce); *kroepoek* (crunchy, puffy shrimp toast); *serundeng* (fried coconut); *roedjak manis* (fruit in sweet sauce); and *pisang goreng* (fried banana). Beware of one very appealing dish of sauce with small chunks of what looks to be bright-red onion—that is *sambal badjak*, or simply *sambal*, and it's hotter than hot.

describe their creations as *cuisine spontane*—they go to the markets, spontaneously pick out whatever's fresh, and equally spontaneously figure out what to do with it back at base. But the name means "praise" in Dutch, and that sounds about right, since the results are invariably admirable. The choice is deliberately limited, not quite take-it-or-leave-it, yet not far away. Oysters are a regular feature among two or three starters; then, choose from three main courses: meat, fish, and vegetarian; and finish with a *torte*. You dine on one of two levels, at plain tables in a cozy setting with bare brick walls and a view of proceedings in the open kitchen.

Haarlemmerstraat 62 (west of Centraal Station). ☎ 020/620-2997. Main courses 12€–22€ (\$14–\$27); fixed-price menu 35€ (\$44). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 6–11pm. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17 to Maartelaarsgracht.

INEXPENSIVE

Café Luxembourg ★★ INTERNATIONAL "One of the world's great cafes," wrote the *New York Times* about this bohemian, see-and-be-seen grand cafe, where the waitstaff wear starched white aprons. Unlike other cafes in Amsterdam, which often draw a distinctive clientele, the Luxembourg attracts all kinds of people because it offers amazingly large portions of food at reasonable prices. Soups, sandwiches, and such dishes as meatloaf are available. Special attractions are choices like Chinese dim sum and *satay ayam* (Indonesian grilled chicken in a peanut sauce). Sunday in particular, but also on other days, it's a

good place to do breakfast with the day's papers and a cup of strong coffee. You're encouraged to linger in this relaxing place and read one of the many international newspapers. In summer, there's sidewalk dining.

Spui 22–24 (at Spui). ☎ 020/620-6264. www.luxembourg.nl. Salads and specials 7.50€–11€ (\$9.40–\$13); lunch 4€–8.75€ (\$5–\$11); main courses 8€–15€ (\$10–\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–1am; Fri–Sat 9am–2am. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

De Jaren ★ CONTINENTAL If you admire picturesque surroundings, you'll love this large cafe/restaurant. Fashionable without being pretentious, it occupies a solid-looking, spacious building (that served originally as a bank) on two stories, with unusually high ceilings and a multicolored tiled mosaic floor. De Jaren's unique selling point is not so much the fashionable set that hangs out here, but its two marvelous open-air terraces beside the Amstel River, places in the sun that are much in demand in fine weather. Occupants of these prime-time seats settle into them with a firmness of purpose as if they mean to settle there permanently. You can enjoy everything from a cup of coffee, a beer, or a glass of *jenever* (gin), to ham and eggs for breakfast, a salad from the extensive salad bar, spaghetti bolognese, couscous, and rib-eye steak. And you can peruse the English-language newspapers while you do it.

Nieuwe Doelenstraat 20–22 (near Muntplein). ☎ 020/625-5771. www.cafe-de-jaren.nl. Main courses 9.75€–17€ (\$12–\$21). V. Sun–Thurs 10am–1am; Fri–Sat 10am–2am. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to Muntplein.

Nam Kee ★ CHINESE In the heart of the city's small but growing Chinatown, Nam Kee has a long interior with few obvious graces, little in the way of decor, and for sure no plastic Ming Dynasty knickknacks. People come here to pay modestly for food that is both authentic and excellent, from a menu of 140 items. The steamed oysters with black bean sauce and the duck with plum sauce are to die for. Judging by the number of ethnic Chinese customers clicking chopsticks around, Nam Kee does okay when it comes to homeland credibility. The service is fast—not quite so fast that you'll still be eating off your plate while the waitperson is bringing it to the dishwasher, but not far away. On the bright side, this means you don't have long to wait for a table, popular though the restaurant is.

Zeedijk 111–113 at Nieuwmarkt. ☎ 020/624-3470. www.namkee.nl. Main courses 5.25€–15€ (\$6.55–\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight. Metro: Nieuwmarkt.

ALONG THE CANAL BELT

VERY EXPENSIVE

Blakes ★★ CONTINENTAL/FUSION If you dress up in black to celebrate, and I don't mean a tux, then head for ultra-hip and hyper-pricey Blakes, the Zen-like restaurant in the reconverted bakery of an 18th-century almshouse—decorated by Anouska Hempel (aka Lady Weinberg, if you please)—of the ultra-chic designer hotel of the same name. This is where neo-millionaires, jet-setters, and media tycoons go to check out each other's black duds while feeding on skate filet with squid ink sauce or chicken Fabergé with lobster and ginger. You might think you've stumbled on a convention of funeral-parlor practitioners, and you'll surely observe more males with ponytails than on a Kentucky stud farm. Affable celeb chef Schilo van Coevorden numbers among Amsterdam's hottest culinary properties and is a proficient practitioner of a number of ethnic cuisines. He cooks up Thai/Italian/French-inspired delicacies like foie gras soup with sweet Thai basil and lime; beef with green papaya salad; chicken with ginkgo-nut curry; and tea-smoked venison. Asian combinations

predominate at lunchtime, and Mediterranean themes edge them out in the evening.

In Blakes Amsterdam Hotel, Keizersgracht 384 (at Runstraat). ☎ 020/530-2010. www.blakesamsterdam.com. Reservations required. Main courses 26€–40€ (\$33–\$50); fixed-price menu 34€ (\$43). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7–11am, noon–2pm, and 6:30–11pm; Sat 7–11am and 6:30–11pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

EXPENSIVE

Christophe ★★ MODERN FRENCH The star of this show is owner and chef Jean-Christophe Royer, who combines influences from his youth in Algeria and southwest France with his experience at top restaurants in New York, Baltimore, and Massachusetts, adding his penchant for Mediterranean flourishes. The result is an updated and unpretentious version of classic French cuisine. He serves sensuous, sophisticated food in an elegant setting featuring dark cherry-wood paneling, thick carpets, rice-paper lamp shades, stately cacti by the windows, and floral paintings by contemporary Dutch artist Martin van Vreden. The food is similarly refined, using traditional Mediterranean ingredients—figs, truffles, olives, and saffron—in exciting new ways. Royer changes his menu seasonally, so what you get depends on when you visit. Try the roasted milk-fed Pyrenean lamb or the roasted turbot in a light curry sauce, and finish with a light tart of prunes in Armagnac.

Leliegracht 46 (between Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht). ☎ 020/625-0807. www.christophe.nl. Main courses 31€–56€ (\$39–\$70); chef's menu 67€–75€ (\$84–\$94). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6:30–10:30pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

MODERATE

Bolhoed ★★ VEGETARIAN Forget the corn-sheaf 'n' brown-rice image affected by so many vegetarian restaurants. Instead, garnish your healthful habits with tangy flavors and a dash of zest. Latin style, world music, ethnic exhibits, evening candlelight, and a fine view of the canal from each of the two plant-bedecked rooms in this former hat store—*bolhoed* is Dutch for bowler hat—distinguish a restaurant for which *vegetarian* is a tad too wholesome-sounding. Service is delivered with equal amounts of gusto and attention. Try such veggie delights as pumpkin soup, *ragoût croissant* (pastry filled with leeks, tofu, seaweed, and curry sauce), a variety of salads, and *zarzuela*. If you want to go the whole hog, so to speak, and eat vegan, most of Bolhoed's dishes can be so prepared, and most are made with organic produce; the wine is organic, too. In fine weather, you can dine right beside the canal.

Prinsengracht 60–62 (near Noordermarkt). ☎ 020/626-1803. www.bolhoed.nl. Main courses 12€–15€ (\$15–\$19); 3-course menu 19€ (\$24). No credit cards. Sun–Fri noon–11pm; Sat 11am–11pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

Tips An Amsterdam Dinner Cruise

A delightful way to combine sightseeing and leisurely dining is a dinner cruise. During these 2½-hour canal cruises you get to enjoy a five-course dinner that includes a cocktail and wine with dinner, coffee with bonbons, and a glass of cognac or a liqueur to finish. Reservations are required. The cruises cost around 70€ (\$88) for adults, and 45€ (\$56) for children ages 4 to 12. See “Organized Tours,” later, for details on the tour-boat lines.

De Belhamel ★★ *Finds* CONTINENTAL Classical music complements a graceful Art Nouveau setting at this two-level restaurant overlooking the photogenic junction of the Herengracht and Brouwersgracht canals. The tables fill up quickly most evenings, so make reservations or go early. The menu changes seasonally (game is a big deal here in the fall), but hopefully something as good as these will be on the list: puffed pastries layered with salmon, shellfish, crayfish tails, and chervil beurre-blanc to start; and beef tenderloin in Madeira sauce with zucchini *rösti* and puffed garlic for a main course. You can also get vegetarian dishes. Try for a window table and take in the superb canal views. The waitstaff is occasionally a bit too laid-back, and when it is full, the acoustic peculiarities of the place can drive the noise level up to that of a boiler factory.

Brouwersgracht 60 (at Herengracht). ☎ 020/622-1095. www.belhamel.nl. Main courses 19€–21€ (\$24–\$26); fixed-price menu 32€ (\$40). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6–10pm; Fri–Sat 6–10:30pm. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17 to Martelaarsgracht.

Spanjer & Van Twist ★★ *Finds* CONTINENTAL This place would almost be worth the visit for its name alone, so it's doubly gratifying to find that the food is good, too. The interior is typical neighborhood-*eetcafé* style, with the day's specials chalked on a blackboard, a long table with newspapers at the front, and the kitchen visible in back. High standards of cooking, however, put this place above others of its kind. The eclectic menu changes seasonally, but to give you an idea of its range, I've come fork-to-face with Thai fish curry and *pandan* rice; *saltimbocca* of trout in white-wine sauce; and artichoke mousseline with taragon sauce and green asparagus. In fine weather, you can eat under the trees on an outdoor terrace beside the tranquil Leliegracht canal.

Leliegracht 60 (off Keizersgracht). ☎ 020/639-0109. Reservations not accepted. Main courses 11€–14€ (\$13–\$17). MC, V. Daily 10am–1am (only light snacks after 11pm). Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

Tempo Doeloe ★★ INDONESIAN For authentic Indonesian cuisine, this place is hard to beat. You dine in a *batik* ambience that's Indonesian, but restrained. The attractive decor and the fine china are unexpected pluses. Try the many small meat, fish, and vegetable dishes of the three different *rijsttafel* (rice table) options, from the 15-plate vegetarian *rijsttafel sayoeran* and the 15-plate *rijsttafel stimoelan*, to the sumptuous 25-plate *rijsttafel istemewa*. You get dishes like *gadon dari sapi* (beef in a mild coconut sauce and fresh coriander), *ajam roedjak* (chicken in a strongly seasoned sauce of chiles and coconut), *sambal goreng oedang* (small shrimp with Indonesian spices), and *atjar* (sweet-and-sour Indonesian salad). For great individual dishes, go for the *nasi koening* or any of the vegetarian options. One caution: When something on the menu is described as *pedis*, meaning hot, that's *exactly* what it is.

Utrechtsestraat 75 (between Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht). ☎ 020/625-6718. Main courses 15€–23€ (\$19–\$29); *rijsttafel* 23€–33€ (\$28–\$41). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–11:30pm. Tram: 4 to Keizersgracht.

INEXPENSIVE

De Prins ★★ *Value* DUTCH/FRENCH This companionable restaurant, housed in a 17th-century canal house across the canal from the Anne Frank House, has a smoke-stained, brown-café style and food that could easily grace a much more expensive place. De Prins offers an unbeatable price-to-quality ratio for typically Dutch/French menu items, and long may it continue to do so. The youthful clientele is loyal and enthusiastic, so the relatively few tables fill up quickly. This is a quiet neighborhood place—nothing fancy or trendy, but very appealing in a human way. There's a bar on a slightly lower level than the restaurant. From March to September, De Prins spreads a terrace along the canal side.

Prinsengracht 124 (at Egelantiersgracht). ☎ 020/624-9382. www.deprins.nl. Main courses 7.50€–15€ (\$9.40–\$19); *dagschotel* 10€ (\$13); specials 11€–15€ (\$14–\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am to 1 or 2am (kitchen to 10pm). Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

Golden Temple ★ VEGETARIAN This temple of taste is one of the best vegetarian (and vegan) options in town. Its limpid, nonsmoking atmosphere is a tad too hallowed, an effect enhanced by an absence of decorative flourishes that may be Zen-like in its purity but leaves you wishing for something, anything, to look at other than your fellow veg-eaters. The menu livens things up, with its unlikely roster of Indian, Middle Eastern, and Mexican dishes, and the food is ace, delicately spiced and flavored, and evidently prepared by loving hands. Multiple-choice platters are a good way to go. For the Indian *thali*, you select from choices like *sag paneer* (homemade cheese in a spinach and onion sauce), vegetable *korma*, and *raita* (cucumber and yogurt dip); the Middle Eastern platter has stalwarts like falafel, chickpea-and-vegetable stew, and vegetable *dolmas*. Side dishes are as varied as guacamole, couscous, and *pakora*.

Utrechtsestraat 126 (2 blocks south of Prinsengracht). ☎ 020/626-8560. www.restaurantgoldentemple.nl. Main courses 10€–14€ (\$13–\$17); mixed platter 13€ (\$16). MC, V. Daily 5–10pm. Tram: 4 to Prinsengracht.

Pancake Bakery ★★ *Kids* PANCAKES Located in a 17th-century canal warehouse, this two-story restaurant with winding staircases and exposed beams serves some of the most delicious and unusual pancakes you'll ever taste. There are several dozen varieties, almost all of which are a full meal. The satisfyingly large—you might even find them heavy—pancakes come adorned with all sorts of toppings, both sweet and spicy. Choices include salami and cheese, cheese and ginger, curried turkey with pineapple and raisins, honey nuts and whipped cream, and ice cream and *advokaat* (a Dutch eggnoglike cocktail). One of the bestsellers is the “American” pancake: with fried chicken, sweet corn, peppers, carrots, Cajun sauce, and salad. In summer, a few tables are placed in front overlooking the canal, but beware: All the syrup, honey, and sugar being passed around tends to attract bees and hornets.

Prinsengracht 191 (at Prinsensstraat). ☎ 020/625-1333. www.pancake.nl. Reservations required for large groups. Pancakes 4.50€–11€ (\$5.60–\$13). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–9:30pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

Traiterie Grekas ★ GREEK With just five tables and a small sidewalk terrace in summertime, Grekas would be more of a frustration than anything else, except that its main business is its takeout service. The food is fresh and authentic, and you can choose your meal like you would in Mykonos, by pointing to the dishes you want. If there are no free tables, you can always take your choices back to your room, or eat alfresco on the canalside. Menu items are standard Greek but with a freshness and taste that are hard to beat. The moussaka and pasticcio are heavenly; the roast lamb with wine, herbs, olive oil, and bouillon is excellent; the calamari in the salad seems to have come straight out of Homer's wine-dark sea; and there's a good Greek wine list. Takeout dishes are a euro or two less than eat-in.

Singel 311 (near Spui). ☎ 020/620-3590. No reservations. Main courses 9.50€–13€ (\$12–\$16). No credit cards. Wed–Sun 5–10pm. Tram: 1, 2, or 5 to Spui.

AROUND LEIDSEPLEIN EXPENSIVE

De Oesterbar SEAFOOD Over 50 years old, this is the best-known and most popular fish restaurant in Amsterdam. (It caused quite a shock to the

digestive systems of the city's foodies when it went belly-up early in 2004, amid allegations of dark dealings and footloose accounting; but it has re-opened under new management.) Its seafood is delivered fresh twice daily. The decor is a delight: all white tiles with fish tanks bubbling at your elbows on the street level, and Victorian brocades and etched glass in the more formal dining room upstairs. The menu is a directory of Dutch seafood dishes, but it offers a few meat selections. Choices include *sole Danoise* with the tiny Dutch shrimp; *sole Véronique* with Muscadet grapes; stewed eel in wine sauce; and the assorted fish plate of turbot, halibut, and fresh salmon.

Leidseplein 10. ☎ 020/623-2988. www.oesterbar.nl. Main courses 25€–34€ (\$31–\$43). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–1am. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10 to Leidseplein.

MODERATE

Café Americain ★ CONTINENTAL The lofty dining room here is a national monument of Dutch Art Nouveau. Since its opening in 1900, the place has been a hangout for Dutch and international artists, writers, dancers, and actors. Seductress/spy Mata Hari held her wedding reception here in her pre-espionage days. *Tout* Amsterdam once liked to be seen here (and some of it still does), but now it's mostly for tourists. Don't let that worry you, though: It's still great. Leaded stained-glass windows, newspaper-littered reading tables, bargello-patterned velvet upholstery, frosted-glass Tiffany chandeliers from the 1920s, and tall carved columns are all part of the dusky sit-and-chat atmosphere. Seafood specialties include monkfish, perch, salmon, and king prawns; meat dishes include rack of Irish lamb and rosé breast of duck with creamed potatoes. Jazz lovers can stock up on good music and good food at the Sunday jazz brunch.

In the American Hotel, Leidsekaade 97 (at Leidseplein). ☎ 020/556-3232. www.amsterdam-american.crowneplaza.com. Main courses 16€–21€ (\$20–\$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–midnight. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10 to Leidseplein.

Fun Fact Real Cutups

In the 1960s, satirist Gerrit Komrij described the Café Americain's famously brusque waiters as "unemployed knife-throwers."

AROUND REMBRANDTPLEIN

MODERATE

Memories of India ★ INDIAN The Khan family proprietors earned their spurs in the crowded and intensely competitive London market for Indian cuisine and then brought their award-winning formula to Amsterdam. That formula is simple, really: Serve top-flight Indian cuisine in a setting that gives traditional Indian motifs a modern slant, charge moderate prices, and employ an attentive waitstaff. The menu is pretty straightforward, too, and contains the usual tandoori and curry dishes, but it pushes the boat out a bit with some fish items, like the Indian Ocean pomfret in a roasted coriander-seed sauce. The restaurant somehow manages to combine the hallowed silence of diners intent on their plates with a buzz of friendly conversation. Takeout service is available.

Reguliersdwarstraat 88. ☎ 020/623-5710. www.memoriesofindia.nl. Main courses 12€–22€ (\$14–\$27); fixed-price menus 17€–23€ (\$22–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11:30pm. Tram: 4, 9, or 14 to Rembrandtplein.

IN THE JORDAAN

EXPENSIVE

Bordewijk ★★ FRENCH This pleasantly located restaurant is often regarded as one of the best in the city. The decor is tasteful, with green potted

Family-Friendly Restaurants

Pancake Bakery (p. 262) I have yet to meet a kid who doesn't love pancakes, and this restaurant is *the* best pancake source around. Pancakes here come with various inventive toppings, and the child-oriented meals and desserts come with suitably colorful ornaments like umbrellas and clowns.

Wilhelmina-Dok (p. 267) Though in no way conceived as a kid-friendly place, this waterside cafe-restaurant does have a few things going for it. You get there and return by harbor ferry, which ought to add some interest to the proceedings. Once there, either outside on the breezy terrace or snug and warm inside, the young folks can see barges, ferries, yachts, and other vessels coming and going on the IJ ship channel, and maybe even a cruise liner docked at Passenger Terminal Amsterdam. This is likely a better jaunt at lunchtime with young kids in tow.

plants offsetting the severity of the white walls and metallic black tables. Service is relaxed yet attentive, and on mild summer evenings you can't beat dining alfresco on the canal-side terrace. But the real treat is the food. An innovative chef accents French standards with Mediterranean and Asian flourishes to create an elegant fusion of flavors. A typical expression of this mix is to be found in the *artisjokken alla Romana*, *wantans met kruiden*, *sauce corail* (Roman-style artichokes with wontons, herbs, and a South Seas sauce). The menu changes often, but might include salted rib roast with bordelaise sauce, Serrano ham marinated in wine and vinegar and served with fresh pasta, pigeon cooked in the style of Bresse, or even Japanese-style raw fish.

Noordermarkt 7 (at Prinsengracht). ☎ 020/624-3899. Main courses 22€–30€ (\$28–\$38); fixed-price menu 34€–46€ (\$43–\$58). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6:30–10pm. Tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, or 17 to Martelaarsgracht.

MODERATE

Hostaria ★ ITALIAN Owners Marjolein and Massimo Pasquinoli have transformed this tiny space on a lively Jordaan street lined with cafes and restaurants into a little piece of authentic Italy, and a showcase for the kind of cuisine Italian mothers only wish they could equal. When you sit down, Marjolein brings a dish of garlicky *tapenade* and warm bread. As an appetizer you might select a perfectly balanced fish soup with a slice of salmon or lightly grilled eggplant slices with fresh herbs. The *zuppa di gamberone con l'acquetta*, a plate of prawns and shellfish from the market, is terrific. You also have a choice of wonderful homemade pastas—the tagliatelle with arugula and truffles is a particular treat—and of *secondi piatti*, such as veal stuffed with Italian sausage, or duck cooked Roman style.

Tweede Egelantiersdwarsstraat 9 (off Egelantiersgracht). ☎ 020/626-0028. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 15€–19€ (\$19–\$24); fixed-price menu 16€ (\$20). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 6:30–10pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

AROUND MUSEUMPLEIN & VONDELPARK

MODERATE

De Knijp ★ DUTCH/FRENCH One of the advantages of this fine restaurant is that it's open late—its kitchen is still taking orders when chefs at many

Tips Local Heroes

You'll have no trouble finding *broodjes* (small sandwiches) on menus all over Amsterdam, but to eat a *broodje* in a real *broodjeswinkel* (sandwich shop), head to the ever-crowded **Eetsalon Van Dobben**, Korte Reguliersdwarstraat 5–9 (☎ 020/624-4200), just off Rembrandtplein; or to **Broodje van Kootje**, Leidseplein 20 (☎ 020/623-2036), and Spui 28 (☎ 020/623-7451).

other Amsterdam restaurants are sound asleep back home. This would not count for much, of course, if the food weren't good, but De Knijp is definitely worth staying up late for, or worth stopping by for after a performance at the nearby Concertgebouw, and many concert-goers and assorted other late-nighters do so. The menu is not wildly inventive, but you might try such specialties as carpaccio with pesto, poached salmon with tarragon sauce, or goose breast with pink pepper sauce. Look also for friendly, if sometimes a little worn-out, service (this is a hardworking place) and an intimate bistro ambience, with lots of wood and tables on two levels. There's a sidewalk terrace in the summer.

Van Baerlestraat 134 (near the Concertgebouw). ☎ 020/671-4248. www.deknijp.nl. Reservations required for lunch and for more than 5 people. Main courses 15€–20€ (\$19–\$25); fixed-price menus 25€–35€ (\$31–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; daily 5:30pm–1:30am. Tram: 3, 5, 12, or 24 to Museumplein; 16 to Concertgebouwplein.

Vertigo ★★ MEDITERRANEAN If the name of this animated cafe/restaurant suggests a high location, the reality is far less giddy—in terms of altitude, at least. The reference is to Hitchcock's classic movie. In the vaulted basement of a monumental, late-19th-century villa, Vertigo shares premises with the Film Museum; hence the portraits of screen legends on the walls and the classic scenes of movie dining on the menu. On summer days, the outside terrace on the edge of Vondelpark is a favored time-out spot for in-line skaters and joggers, and on hot days a restricted menu is served here. At other times, you can enjoy the southern-European-inspired cuisine in an intimate, candlelit setting inside. The menu, which changes often, has fish, meat, and vegetarian options, plus some fresh pastas. If you see grilled breast of guinea fowl on the menu, go for it!

Vondelpark 3 (at the Film Museum). ☎ 020/612-3021. www.vertigo.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 19€–23€ (\$23–\$28); fixed-price menu 24€ (\$29). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–1am. Tram: 1 or 6 to Eerste Constantijn Huygensstraat; 2, 3, 5, or 12 to Van Baerlestraat.

Wildschut ★ CONTINENTAL Wildschut is one of those places that keeps its chic reputation through thick and thin. The cafe-restaurant occupies a curved dining room at the junction of Van Baerlestraat and Roelof Hartstraat, not far from the Concertgebouw. Amsterdam's bold and beautiful from the arts and media crowd like to see and be seen on the fine terrace in summer, particularly on an evening when the setting sun lights up all those carefully presented faces, or amid the smoke in the Art Deco, brasserie-style interior in winter. It gets crowded here on Friday and Saturday evenings, so be prepared to join the standing throng while waiting for a table. The food is straightforward but good, ranging from BLTs, to vegetarian lasagna, to American rib-eye with green pepper sauce. If at all possible, try to wear something that gets you noticed—but not too much, if you get the idea.

Roelof Hartplein 1–3 (off Van Baerlestraat). ☎ 020/676-8220. www.goodfoodgroup.nl. Main courses 12€–13€ (\$15–\$16). MC, V. Mon–Thurs 9am–1am; Fri 9am–3am; Sat 10:30am–3am; Sun 9:30am–midnight. Tram: 3, 5, 12, or 24 to Roelof Hartplein.

IN AMSTERDAM EAST

VERY EXPENSIVE

La Rive ★★ REGIONAL FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN Amsterdam's high temple of the culinary arts combines French cuisine with influences from around the Mediterranean, and a taste for adventure from even further afield. Royalty, leading politicians, show business stars, and captains of industry all show up here. The dining room overlooks the Amstel, and in summer opens onto a terrace along the embankment with superb views on the river. The interior atmosphere suggests a private library called into service for a dinner party. The walls are paneled in cherry and punctuated with cabinets filled with books and brass objects. Along one wall, private booths overlook the other tables and provide views through the French windows to the water. Specialties include grilled baby abalone with citrus-pickled onion purée and garlic juice, turbot and truffles with trimmings, and grill-roasted rack of lamb with dates and Zaanse mustard.

In the Amstel Inter-Continental Amsterdam Hotel, Professor Tulp plein 1 (off Weesperstraat). ☎ 020/520-3264. www.restaurantlarive.com. Main courses 35€–53€ (\$44–\$66); fixed-price menu 85€–98€ (\$106–\$122). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30pm. Tram: 6, 7, or 10 to Sarphatistraat.

MODERATE

Gare de l'Est ★★ FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN A distinctive detached house, with a conservatory extension and a large sidewalk terrace, originally a coffeehouse for workers at the docks, is an altogether good reason for making a trip to this part of town. As the restaurant's name indicates, the cuisine is French traditional, though with Mediterranean touches. Service is both relaxed and knowledgeable, and since the fixed-price menu is excellent value for money, any surprises appear on your plate rather than on the check. The strict five-course formula (starter, salad, main course of meat or fish, cheese, and dessert) leaves no room for choice—except for the main course—but plenty for market-fresh ingredients and culinary creativity. How does this sound: *pulpo estofado et risotto nero* (ink-fish stew and black rice) as a starter, and roast lamb with gazpacho and farfalle as a main course?

Cruquiusweg 9 (at the East Harbor). ☎ 020/463-0620. www.garedelest.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Fixed-price menu 30€ (\$38). No credit cards. Daily 6–11pm. Tram: 7 or 10 to Zeeburgerdijk.

IN AMSTERDAM SOUTH

MODERATE

De Kas ★★ CONTINENTAL Despite its precocious, see-and-be-seen house style, a traispe out to this eatery on the edge of town is well merited. The converted 1926 greenhouse with smokestack on open ground in South Amsterdam is light, breezy, and spacious, though the atmosphere's maybe a tad too precious. You get just a couple of variations on a three-course, daily changing fixed menu, with cheeseboard extra. Organic Mediterranean-style greens and herbs come fresh from an adjacent working hothouse and the restaurant's own farm, and meat is sourced daily from nearby animal-friendly eco-producers. Picky attention to detail is the norm in the kitchen, and service is attentive enough that the waitstaff seem acquainted personally with every item on your plate.

Kamerlingh Onneslaan 3 (close to Amstel Station). ☎ 020/462-4562. www.restaurantdekas.nl. Reservations required. Fixed-price lunch 32€ (\$40); fixed-price dinner 44€ (\$55). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 6:30–10pm; Sat 6:30–10pm. Tram: 9 to Hogeweg.

IN AMSTERDAM WEST

MODERATE

Amsterdam ★★ ★ *Finds* CONTINENTAL Think of it as *Amsterdam: the Restaurant*, because it's quite a performance. Based in a century-old water-pumping station, complete with diesel-powered engine, the Amsterdam has taken this monument of Victorian industrial good taste and made of it a model of contemporary good eats. You dine amidst a buzz of conviviality in the large, brightly lit, former pumping hall, which had been so carefully tended by the water workers that some of its elegant decoration didn't even need repainting. Service is friendly and the food is good and moderately priced. The fried sweet-breads are popular. If you're feeling flush, spring for a double starter of half lobster with six Zeeland oysters. The Amsterdam is a little bit out from the city center, but easily worth the tram ride.

Watertorenplein 6 (off Haarlemmerweg). ☎ 020/682-2666. www.cradam.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 10€–20€ (\$12–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–1am; Fri–Sat 11am–2am (meals served to 11:30pm). Tram: 10 to Van Hallstraat.

IN AMSTERDAM NORTH

MODERATE

Wilhelmina-Dok ★★ ★ *Kids* CONTINENTAL This waterside cafe-restaurant on the north shore of the IJ ship channel is a slightly wacko-looking modern place on three floors. Plain wood, candlelit tables, wood floors, and oak cabinets give the interior an old-fashioned maritime look, and large windows serve up views across the canal barge-speckled waterway. Breezy is one way to describe the impact of the prevailing westerlies, but tables on the outdoor terrace are sheltered from the wind. The menu favors plain cooking and organic products. A couple of good choices are the *zwaardvis van de grill met saffrianrisotto* (grilled swordfish with saffron rice) and the *kalfslende van de grill met gemarineerde aubergine en flageolottensalade en pesto* (grilled veal cutlets with marinated aubergines, flageolet salad, and pesto). Or you can settle back with just a beer and a snack. On Monday evenings in August, movies are shown on an outdoor screen.

Tips Picnic Picks

You can pick up almost anything you might want for a picnic, from cold cuts, to freshly packed sandwiches, to a bottle of wine, at the **Albert Heijn supermarket**, at the corner of Leidsestraat and Koningsplein, near Spui (tram: 1, 2, or 5), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 8pm and Saturday from 9am to 6pm. Then head over to Vondelpark, only a 10-minute walk. In summertime, you might even catch a free concert at the outdoor theater there.

At the branch of **Albert Heijn** on Museumplein, across the street from the Concertgebouw (tram: 3, 5, 12, or 16), you can haul your brown bag right up onto the sloping, grass-covered roof, which has become a prime spot for sunbathing, hanging out, and picnicking, and has a great view on Museumplein.

Nordwal 1 (at IJplein). ☎ 020/632-3701. www.wilhelmina-dok.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 15€–18€ (\$19–\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–midnight; Sat–Sun noon–1am. Ferry: IJveer from Pier 8 behind Centraal Station to the dock at IJplein; then go right along the dike-top path.

5 Seeing the Sights

For sightseers in Amsterdam, the question is not simply what to see and do, but rather how many of this intriguing city's marvelous sights you can fit into the time you have!

There are miles and miles of canals to cruise, hundreds of narrow streets to wander, countless historic buildings to visit, more than 40 museums holding collections of everything from artistic wonders to obscure curiosities, not to mention all the diamond cutters and craftspeople to watch as they practice generations-old skills . . . the list is as long as every tourist's individual interests.

Your very first stop on any sightseeing excursion, of course, should be the **VVV** tourist office—the staff there has information on anything you might want to know and some things you might not even have known you wanted to know. One absolute must-do in Amsterdam is a **canal-boat cruise** (see “Organized Tours,” later in this chapter). The view of the elegant canal houses from the water is unforgettable.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Anne Frankhuis ★★☆☆ In summer you may have to queue for an hour or more to get in, but no one should miss seeing and experiencing this house, where eight people from three separate families lived together in near total silence for more than 2 years during World War II. The hiding place Otto Frank found for his family and friends kept them safe until, tragically close to the end of the war, it was raided by Nazi forces, and its occupants were deported to the

Your Passport to Amsterdam

A sound way to get the most out of your trip is to avail yourself of the **Amsterdam Pass**. The credit card-size pass is valid for 1 day for 31€ (\$39), 2 days for 41€ (\$51), and 3 days for 51€ (\$77). It allows free travel on public transportation; free admission to more than 20 museums and attractions, including to the Rijksmuseum or the Van Gogh Museum (not both) and the Stedelijk Museum, and discounted admission to more museums and attractions; a free canal-boat cruise; discounted excursions, including reduced rates on the Museum Boat and the Canal Bus; and discounts in selected restaurants and stores. Total possible savings on the pass are in the region of 150€ (\$188).

Before purchasing one, consider carefully whether you'll get your money's worth out of this pass. Remember, this is Holland, where the local fondness for the coin of the realm is proverbial and killer bargains are thin on the ground. You'll have to work yourself pretty hard to come out ahead on the cost of the pass, jumping on and off trams, buses, and canal boats, and running into and out of museums that fall mostly into the solid-culture class.

The pass is available from Holland Tourist Information at Schiphol Airport and from VVV tourist information offices in the city.

concentration camps. It was here that Anne wrote her famous diary as a way to deal with the boredom and her youthful jumble of thoughts, which had as much to do with personal relationships as with the war and the Nazi terror raging outside her hiding place.

The rooms of this building, which was an office and warehouse at that time, are still as bare as they were when Anne's father returned, the only survivor of the eight *onderduikers* (divers or hidiers). Nothing has been changed, except that protective Plexiglas panels have been placed over the wall where Anne pinned up photos of her favorite actress, Deanna Durbin, and of the young English princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. As you tour the small building, it's easy to imagine Anne's experience, growing up in this place, awakening as a young woman, and writing down her secret thoughts in a diary.

Get here as early as you can to avoid the lines—this advice isn't as useful as it used to be, because everybody is both giving it and heeding it, but it should still save you some waiting time. An alternative, and better, strategy if you're in town from April to August, when the museum is open to 9pm, is to go in the evening, as it is invariably quiet then—till now at any rate. A typical Amsterdam canal house, this has very steep interior stairs. Next door at no. 265–267 is a new wing for temporary exhibits. You can see a bronze sculpture of Anne at nearby Westermarkt.

Prinsengracht 263 (at Westermarkt). © 020/556-7105. www.annefrank.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) children 10–17, free for children under 10. Apr–Aug daily 9am–9pm; Sept–Mar daily 9am–7pm; Jan 1 and Dec 25 noon–7pm; May 4 9am–7pm; Dec 16 and 31 9am–5pm. Closed Yom Kippur. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

Rijksmuseum ★★ ★ Most of Holland's premier museum is closed for renovation until mid-2008. During this period, under the head *The Masterpieces*, key paintings and other stellar works from the magnificent 17th-century Dutch Golden Age collection can be viewed in the museum's Philips Wing. The three-star rating given here is justified even for the truncated highlights of Golden Age art alone, but you need to remember that most of the museum's collection, which totals some seven million individual objects (only a small fraction of which would be displayed at any given time), will be "invisible" to visitors for some time to come.

Architect Petrus Josephus Hubertus Cuypers (1827–1921), the "grandfather of modern Dutch architecture," designed the museum in a monumental Dutch neo-Renaissance, gabled style in brick. Cuypers, a Catholic, slipped in more than a dab of neo-Gothic, too, causing the country's thoroughly Protestant King William III to scorn what he called "that cathedral," and the building opened in 1885 to a less-than-enthusiastic public reception. Since then, many additions have been made to the collections and the building.

Impressions

What other place in the world could you choose where all of life's comforts, and all novelties that man could want are so easy to obtain as here and where you can enjoy such a feeling of freedom.

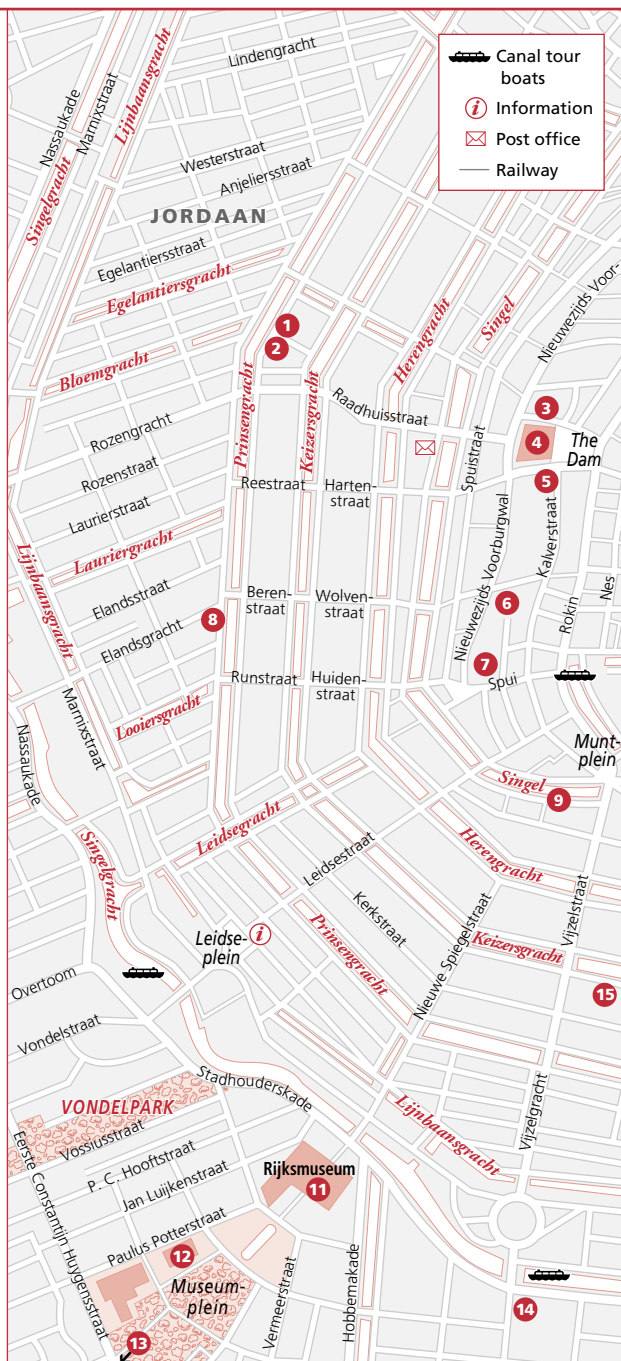
—René Descartes, French philosopher (1634)

While Amsterdam may box your Puritan ears, this great, historic city is an experiment in freedom.

—ABCNEWS.com (2000)

What to See & Do in Amsterdam

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The Rijksmuseum contains the world's largest collection of paintings by the Dutch Masters, including the most famous of all, a single work that all but defines the Golden Age. The painting is *The Shooting Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch*, 1642, better known as *The Night Watch*, by Rembrandt. The scene it so dramatically depicts is surely alien to most of the people who flock to see it: gaily uniformed militiamen checking their weapons and accouterments before moving out on patrol. Van Ruisdael, van Heemskerck, Frans Hals, Paulus

Fun Fact The Day Watch?

Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) actually shows a day-time scene. Centuries of grime dulled its luster until restoration revealed sunlight glinting on the militia company's arms and accouterments.

Potter, Jan Steen, Vermeer, de Hooch, Terborch, and Gerard Dou are also represented. The range is impressive—individual portraits, guild paintings, landscapes, seascapes, domestic scenes, medieval religious subjects, allegories, and the incredible (and nearly photographic) Dutch still lifes.

Philips Wing, Jan Luijkenstraat 1 (at Museumplein). ☎ 020/647-7000. www.rijksmuseum.nl. Admission 9€ (\$11) adults, free for those under 19. Daily 9am–6pm. Closed Jan 1. Tram: 2 or 5 to Hobbemastraat.

Van Gogh Museum ★★☆☆ Anyone who has ever responded to van Gogh's vibrant colors and vivid landscapes will find walking through the rooms of this rather stark contemporary building a moving experience. The museum displays, in chronological order, more than 200 van Gogh paintings. As you move through the rooms, the canvases reflect the artist's changing environment and much of his inner life, so that gradually van Gogh himself becomes almost a tangible presence standing at your elbow. You'll see the early, brooding *The Potato Eaters* and *The Yellow House*, as well as the painting known around the world simply as *Sunflowers*, though van Gogh actually titled it *Still Life with Fourteen Sunflowers*. By the time you reach the vaguely threatening painting of a flock of black crows rising from a waving cornfield, you can almost feel the artist's mounting inner pain.

In addition to the paintings, there are nearly 600 drawings by van Gogh, which will be on permanent display in the museum's new wing. This free-standing, multistory, half-oval structure, designed by the Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, is constructed in a bold combination of titanium and gray-brown stone, and is connected to the main building by a subterranean walkway.

Note: Lines at the museum can be very long, especially in summer—try going on a weekday morning. Allow 2 to 4 hours to get around once you're inside.

Paulus Potterstraat 7 (at Museumplein). ☎ 020/570-5200. www.vangoghmuseum.nl. Admission 13€ (\$16) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 13–17, free for children under 13. Sat–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri 10am–10pm. Closed Jan 1. Tram: 2, 3, 5, or 12 to Van Baerlestraat.

MORE MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Amsterdams Historisch Museum (Amsterdam Historical Museum) ★★☆☆

Few cities in the world have gone to as much trouble and expense as Amsterdam to display and explain their history. This intriguing and informative museum is housed in the huge, beautifully restored 17th-century buildings of the former city orphanage. It has three courtyards and a civic-guard gallery (with large-scale 17th-century group portraits) linking it to the Begijnhof. The museum will give

Tips Don't "Go"

Gogh is not pronounced *go*, as Americans incorrectly say it, nor is it *goff*, as other English speakers would have it, but *khokh* (the *kh* sounds like the *ch* in the Scottish pronunciation of *loch*—a kind of clearing-your-throat sound). If you can pronounce Van Gogh correctly, you should also be able to manage Schiphol (*skhip-ol*), Scheveningen (*skheven-ingen*), and 's-Gravenhage (*ss-khraven-hakhe*, the full name of Den Haag/The Hague).

you a better understanding of everything you see when you go out to explore the city on your own. Gallery by gallery, century by century, you see how a small fishing village became a major world power; you also see the historical context of the great Dutch artists and their work.

Kalverstraat 92, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 357, and Sint-Luciënsteeg 27 (next to the Begijnhof). ☎ 020/523-1822. www.ahm.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 4.50€ (\$5.65) seniors, 3€ (\$3.75) children 6–16, free for children under 6. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to Spui.

Hermitage Amsterdam ★ A visit to Amsterdam can now offer you some of the experiences of a trip to St. Petersburg. Opened in 2004 in the neoclassical Amstelhof, the Amsterdam branch of Russia's renowned State Hermitage museum of art and fine arts recalls links between the two canal-threaded cities that date back centuries. During a visit to Amsterdam in 1697, Czar Peter the Great, a great admirer of Holland, visited the Amstelhof, which dates from 1681–83 and was built as a home for seniors (at first only for Protestant women). It is built around a central courtyard and is flanked on two sides by canals, and on a third by the Amstel River. Exhibits in Amsterdam change twice a year, at first in six galleries on the two floors of the renovated and modernized Neerlandia Building, which was built next to the Amstelhof in 1888 as a home for indigent married couples. The full Amstelhof complex is expected to open by 2007, with the Neerlandia section then being re-purposed as a "Children's Hermitage."

Nieuwe Herengracht 14 (at the Amstel River). ☎ 020/530-8755. www.hermitage.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, free for children under 17. Daily 10am–5pm. Tram: 9 or 14 to Waterlooplein.

Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) ★ In 1987, this museum opened in the restored Ashkenazi Synagogue complex, a cluster of four former synagogues, in the heart of what was once Amsterdam's thriving Jewish Quarter (see below). It's home to a collection of paintings, decorations, and ceremonial objects confiscated during World War II and patiently reestablished in the postwar period. Through its objects, photographs, artworks, and interactive displays, the museum tells three intertwining stories—of Jewish identity, Jewish religion and culture, and Jewish history in the Netherlands. It presents the community in both good times and bad and provides insights into the Jewish way of life over the centuries. Leave time to appreciate the beauty and size of the buildings themselves, which include the oldest public synagogue in Europe. This is a museum for everyone—Jewish or otherwise. There are frequent temporary exhibits of international interest.

The museum cafe is a great place to have a cup of coffee and a pastry, or a light meal (kosher, too). It's quiet and inexpensive, and the food is good.

Jonas Daniël Meijerplein 2–4 (at Waterlooplein). ☎ 020/626-9945. www.jhm.nl. Admission 6.50€ (\$8.15) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors, 3€ (\$3.75) children 13–17, 2€ (\$2.50) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Daily 11am–5pm. Closed Yom Kippur. Tram: 9 or 14 to Waterlooplein.

Museum Het Rembrandthuis (Rembrandt House Museum) ★ To view Rembrandt's greatest masterpieces you must visit the Rijksmuseum, but in this house you'll find a more intimate sense of the artist himself. Bought by Rembrandt in 1639 when he was Amsterdam's most fashionable portrait painter, the house, which has 10 rooms, is a shrine to one of the greatest artists the world has ever known. In this house, Rembrandt's son Titus was born and his wife, Saskia, died. The artist was bankrupt when he left it in 1658 (the militia company of Capt. Frans Banning Cocq portrayed in *The Night Watch* hated the artistic freedom Rembrandt had exercised on their group portrait and this helped to ruin his previously brilliant career). Not until 1906 was the building rescued from a succession of subsequent owners and restored as a museum.

In 1998, a modern wing for temporary exhibits was added. Restoration has returned the old house to the way it looked when Rembrandt lived and worked here. The rooms are furnished with 17th-century objects and furniture that, as far as possible, match the descriptions in Rembrandt's 1656 petition for bankruptcy. His printing press is back in place, and you can view 250 of his etchings and drawings hanging on the walls. These include self-portraits and landscapes, and several relate to the traditionally Jewish character of the neighborhood, such as the portrait of Rabbi Menassah ben Israel.

Jodenbreestraat 4–6 (at Waterlooplein). ☎ 020/520-0400. www.rembrandthuis.nl. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) students, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children 6–15, free for children under 6. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1. Tram: 9 or 14 to Waterlooplein.

Museum Van Loon The history of this magnificent patrician house, one of a matched pair dating from 1672, is a long saga of ne'er-do-well spouses and ailing orphans, of misguided inheritances and successive bankruptcies. The elegant home was owned by the Van Loon family from 1884 to 1945. On its walls hang more than 80 family portraits, including those of Willem van Loon, one of the founders of the Dutch United East India Company; Nicolaes Ruyschaver, who liberated Amsterdam from the Spanish in 1578; and another, later, Willem van Loon, who became mayor in 1686. Among other treasures are a family album in which you can see tempera portraits of all living Van Loons painted at two successive dates (1650 and 1675), and a series of commemorative coins struck to honor seven different golden wedding anniversaries celebrated between the years 1621 and 1722. The house's completely restored period rooms are filled with richly decorated paneling, stucco work, mirrors, fireplaces, furnishings, porcelain, medallions, chandeliers, rugs, and more. The garden has carefully tended hedges and a coach house modeled on a Greek temple.

Keizersgracht 672 (near Vijzelstraat). ☎ 020/624-5255. www.museumvanloon.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 4€ (\$5) students and children 5–18, free for children under 5. Sept–June Fri–Mon 11am–5pm; July–Aug daily 11am–5pm. Tram: 16, 24, or 25 to Keizersgracht.

Museum Willet-Holthuysen This museum offers another rare opportunity to visit an elegant 17th-century canal house, with a beautiful garden. This particular house, built in 1687, was renovated several times before its last inhabitant gave it and its contents to the city in 1889. Among the most interesting rooms are a Victorian-era bedroom on the second floor, a large reception room with tapestry wall panels, and an 18th-century basement kitchen that's still so

completely furnished and functional you could swear the cook had merely stepped out to go shopping. In the dining salon, the table under the chandelier is set for a meal being served some 300 years too late.

Herengracht 605 (near the Amstel River). ☎ 020/523-1822. www.willetholthuysen.nl. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) seniors, 2€ (\$2.50) children 6–15, free for children under 6. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Tram: 4, 9, or 14 to Rembrandtplein.

Scheepvaartmuseum (Maritime Museum) ★★ Kids What a bonanza for anyone who loves ships and the sea! The Netherlands Maritime Museum is housed in a former arsenal of the Amsterdam Admiralty dating from 1656, and overlooks the busy Amsterdam harbor. The inner courtyard is stunning. Surrounding it are 25 rooms with exhibits: ship models, charts, instruments, maps, prints, and paintings—a chronicle of Holland's abiding ties to the sea through commerce, fishing, yachting, navigational development, and even war. Brief texts explain each exhibit, and desks with more extensive information are found in every room.

A full-size replica of the *Amsterdam*, a three-masted United East India Company sailing ship which foundered off Hastings in 1749 on her maiden voyage to the fabled Spice Islands (Indonesia), is moored at the museum's wharf, as is a recently completed replica of the *Stad Amsterdam*, an iron clipper from 1854. Other ships that can be seen include a steam icebreaker, a motor lifeboat, and a herring lugger. Environmentalists will want to board Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior*, a warrior of environmental protection on the high seas. You can reach this museum by taking a 20-minute walk along the historical waterfront, the *Nautisch Kwartier* (Nautical Quarter).

Kattenburgerplein 1 (in the Eastern Dock). ☎ 020/523-2222. www.scheepvaartmuseum.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 6€ (\$7.50) seniors, 5.60€ (\$7) students, 4€ (\$5) children 6–17, free for children under 6. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (also Mon during school vacations), Sun noon–5pm. Bus: 22 or 32 to Kattenburgerplein.

Stedelijk Museum CS ★★ **Note:** At press time, the Stedelijk Museum's premises on Paulus Potterstraat at Museumplein were closed until mid-2006 for renovation and expansion. The collection moved during 2004 to temporary quarters in the old TPG Post building east of Centraal Station (hence the "CS" in the name).

The city's modern art museum is the place to see works by such Dutch painters as Karel Appel, Willem de Kooning, and Piet Mondrian, alongside works by the French artists Chagall, Cézanne, Picasso, Renoir, Monet, and Manet; and by the Americans Calder, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, and Warhol. The Stedelijk centers its collection around the De Stijl, Cobra, post-Cobra, Nouveau Réalisme, pop art, color-field painting, zero, minimalist, and conceptual schools of modern art. It houses the largest collection outside Russia of the abstract paintings of Kasimir Malevich.

Oosterdokskade 3–5. ☎ 020/573-2911. www.stedelijk.nl. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) seniors and children 7–17, free for children under 7. Daily 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1. Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 16, 17, 24, or 25 to Centraal Station.

Tropenmuseum (Tropical Museum) ★★ Kids One of Amsterdam's more intriguing museums is run by the Royal Tropical Institute, a foundation devoted to the study of the cultures of tropical areas around the world. The Tropical Institute building complex alone is worth the trip to Amsterdam East and the *Oosterpark* (East Park); its heavily ornamented facade is an amalgam of Dutch architectural styles—turrets, stepped gables, arched windows, and delicate

spires—and the monumental galleried interior court is one of the most impressive spots in town.

The most interesting exhibits are the walk-through model villages and city-street scenes that capture moments in the daily lives of such places as India and Indonesia; the exhibition on the tools and techniques used to produce *batik*, the distinctively dyed Indonesian fabrics; and the displays of the tools, instruments, and ornaments that clutter a tropical residence. There's also a permanent exhibition on people and the environment in West Asia and North Africa. Part of the premises is given over to the children-only Kindermuseum—the Tropical Museum Junior—with its educational and interactive exhibits.

Linnaeusstraat 2 (at Mauritskade). ☎ 020/568-8215. www.tropenmuseum.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) seniors and students, 3.75€ (\$4.70) children 6–17, free for children under 6. Daily 10am–5pm (to 3pm Dec 5, 24, 31). Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, May 5, Dec 25. Tram: 7, 9, 10, or 14 to Mauritskade.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS & MONUMENTS

Beurs van Berlage (Old Stock Exchange) Designed by architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage and built between 1896 and 1903, the Stock Exchange, a massive edifice of colored brick and stone enclosing three arcades roofed in glass and iron, represented a revolutionary break with 19th-century architecture. Though it's no longer the stock exchange, it's still well worth visiting as the prime example of Amsterdam School architecture, which was contemporaneous with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright in America. Today, the Beurs is used as a space for concerts, conferences, and exhibits.

Beursplein 1 (at the Dam). ☎ 020/624-0141. www.beursvanberlage.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, free for ages 17 and under (admission varies for concerts and other special events). Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

De Waag (Weigh House) Built in the 14th century, the city's only surviving medieval fortified gate later became a guild house. Among the guilds lodged here was the Surgeon's Guild, immortalized in Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson* (1632), which depicts a dissection in the rarely open upper-floor Theatrum Anatomicum. Today the Waag is a multimedia center for exhibits, theater, and music performances. The reading table in its cafe features not only newspapers, as is common in Amsterdam, but also Internet access and a selection of CD-ROMs.

Nieuwmarkt. ☎ 020/557-9898. Free admission (but some exhibits charge admission). Sun–Thurs 10am–1am; Fri–Sat 10am–2am. Metro: Nieuwmarkt.

Koninklijk Paleis (Royal Palace) ★★ Dominating the Dam is the 17th-century, neoclassical facade of the Royal Palace. The building was originally designed by Jacob van Campen as a town hall, but in 1808, when Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother Louis reigned as king of the Netherlands, it became a palace and was filled with Empire-style furniture. During the summer, you can visit the high-ceilinged Citizens' Hall, the Burgomasters' Chambers, and the Council Room. Since the return to the throne of the Dutch House of Orange, this has been the official palace of the reigning king or queen of the Netherlands. However, it's only used for occasional state receptions or official ceremonies (Queen Beatrix prefers living at Huis ten Bosch in The Hague).

Dam. ☎ 020/620-4060. www.koninklijkhuis.nl. Admission 4.50€ (\$5.65) adults; 3.60€ (\$4.50) seniors, students, and children 6–16; free for children under 6. Easter holidays and June–Aug, daily 11am–5pm; Sept to mid-Dec and mid-Feb to May (except Easter holidays), generally Tues–Thurs 12:30–5pm (open days and hours vary; check before going). Free guided tours usually Wed 2pm. Closed during periods of royal residence and state receptions. Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

Finds **Gay Remembrance**

The **Homomonument**, Westermarkt (tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17), a sculpture group of three pink granite triangles near the Anne Frankhuis, is dedicated to the memory of gays and lesbians killed during World War II, or as a result of oppression and persecution because of their sexuality. People also visit to remember those who have died of AIDS.

SIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

A cluster of small homes around a garden courtyard, the **Begijnhof**  , Spui (☎ 020/625-8853; tram: 1, 2, or 5), dates from the 14th century and is one of the best places to appreciate the earliest history of the city, when Amsterdam was a destination for religious pilgrims and an important center of Catholic nunneries. The Begijnhof itself was not a convent, but an almshouse for pious laywomen—*begijnen*—involved in religious and charitable work. It remained in operation even after the about-face changeover of the city from Catholicism to Protestantism in the late 16th century. The last of the *begijnen* died in 1971, but you can still pay homage to these pious women by pausing for a moment at the small flower-planted mound that lies just at the center garden's edge across from the English Reformed church. Opposite the front of the church is a secret Catholic chapel built in 1671 and still in use. In the southwest corner of the cloister, at no. 34, stands **Het Houten Huys**, one of Amsterdam's pair of surviving timber houses, built around 1425. (The authorities prohibited construction of timber houses in 1452 after a series of disastrous fires.) You're welcome to visit the Begijnhof daily from 8am to 1pm. Seniors now reside in the 47 old homes, and their privacy and tranquillity must be respected. Access is on Gedempte Begijnensloot, an alleyway off Spui. Admission is free.

Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) This beautiful church was built in the last years of the 14th century, when the Oude Kerk (see below) had become too small to accommodate its congregation. Many of the Nieuwe Kerk's priceless treasures were removed or painted over in 1578 when it passed into Protestant hands, but much of the church's original grandeur has since been recaptured. In 1814, the king first took the oath of office and was inaugurated here (Dutch royalty are not crowned). The church has a stately arched nave, an elaborately carved altar, a great pipe organ that dates from 1645, several noteworthy stained-glass windows, and sepulchral monuments for many of Holland's most revered poets and naval heroes.

Dam (next to the Royal Palace). ☎ 020/638-6909. www.nieuwekerk.nl. Admission varies with different events; free when there's no exhibit. Daily 10am–6pm (Thurs to 10pm during exhibits). Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

Oude Kerk (Old Church)   This late-Gothic church was begun in the year 1250. On its southern porch, to the right of the sexton's house, you will see a coat of arms belonging to Maximilian of Austria who, with his son Philip, contributed to the porch's construction. Rembrandt's wife Saskia is buried here. The church contains a magnificent organ from 1724 and is used regularly for organ recitals. Nowadays, the pretty little gabled almshouses around the Oude Kerk feature red-fringed windows through which the scantily dressed ladies of the Red Light District can be seen.

Oudekerksplein (at Oudezijds Voorburgwal). ☎ 020/625-8284. www.oudekerk.nl. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 3.20€ (\$4) seniors and students, free for children under 12; rates may vary for special exhibits. Church: Mon–Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm. Tower: June–Sept Wed–Sun 2–4pm; Sept–Apr Sun–Fri 1–5pm, Sat 11–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30. Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

Portugees-Israëlietische Synagoge (Portuguese-Israelite Synagogue)

Sephardic Jews fleeing Spain and Portugal during the 16th and early 17th centuries established a neighborhood east of the center known as the Jewish Quarter. In 1665 they built an elegant Ionic-style synagogue within an existing courtyard facing what is now a busy traffic circle. The building was restored in the 1950s. Today it looks essentially as it did 320 years ago, with its women's gallery supported by 12 stone columns to represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and the large, low-hanging brass chandeliers that together hold 1,000 candles, all of which are lighted for the private weekly services.

Mr. Visserplein 3 (at Waterlooplein). ☎ 020/624-5351. www.esnoga.com. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 4€ (\$5) children 10–15, free for children under 10. Apr–Oct Sun–Fri 10am–6pm; Nov–Mar Sun–Thurs 10am–6pm, Fri 10am–3pm. Closed Jewish holidays. Tram: 9 or 14 to Mr. Visserplein.

Westerkerk (West Church) The Dutch Renaissance-style Westerkerk is where Rembrandt was buried, and holds the remains of his son, Titus; this is also where Queen Beatrix said her marriage vows in 1966. The church was begun in 1620 and was designed by Hendrick de Keyser, who was succeeded, after his death, by his son Pieter. The church opened in 1631. Its light and spacious interior holds a fine organ. The 83m (277-ft.) tower, the Westertoren, is the tallest in Amsterdam, providing a spectacular view of the city. The tower is surmounted by the blue, red, and gold crown of the Holy Roman Empire, a symbol bestowed on the city by the Austrian Emperor Maximilian.

Westermarkt. ☎ 020/624-7766. www.westerkerk.nl. Church: Free admission. Apr–June and Sept Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; July–Aug Mon–Sat 11am–3pm. Tower 3€ (\$3.75). June–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17 to Westermarkt.

OTHER SITES & ATTRACTIONS

Artis ★★ *Kids* If you're at a loss for what to do with the kids, Artis is a safe bet. Established in 1838, the oldest zoo in the Netherlands houses more than 6,000 animals. Of course, you find the usual tigers, leopards, elephants, camels, and peacocks no self-respecting zoo can do without. Yet there's much more, for no extra charge. There's the excellent Planetarium (closed Mon morning), and a Geological and Zoological Museum. The Aquarium, built in 1882 and renovated in the late 1990s, is superbly presented, particularly the sections on the Amazon River, coral reefs, and Amsterdam's own canals, with their fish population and burden of urban detritus. Finally, there's a children's farm, where kids help tend to the needs of resident sheep, goats, chickens, and cows. You can rest for a while and have a snack or lunch at Artis Restaurant.

Plantage Kerklaan 38–40 (at Plantage Middenlaan). ☎ 020/523-3400. www.artis.nl. Admission 15€ (\$18) adults, 14€ (\$17) seniors, 11€ (\$14) children 3–9, free for children under 3. July–Aug daily 9am–6pm (Sat to 10pm); Sept–June daily 9am–5pm. Tram: 9 or 14 to Plantage Kerklaan; 6 to Plantage Doklaan.

Heineken Experience The experience unfolds inside the former Heineken brewing facilities, which date from 1867. Before the brewery stopped functioning in 1988, it was producing more than 100 million liters (26 million gal.) annually. The fermentation tanks, each capable of holding a million glassfuls of Heineken, are still there, along with the multistory malt silos and all manner of vintage brewing equipment and implements. You “meet” Dr. Elion, the 19th-

century chemist who isolated the renowned Heineken “A” yeast, which gives the beer its taste. In one amusing attraction, you stand on a moving floor, facing a large video screen, and get to see and feel what it’s like to be a Heineken beer bottle—one of a half-million every hour—careening on a conveyor belt through a modern Heineken bottling plant. Best of all, in another touchy-feely presentation, you “sit” aboard an old brewery dray-wagon, “pulled” by a pair of big Shire horses on the video-screen in front of you, that shakes, rattles, and rolls on a minitour of Amsterdam.

Stadhouderskade 78 (at Ferdinand Bolstraat). ☎ 020/523-9666. www.heinekenexperience.com. Admission 10€ (\$13); under 18 admitted only with parental supervision. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 16, 24, or 25 to Stadhouderskade.

Holland Experience  *Overrated* This multidimensional film and theater show takes you through the landscapes and culture of Holland at different periods of its history and today. If you’ve ever nervously wondered what would happen to the city if all that seawater should ever break through the defensive dikes, Holland Experience will give you a taste. Other exhibits include farming and fishing scenes. The show isn’t as good as they could easily make it, or as the steep admission would justify, but it does give you a nutshell picture of Holland. If you’re not much into traipsing around heavy-duty cultural museums, this is a reasonably pleasant way to spend an hour or two on a rainy day.

Waterlooplein 17 and Jodenbreestraat 8–10 (next door to the Rembrandthuis). ☎ 020/422-2233. www.holland-experience.nl. Admission 8.50€ (\$11) adults, 7.25€ (\$9.05) seniors and children 5–16, free for children under 5. Daily shows on the hour, 11am–7pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25 and 26. Tram: 9 or 14 to Waterlooplein.

Madame Tussaud’s  *Kids* The Amsterdam version of the famous London attraction has its own cast of Dutch characters (Rembrandt, Queen Beatrix, Mata Hari), among a parade of international favorites (Churchill, Kennedy, Gandhi). The Amsterdam branch reopened in March 2002, after a “face-lift” that cost more than 4 million euros. Exhibits brings you “face to face” with the powerful and famous and let you step into the times, events, and moments that made them famous. The popular Dutch 17th-century Golden Age exhibit received only minor changes. In the Grand Hall, styled to look like a reception room in a Dutch manor around 1700, are images of world leaders, royalty, artists, writers, and religious leaders. Those portrayed are brought to life with memorabilia such as paintings, smoking cigarettes, or pictures of the most memorable moments of their lives.

Dam 20. ☎ 020/522-1010. www.madametussauds.nl. Admission 23€ (\$29) adults, 20€ (\$25) seniors, 18€ (\$22) children 5–16, free for children under 5. Mid-July to mid-Aug daily 10am–11pm; mid-Aug to mid-July daily 10am–6:30pm. Closed Apr 30. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

NEMO  *Kids* NEMO, a paean of praise to science and technology, is in a strikingly modern building in the Eastern Dock, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, which seems to reproduce the graceful lines of an ocean-going ship. The center is a hands-on experience as much as a museum, with games, experiments, demonstrations, workshops, and theater and film shows. You learn how to steer a supertanker safely into port, boost your earnings on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and execute a complicated surgical procedure. One exhibit will even try to make you understand the basis of sexual attraction. Internet-linked computers on every floor help provide insights. IStudio Bits & Co is NEMO’s digital world, in which you can play with images, sounds, text websites, and your own imported material.

Narrow-Minded Housing?

You can see the **narrowest house** in Amsterdam at **Singel 7**. It's just 1m (3.3 ft.) wide—barely wider than the front door. However, it's a cheat. Only the front facade is really so narrow; behind this it broadens out to more usual proportions. The *genuine* narrowest house is **Oude Hoogstraat 22**, near Nieuwmarkt. With a typical Amsterdam bell gable, it's 2.02m (6½ ft.) wide and 6m (20 ft.) deep. A close rival is nearby at **Kloveniersburgwal 26**, the cornice-gabled **Kleine Trippenhuys**, 2.44m (8 ft.) wide.

Oosterdok 2 (off Prins Hendrikkade, over the south entrance to the IJ Tunnel). ☎ 0900/919-1100. www.nemo.nl. Admission 11€ (\$14) adults and children over 3, free for children under 3 July–Aug daily 10am–5pm; Sept–June Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Bus: 22 to Kadijksplein.

AN ALTERNATIVE MUSEUM

Hash Marihuana Hemp Museum Well, it wouldn't really be Amsterdam, would it, without its fascination with intoxicating weeds? This museum will teach you everything you ever wanted to know, and much you maybe didn't, about hash, marijuana, and related products. The museum does not promote drug use but aims to make you better informed before deciding whether to light up and, of course, whether to inhale. One way it does this is by having a cannabis garden in the joint (sorry) . . . on the premises. Plants at various stages of development fill the air with an unmistakable, heady, resinous fragrance. And hemp, not plastic, could be the future if the exhibit on the multifarious uses of the fiber through the ages is anything to go by. Some exhibits shed light on the medicinal uses of cannabis and on hemp's past and present-day uses as a natural fiber. Among several notable artworks in the museum's collection is David Teniers the Younger's painting, *Hemp-Smoking Peasants in a Smoke House* (1660).

Oudezijds Achterburgwal 130 (Red Light District). ☎ 020/623-5961. www.hashmuseum.com. Admission 5.70€ (\$7.15), free for children under 13. Daily 11am–11pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Tram: 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam.

THE JORDAAN

Little in the way of traditional sights clutters the old Jordaan district that lies just west of the northern reaches of the Canal Belt—though 800 of its buildings are protected monuments. But the area has a charm all its own and provides an authentic taste of Old Amsterdam. The neighborhood of narrow streets and canals, and tightly packed houses, was built in the 17th century for craftsmen, tradesmen, and artists. Some streets used to be canals, until these were filled in during the 19th century.

This modest nature remains even though renewal and gentrification proceed apace, bringing in its train an influx of offbeat boutiques, quirky stores, cutting-edge art galleries, and trendy restaurants. The name Jordaan may have come from the French *jardin* (garden), from Protestant French Huguenot refugees who settled here in the late 17th century. Indeed, many streets and canals are named for flowers, trees, and plants.

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

This warren of streets and old canals (known as De Rosse Buurt or De Wallen in Dutch) around Oudezijds Achterburgwal and Oudezijds Voorburgwal by the Oude Kerk, a testament to the city's tolerance and pragmatism, is on most

people's sightseeing agenda. However, a visit to this area is not for everyone, and if you're liable to be offended by the sex industry exposed in all its garish colors, don't go. If you do choose to go, you need to exercise some caution, because the area is a center of crime, vice, and drugs. As always in Amsterdam, there's no need to exaggerate the risks; and in fact the nightclubs' own security helps keep the brightly lit areas quite safe. Plenty of tourists visit the Rosse Buurt and suffer nothing more serious than a come-on from one of the prostitutes.

It's extraordinary to view the prostitutes in leather and lace sitting in their storefronts with their radios and TVs blaring as they do their knitting or adjust their makeup, waiting patiently for customers. The district seems to reflect Dutch pragmatism; if you can't stop the oldest trade in the world, you can at least confine it to a particular area and impose health and other regulations on it. And the fact is that underneath its tacky glitter, the Red Light District contains some of Amsterdam's prettiest canals and loveliest old architecture, plus some excellent bars and restaurants, secondhand bookshops, and other specialty shops (not all of which work the erogenous zones). To get there, take tram no. 4, 9, 14, 16, 24, or 25 to the Dam, then pass behind the Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky.

GREEN AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam is not a notably green city, particularly in the old center, where the water in the canals is the most obvious and visible encroachment of the natural world. Still, the city as a whole has plenty of parks, including the famous **Vondelpark** ★★. You'll find Frisbee flipping, in-line skating, soccer, open-air performances, smooching in the undergrowth, and picnics. Best of all, it's free, or as the Dutch say, *gratis*. The Vondelpark lies southwest of Leidseplein, with the main entrance adjacent to the Leidseplein, on Stadhouderskade.

To enjoy scenery and fresh air, you should head out to the giant **Amsterdamse Bos (Amsterdam Wood)** ★, whose main entrance is on Amstelveenseweg, in the southern suburb of Amstelveen. This is nature on the city's doorstep. The park was laid out during the Depression years as a public works project. The **Bezoekerscentrum (Visitor Center)** (☎ 020/545-6100), at the main entrance, traces the park's history and gives information about its wildlife; it's open daily (except Dec 25 and 26) from noon to 5pm. At a large pond called the **Grote Vijver** you can rent boats (☎ 020/644-5119). The **Openluchttheater (Open-Air Theater)** often has performances on summer evenings. The best way to get to the **Amsterdamse Bos** from the center is to take Connexion bus nos. 170 or 172 from outside Centraal Station.

ORGANIZED TOURS

BY BOAT Canal-boat tours last approximately an hour and leave at regular intervals from *rondvaart* (excursion) piers in key locations around town. The majority of launches are docked along Damrak and Prins Hendrikkade near Centraal Station, on Rokin near Muntplein, and at Leidseplein. Tours leave every 15 to 30 minutes during the summer season (9am–9:30pm), every 45 minutes in winter (10am–4pm). A basic 1-hour tour is around 8.50€ (\$11) for adults, 5.75€ (\$7.20) for children ages 4 to 12, and free for children under 4 (prices may vary from company to company).

Operators of canal-boat tours are: **Amsterdam Canal Cruises** (☎ 020/626-5636); **Holland International** (☎ 020/622-7788); **Meijers Rondvaarten** (☎ 020/623-4208); **Rederij Boekel** (☎ 020/612-9905); **Rederij Hof van Holland** (☎ 020/623-7122); **Rederij Lovers** (☎ 020/530-1090)—despite its

heart-shaped logo, Lovers is not necessarily for lovers only, but is named after the man who started the company; **Rederij Noord-Zuid** (☎ 020/679-1370); **Rederij P. Kooij** (☎ 020/623-3810); and **Rederij Plas** (☎ 020/624-5406).

BY CANAL BIKE If the canal-boat cruise whets your appetite to ramble the canals on your own, you can rent sturdy paddleboats, called canal bikes, from (by a strange coincidence) **Canal Bike**, Weteringschans 24 (☎ 020/626-5574). Canal bikes seat two or four and come with a detailed map, route suggestions, and a bit of information about the places you pedal past. The four Canal Bike moorings are at Leidseplein (tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10); Westerkerk, near the Anne Frankhuis (tram: 6, 13, 14, or 17); Stadhouderskade, beside the Rijksmuseum (tram: 6, 7, or 10); and Toronto Bridge on Keizersgracht, near Leidsestraat (tram: 1, 2, or 5). You can rent a canal bike at one mooring and leave it at another. The canals can be busy with tour boats and other small craft, so go carefully, particularly under bridges. Rental is 8€ (\$10) per person hourly for one or two people; 7€ (\$8.75) per person hourly for three or four people. You need to leave a deposit of 50€ (\$63).

BY BIKE You're going to look pretty conspicuous taking one of the guided tours offered by **Yellow Bike**, Nieuwezijds Kolk 29, off Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal (☎ 020/620-6940). Why? Because you'll be biking on a yellow bike along with a dozen other people also on yellow bikes, that's why. In partial compensation, you'll have a close encounter with Amsterdam or the nearby countryside.

BY BUS For many travelers, a quick bus tour is the best way to launch a sightseeing program in a strange city, and though Amsterdam offers its unique alternative—a canal-boat ride—you might want to get your bearings on land. A basic 2½-hour bus tour is around 17€ (\$21); on most tours children ages 4 to 13 are charged half-fare, and children under 4 go free. Major sightseeing lines offering these and other motor-coach tours are **The Best of Holland**, Damrak 34 (☎ 020/623-1539); **Holland International**, Prins Hendrikkade 33A (☎ 020/625-3035); **Holland Keytours**, Dam 19 (☎ 020/624-7304); and **Lindbergh Excursions**, Damrak 26 (☎ 020/622-2766). In addition, these lines provide a variety of half- and full-day tours into the surrounding area, particularly between April and October, and there are special excursions at tulip time and at the height of the summer season. Rates vary a bit from company to company and with the particular tour on offer. Typical half-day tours are around 25€ (\$31), full-day tours 38€ (\$48); children ages 4 to 13 are charged half-fare, and children under 4 go free.

BY FOOT **Amsterdam Walking Tours** (☎ 020/640-9072) leads guided strolls through historic Amsterdam on Saturday and Sunday at 11am.

6 Sports & Recreation

AMERICAN FOOTBALL Yes, there's an American football league in Europe, and Amsterdam has its own franchise. The Amsterdam Admirals, complete with cheerleaders, are based at the Amsterdam ArenA (see "Soccer," below).

BASEBALL Honk if you like baseball (the game is called *honkbal* in Holland). The Amsterdam Pirates aren't the greatest practitioners of the sport, but they have their moments, as you can see at the **Sportpark**, Jan van Galenstraat 16 (☎ 020/684-8143).

BASKETBALL The Amsterdam Astronauts play at Sporthallen Zuid (☎ 020/423 1818; www.astronauts.nl).

BOWLING If you find you just have to knock down a few pins, try **Knijn Bowling**, Scheldeplein 3 (☎ 020/664-22-11).

FITNESS CENTERS If don't want to neglect your exercise routine, there are several centers you can try, including **Fitness Aerobic Center Jansen**, Rokin 109–111 (☎ 020/626-9366); **Sporting Club Leidseplein**, Korte Leidsedwarsstraat 18 (☎ 020/620-6631); **Garden Gym**, Jodenbreestraat 158 (☎ 020/626-8772); and **Splash**, Looiersgracht 26 (☎ 020/624-8404).

GOLF There are public golf courses in or near Amsterdam at the **Golf Center Amstelborgh**, Borchlandweg 6 (☎ 020/697-5000); **Sloten**, Sloterweg 1045 (☎ 020/614-2402); **Waterland Golf Course**, Buikslotermeerdijk 141 (☎ 020/636-1010); and **Spaarnwoude Golf Course**, Het Hogeland 2, Spaarnwoude (☎ 020/538-5599). Call ahead for greens fees and tee times.

HORSEBACK RIDING Riding, both indoor and outdoor, is offered at **Amsterdamse Manege**, Nieuwe Kalfjeslaan 25 (☎ 020/643-1342); indoor riding only is available at **Nieuw Amstelland Manege**, Jan Tooropplantsoen 17 (☎ 020/643-2468). Horses rented at **De Ruif Manege**, Sloterweg 675 (☎ 020/615-6667), can be ridden in Amsterdamse Bos.

ICE-SKATING Skating on Amsterdam's ponds and canals (see the box "Skating on the Canals," below) won't be easy unless you're willing to shell out for a new pair of skates—there are very few places that rent them. One of these is **Jaap Edenbaan**, Radioweg 64 (☎ 020/694-9894). Here you can rent skates November to February.

IN-LINE SKATING **Rent A Skate** has a rent shop for in-line skates in Vondelpark, at the Amstelveenseweg entrance (☎ 020/664-5091).

JOGGING The two main jogging areas are Vondelpark in the city center and Amsterdamse Bos on the southern edge of the city. You can also run along the Amstel River. If you choose to run along the canals, as many do, watch out for uneven cobbles, loose paving stones, and dog poop.

SOCCER Soccer (known as football in Europe, and *voetbal* in Dutch) is absolutely the biggest game in Holland. Ajax Amsterdam is invariably the best team in the land, and often is among the best in Europe. Ajax plays home matches at a fabulous modern stadium with a retractable roof, the **Amsterdam ArenA**, ArenA Blvd. 1, Amsterdam Zuidooost (☎ 020/311-1333; Metro: Strandvliet/ArenA). There's even an on-site Ajax Museum.

SWIMMING Amsterdam's state-of-the-art swimming facility is **De Mirandabad**, De Mirandalaan 9 (☎ 020/642-8080). This ultramodern complex features indoor and outdoor pools with wave machines, slides, and other amusements. **The Marnixbad**, Marnixplein 5 (☎ 020/625-4843), is a glass-enclosed public pool. The **Zuiderbad**, Hobbemastraat 26 (☎ 020/679-2217), dates from 1911. Other public pools are the **Floralparkbad**, Sneeuwbalweg 5 (☎ 020/636-8121); and the **Sloterparkbad**, Slotermeerlaan 2 (☎ 020/611-4565).

TENNIS You'll find indoor courts at **Frans Otten Stadion**, Stadionstraat 10 (☎ 020/662-8767). For both indoor and outdoor courts, try **Gold Star**, Karel Lotsyalaan 20 (☎ 020/644-5483); and **Amstelpark Tenniscentrum**, Koenenkade 8, Amsterdamse Bos (☎ 020/644-5436), which has a total of 36 courts.

Moments **Skating on the Canals**

In winter, the Dutch watch the falling thermometers as avidly as people in Aspen and Chamonix. When it drops low enough for long enough, the landscape becomes a big icemaker, and rivers, canals, and lakes become sparkling highways through the countryside. This doesn't happen very often, but if you're lucky enough to be here at such a time, the best experience of your whole trip may be skating on the canals of Amsterdam. Classical music plays over the ice, and little kiosks are set up to dispense heart-warming liqueurs. Just be cautious when skating under bridges, and in general don't go anywhere that the Dutch themselves don't.

7 Shopping

Bargain-hunters won't have much luck here (except at the flea markets), but shopping in Amsterdam definitely has its rewards. Best buys include diamonds and traditional Dutch products, such as Delftware, pewter, crystal, and old-fashioned clocks. No matter what you're looking for, you're sure to be impressed with the range of possibilities Amsterdam offers. Shopping can easily be integrated into your Amsterdam experience because the city center is small enough that shops and other attractions are often right beside each other.

All taxes are included in the amounts shown on tags and counter display cards. End-of-season and other special sales occur from time to time throughout the year.

THE SHOPPING SCENE

Major shopping streets in Amsterdam, many of which are closed to traffic, include the following: **Kalverstraat**, from the Dam to Muntplein (inexpensive and moderately priced shops); **Rokin**, parallel to Kalverstraat (quality fashions, art galleries, antiques shops); **Leidsestraat** (upmarket shops for clothing, china, gifts); **P. C. Hooftstraat** and **Van Baerlestraat**, near Museumplein (designer fashions, accessories, china, gifts); and **Nieuwe Spiegelstraat**, near the Rijksmuseum (art and antiques).

Malls are springing up throughout the city. **Magna Plaza** has filled a former post office, just behind the Dam, with four floors of exclusive and useful shops. The **Kalvertoren** mall occupies a prime site at the corner of Kalverstraat, near the Munt; a cafe at the top offers a bird's-eye view of Amsterdam's rooftops.

STORE HOURS Regular open hours are Monday from 10 or 11am (some shops don't open at all in the morning) to 6pm; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am to 6pm; Thursday from 9am to 9pm; and Saturday from 9am to 5pm. Many shops stay open on Sunday as well, usually from noon to 5pm. More and more supermarkets are staying open daily from 8am to 8pm (or even until 10pm).

SHOPPING A TO Z ANTIQUES

Amsterdam's antiques shops rank among the finest in Europe. The best places to look for them are around **Nieuwe Spiegelstraat** and **Kerkstraat**, and in the **Jordaan** section of the city. The **Kunst- & Antiekcentrum de Looier**, Elandsgracht 109 (☎ 020/624-9038), is an indoor antiques market spread through

several old warehouses, where hundreds of individual dealers rent small stalls and corners to show their wares.

ART

Paintings large and small, originals and reproductions, peer out of every other shop window. For good-quality reproductions of works by the Masters, **museum shops** are your best bet. Pick up your favorite cartoon characters at **Animation Art**, Berenstraat 39 (☎ 020/627-7600).

BOOKS

For English-language publications, there's the **American Book Center**, Kalverstraat 185 (☎ 020/625-5537); **Waterstone's**, Kalverstraat 152 (☎ 020/638-3821); and **Athenaeum Boekhandel**, Spui 14-16 (☎ 020/622-6248), which carries a comprehensive selection of international magazines and newspapers, as well as books.

CIGARS, PIPES & SMOKING ARTICLES

Amsterdammers treasure **P. G. C. Hajenius**, Rokin 92-96 (☎ 020/623-7494), almost as much as they treasure their pipes. Run by the same family since 1826, the warm, wood-paneled store is virtually a museum of antique tobacco humidors (not for sale), and has a beautiful selection of distinctively Dutch blends for sale. Pipes of all description are displayed for your selection, and fine Sumatra and Havana cigars are kept in a room-size glass humidor.

CLOCKS

Traditional clockmakers turn out timepieces with soft-toned chimes in exquisite Old Dutch-style handcrafted cases, covered with tiny figures and mottoes, insets of hand-painted porcelain, and hand-painted Dutch scenes. **B.V. Victoria**, Prins Hendrikkade 47 (☎ 020/624-7314), is a happy hunting ground for these treasures. This small shop across from Centraal Station near the Victoria Hotel has a particularly good selection and reasonable prices. It also has a good stock of Delftware, chocolates, and quality gifts.

Tips Tax Return

If you live outside the European Union (EU), you're entitled to a refund of the value-added tax (BTW) you pay on purchases of 137€ (\$171) or more in a day at a store that subscribes to the system. Subscribing stores are identified by a TAX FREE SHOPPING sticker. On high-ticket items, the savings of 13.5% can be significant. You must export the purchases within 3 months.

To obtain your refund, ask for a **global refund check** from the store. When you are leaving the EU, present this check, your purchases, and receipts to Customs. They will stamp the check. You can get the refund in cash or paid to your credit card at an International Cash Refund Point. At Schiphol Airport, this is the Global Refund Cash Refund Office; refunds are also available from the airport's branch of ABN-AMRO bank.

For more information, contact **Europe Tax-Free Shopping**, Leidsevaartweg 99, 2106 AS, Heemstede, Netherlands (☎ 023/524-1909; fax 023/524-6164; www.globalrefund.com).

CRAFTS & CURIOS

The **Blue Gold Fish**, Rozengracht 17 (☎ 020/623-3134), has no real rhyme or reason behind the items for sale. The shop stocks a wide range of ceramics, jewelry, household items, and textiles, running the gamut of expression from kitsch to chic. Still, there's unity in its diversity and in the more-or-less fantastic design sensibility that goes into each piece. The more traditional **t Winkeltje**, Prinsengracht 228 (☎ 020/625-1352), sells assorted knickknacks such as colored bottles and glasses, modern versions of old tin cars and other children's toys from the 1950s and earlier, big plastic butterflies, lamps shaped like bananas, and many other such useful things.

DEPARTMENT STORES

De Bijenkorf (The Beehive), Dam 1 (☎ 020/621-8080), is Amsterdam's largest department store, with a vast array of goods in all price ranges and a very good restaurant. Other well-stocked warehouses, as the Dutch call department stores, include **Vroom & Dreesmann (V&D)**, Kalverstraat 203, near Muntplein (☎ 0900/235-8363); **Metz & Co.**, Keizersgracht 455, on the corner of Leidsestraat (☎ 020/520-7020); and **HEMA**, the Dutch Woolworth's, Nieuwendijk 174–176 (☎ 020/623-4176) and in the Kalvertoren mall near the Munt (☎ 020/626-8720).

DIAMONDS

Amsterdam diamond cutters have an international reputation for high standards. When you buy from them, you'll be given a certificate listing the weight, color, cut, and identifying marks of the gem you purchase. The following shops offer diamond cutting and polishing tours, as well as sales of the finished product: **Amsterdam Diamond Center**, Rokin 1–5 (☎ 020/624-5787); **Coster Diamonds**, Paulus Potterstraat 2–8 (☎ 020/305-5555); **Gassan Diamonds**, Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 173–175 (☎ 020/622-5333); **Stoeltie Diamonds**, Wagenstraat 13–17 (☎ 020/623-7601); and **Van Moppes Diamonds**, Albert Cuypstraat 2–6 (☎ 020/676-1242).

FASHIONS

Alongside the standard designer emporia on the **Rokin** and the **P. C. Hooftstraat** streets are more exclusive, often homegrown designer clothes stores in the

Tips The Lowdown on Delftware

By far the most ubiquitous items you'll see will be those in the familiar blue-and-white "Delft" colors that have almost become synonymous with Holland itself. Souvenir shops, specialty shops, and department stores feature Delftware earthenware products in the widest variety of forms imaginable. If any one object has particular appeal, by all means buy it—but be aware that unless it meets certain specifications, you are not carting home an authentic piece of the hand-painted earthenware pottery that has made the Delft name famous. A wide selection of hand-painted Delftware of every conceivable type from De Porcelyne Fles can be found at the nondescript but well-stocked emporium **Galleria d'Arte Rinascimento**, Prinsengracht 170 (☎ 020/622-7509), opposite the Anne Frank House.

small streets running across the main canals, such as **Herenstraat**, **Hartenstraat**, **Wolvenstraat**, and **Huidenstraat**.

FLOWER BULBS

Gardeners will find it well-nigh impossible to leave Amsterdam without at least one purchase from the **Flower Market** ★, on Singel Canal at Muntplein, open daily year-round. Just be certain that the bulbs you buy carry with them the obligatory certificate clearing them for entry into the United States.

FOOD & DRINK

Jacob Hooy & Co., Kloveniersburgwal 10–12 (☎ 020/624-3041), opened in 1743 and operated for the past 130 years by the same family, is a wonderland of fragrant smells that offers more than 500 different herbs and spices and 30 different teas, sold loose by weight, as well as health foods, homeopathic products, and natural cosmetics. **Simon Levelt**, Prinsengracht 180 (☎ 020/622-8428), in a store from 1839, specializes in coffee and tea. **H. P. de Vreng en Zonen**, Nieuwendijk 75 (☎ 020/624-4581), has an extensive selection of special Dutch liqueurs and gins. To recover from the aftereffects of these fine distilled spirits, head for **De Waterwinkel**, Roelof Hartstraat 10 (☎ 020/675-5932), a one-of-a-kind store that stocks a massive range of mineral waters from around the world.

JEWELRY

Marvelous contemporary designs and materials turn jewelry into an art form at **Galerie Ra**, Vijzelstraat 90 (☎ 020/626-5100). Owner Paul Derrez specializes in stunning modern jewelry in gold and silver, and goes a bit further, turning feathers, rubber, foam, and other materials into pieces that he describes as “playful.” **BLGK Edelsmeden**, Hartenstraat 28 (☎ 020/624-8154), is owned by three jewelry designers, who each produce and sell affordable designer jewelry. Some of their pieces represent a fresh spin on classic forms; others are more innovative.

MARKETS

Awnings stretch over 15 stalls of brightly colored blossoms, bulbs, and potted plants at the **Bloemenmarkt (Flower Market)** ★, Singel, at Muntplein. Floating on a row of permanently moored barges, this is one of Amsterdam’s stellar spots, the most atmospheric place to buy fresh-cut flowers, bright- and healthy-looking plants, ready-to-travel packets of tulip bulbs, and all the necessary accessories for home gardening. The market is open daily from 8am to 8pm.

At the **Albert Cuypmarkt**, Albert Cuypstraat, you find just about anything and everything your imagination can conjure up. It’s open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm. Every Friday from 10am to 6pm, there’s a **Book Market** on Spui. The **Farmer’s Market**, also known as the Bio Market, takes place every Saturday from 9am to 5pm on Noordermarkt; it caters to Amsterdam’s infatuation with health foods and natural products. Thorbeckeplein hosts a **Sunday Art Market** April to October, Sunday from 11am to 6pm, with local artists showing their wares. The **Waterlooplein Flea Market** ★ is the classic market of Amsterdam, offering everything from cooking pots to mariner’s telescopes to decent prints of Dutch cities. It’s open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm.

8 Amsterdam After Dark

Nightlife is centered around the **Leidseplein** and **Rembrandtplein** areas, both of which have a massive and varied selection of restaurants, bars, and nightspots.

The **Rosse Buurt (Red Light District)** serves up its unique brand of nightlife, and adjoining this is **Nieuwmarkt**, which is rapidly becoming a popular, somewhat alternative hangout.

If you want to attend any of Amsterdam's theatrical or musical events (including rock concerts), make it your first task upon arrival to get tickets. **Amsterdam Uit Buro (AUB) Ticketshop**, Leidseplein 26 (☎ 0900/0191; amsterdam.uitlijn.nl; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), can reserve tickets for almost every venue in town, for 2€ (\$2.50) per ticket; it also handles reservations in advance from abroad. The office is open Monday to Wednesday and Saturday from 10am to 6pm, Thursday from 10am to 9pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm. The VVV Amsterdam tourist information office (see chapter 11 for addresses and hours) can also reserve tickets, and charges 2.50€ (\$3.15) for the service. Most upmarket and many mid-level hotels will reserve tickets as well.

Prices for after-dark entertainment in Amsterdam tend to be modest. Many nightspots only charge for drinks, though others have a nominal cover charge.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Amsterdam's top orchestra—indeed one of the world's top orchestras—is the famed **Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra**, whose home is the **Concertgebouw**, Concertgebouwplein 2–6 (☎ 020/671-8345 daily 10am–5pm; 24-hr. information line 020/675-4411). World-class orchestras and soloists are only too happy to appear at The Grote Zaal (Great Hall) of the Concertgebouw because of its perfect acoustics. No matter where you sit, the listening is impeccable. Chamber and solo recitals, including a top-notch string quartet series, are also given in the Kleine Zaal (Little Hall). Tickets are from 15€ to 100€ (\$19–\$125). The main concert season is from September to mid-June, but during July and August there is the Robeco Summer Series, also world class but with a more friendly price tag—all seats are just 30€ (\$38).

The city's other symphony orchestra, the **Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra**, doesn't lag far behind its illustrious cousin. The orchestra's official home is the **Beurs van Berlage**, Damrak 213 (☎ 020/627-0466 for information and box office), formerly the Amsterdam Stock Exchange. This venue also hosts chamber music concerts and recitals in the large hall that was once the trading floor of the exchange.

At the other end of the musical spectrum, lovers of contemporary classical music should head to **De IJsbreker**, Weesperzijde 23 (☎ 020/668-1805), where you can savor the delights of electronic adventurism and contemporary use of the standard instrumentarium. The terrace of the cafe/bar here is one of the most idyllic in town. The music side of the operation is due to move during 2005 to the new Muziekgebouw concert hall, on the waterfront east of Centraal Station.

OPERA & DANCE

In recent years, Pierre Audi has been building up the **Netherlands Opera** and its repertoire, and the house is starting to establish an international reputation for often daring productions. The company has just completed a production of Wagner's massive four-part *Ring* cycle that exploits all the possibilities offered by its modern, well-equipped house, the **Muziektheater**, Waterlooplein 22 (24-hr. information line ☎ 020/551-8100; box office 020/625-5455). This theater is also used by **Het Nationale Ballet (The National Ballet)**, which performs large-scale classical ballet repertoire as well as more contemporary work, and by

Tips After-Dark Attire

If you intend to go to the opera, a classical music concert, or the theater, don't worry about what to wear, since Amsterdam has a very informal dress code—no code at all, really. Of course, you might want to dress up, and in fact many people do, but you'll never be turned away for being "improperly" dressed.

the **Nederlands Dans Theater (Netherlands Dance Theater)**, which is based in The Hague but also visits Amsterdam and is famous for its ground-breaking contemporary repertoire. Most performances begin at 8:15pm, with opera tickets costing 20€ to 80€ (\$25–\$100), and ballet tickets slightly less.

THEATER

Homegrown theater productions are almost always in Dutch, but because English is so widely spoken, Amsterdam is a favorite venue for road shows from the United States and England. Check *What's On* to see what's happening when you're in town. Theaters that often host English-language productions include: **Felix Meritis**, Keizersgracht 324 (☎ 020/626-2321); **Frascati**, Nes 63 (☎ 020/626-6866), which focuses on modern theater; **Carré**, Amstel 115–125 (☎ 020/622-5225); and **Nieuwe de la Mar**, Marnixstraat 404 (☎ 020/623-3462). Show time is usually 8:15pm, and ticket prices vary widely.

Comedy

For several years, **Boom Chicago** ★, Leidsepleintheater, Leidseplein 12 (☎ 020/423-0101; www.boomchicago.nl; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), has been bringing delightful English-language improvisational comedy to Amsterdam. *Time* magazine compared it to Chicago's famous Second City comedy troupe. Dutch audiences don't have much problem with the English sketches; they often seem to get the point ahead of the native English-speakers in attendance. Spectators are seated around candlelit tables for eight people and can have dinner and a drink while they enjoy the show. Tickets are 12€ to 32€ (\$15–\$39) but don't include dinner. The restaurant is open at 7pm. The box office is open daily from noon to 8:30pm.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

JAZZ & BLUES

In Amsterdam, jazz and blues groups hold forth in bars, and the joints start jumping at around 11pm. **Bimhuis**, Oudeschans 73–77 (☎ 020/623-1361), is for the more serious contemporary jazz connoisseur (the concert venue is due to move during 2005 to the new Muziekgebouw concert hall, on the waterfront east of Centraal Station); **Joseph Lam Jazz Club**, Diemenstraat 8 (☎ 020/622-8086), plays Dixieland; and **Bourbon Street Jazz & Blues Club**, Leidsekruijsstraat 6–8 (☎ 020/623-3440), hosts a mix of local and traveling talent. Also recommended is **Alto**, Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 115, off the Leidseplein (☎ 020/626-3249).

DANCE CLUBS

Amsterdam's disco scene embraces every type of ambience and clientele, from the more sophisticated rooms in large hotels to underground alternative spots. The scene isn't wildly volatile, but places do come and go, so check the listings in *What's On* for current addresses. Today's leading discos include **Mazzo**,

Melkweg: A Multidimensional Venue

A sometime hippie haven in an old dairy factory, the **Melkweg**, Lijnbaansgracht 234A (☎ 020/531-8181; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), near Leidseplein, is a throwback to Amsterdam's glory days in the '60s, but it is big enough and wise enough to accommodate the latest trends. It constantly reinvents its multimedia persona. Inside, you find an art center, dance floor, cinema, theater, concert hall, photo gallery, and exhibition space. Cover is 5€ to 10€ (\$6.25–\$13) plus 3€ (\$3.75) monthly club membership. The box office is open Monday to Friday from 1 to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 4 to 6pm.

Rozengracht 114 (☎ 020/626-7500), for trance and techno; **Akhnaton**, Nieuwezijds Kolk 25 (☎ 020/624-3396), for African music and salsa; **Melkweg**, Lijnbaansgracht 234a (☎ 020/624-1777), for a variety of live music plus dance events; **iT**, Amstelstraat 24, near Rembrandtplein (☎ 020/625-0111), which is gay on Saturday and mixed Thursday, Friday, and Sunday; **Paradiso**, Weteringschans 6–8 (☎ 020/626-4521), which has live music followed by dance parties; and **Soul Kitchen**, Amstelstraat 32, near Rembrandtplein (☎ 020/620-2333), which usually has a relaxed, amicable crowd just out to swing. The most popular gay disco in town, **Cockring**, Warmoesstraat 96 (☎ 020/623-9604), in the Red Light District, generally lays down no-nonsense, hard-core, high-decibel dance and techno music on the dance floor. More relaxed beats in the sociable upstairs bar make a welcome break.

THE BAR & CAFE SCENE

BROWN CAFES

You'll see brown cafes (*bruine kroegen*) everywhere: on street corners, at the canal intersections, and down narrow little lanes. They look as if they've been there forever, and they have, practically (rumor has it there's one that hasn't closed its doors since 1574, but I never found it). These are the favorite local haunts and are quite likely to become yours as well—they're positively addicting. Brown cafes will typically sport lace half-curtains at the front window and ancient Oriental rugs on tabletops (to sop up any spills from your beer). Wooden floors, overhead beams, and plastered walls blend into a murky brown background, darkened by centuries of smoke from Dutch pipes. Frequently there's a wall rack with newspapers and magazines, but they get little attention in the evening, when conversations flow as readily as *pils* (beer). *Jenever*, the lovely (and potent) Dutch gin, is on hand in several different flavors, some served ice cold—but never on the rocks. Excellent Dutch beers, as well as more expensive imported brews, are available as well.

Your hotel neighborhood is sure to have at least one brown cafe close at hand, and far be it for me to set any sort of rigid itinerary for a brown-cafe *kroegentocht* (pub crawl), but you might want to look into the following: **Hoppe**, Spui 18–20 (☎ 020/623-7849), a student and journalist hangout since 1670, which still has sawdust on the floor and is always packed and lots of fun; **Kalkhoven**, at Prinsengracht and Westermarkt (☎ 020/624-9649), an atmospheric old bar that dates back to 1670; **Cafe 't Smalle**, Egelantiersgracht 12 (☎ 020/623-9617), in the Jordaan district on the canalside, a beautiful bar in a former distillery and tasting house that dates from 1786; **Café Chris**, Bloemstraat 42

Smoking Coffeeshops

Tourists often get confused about “smoking” coffeeshops and how they differ from “nonsmoking” ones. Well, to begin with, “smoking” and “nonsmoking” don’t refer to cigarettes—they refer to hashish and marijuana.

Smoking coffeeshops not only sell cannabis, most commonly in the form of hashish, they also provide a place where patrons can sit and smoke it all day long if they so choose. Generally, these smoking coffeeshops are the only places in Amsterdam called “coffeeshops”—regular cafes are called cafes or *eetcafés*—so chances are, whether or not you want to smoke, you’ll be able to find what you’re looking for without too much difficulty.

You are allowed to possess up to 5 grams of hashish or marijuana for personal use, and coffeeshops are forbidden to sell more than this amount to each customer. Each coffeeshop has a menu listing the different varieties of hashish and marijuana it stocks. Hash comes in two varieties: light pollen and oily black. Connoisseurs say the best stuff has a stronger smell and is soft and sticky. The bright green weed called Skunk has an extra high content of THC (the active ingredient in cannabis). A 5-gram bag is from 4€ to 10€ (\$5–\$13), depending on the quality. Coffeeshops also have joints (stickies) for sale, rolled with tobacco. Officially, coffeeshops are not allowed to sell alcohol, so they sell coffee, tea, and fruit juices. You’re even allowed to bring along and smoke your own stuff, so long as you buy a drink.

(☎ 020/624-5942), a tap house since 1624; **Gollem**, Raamsteeg 4 (☎ 020/626-6645), which sells more than 200 different beers; **De Karpershoek**, Martelaarsgracht 2 (☎ 020/624-7886), which dates from 1629 and was once a favorite hangout of sailors; and **Papeneiland**, Prinsengracht 2 (☎ 020/624-1989), a 300-year-old establishment filled with character and a secret tunnel leading under the Brouwersgracht that was used by Catholics in the 17th century.

TASTING HOUSES

The decor will still be basically brown and typically Old Dutch—and the age of the establishment may be even more impressive than that of its beer-swilling brown cafe neighbors—but in a tasting house (or *proeflokaal*) you usually order *jenever* (Dutch gin, taken neat, without ice) or another product of the distillery that owns the place. To drink your choice of spirit, custom and ritual decree that you lean over the bar, with your hands behind your back, to take the first sip from your well-filled *borreltje* (small drinking glass).

Tasting houses to look for include: **De Admiraal**, Herengracht 319 (☎ 020/625-4334); **De Drie Fleschjes**, Gravenstraat 18 (☎ 020/624-8443), behind the Nieuwe Kerk; **De Ooievaar**, Sint Olofspoort 1 (☎ 020/625-7360), on the corner with the Zeedijk near Centraal Station; and **Het Proeflokaal**, Pilsteeg 35 (☎ 020/622-5334), a wonderful little place that undoubtedly looks much as it did when it first opened its doors in 1680.

TRENDY CAFES

Every city has its hip venues, where those out to impress can preen their feathers against a fitting backdrop. Amsterdam is no exception. The places listed below offer modern tastes, contemporary design, and often cocktails instead of beer. Some of them also function as grand cafes. **Café Dante**, Spuistrat 320 (☎ 020/638-8839), is an artists' hangout with an exhibition space, close to the Spui; **Seymour Likely**, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 250 (☎ 020/627-1427), behind the Royal Palace at the Dam, has a constantly changing decor; and **Café Schiller** ★, Rembrandtplein 36 (☎ 020/624-9864), has enduringly attracted artistic and literary types to its stunning Art Nouveau setting.

GAY & LESBIAN BARS

The gay scene in Amsterdam is strong, and there is no lack of gay bars and nightspots in town. Below are listings of some of the most popular spots for gay men. For lesbians, the scene is a little more difficult to uncover. Places that are hot now might not be later, so you might want to call or visit **COC**, Rozenstraat 14 (☎ 020/623-4079), the office/cafe headquarters of the Organization of Homosexuals in the Netherlands. The office and telephone lines are open daily from 10am to 5pm. More information should be available from the **Gay and Lesbian Switchboard** (☎ 020/623-6565). *Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe* devotes a fabulous chapter to Amsterdam.

Most of the city's gay bars are in well-defined areas. For frivolous, old-style camp, look along the Amstel near Muntplein and on Halvemaansteeg. You find trendier places along Reguliersdwarstraat. Casual locals head for Kerkstraat, on both sides of the crossing with Leidsestraat.

Lesbian bars are more thinly spread, from the longstanding *Vive-la-Vie* near Rembrandtplein, via the brown-cafe atmosphere of *Saarein* in the Jordaan, to the hipper *Getto*, a mixed bar and restaurant on Warmoesstraat (see below for details).

One of the city's oldest, most traditional gay bars, **Amstel Taveerne**, Amstel 54 (☎ 020/623-4254), off Rembrandtplein, is the kind of place where about an hour after happy hour everyone starts singing popular songs in Dutch. It's said that every gay visitor to Amsterdam goes to **Café April**, Reguliersdwarstraat 37 (☎ 020/625-9572), near the Flower Market, at least once, so you're likely to make friends that hail from around the world. **April's Exit**, Reguliersdwarstraat 42 (☎ 020/625-8788), an affiliated dance club, is close by, and many people from Café April head over after happy hour.

Getto, Warmoesstraat 51 (☎ 020/421-5151), in the Red Light District, attracts an equal mix of boys and girls with its hip interior and such events as "Club Fu" karaoke (first Mon of every month) and bingo (every Thurs). There is an eclectic dinner menu inspired by food from around the world, whether vegetarian or a Cajun crocodile steak. **Spijker**, Kerkstraat 4 (☎ 020/620-5919), on the corner with Leidsegracht, attracts a casual crowd who extend a friendly welcome to visitors. The pinball machine and pool table are sociable focal points, and side-by-side video screens show an amusing juxtaposition of cartoons and erotica. Lively bar staffers keep the atmosphere relaxed with a varied selection of music and stiff drinks, and happy hour draws the crowds in daily from 5 to 7pm.

Once a female-only enclave with a feisty atmosphere, **Saarein**, Elandsstraat 119 (☎ 020/623-4901), in the Jordaan, is now open to both genders and has livened up a bit. Attractions include pool, darts, pinball, and Continental food. Lesbian bar **Vive-la-Vie**, Amstelstraat 7 (☎ 020/624-0114), off Rembrandtplein, celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2000. The place attracts a young, lively

crowd prior to club-hopping time, and lipstick isn't forbidden. The sidewalk terrace offers excellent summertime relaxation and a fine view of the flocks of tourists in neighboring Rembrandtplein.

MORE ENTERTAINMENT

MOVIES

In Amsterdam you'll find a dozen or more first-run features, most of them Hollywood's finest, in English with Dutch subtitles. Admission prices are around 10€ (\$13), depending on the day, the time, and the movie. The **Tuschinski Theater**, Reguliersbreestraat 26–34 (☎ 0900/1458; tram: 4, 9, or 14), is well worth a visit to view its extravagant restored, Art Deco style from 1921, when it first opened as a variety theater. On the upper balconies you sit on plush chairs and can sip champagne during the movie.

CASINOS

Visit **Holland Casino Amsterdam**, in the Lido, Max Euweplein 62 (☎ 020/521-1111; tram: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, or 10), at Leidseplein, for European gambling, with emphasis on the quiet games of roulette, baccarat, punto banco, blackjack, and others, though there are abundant one-armed bandits, which the Dutch call "fruit machines," and blackjack, poker, and bingo machines (start saving your euro coins!). You need correct attire to get in (jacket and tie or turtleneck for men), and you also have to bring your passport to register at the door. The minimum age is 18. The casino is open daily (except May 4 and Dec 31) from 1:30pm to 3am. Admission is 4€ (\$5).

Haarlem & Noord-Holland

The landscape around Amsterdam in the province of Noord-Holland (North Holland) affords a taste of the cultural and natural variety of the Netherlands—the dikes that have brought this improbable country into being, windmills, wooden shoes, tidy farms, tiny yacht-filled harbors overlooking IJsselmeer Lake, flower fields reaching to the horizon, and sandy beaches looking out to the North Sea.

To the west of Amsterdam are the historic city of Haarlem; to the east are picturesque remnants of strategic fortifications that protected medieval

crossing points. In other places in the province, you can climb tall towers and view museums that re-create the local life of yesteryear, ride a steam train, eat fish by the harbor, and see giant locks and tiny canals.

Everything in Noord-Holland is an easy day trip from Amsterdam, but there's so much to see that you need to make several trips to do the region justice.

For details of tours from Amsterdam by bus, and out-of-town trips by bike, see "Organized Tours," in chapter 11.

1 Haarlem ★★

18km (11 miles) W of Amsterdam

Some visitors to Amsterdam prefer to "commute" to the capital from Haarlem. The small city (pop. 150,000) has a similar 17th-century ambience, but gets along nicely without the many hassles that go with the nearby capital's famously tolerant and often eccentric lifestyle. You can easily get around this quaint, quiet center of music and art on foot. Besides, Haarlem is home to one of Holland's premier art museums. In addition, it's close to the North Sea beaches and to the bulb fields, at the heart of an area dotted with elegant manor houses and picturesque villages.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart at least every half-hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station for Haarlem; the trip takes 15 minutes. **Buses** depart every 15 minutes or so from outside Amsterdam Centraal Station, but take longer than the train, so there's no real need to use them. By **car** from Amsterdam, take N5 and A5.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Haarlem**, Stationsplein 1, 2011 LR Haarlem (☎ 0900/616-1600; fax 023/534-0537; www.vvz.nl), is located just outside the rail station. The office is open January to March and October to December, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 10am to 2pm; April to September, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.



SEEING THE SIGHTS

Traditionally, Haarlem is the little sister city of Amsterdam. Granted municipal status by Count Willem II of Holland in 1245, it was where Frans Hals, Jacob van Ruisdael, and Pieter Saenredam were living and painting their famous portraits, landscapes, and church interiors during the same years that Rembrandt was living and working in Amsterdam.

THE GROTE MARKT & STADHUIS

The old center is a 5- to 10-minute walk from the graceful Art Nouveau rail station from 1908 (which is decorated with painted tiles and has a fine station restaurant), most of it via pedestrian-only shopping streets. First-time visitors generally head straight for the **Grote Markt** ★★, the beautiful central market square, adjacent to the Church of St. Bavo (see below). Most points of interest in Haarlem are within easy walking distance of the Grote Markt. The monumental buildings around the tree-lined square, which date from the 15th to the 19th century, are a visual minicourse in the development of Dutch architecture. Here stands Haarlem's 14th-century **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, Grote Markt 2 (☎ 023/511-3000), a former hunting lodge of the counts of Holland rebuilt in the 17th century, and containing a magnificent 1629 tapestry of the *Crusades* by Josef Thienpont of Oudenaerde.

OTHER TOP SIGHTS

Frans Hals Museum ★★ The finest attraction in Haarlem may well turn out to be a high point of your trip to Holland. The galleries here are the halls and furnished chambers of a lovely old Flemish house (with a beautiful courtyard garden) from 1608 for retired gentlemen, designed by Ghent architect Lieven de Key. So the famous paintings by Frans Hals (ca. 1580–1666) and other Masters of the Haarlem school hang in settings that look like the 17th-century houses they were intended to adorn. Hals is best known for works such as *The Laughing Cavalier* (1624) and *The Gypsy Girl* (1630)—neither of which are in the museum—but he earned his bread and butter by painting portraits of members of the local Schutters (Musketeers) Guild. Typified by his *Officers of the Militia Company of St. George* (ca. 1627), five such works, whose style inspired van Gogh, hang in the museum, along with six more paintings by Hals. Look out also for a curious painting, *The Monk and the Beguine* (1591) by Cornelisz van Haarlem: It depicts a monk touching a beguine nun's bare breast, and has been interpreted either as a satire on lecherous behavior in cloisters, or as being symbolic of purity and virginity.

Among other pieces is a superb dollhouse from around 1750—though “dollhouse” seems an inadequate description for an exquisitely detailed miniature replica of an Amsterdam merchant's canal house. You'll also see fine collections of antique silver, porcelain, and clocks.

Groot Heiligland 62. ☎ 023/511-5775. www.franshalsmuseum.com. Admission 5.40€ (\$6.75) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors, free for those under 19. Tues–Sat 11am–5pm; Sun and holidays 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Sint-Bavokerk ★★ Walking to the town center from Haarlem Station, you catch only glimpses of the high-towered St. Bavo's Church, also known as the Grote Kerk (Great Church), looming above the narrow streets. But the moment you reach the Grote Markt, it is revealed in all its massive splendor. The colossal late-Gothic church was begun in 1445 under the direction of Antwerp's city architect Evert Spoorwater. It was basically complete by 1520 and so has a rare unity of structure and proportion. Its elegant wooden tower is covered with lead

Look for the tombstone of painter Frans Hals, who was probably born in Antwerp around 1580 and who lived and worked for most of his life in Haarlem, where he died in 1666. Search, too, for a cannonball that has been embedded in the wall ever since it came flying through a window during the siege of Haarlem (1572–73). Don't miss the famous Christian Müller Organ, built in 1738. Mozart played this magnificent instrument in 1766 when he was just 10 years old and is said to have shouted for joy—when you see it, you may be struck dumb at the thought of little Wolfie reaching for one of the 68 stops. You can hear it at one of the free concerts on Tuesday and Thursday from April to October.

Teylers Museum The oldest public museum in the Netherlands was established here in 1784 by a private collector. It contains a curious collection of

Moments **Canal Boat Trips**

Just like in Amsterdam, an ideal way to view the town is by canal boat. These are operated by **Woltheus Cruises** (☎ 023/535-7723; www.woltheuscruises.nl), whose jetty is on the Spaarne River at the Gravenstenenbrug, a handsome lift bridge. Boats depart every hour for a cruise around the canals. Cruises, from April to October at 10:30am, noon, 1:30pm, 3pm, and 4:30pm, are 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 4€ (\$5) children 4 to 11, and free for children under 4.

displays: drawings by Michelangelo, Raphael, and Rembrandt (which are exhibited in rotation); fossils, minerals, and skeletons; and instruments of physics and an odd assortment of inventions, including the largest electrostatic generator in the world (built in 1784) and a 19th-century radarscope.

Spaarne 16. ☎ 023/531-9010. www.teylersmuseum.nl. Admission 5.50€ (\$6.90) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children 5–18, free for children under 5. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

MORE PLACES OF INTEREST

Belgium's French-speaking Walloons weren't left out of Haarlem's feast of Flemish history and culture, as may be seen in the 16th-century **Waalse Kerk (Walloon Church)**, at the Begijnhof, built by Walloon and French Protestant refugees so they could practice their religion in peace and in French. The church is surrounded by the Begijnhof, a cluster of little houses that started out as a Catholic foundation for pious laywomen. Its rooms have been put to use by less-pious modern laywomen—they now host the minimally clad working girls of Haarlem's *rossebuurt* (red light district).

Haarlem counts one of the finest tallies of *hoffes* (almshouses) of any Dutch city. These charitable establishments around secluded courtyards were constructed from medieval times onward to house poor and retired persons. There are 20 of them scattered around town, and there's no easy way to get to them all. Two worth visiting in the central zone close to the Grote Markt are the **Hofje van Oorschot**, in Kruisstraat; and the **Bakenesserhofje**, founded in 1395, in Wijde Appelaarsteeg.

WHERE TO DINE

De Lift DUTCH/INTERNATIONAL You get reasonably priced meals at this brown cafe, where the decor is Art Nouveau and the music leans toward classic jazz. The kitchen turns out a respectable chicken satay and other soul food staples.

Grote Markt 29. ☎ 023/532-9742. Main courses 6.50€–11€ (\$8–\$14). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 9am–2am; Fri–Sat 9am–3am.

Jacobus Pieck ★ DUTCH/INTERNATIONAL This popular cafe-restaurant has a lovely shaded terrace in the garden for fine-weather days, while inside it's bustling and stylish. Outside or in, you find excellent food for reasonable prices and friendly, efficient service. At lunchtime they serve generous sandwiches and burgers, and their salads are particularly good. Main dinner courses range from pastas and Middle Eastern dishes to wholesome Dutch standards.

Warmoesstraat 18. ☎ 023/532-6144. Main courses 8€–15€ (\$10–\$19). AE, MC, V. Mon 10am–4pm; Tues–Sat 10am–11pm.

2 Zandvoort

24km (15 miles) W of Amsterdam; 7km (4½ miles) W of Haarlem

If you feel like drawing a breath of fresh sea air and you don't have much time for it, do what most Amsterdammers do, and head for Zandvoort. On the North Sea coast just west of Haarlem, the resort is brash and brassy in the summer, though it often looks forlorn in the off season. Yet even in winter it's an Amsterdam tradition to take the train here, stroll along the shore for an hour or so, and then repair to one of the town's cafes.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart hourly from Amsterdam Central Station for Zandvoort. Transfer at Haarlem (where the Zandvoort train is usually waiting on the adjacent platform). During summer months extra trains go direct from Centraal Station. In either case, the trip time is around 30 minutes. **Buses** depart every 30 minutes from outside Centraal Station, but they take longer than the train. By **car** go via Haarlem, on N5, A5, and N200, but beware of frequent long traffic lines in summer.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Zandvoort**, Schoolplein 1, 2042 VD Zandvoort (☎ 023/571-7947; fax 023/571-7003; www.vvz.nl), is opposite the bus station in the center of town. The office is open October to March, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 3:30pm; April to mid-July and mid-August to September, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm; mid-July to mid-August, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 7pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

There is not much more to Zandvoort than its **beach**, but what a beach! In summer, this seemingly endless stretch of smooth sand is lined with dozens of temporary beach cafe-restaurants (*paviljoenen*). Adjoining the mainstream section of the beach is a naturist stretch, where the shocking sight of a clothed individual can generate considerable moral outrage; and a stretch that has been ceded, more or less, to gays.

Windsurfing is pretty good at Zandvoort, which hosts international competitions in this sport and in catamaran sailing. The Dutch Formula One Grand Prix motor race used to be run at **Circuit Park Zandvoort**, Burg van Alphenstraat 63 (☎ 023/574-0740), in the north of the town. For now the circuit hosts only smaller events. If you come on a summer weekend, you might find a Formula Three training session or a Porsche meeting under way.

Tips **Hot Jets**

How about a jetfoil ride from Amsterdam to the sea? **Fast Flying Ferries** (☎ 020/639-2247) runs a scheduled service on the North Sea canal between Amsterdam and IJmuiden. Jetfoils depart from a pier behind Amsterdam Centraal Station every half-hour from 7 to 10am and from 4 to 7:30pm, and every hour from 10am to 4pm; the trip takes 30 minutes. Fares are 4.50€ (\$5.65) one-way and 7.75€ (\$9.70) round-trip for adults, and 2.75€ (\$3.45) one-way and 4.50€ (\$5.65) round-trip for children ages 4 to 11; children under 4 go free.

Equally racy, though less noisy, is **Holland Casino Zandvoort**, Badhuisplein 7 (☎ 023/574-0574), in the center behind the seafront promenade. There's roulette, blackjack, punto banco, fruit machines, and more. The dress code is "correct" (collar and tie for men), and the minimum age is 18. You need your passport to get in. The casino Zandvoort is open daily (except May 4 and Dec 31) from 1:30pm to 3am. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75).

Solitude amid surroundings of natural beauty can be found by walking among the 2,500 hectares (6,200 acres) of sand dunes, deciduous and pine forest, grassland, and small lakes in **Zuid-Kennemerland National Park**, north of town. Reinforced by native vegetation, the dunes play an important part in the sea defense system and have been designated nature reserves. You can have an active fresh-air experience here, strolling along pathways—once used by fishermen's wives bringing their menfolks' catch from the coast to market—through the woods on the landward side and westward across the dunes toward the sea. A variety of plants, some of them rare, occupies this relatively small area, and you can spot up to 230 species of birds, including rare crossbills and sea eagles. The beach is never far away.

Adjoining the national park, the beach resort of **Bloemendaal aan Zee** is fancier and less crowded than Zandvoort.

3 The Western IJsselmeer Shore

Some of Holland's most emblematic places—Hoorn, Edam, Marken, Urk, Stavoren—lie along the shores of this great lake. Painterly light washes through clouds and luminous mists that seem to merge water and sky. Cyclists test both speed and endurance against its 400km (250-mile) circumference, zipping round in bright Lycra blurs, or plodding along on the dike-top, immersed in

By the Side of the Zuiderzee

Only in Holland could you say, "This used to be a sea." The IJsselmeer actually was once a sea, until the Dutch decided they didn't want it to be one any longer, since it was always threatening to flood Amsterdam and other towns and villages along its low-lying coastline.

For centuries the Dutch have been protecting themselves from encroaching seas, and snatching more land to accommodate their expanding population. One of their most formidable opponents was the Zuiderzee (Southern Sea), an incursion of the North Sea that washed over Frisian dunes to flood vast inland areas between A.D. 200 and 300. Over the centuries, the Zuiderzee continued to expand, and in the 1200s a series of storms drove its waters far inland.

As early as the 1600s, there was talk of driving back the sea and reclaiming the land it covered. Parliament got around to authorizing the project in 1918, and in the 1920s, work was begun. In 1932, in an unparalleled feat of engineering, the North Sea was sealed off, from Noord-Holland to Friesland, by the 30km (19-mile) Afsluitdijk (Enclosing Dike), and the saltwater Zuiderzee became the freshwater IJsselmeer. Since then, a vast area has been pumped dry, converting fishing villages into farming villages, and joining islands to the mainland.

Finds At Home in Waterland

Midway along the road from Amsterdam to Monnickendam, the pretty village of **Broek in Waterland** is worth a stop for its charming green- and gray-painted 17th- and 18th-century timber houses set beside little Havenrak Lake. During summer months, visit the Jakob Wiedermeier farmhouse, to watch Edam cheeses being produced. Look, too, for the pagoda-style Napoleonhuisje from 1656, a lakeside pavilion named for a visit by Napoleon in 1811.

wind, rain or shine. The IJsselmeer (pronounced *eye*-sselmeer) has a surface area of around 1,200 sq. km (460 sq. miles), and hosts fleets of traditional *boter* and *skûtsje* sailing ships, fishing smacks, modern sailboats, powerboats, and canoes. Its waters are an important feeding ground for migrating and resident birds.

This section covers the IJsselmeer's western shore, the part that lies in Noord-Holland province. To complete the "Golden Circle" of the great lake, see also "The Eastern IJsselmeer Shore," in chapter 14; and "Lelystad & the Noor-doostpolder," in chapter 15.

VOLENDAM, MARKEN & MONNICKENDAM

18km (11 miles), 16km (10 miles), and 14km (9 miles) NE of Amsterdam

Volendam and Marken have long been combined on bus-tour itineraries from Amsterdam as a kind of "packaged Holland and costumes to go." Many people would even attach that damning label "tourist trap" to them. Not everyone. Though touristy (in particular during summer months), it's possible to have a delightful day in the bracing air of these two lakeside communities, where a few residents (fewer all the time) may be seen going about their daily business in traditional dress. Monnickendam lies between them.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE You get to Volendam and Monnickendam by **buses** that depart every 15 to 30 minutes from outside Amsterdam Centraal Station. Bus nos. 110, 112, and 116 stop in Volendam; bus no. 111 goes to Marken via Monnickendam; and bus no. 115 goes to Monnickendam. Trip time to Volendam is 35 minutes; to Monnickendam 30 minutes; to Marken 45 minutes. When **driving** to Marken, which was once an island, you cross a 3km (2-mile) causeway from Monnickendam. You then must leave your car in a parking lot outside the main village in Marken before walking through the narrow streets to the harbor. From April to October, the **Marken Express** ( **0299/363-331**; www.marken-express.nl), a passenger and bike ferry sails every hour or so between Volendam and Marken from 11am to 6pm; the trip takes around 30 minutes, and costs 4€ (\$5) for adults, 3.25€ (\$4.05) for children under 12.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Volendam** is at Zeestraat 37, 1131 AA Volendam ( **0299/363-747**; fax 0299/368-484; www.vvvvolendam.nl), beside the harbor. **VVV Monnickendam/Marken** is at Nieuwpoortslaan 15, 1141 BT Monnickendam ( **0299/651-998**). Open hours for both offices are Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

A small, Catholic town on the mainland, **Volendam** lost most of its fishing industry to the enclosure of the Zuiderzee. It is geared now for tourism in a big

Moments **Perchance to Dream**

To overnight in traditional style in Volendam and Monnickendam, ask at their VVV offices about sleeping aboard one of the old wooden IJsselmeer *boters* and *skûtsjes* (sailing ships) moored in the harbor (this option is not available in Marken). It makes for a romantic, if somewhat cramped, way to spend the night.

way and has souvenir shops, boutiques, gift shops, cafes, and restaurants. Lots of people come to town to pig out on the town's near-legendary *gerookte paling* (smoked eel), and to visit such attractions as the **fish auction**, **diamond cutter**, **clog maker**, and **house** with a room entirely wallpapered in cigar bands. Still, Volendam's boat-filled harbor, tiny streets, and traditional houses have an undeniable charm. If you must have a snapshot of yourself in the traditional Dutch costume—local women wear white caps with wings—this is a good place to do it.

Volendam's rival, **Marken** , is Protestant and was an island until a narrow causeway connected it to the mainland in 1957. It remains insular. Smaller and less rambunctious than Volendam, it is rural, with clusters of farmhouses dotted around the polders. Half of Marken village, Havenbuurt, consists of green-and-white houses on stilts grouped around a tiny harbor. A **clog maker** works in summer in the village car park. Four old smokehouses in the other half of the village, Kerkbuurt, serve as the **Marker Museum**, Kerkbuurt 44–47 (© 0299/601-904), which covers traditional furnishings, costumes, and more. The museum is open May to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 4:30pm, and Sunday from noon to 4:30pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50).

For a pleasant stroll (in fine weather) of an hour or two, take the road that leads past Havenbuurt, through the peaceful heart of the former island, to a white-painted **lighthouse** on the IJsselmeer shore. Then, go left along the dike, all the way back to Havenbuurt—where you arrive conveniently right next to the harbor-front cafe-restaurant De Taanderij (see below).

Marken does not go gushy for the tourists. It merely feeds and waters them, and allows them to wander its pretty streets gawking at the locals as they go about their daily routines of hanging out laundry, washing windows, and shopping for groceries. Some residents occasionally wear traditional dress—for women, caps with ribbons and black aprons over striped petticoats—but as much to preserve the custom as for the tourists.

In contrast to its two neighbors, **Monnickendam** doesn't pay much attention to tourists at all, but gets on with its own life as a boating center and with what's left of its fishing industry, as you can see in its busy **harbor**. Take a walk through streets lined with gabled houses and make a stop to admire the 15th-century late Gothic **Sint-Nicolaaskerk (St. Nicholas's Church)**, at Zarken 2. Be sure to visit the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, at Noordeinde 5, which began as a private residence in 1746 and has an elaborately decorated ceiling. Across the street, a 15th-century tower, the **Speeltoren**, has a carillon that chimes every hour, accompanied by a parade of mechanical knights.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Spaander  This old-fashioned hotel has a real harbor flavor to go with its waterfront location. The public spaces have an Old Dutch interior look, and the paintings on the walls were seemingly accepted in times past as payment

by visiting artists—but I wouldn't try that today. The rooms are modern, brightly furnished, and comfortable. Around 30 recently upgraded rooms have minibars and dataports. Two dining rooms and an outside terrace cafe are good restaurant choices. Meals are 13€ to 28€ (\$16–\$34).

Haven 15–19 (north end of the harbor), 1131 EP Volendam. ☎ 0299/363-595. Fax 0299/369-615. www.spaander.com. 80 units. 69€–115€ (\$86–\$144) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Amenities: Restaurant (Dutch); bar; heated indoor pool; fitness center. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

De Taanderij ★ DUTCH/FRENCH This little *eethuis* at the end of the harbor is great for lunch; or try traditional Dutch treats of *koffie en appelgebak met slagroom* (coffee with apple pie and cream) or *poffertjes* (small fried pancake “puffs” coated with confectioners’ sugar and filled with syrup or liqueur). Seafood dishes are also served. The inside is an elegant and cozy interpretation of Old Marken style. When the weather is good, a terrace will be spread at the harborside, where you can absorb the sunshine, the tranquil view over the Gouwzee and, of course, the luscious goodies on the menu.

Havenbuurt 1, Marken. ☎ 0299/602-206. Main courses 15€–19€ (\$18–\$24); snacks 4€–13€ (\$5–\$16). AE, MC, V. Apr–Sept Tues–Sun 11am–10pm; Oct–Mar Tues–Sun 11am–7pm.

EDAM ★

18km (11 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 2km (1 mile) N of Volendam

A little way inland from the IJsselmeer, Edam (pronounced “ay-dam”) has given its name to one of Holland’s most famous cheeses. Don’t expect to find it in the familiar red skin, however—that’s for export. In Holland, the cheese’s skin is yellow. This pretty little town (pop. 7,000), a whaling port during Holland’s Golden Age in the 17th century, is centered around canals you cross by way of drawbridges, with views on either side of lovely canal houses, beautiful gardens, and canal-side teahouses.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Bus nos. 114 and 116 depart every half-hour or so from outside Amsterdam Centraal Station. By car from Amsterdam, drive via Monnickendam and Volendam.

VISITOR INFORMATION VVV Edam is at the Stadhuis (Town Hall), Damplein 1, 1135 BK Edam (☎ 0299/315-125; fax 0299/374-236; www.vvv-edam.nl), in the city center. Should you wish to tour a local Edammer cheese factory, this is where you get the details. The office is open May to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm; November to April, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 3pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

If you’ve arrived here after mingling with the floods of tourists in Volendam, Monnickendam, and Marken, Edam will make a pleasant change of pace. Except during the Wednesday cheese market, it’s not a huge draw for tourists. You get to explore a pretty canal-side town with some handsome old buildings without this distraction, and Edam is well worth a few hours of strolling.

This was once a port of some prominence, and a visit to the **Edams Museum**, Damplein 8 (☎ 0299/372-644), opposite the Town Hall (and with a section in the Town Hall itself), gives you a peek not only at its history but also at some of its most illustrious citizens of past centuries. Look for the portrait of Pieter Dirksz, a one-time mayor and proud possessor of what is probably the longest beard on record anywhere. An intriguing feature of this merchant’s house from

around 1530 is the cellar, which is actually a box floating on water, constructed that way so changing water levels wouldn't upset the foundations of the house. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 4:30pm, and Sunday from 1 to 4:30pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 5 to 17.

Take a look at the lovely "wedding room" in the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**. The **Speeltoren (Carillon Tower)** from 1561 tilts a bit and was very nearly lost when the church to which it belonged was destroyed.

The Cheese Market

Edam wouldn't really be Edam without a *kaasmarkt* (cheese market)—and the cheese in question is Edammer, naturally. The market takes place each Wednesday in July and August, from 10:30am to 12:30pm, in Kaasmarkt, outside the gaily decorated **Kaaswaag (Cheese Weigh House)** from 1592, which features a cheese-making display during these months.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hotel-Restaurant De Fortuna Most of the modern, comfortable rooms in this hotel look out onto a quiet garden and the canal in back. In fine weather you can lounge on the canal-side terrace. The step-gabled main house, where you eat breakfast, features country-style furnishings and exposed beams. The hotel's restaurant has specialties of game and fish. Menus are around 33€ (\$41).

Spuistraat 3, 1135 AV, Edam. ☎ 0299/371-671. Fax 0299/371-469. www.fortuna-edam.nl. 30 units. 88€–100€ (\$109–\$124) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar.

HOORN ★★

32km (20 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 17km (11 miles) N of Edam

Hoorn (pronounced *Hoarn*) is one of the legendary names in Dutch maritime history. Even now, with the open sea no longer on its doorstep, it remains orientated toward the water and is a busy IJsselmeer sailing center. While touring the graceful streets of the Golden Age town, in particular those streets around the central square, the Rode Steen, be sure to visit the beautiful harbor, the Binnenhaven. Hoorn (pop. 62,000) was the hometown of Willem Cornelisz Schouten, who in 1616 rounded South America's southernmost tip, which he promptly dubbed Kap Hoorn (Cape Horn) in the town's honor.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart at least every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station to Hoorn; trip time is 1 hour. **Buses** depart every hour or so from outside Centraal Station, but they take longer than the train. By **car** from Amsterdam, take E22/A7 north.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Hoorn** is at Veemarkt 4, 1621 JC Hoorn (☎ 0900/403-1055; fax 0229/215-023; www.vvvhoorn.nl), between the rail station and the city center. The office is open May to August Monday from 1 to 6pm; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30am to 6pm; Thursday from 9:30am to 9pm; and Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm. September to April, it's open Monday from 1 to 5pm; and Tuesday to Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Visit the **Westfries Museum**, Rode Steen 1 (☎ 0229/280-022; www.wfm.nl), in a beautiful building from 1632. It contains a wide-ranging historical collection that includes armor, weapons, paper cuttings, costumes, toys, naive paintings

(these embody a style that is deliberately “childlike”), coins, medals, jewels, civic guards’ paintings, and porcelain. A second-floor exhibit details the town’s maritime history, with an emphasis on ships and voyages of the United East India Company (V.O.C.). There are tapestries and 17th- and 18th-century period rooms. A collection of Bronze Age relics is exhibited in the basement. The museum is open Monday to Friday from 11am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5pm; closed January 1, April 30, the third Monday in August, and December 25. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15).

Every Wednesday in July an interesting **craft market** is held in the marketplace, with demonstrations and items for sale.

During summer months, an antique steam tram, the **Museumstoomtram Hoorn-Medemblik** ★ (☎ 0229/214-862; www.museumstoomtram.nl), transports visitors through the pretty West Friesland farm country between Hoorn and Medemblik (see below), a 1-hour trip. It departs from a station at Van Dedemstraat 8 in Hoorn. Tickets are 9.50€ (\$12) round-trip for adults, 7.25€ (\$9.05) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4.

WHERE TO DINE

De Hoofdtoren ★ DUTCH Boat-lovers will want to sit on the terrace of this cafe-restaurant in an old defense tower, in the midst of the busy harbor, surrounded by traditional IJsselmeer sailing ships and by pleasure boats large and small. The tower, which dates from about 1500, protected the harbor entrance, and its interior retains many antique features. Traditional Dutch fare and grilled specialties, both meat and fish, are served at dinner. During the day there is a lunch and snacks menu.

Hoofd 2. ☎ 0229/215-487. www.hoofdtoren.nl. Main courses 9.50€–28€ (\$12–\$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

De Waag ★ FRENCH This grand cafe in the monumental Weigh House from 1609 is open all day, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It stands on a square that is among the most beautiful in the country, surrounded by 17th-century buildings from the town’s heyday. You can still see the antique weighing scales in the wood-beamed interior.

Rode Steen 8. ☎ 0229/215-195. www.dewaaghoorn.nl. Main courses 8.50€–17€ (\$11–\$21). MC, V. Daily 10am–1am.

ENKHUIZEN ★

44km (27 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 15km (9 miles) NE of Hoorn

A 400-boat herring fleet once sailed out of Enkhuizen, and so important was this fish to the town’s prosperity that images of three herring grace its coat of arms. Then in 1932 came the Enclosing Dike (see below), closing off the North Sea. Enkhuizen’s population has declined from 30,000 in its 17th-century heyday to 16,000 today, and the town looks to pleasure boating, tourism, and bulb-growing for its livelihood. It does pretty well in all three respects, and boasts one of the country’s most fascinating open-air museums, a must-see sight on any itinerary that passes this way.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains depart hourly from Amsterdam Centraal Station for **Enkhuizen Station**, Stationsplein 2 (☎ 0228/321-002), beside the harbor; trip time is 1 hour 15 minutes. **Buses** depart every half-hour or so from outside Hoorn rail station. By **car** from Amsterdam, drive to Hoorn, then take N302 northeast.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Enkhuizen** is at Tussen Twee Havens 1, 1601 EM Enkhuizen (☎ 0228/313-164; fax 0228/315-531; www.vvv-enkhuizen.nl), at the harbor. The office is open January to March and November to December, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 12:30pm and 1 to 3pm; April to October, daily from 9am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The town is orientated toward its harbors, Oosterhaven, Oudehaven, Buitenhaven, and Spoorhaven, protected by the 16th-century **Drommedaris** defense tower, which now houses a restaurant. Behind the waterfront, the handsome old center is worth a leisurely stroll along Westerstraat between the 15th- to 16th-century **Westerkerk**, also known as the **Sint-Gomaruskerk**, and the 17th-century **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**. You can also do a pleasant walk along the moated 16th- to 17th-century defense walls on the west side of town, along Vest.

Enkhuizen is connected by road across the IJsselmeer, 31km (19 miles) atop the Markerwaarddijk to Lelystad (see “Lelystad & the Noordoostpolder,” in chapter 15). This dike originally was built to enclose a vast drainage project, the Markerwaard Polder, in the southwestern reaches of the lake, but the plan was cancelled for financial and environmental reasons, and the Markermeer is still open water. In summer months, you can go by passenger boat from Enkhuizen’s Veerhaven up the coast to Medemblik (see below), or across the IJsselmeer to Stavoren (see “The Eastern IJsselmeer Shore,” in chapter 14 and Urk (see “Lelystad & the Noordoostpolder,” in chapter 15).

An Outstanding Museum of Tradition

Zuiderzeemuseum ★★ Kids Take a step back in time at this remarkable museum, and come face to face with bygone ways of life in the fishing ports around the old Zuiderzee from 1880 until the sea was transformed into the freshwater IJsselmeer in 1932. It’s in two sections, the Binnenmuseum (Indoor Museum) and the Buitenmuseum (Outdoor, or Open-Air Museum), and you’ll need to set aside a half-day at least to get the most out of them. Information desks, restrooms, souvenir stores, and cafe-restaurants are on-site.

You go by boat from a dock in Veerhaven beside Enkhuizen rail station, or from another dock beside the dike road from Enkhuizen to Lelystad, for the short trip across to the **Open-Air Museum**. This stands on the IJsselmeer shore at the northeast edge of town and can be accessed only by way of these boats. It contains 130 complete old buildings, including farmhouses, public buildings, stores, and a church, all furnished in period style and some of them with beautifully tiled interiors. These buildings have been shipped intact from lakeside villages or rebuilt on-site and combined to form a cobblestone-street village. The boat docks beside a pair of bottle-shaped limekilns, which employed seashells as the raw material for making quicklime. Then, you set off by foot to explore the scene, beginning with transplanted houses from the village of Zoutkamp.

To the north, a working windmill twirls its sails atop the dike. Nearby is a functioning smokehouse, where workers preserve herring by smoking them over smoldering wood chips before packing them in barrels. The village church hails from the former island of Wieringen, which now lies inland surrounded by polders northwest of Enkhuizen. In the sail maker’s shop, you can watch sails being made that later will fill with wind aboard traditional Zuiderzee *boter* and *skûtsje* sailing ships. In a group of houses from Urk on the IJsselmeer’s eastern shore, daily scenes from around 1905 are reenacted. Don’t miss the apothecary and its ornamental “gapers”—painted heads with open mouths—in the window.

Among other buildings, all of them functioning concerns, are a grocery store, a cheese warehouse, a post office, a baker's, a painter's shop, and a steam laundry.

Between the Open-Air Museum and the Indoor Museum is a re-creation of the harbor at Marken, with smokehouses for preserving herring and eels standing on the dike, and fishing boats tied up at the dock. From here you can walk a short way to the **Indoor Museum**, housed in the Peperhuis (Pepper House), a Dutch Renaissance building from 1625 that was used as offices and a warehouse by the Enkhuizen Chamber of the United East India Company (V.O.C.). In a former warehouse are numerous examples of the old fishing boats which provided the incomes on which Zuiderzee villagers largely depended, as well as old sailboats (including one that the kids can play on). Other rooms have been fitted out in the varied styles of houses from villages around the Zuiderzee and from other parts of Holland.

Wierdijk 12–22. ☎ **0228/351-111**. www.zuiderzeemuseum.nl. Admission mid-Apr to Oct: 9.50€ (\$12) adults, 7.50€ (\$9.40) children 4–12, free for children under 4; Nov–Mar: 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 4.50€ (\$5.65) children 4–12, free for children under 4. Outdoor Museum: mid-Apr to Oct daily 10am–5pm; Indoor Museum: daily 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

MEDEMBLIK

46km (29 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 14km (9 miles) NW of Enkhuizen

A small IJsselmeer town with busy twin harbors that already was a going concern by the year 700, Medemblik later joined the powerful Hanseatic League trading federation.

There are two great ways to get to Medemblik in summer. One is onboard the 1956 passenger (and bike) ferry *Friesland* from Enkhuizen (see above). Another is by antique steam train from Hoorn (see above). Train tickets are 8.35€ (\$10) round-trip for adults, 6.35€ (\$8) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. The train arrives at an old station. Tourist information is available from **VVV Medemblik**, Kaasmarkt 1, 1671 BH Medemblik (☎/fax **0227/542-852**; www.vvvmedemblik.nl).

Adjacent to Medemblik's Oosterhaven (East Harbor)—its twin is called the Westerhaven (West Harbor)—is the moated **Kasteel Radboud**, Oudevaartsgat 8 (☎ **0227/541-960**; www.kasteelradboud.nl), a castle fortified by the count of Holland in 1289 against a possible rebellion by the troublesome Frisians. The remaining section has been restored to its 13th-century state and is well worth a visit. The castle is open May to September, Monday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm and Sunday from 2 to 5pm; and October to April, Sunday from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors and children ages 5 to 13, and free for children under 5.

AFSLUITDIJK (ENCLOSING DIKE) ★

62km (38 miles) N of Amsterdam; 19km (12 miles) N of Medemblik

It's hard to grasp what a monumental work the great barrier that separates the salty Waddenzee from the freshwater IJsselmeer is until you've driven across its 30km (19-mile) length. The Afsluitdijk connects the provinces of Noord-Holland and Friesland. Dr. Cornelis Lely came up with the plans in 1891, but construction was delayed for 25 years while he tried to convince the government to allocate funding.

Massive effort and backbreaking labor went into building the dike, which is 100m (330 ft.) wide and stands 7m (23 ft.) above mean water level. Many communities around the shores of what used to be the saltwater Zuiderzee lost their livelihood when access to the open sea was shut off. Some of the fishing boats

that now sail the IJsselmeer hoist dark-brown sails as a sign of mourning for their lost sea fishing.

Midway along the dike's length, at the point where it was completed in 1932, stands a **monument** to the men who put their backs to the task, and a memorial to Dr. Lely. You can stop for a snack at the café in the monument's base and pick up an illustrated booklet that explains the dike's construction. For those crossing over by bike or by foot, there's both a bike path and a pedestrian path.

4 The Zaanstreek

Also known as Zaanstad, this district occupies both banks of the Zaan River north of Amsterdam. The industrial towns of the Zaanstreek are not greatly worth visiting in their own right, but they contain a number of embedded pearls that are worth seeking out. Timber was the foundation of wealth along the Zaan in the 16th and 17th centuries. A burgeoning Dutch merchant marine and navy needed the wood, and the invention of a wind-powered sawmill here in 1592 provided the power. The wood was also used to build the Zaanstreek's distinctive green-painted houses.

ZAANSE SCHANS ★★

16km (10 miles) NW of Amsterdam

On the northern edge of the Zaanstreek, on the east bank of the Zaan, this living-history experience is a replica 17th- to 18th-century village made up of houses, windmills, and workshops that were moved to the site when industrialization leveled their original locations. The aim is to re-create the way of life along the Zaan in the 17th century. Pictures of the windmills and the green-painted houses grace many a Holland brochure. Most of the buildings on the 8-hectare (20-acre) site are inhabited by people who can afford and appreciate their antique timbers, and who have the patience for the summertime crowds that pour from fleets of tour buses.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart every 20 minutes from Amsterdam Centraal Station via Zaandam to Koog-Zaandijk Station, from where Zaanse Schans is around 1km (½ mile) distant; you can take bus no. 88 from outside the station. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A8 north, then switch to A7/E22 north to Exit 2, from where you follow the signs to Zaanse Schans.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Zaanstreek/Waterland** is at Gedempte Gracht 76, 1506 CJ Zaandam (☎ 075/616-2221; fax 075/670-5381; www.zaanstreekwaterland.nl), between Zaandam rail station and the town center. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

From the **Visitor Center** (☎ 075/616-8218; www.zaansechans.nl), beside the parking lot, pick up a brochure that features an artist's-impression bird's-eye view of the entire site, with each important location identified. This makes self-guided exploration a snap. You then enter the village, which is crisscrossed by canals and paths that cross the water on bridges.

To the pleasure of walking, you can add a visit to one or more of four different kinds of big industrial windmills here, lined up along the Zaan shore. From south to north from the boat dock, these are **Mosterdmolen De Huisman**, where the renowned Zaanse mustard is produced; a sawmill, **Houtzaagmolen**

De Gekroonde Poelenburg; Werfmolen De Kat, specialized in producing paint; and two mills that produce vegetable oil, **Oliemolen De Zoeker** and **Oliemolen De Bonte Hen**. By the end of the 17th century, the Zaanstreek sported more than 500 windmills spinning their sails in the breeze and providing plenty of free power. An even dozen have survived intact, including these five, and a short tour of one shows you just how these wind machines worked.

Visit, too, **Museumwinkel Albert Heijn**, Kalverringdijk 5, a working reconstruction (with old-style candies and other items for sale) of an Oostzaan store from 1887 that was the beginning of the Albert Heijn supermarket chain, Holland's largest. If you are at all interested in cookies and candy and in old recipes for the same, step inside the **Bakkerijmuseum (Bakery Museum)**, Zeilenmakerspad 4, in an old house called De Gekroonde Duykevater. And to get an idea of how a well-heeled Zaan resident lived, visit **Museum Het Noorderhuis**, Kalverringdijk 17, a merchant's house from 1670 containing furnishings, utensils, and costumes that date from a period 2 centuries later.

Even if you are in a hurry, you should make time for the **Nederlandse Uurwerk (Dutch Clock) Museum**, Kalverringdijk 3, which displays timepieces from the period 1500 to 1900, and a workshop as well. Then there's the **Klompensmakerij (Clog Maker's Workshop)**, a workshop where wooden *klompen* (clogs) are made and sold; and **De Catherina Hoeve Kaasmakerij**, which does likewise with cheese.

Most of these mini-museums and other attractions are open March to October, daily from 10am to 5 or 6pm; and November to February, Saturday and Sunday from around 11am to 4pm. Open hours for other sites are more restricted. Admission (sometimes free) varies from 1€ to 2.50€ (\$1.25–\$3.15) for adults, 0.50€ to 1€ (65¢–\$1.25) for children ages 5 to 12, and free for children under 5.

For a view from a different perspective, take a 1-hour **cruise** on the Zaan River aboard a tour boat of **Rederij De Schans** (☎ 075/614-6762; www.rederijdeschans.nl). Boats depart from a dock on the Zaan River beside the De Huisman windmill, April to September, hourly from 10am to 5pm. Cruises are 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 2.50€ (\$3.10) for children ages 3 to 12, and free for children under 3.

On exiting the main site, you might want to tour the modern **Zaans Museum**, Schansend 7 (☎ 075/616-2862; www.zaansmuseum.nl), at the far side of the parking lot, where the district's fascinating history is told. The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is 4.50€ (\$5.65) for adults, 2.70€ (\$3.40) for children ages 5 to 12, and free for children under 5.

De Hoop op d'Swarte Walvis ⚡ FRENCH A stellar restaurant with a mouthful of a name, the "Hope for the Black Whale" stands amid the green-painted houses of Zaanse Schans, with a glass pavilion and an outdoor terrace

Get Your Clogs On

Clogs are still a fixture in many farming areas, where they're much more effective against wetness and cold than leather shoes or boots. They're also, of course, a tourist staple, and if you plan to buy a pair, Zaanse Schans is a good place to do it. Traditionally, those with pointed toes are for women and rounded toes are for men. All must be worn with heavy socks, so when buying, add the width of one finger when measuring for size.

overlooking the Zaan River and the waterside villas on the far bank. The restaurant is owned by the same company as Holland's biggest supermarket chain, Albert Heijn. You can expect an unforgettable treat, with subtle mixtures of superior produce (it is owned by the same company as the Netherlands' biggest supermarket chain) cooked and prepared to perfection.

Kalverringdijk 15. ☎ 075/616-5629. www.dewalvis.nl. Main courses 14€–27€ (\$18–\$21); lunch menu 45€ (\$56); dinner menu 60€–70€ (\$74–\$87). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6–10pm; Sat 6–10pm.

NEARBY PLACES OF INTEREST

Across the river from the Zaanse Schans, in **Zaandijk**, riverside Lagedijk is a well-preserved example of an old-style Zaanstreek street. At its northern end, in a merchant's house from 1706 furnished in the old Zaan style, is the **Zaans Historisch Museum**, Lagedijk 80 (☎ 075/621-7626). Paintings, furnishings, religious items, traditional costumes, Chinese porcelain, and more afford an idea about life in the Zaan district around this period. The museum is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to noon and 1 to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm.

Adjoining Koog aan de Zaan to the south, **Zaandam**, the main town of the Zaanstreek, was an important shipbuilding center in the 17th century. In 1697, Czar Peter the Great of Russia worked incognito as "Peter Mikhailov" for a few days at a Zaandam shipyard, studying the shipbuilding methods of Dutch craftsmen, whom that avid nautical student considered the world's finest. He stayed at the humble timber home of a local blacksmith, Gerrit Kist. The **Czaar Peter-huisje**, Krimp 23–24 (☎ 075/616-0390), is the oldest surviving house of the Zaan district. In 1895, Czar Nicholas II had it enclosed inside a brick shelter. It contains souvenirs of Peter's stay, including an exhibit on his life, the small bed into which the Czar of All the Russias squeezed his 2.1-m (7-ft.) frame, and

Windmill Ways

Picture Holland in your mind. Now try to picture it without windmills. See, it can't be done. The Netherlands isn't the only country that ever harnessed the passing wind in this way, yet it appears to have secured the exclusive worldwide rights to the image. Tulips, clogs, and cheese all have their places in Dutch mythology, but without windmills much of this low-lying country would not even exist.

Windmills first appeared in the 13th century, transforming the rotation of their sails into mechanical energy via a system of cogs and gears. Of the many thousands that once stood in towns and villages, and in rows on the dikes, less than a thousand working examples survive today. They were employed to grind wheat, barley, and oats; crush seeds to create mustard and vegetable oil; hull rice and peppercorns; and power sawmills and other industrial machinery. Most important of all, windmills kept the fertile polder land dry by pumping away surplus water and draining it into the rivers by way of a network of stepped canals.

The two most famous multiple-windmill scenes in the country are the industrial windmills at Zaanse Schans (see above) and the polder-drainage windmills at Kinderdijk (see "Windmills of Kinderdijk," in chapter 13).

displays recounting the history of the district and of shipbuilding on the Zaan. Peter visited Zaandam again in 1698 and twice in 1717, each time paying Kist a visit. The house is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 5:30pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children under 13. A **statue** of Peter at work on a ship stands in Damplein, the town's main square.

5 Tulips & Cheese

After windmills come tulips and the cheeses of Edam and Gouda, as standard bearers of Dutch national pride. The places to see tulips in their full glory are in the extensive bulb fields of the **Bollenstreek** and at **Keukenhof**, where vast numbers of tulips and other flowers create a dazzling tapestry of color. (Keukenhof is actually just across the province line in neighboring Zuid-Holland, so strictly speaking it belongs in chapter 13.) Edam (see “The Western IJsselmeer Shore,” earlier in this chapter) and Gouda (see chapter 13) have more than cheese-making to occupy their time, but the town of Alkmaar is a pretty good stand-in, for the sheer and unabashed hokum of its weekly cheese market.

Keukenhof ★★ Flowers at their peak and these gardens both have short seasons, but if you're here in the spring, you'll never forget a visit to this park. A meandering, 32-hectare (70-acre) wooded green in the heart of the bulb-producing region is planted each fall by the major Dutch growers (each plants his own plot or establishes his own greenhouse display). Then, come spring, the bulbs burst forth and produce not hundreds of flowers, or even thousands, but millions (almost eight million at last count) of tulips and narcissi, daffodils and hyacinths, bluebells, crocuses, lilies, amaryllis, and many others. The blaze of color is everywhere in the park and in the greenhouses, beside the brooks and shady ponds, along the paths and in the neighboring fields, in neat little plots and helter-skelter on the lawns. Keukenhof claims to be the greatest flower show on earth—and it's Holland's annual spring gift to the world. **Tip:** There are four cafes where you can grab a quick bite to eat so that you don't have to run around looking for a place to eat when you'd rather be enjoying the flowers.

Fun Fact Flower Power

During Holland's 17th-century “Tulip Mania,” when trading in bulbs was a lucrative business and prices soared to ridiculous heights, a single tulip bulb could be worth as much as a prestigious Amsterdam canal house, with garden and coach house thrown in.

Stationsweg 166A, Lisse. ☎ 0252/465-555. www.keukenhof.nl. Admission 13€ (\$16) adults, 11€ (\$14) seniors, 5.50€ (\$6.90) children 4–11, free for children under 4. Late Mar to late May daily 8am–7:30pm. Special train/bus connections via Haarlem and Leiden.

BULB FIELDS

The heaviest concentration of bulb fields is in the **Bollenstreek** ★, a strip of land 16km (10 miles) long and 6km (4 miles) wide, between Haarlem and Leiden. In the spring, it's a kind of a Dutch rite of passage to take a traipse through this colorful Bulb District and view the massed, varicolored regiments of tulips on parade. Each year from around the end of January to late May, the fields are covered at various times with tulips, crocuses, daffodils, narcissi, hyacinths, lilies, and more.

Impressions

Aalsmeer is an auction house in the sense that Shanghai is a city or Everest a mountain.

—National Geographic (Apr 2001)

The signposted **Bollenstreek Route**, which you can do by car or bike (or even on your hands and knees, I suppose, in order to get serial nosefuls of the multifarious scents), runs 60km (37 miles) through the district and makes viewing the flowers easy. Stalls along the roads sell flower garlands—do as the natives do and buy one for yourself and another for the car. VVV tourist information offices in the area can provide detailed information about the route. To get to the bulb fields from Amsterdam, you can drive first to Haarlem; then drive south on N206 through De Zilk and Noordwijkerhout, or on N208 through Hillegom, Lisse, and Sassenheim. Alternatively, go south from Amsterdam on A4/E19, past Schiphol Airport, to Exit 4 (Nieuw-Vennep), and then northwest on N207 for 8km (5 miles) until you hit N208.

Other bulb-growing centers are scattered around Noord-Holland, with an important concentration in the Hoorn–Medemblik area. If you are interested in the original plants, **Hortus Bulborum**, Zuidkerkenlaan 23A, Limmen (☎ 0251/231-286; www.hortus-bulborum.nl), a specialized tulip garden 30km (18 miles) northwest of Amsterdam, has re-created some of the older varieties. Here you can see the flowers that are so prominent in the floral still-lives painted by 17th-century artists, fancifully shaded in flaming patterns and with names like *Semper Augustus* and *Bruin Anvers*. The garden is open mid-April to mid-May, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday from noon to 5pm.

A GARGANTUAN FLOWER AUCTION

Selling flowers and plants nets 1.5 billion euros a year at the **Bloemenveiling (Flower Auction)** ★, Legmeerdijk 313 (☎ 0297/392-185; www.vba.nl), in the lakeside community of Aalsmeer, 18km (11 miles) southwest of Amsterdam, close to Schiphol Airport. Every day, the auction sells 19 million cut flowers and two million plants, in 12,000 varieties, from 7,000 nurseries, representing 30% of the trade worldwide. So vast is the auction “house” that 120 soccer fields would fit inside.

Get here early to see the biggest array of flowers in the distribution rooms and to have as much time as possible to watch the computerized auctioning process. The bidding on flowers goes from high to low. Mammoth bidding clocks are numbered from 100 to 1. As many as 1,500 buyers sit in rows in the five auditorium-style auction halls; they have microphones to ask questions and buttons to push to register their bids in the computer (which takes care of the paperwork). As bunches of tulips, daffodils, whatever, go by the stand on carts, they are auctioned in a matter of seconds. The first bid, which is the first one to stop the clock as it works down from 100 to 1, is the only bid.

The auction is open Monday to Friday from 7:30 to 11am. Admission is 4.50€ (\$5.65) for adults, 2.50€ (\$3.10) for children ages 6 to 11, and free for children under 6. Bus no. 172 goes there from outside Amsterdam Centraal Station. By car, take A4/E19 south to the Hoofddorp junction, then go southeast on N201.

ALKMAAR

30km (19 miles) N of Amsterdam

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart at least every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station to Alkmaar, and **buses** every half-hour or so from outside Centraal Station. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A8, N246, N203, and A9 north.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Alkmaar** is at Waagplein 2, 1811 JP Alkmaar (☎ 072/511-4284; fax 072/511-7513; www.vvvalkmaar.nl), in the city center. The office is open Monday from 10am to 5:30pm, Tuesday and Wednesday from 9am to 5:30pm, Thursday from 9am to 9pm, Friday from 9am to 6pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

At the Friday morning **Kaasmarkt (Cheese Market)** ★ in Waagplein, yellow-skinned Edam, Gouda, and Leidse (Leiden) cheeses are piled high on the cobblestone square. The carillon in the 16th-century **Waaggebouw (Weigh House)** tower hourly showers the streets with tinkling Dutch folk music, accompanying a jousting performance of attached mechanical knights. The square is filled with sightseers, barrel organs, souvenir stalls, and a tangible excitement. White-clad *kaasdragers* (cheese porters) dart around, wearing colored lacquered straw hats in red, blue, yellow, or green as a sign of which of four sections of their more than 400-year-old guild they belong to. Porters, who are not permitted to smoke, drink, or curse while on duty, are so proud of their standards that every week they post on a “shame board” the name of any carrier who has indulged in profranity or has been late arriving at the auction.

The bidding process is carried on in the traditional Dutch manner of hand clapping to bid the price up or down, and a good solid hand clap to seal the deal. Then, once a buyer has accumulated his lot of cheeses, teams of porters move in with their shiny, shallow barrows and, using slings that hang from their shoulders, carry the golden wheels and balls of cheese to the scales in the Weigh House for the final tally of the bill. The market is held from the first Friday of April to the first Friday of September, from 10am to 12:30pm; art and craft markets piggyback on the cheese market but run longer.

The history of Dutch cheese and how the various cheeses are produced is the theme of the **Hollands Kaasmuseum**, in the Waaggebouw, Waagplein 2 (☎ 072/511-4284). It's open April to October, Monday to Thursday and Saturday from 10am to 4pm, and Friday from 9am to 4pm; Christmas and New Year holidays from 10am to 4pm; and Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension Day holidays from 10:30am to 1:30pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 4 to 12, and free for children under 4.

6 Den Helder & Texel

These two places are connected like sea-going Siamese twins. Den Helder, a harbor town on the tip of the Noord-Holland peninsula, with the North Sea on one side and the Wadden Sea on the other, is the gateway to the vacation island of Texel.

DEN HELDER

67km (42 miles) N of Amsterdam; 31km (19 miles) NW of Medemblik

Den Helder used to have the country's most important navy base. It still is home to its Royal Naval College (the Dutch Annapolis), and host of the annual Navy Days, the national fleet festival, in July. It's also a reasonably endowed resort in

its own right, with plenty of adjacent beach space, and takes delivery of more hours of sunshine annually than any other place in the country (even if that amounts to no more than an extra hour or two).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart at least every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station for Den Helder. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A8, A9, and N9 north.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Den Helder**, Bernhardplein 18, 1781 HH Den Helder (☎ **0223/625-544**; fax 0223/614-888; www.kopvannoordholland.nl), is beside the rail station. The office is open Monday from 1 to 6pm; Tuesday to Friday from 9:30am to 6pm; and Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Marinemuseum (Navy Museum) ★ For an insight into the Royal Netherlands Navy's illustrious past, by way of models, marine paintings, weapons and equipment, and some real live warships, visit this extensive facility just 200m (220 yd.) west of the Texel ferry dock. Among several retired combatants on display is the steam-and-sail ram *De Schorpioen*, built in France for the Dutch navy in 1868. Now tied to a dock, the "*Scorpion*" was once a vessel with a sting in its bow, where a below-the-water-line ram could deal fatal blows to enemy ships—not that it ever did. The steam engine still works, and you can visit the captain's cabin and crew's quarters. Equally fascinating is the dry-landed coastal submarine *Tonijn (Tunny)*, which has a torpedo emerging from its front tube and which you can board to experience the claustrophobic quarters of a submariner's world.

Hoofdgracht 3. ☎ **0223/657-534**. www.marinemuseum.nl. Admission 4.50€ (\$5.65) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors, 2.30€ (\$2.90) children 5–15, free for children under 5. May–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun and holidays noon–5pm; Nov–Apr Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Other Attractions

While you're in navy mode, visit the **Nationaal Reddingmuseum Dorus Rijkers (Dorus Rijkers National Lifeboat Museum)**, Willemsoord 60G (☎ **0223/618-320**; www.reddingmuseum.nl), which chronicles the history of the service. The museum is open April to October, daily from 10am to 5pm; and November to March, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm. It's closed January 1 and December 25. Admission (which includes access to the Cape Holland Attractions Park) is 12€ (\$15) for adults, 11€ (\$13) for children ages 3 to 12, and free for children under 3.

The Bulb District between Leiden and Haarlem (see earlier in this chapter) may be better known, but in the hinterland of Den Helder is the largest area of bulb fields in the country, and the serried ranks of spring tulips look every bit as colorful here as there.

TEXEL ★

69km (43 miles) N of Amsterdam; 4km (2½ miles) N of Den Helder

A short ferry trip from Den Helder, family-orientated Texel (pronounced *Tèss-uhl*) is the largest and most populated of the Wadden Islands archipelago. With just 14,000 permanent inhabitants (outnumbered three to two by sheep that are the source of the prized Texel lamb), that's not saying much. Texel, 24km (15 miles) long and a maximum of 9km (6 miles) wide, has a varied landscape of tidal gullies, sand dunes, and rolling meadows, and its entire North Sea shoreline is one long beach. It has the serenity intrinsic to islands, even allowing for the many visitors who pour in during summer months to fill up the island's extensive roster of hotels, holiday homes, apartments, and camping sites.

Fun Fact Ice Hazard

Den Helder has the dubious distinction of being possibly the only port in the world that ever lost a fleet to a company of horsemen. That unique event took place in January 1794, when the Dutch navy found itself stuck fast in the frozen waters of the roads between Den Helder and Texel. French cavalry simply rode out to the ships and captured them.

For the other Wadden Islands—Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland, and Schiermonnikoog—see chapter 14.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The **TESO** line (☎ 0222/369-691; www.teso.nl) operates two car ferries, the *Molengat* and the *Schulpengat*, from Den Helder across the Marsdiep Strait to 't Horntje on Texel—a 20-minute crossing. A connecting bus shuttles between Den Helder rail station and the ferry dock. Ferries depart hourly at peak times and reservations are not accepted. Round-trip fares for cars, including passengers, are: April to October, Friday to Monday 35€ (\$44), and all other days 25€ (\$31). For passengers without cars, round-trip fares are 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. Bicycles cost 2.50€ (\$3.10). May to September, a passengers-only tourist boat operates between De Cocksdorp in the north of Texel and neighboring Vlieland, a 25-minute crossing that opens up the possibility of island-hopping through the Wadden chain.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Texel**, Emmalaan 66, 1790 AA Den Burg (☎ 0222/312-847; fax 0222/314-129; www.texel.net), lies just off the main road into town from the ferry harbor. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm; and Saturday from 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND **Cars** are permitted on Texel, and **buses** connect the villages and the main beaches, but there's no doubt that the best way to get around and to respect the island's environment is to go by **bike**. These can be brought over free on the ferry, or rented from dozens of outlets around the island.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Beaches, sailing, biking, hiking, and bird-watching are the big attractions on Texel, yet eating, drinking, and partying have a place, too. The main village, **Den Burg**, is a bustling settlement near the center of the island. For a glimpse of past island life, visit its moderately interesting, centrally located **De Oudheidkamer**, Koogerstraat 1 (☎ 0222/313-135). The house dates from 1599 and is the island's oldest, furnished in a style from around 1900. The museum is open April to October, daily from 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 3:30pm. Admission is 1.80€ (\$2.25) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

Areas of dune and forest belonging to the **Staatsbosbeheer (State Forest Authority)** may be freely visited so long as you stick to the marked trails. Guided tours of some of these areas are conducted by wildlife biologists from **EcoMare**, Ruyslaan 92 (☎ 0222/317-741; www.ecomare.nl), a Wadden Islands research center, located amid the sand dunes just south of the main coastal village, De Koog. EcoMare's visitor center houses a small natural history museum that features the geology and plants of Texel, and its wildlife of land, sea, and air. The Wadden Sea was rich in seals until a 1988 viral epidemic greatly reduced

their numbers. EcoMare's seal rehabilitation facility aids the recovery effort by caring for weak and injured seals until they are strong enough to be returned to the sea. An additional rehabilitation project cares for birds affected by pollution and other hazards.

Some 300 bird species have been observed on Texel, of which around 100 breed on the island. Among the avian stars are oyster-catchers, Bewicks swans, spoonbills, eider ducks, Brent geese, avocets, marsh harriers, snow buntings, ringed plovers, kestrels, short-eared owls, and bar-tailed godwits. You can observe these and more in the **De Schorren**, **De Bol**, and **Dijkmanshuizen**, three protected nature reserves that may be entered only on tours conducted by guides from EcoMare (see above).

WHERE TO DINE

Het Vierspan DUTCH/FRENCH The warm welcome here, on a pretty corner occupied by the island's top restaurants, is complemented by a homely interior and well-prepared dishes based on local ingredients. Don't miss out on the local Texel lamb, succulent and salty from grazing the sea-sprayed grass. Other specialties here include game and mushrooms.

Gravenstraat 3, Den Burg. ☎ 0222/313-176. Main courses 13€–18€ (\$16–\$23). AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–11pm.

7 Castle Country

In earlier times, the territory southeast of Amsterdam was a place of strategic importance, as evidenced by the grand constructions still standing today, such as the 13th-century Muiderslot moated castle in Muiden—itself a handsome village of gabled houses along the waterfront at the mouth of the Vecht River—and the star-shaped fortifications of Naarden.

Muiderslot ★ A 14th-century, fairy-tale castle with a moat, turrets, and stout walls with crenellations, Muiderslot perches on the bank of the Vecht River, just outside the small IJsselmeer harbor town of Muiden, 13km (8 miles) southeast of Amsterdam. Count Floris V of Holland, who in 1275 granted toll privileges to the vibrant new settlement of Aemstelledamme (Amsterdam), built the castle around 1280, and was murdered here by rival nobles in 1296. Muiderslot is also where poet P. C. Hooft found both a home and employment—and inspiration for romantic and lofty phraseology—when he served here as castle steward and local bailiff for 40 years in the early 17th century. The castle is furnished essentially as Hooft and his artistic friends, known in Dutch literary history as the Muiderkring (Muiden Circle), knew it. You'll find distinctly Dutch carved cupboard beds, heavy chests, fireside benches, and mantelpieces.

Muiden. ☎ 0294/261-325. www.muiderslot.nl. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children ages 4 to 12, free for children under 4. Apr–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun and holidays 1–5pm (last tour 4pm); Nov–Mar Sat–Sun 1–4pm (last tour 3pm). By car from Amsterdam, take A1/E231 east.

NAARDEN

19km (12 miles) E of Amsterdam

This small town doesn't have too much to recommend it, other than one of Holland's best-preserved rings of old military fortifications.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart every hour or so from Amsterdam Centraal Station for Naarden. By **car** from Amsterdam, take E231/A1 east.

An American Life

American artist William Henry Singer (1868–1943) chose to live and paint in the clear light of Holland rather than follow his family's traditional path to fame and fortune via the steel mills of Pittsburgh. He settled in suburban Laren, a haven for artists of the Laren, Hague, and Amsterdam schools, 26km (16 miles) southeast of Amsterdam. Among the town's star residents was Dutch Impressionist Anton Mauve (1838–88), an uncle of Vincent van Gogh.

Singer's former home, a 1911 villa he called *The Wild Swans*, is now the **Singer Museum**, Oude Drift 1 (☎ 035/531-5656; www.singerlaren.nl). It houses Impressionist-influenced paintings by Singer and his collection of works by American, Dutch, French, and Norwegian artists. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm; closed January 1, April 30, and December 25. Admission is 9€ (\$11) for adults, 8€ (\$10) for seniors, and free for children under 13. To get here from Amsterdam, take bus no. 136, which departs from outside Amstel rail station every half-hour and stops at the museum.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Naarden**, Adriaan Dortsmanplein 1B, 1411 RC, Naarden (☎ 035/694-2836; fax 035/694-3424; www.vvvhollandsmidden.nl), is located inside the walls of the old town. The office is open May to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 3pm, and Sunday from noon to 3pm; November to April, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Much in the spirit of locking the barn door after the horse had bolted, the surviving inhabitants of Naarden erected their double fortifications (in the shape of a beautiful 12-pointed-star) after the town was brutally sacked and its populace put to the sword by Don Frederick of Toledo and his Spanish troops in 1572. They might have spared themselves the trouble, since the French were able to storm the works in 1673.

Beneath the Turfpoort, one of six bastions, you can visit the casemates (artillery vaults) which house the **Nederlands Vestingmuseum (Dutch Fortification Museum)**, Westwalstraat 6 (☎ 035/694-5459; www.vestingmuseum.nl), filled with cannon, muskets and accouterments, and documentation. The museum is open March to November, Tuesday to Friday from 10:30am to 5pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays from noon to 5pm; November to March, Sunday, and Saturday before Christmas to Sunday after New Year, from noon to 5pm; closed January 1 and December 25 and 31. Admission is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for children 5 to 16, free for children under 5.

Also take in the town's 15th-century late-Gothic **Grote Kerk (Great Church)**, Marktstraat (☎ 035/694-9873), noted for its 45m-high (148-ft.) tower, fine acoustics, and annual performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. The church is open June to September, daily from 1 to 4pm. Admission is free.

The Hague, Rotterdam & Zuid-Holland

Zuid-Holland (South Holland) province takes in a constellation of important cities and towns, all of them within about an hour's drive—gridlock permitting—or train ride from Amsterdam. Roads pass through a landscape straight out of a painting by one of the Dutch Masters, with flat green fields ribboned with canals and distant church spires piercing a wide sky (there's also the occasional clump of industrial smokestacks).

Stately and dignified, **The Hague** has seen the centuries come and go with scarcely a tremor in the foundations of its lofty perch as the home of the Dutch government and its vast but smoothly functioning bureaucracy, even if it's not the country's capital. Technically it's not even a true city, never having been granted a charter or city rights, but such a triviality is brushed off with disdain. Secure in its regal position, The Hague goes serenely on its way.

By contrast, brash, modern **Rotterdam** has been commercial to the core

from the very beginning. Most of its historically significant buildings—along with most of the city—were destroyed in World War II Nazi bombings. Rebuilding was a remarkable feat of contemporary urban planning. High-rise office towers, straight lines and right angles—features that until recently were considered anathema in most other parts of the country—mold an oddly attractive open cityscape. Rotterdam's port, farther downriver, boasts the world's highest annual shipping tonnage.

If The Hague and Rotterdam, for all their geographical proximity, are about as different as two cities easily could be, Zuid-Holland's trio of venerable art towns have more in common. The triangle formed by **Delft**, **Gouda**, and **Leiden** makes for leisurely sightseeing, with distances short enough to allow you to visit all three from a base in Amsterdam, The Hague, or Rotterdam.

1 The Hague ★★

63km (43 miles) SW of Amsterdam

Sophisticated and cosmopolitan, this city makes an easy day trip from Amsterdam, but some travelers prefer The Hague as a quieter, more relaxed sightseeing base. 's-Gravenhage, to give the city its full name, or more commonly Den Haag, is a center of style and culture, full of parks and elegant homes, and with an 18th-century French look that suits its role as a diplomatic center and the site of the International Court of Justice, housed in the famous Peace Palace.

Amsterdam might be the national capital, but The Hague has always been the seat of national government and the official residence of the Dutch monarchs, whether or not they chose to live there. Three royal palaces grace the city.



In the beginning, the counts of Holland chose a small village named Haag (from the Dutch for “hedge”) as the setting for their hunting lodge, which was why the town was later called ’s-Gravenhage (the count’s hedge). By the time Count Willem II was crowned king of the Romans in 1248, in the German city of Aachen, his father, Floris IV, had already begun construction of the Binnenhof, which Willem quickly appointed the official royal residence. Based on that defining year, the city celebrated its 750th anniversary in 1998. Willem’s son, Floris V, added the massive Ridderzaal (Hall of the Knights), expanding a complex that today is the heart of the country’s government. The lush greenery of its original hunting grounds remains in the large parks, gardens, and woods that continue to thrive within the city limits.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The Hague is an easy day trip from Amsterdam, with frequent **train** service from Amsterdam Centraal Station. Note that The Hague has two main rail stations, Centraal and Hollands Spoor; most of the sights are closer to Centraal Station, but some trains stop only at Hollands Spoor. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A4/E19.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Den Haag**, Koningin Julianaplein, 2500 CD Den Haag (☎ **0900/340-3505**; fax 070/347-2102; www.denhaag.com), is in front of Centraal Station. The office is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

Fun Fact Hard-Handed Boosters

In an ironic counterpoint to The Hague's genteel image, supporters of the city's soccer side, FC Den Haag, have about the worst reputation in the land for hooliganism.

GETTING AROUND There is good tram and bus transportation in and around the city, originating at both Centraal Station and Hollands Spoor Station, operated by **HTM** (☎ **0900/9292**; www.htm.nl). Taxi stands are located at both stations and at many strategic points around the city. For information, call ☎ **070/390-7722**.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

One of the great pleasures of spending one or more days in The Hague is walking through its pleasant streets, matching your pace to the unhurried leisure that pervades the city. Stroll past the mansions that line Lange Voorhout, overlooking a broad avenue of poplar and elm trees, and notice how these spacious, restrained structures differ from Amsterdam's gabled, highly ornamented canal houses. Window-shop or get down to serious buying in the covered shopping arcades or store-lined pedestrians-only streets. Take time to loiter in the more than 694 sq. km (430 sq. miles) of parks and gardens within the city limits, or hop on a tram for the short ride out to The Hague's seacoast resort, Scheveningen, and to nearby Delft.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

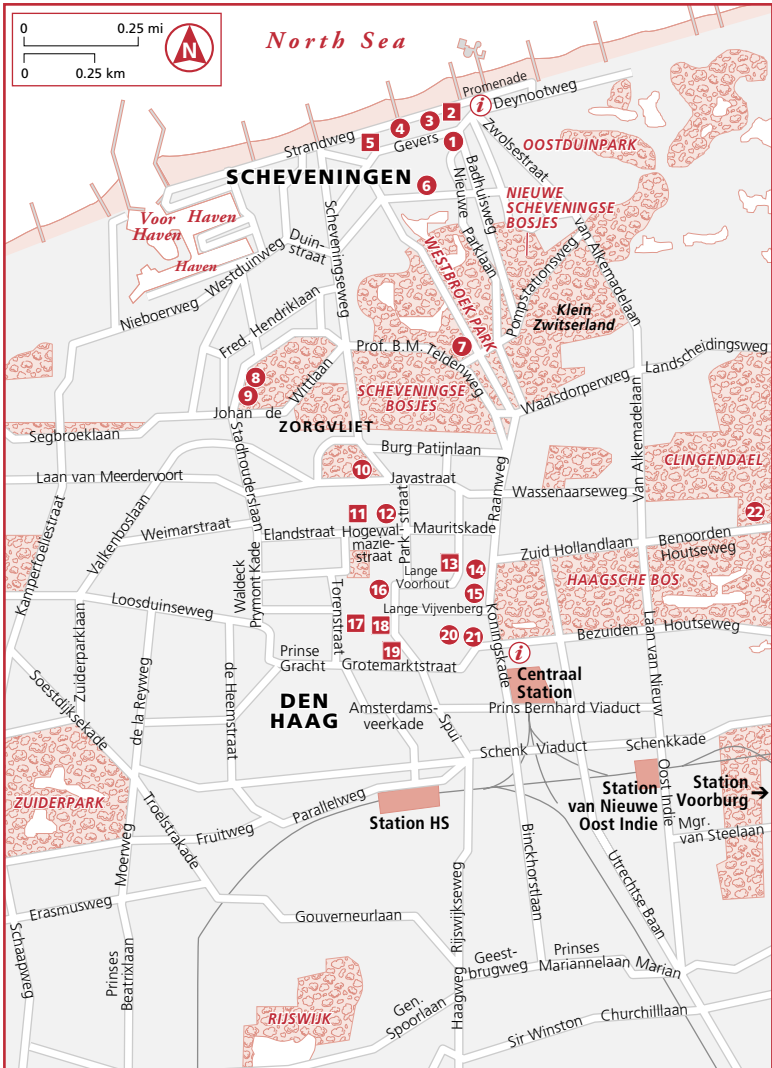
Binnenhof & Ridderzaal (Inner Court & Hall of the Knights) ★★ The magnificent Binnenhof, the 13th-century hunting lodge of the counts of Holland, is the center of Holland's political life and the official seat of government. At its heart is the beautiful Hall of the Knights, measuring 38m×18m (126 ft.×59 ft.) and soaring 26m (85 ft.) to its oak roof. Since 1904, its immense interior, adorned with provincial flags and leaded-glass windows depicting the coats of arms of Dutch cities, has hosted the queen's annual address (the third Tues in Sept), the opening of Parliament, official receptions, and interparliamentary conferences. There are three entrances and four gates to the Binnenhof. The buildings to the left and right of the Ridderzaal are the former Quarters of the *Stadhouder* (Head of State), which now house the First and Second Chamber of the *Staten-Generaal* (States General), the equivalent of the House of Representatives and Senate of the U.S. Congress,

Binnenhof 8A. ☎ **070/364-6144**. Admission to courtyard and Ridderzaal reception hall free; guided tours vary depending on the program, but are around 2.50€ (\$3.15) or 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) or 2.50€ (\$3.15) seniors or children under 14. Mon–Sat 10am–4pm (last tour 3:45pm). Closed holidays and during special events. Tram: 1 or 16 to Centrum.

Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (The Hague Municipal Museum) ★★

This fine museum is housed in an early-20th-century building designed by Berlage, most famous for his redbrick Amsterdam Stock Exchange. The collection is divided into three separate departments. The Modern Art Department focuses on early-19th-century Dutch romantic paintings, the Impressionist Hague School, and 20th-century art, including a fine collection of prints and drawings by Karel Appel, O. Redon, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Top billing is reserved for the world's most comprehensive collection of works by Piet Mondrian, including his last unfinished work, *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944), a lively

The Hague & Scheveningen



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Binnenhof and Hall of Knights 20
- Casino 1
- Haags Gemeentemuseum 8
- Het Paleis 15
- Huis ten Bosch Palace 22
- Madurodam 7
- Mauritshuis 21

- Museum of the Book 14
- Noordeinde Palace 16
- Omniversum 9
- Panorama Mesdag 12
- Peace Palace 10
- Scheveningen Museum 6
- Sculptures on the Seafront 4
- Sea Life Center 3

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Corona 19
- Delta Hotel 11
- De Seinduin 5
- Hotel des Indes 13
- Steigenberger Kurhaus 2
- Paleisshotel 18
- Parkhotel Den Haag 17

abstract representation of New York. The Department of Decorative Arts shows ceramics from China, the Middle East, and Delft; Venetian and Dutch glass; silver; and interesting period rooms. The Music Department displays European and non-European musical instruments and also has an impressive music library with scores, books, and prints. The new wing is currently used for an innovative fashion exhibition.

Stadhouderslaan 41 (bordering the Museum Gardens north of the city center). ☎ 070/338-1111. www.gemeentemuseum.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) seniors and students, free for those under 19. Tues–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 10 or 17 to Gemeentemuseum.

Mauritshuis ★★ ★ Once the residence of *Stadhouder* (Head of State) Frederik Hendrik's nephew, Count Johan Maurits van Nassau, the delightful 17th-century mansion houses the Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen (Royal Cabinet of Paintings), a small but unsurpassed collection of paintings from Holland's Golden Age. The intimate rooms make it seem as if you are visiting a private collection, and you can appreciate each painting at ease. The ground floor is devoted to works from the 15th and 16th centuries, mainly religious paintings by Dutch and Flemish artists and portraits by Holbein and Rubens. Works by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Jan Steen are on the second floor, including such pieces as Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson* and Vermeer's *The View of Delft*.

Korte Vijverberg 8 (next to the Binnenhof, overlooking Court Lake). ☎ 070/302-3435. www.mauritshuis.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, free for those under 18. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk.

Vredespaleis (Peace Palace) This imposing building, the construction of which between 1907 and 1913 was largely due to donations made by Andrew Carnegie, houses the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the International Court of Justice, the International Law Academy, and an extensive library. Its furnishings have been donated by countries around the world.

Carnegieplein 2. ☎ 070/302-4242. www.vredespaleis.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 5–13, free for children under 5. Guided tours Mon–Fri 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm, and 4pm. Tram: 1 or 10 to Vredespaleis.

THE ROYAL PALACES

The working palace for Queen Beatrix and her staff, the splendid neoclassical **Paleis Noordeinde**, Noordeinde (tram: 1 or 10), west of Lange Voorhout, dates from 1553. It was elegantly furnished when William of Orange's widow was in residence, but it became almost derelict by the beginning of the 19th century. In 1815, restoration brought it back to a state suitable for the residence of King Willem I. Extensive renovation followed fire damage in 1948, and in the early 1980s further restoration was begun. It is from here that Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus, on the third Tuesday of September each year, depart in a golden coach drawn by eight horses, escorted by military corps, bands, local authorities, and a blaze of street pageantry, to proceed to the Binnenhof, where the queen

Tips A Right Royal Bus Route

If you have an interest in royalty and palaces, take a ride on city bus no. 4. Its route passes by four Dutch palaces built during the 16th and 17th centuries, including Huis ten Bosch, the home of Queen Beatrix, in the Haagse Bos (Hague Woods); no visits are permitted.

Moments Rising Roses

In the **Rosarium** in Westbroekpark, more than 20,000 roses bloom each year between July and September. The grounds are open daily from 9am to 1 hour before sunset.

officially opens Parliament with an address to both houses of the States General in the Ridderzaal. The palace is not open to visitors.

When Queen Juliana abdicated the Dutch throne in 1980, her daughter, Queen Beatrix, moved her family and the official royal residence from a palace near Utrecht to the **Paleis Huis ten Bosch (House in the Woods Palace)**, in the beautiful Haagse Bos (Hague Woods; bus: 4 or 43). For many years, it had been the royal family's summer residence, and originally a small, rather plain structure consisting of several rooms opening from a domed central hall. Prince Willem IV added the two large side wings in the 1700s. You cannot enter the palace, but you can view it from the park.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Madurodam   To see “Holland in a Nutshell,” head to the wooded dunes linking The Hague and the coastal resort of Scheveningen. This amazing display of a miniature, fictitious city sprawls over 25,600 sq. m (28,000 sq. yd.), amid the trees of the Scheveningse Bosjes (Scheveningen Woods). Typical Dutch townscapes and famous landmarks are replicated on a scale of 1:25—you feel a bit like Gulliver viewing Lilliput. The wonder of it all is that this is a working miniature city: trains run, ships move, planes taxi down runways, the barrel organ plays, there's a town fair in progress, and 50,000 tiny lamps light up when darkness falls. Children love it—but surprisingly, 75% of the 1.2 million annual visitors are adults!

George Maduroplein 1. ☎ **070/416-2400**. www.madurodam.nl. Admission 12€ (\$15) adults, 11€ (\$14) seniors, 8.75€ (\$11) children 3–11, free for children under 3. Apr–June daily 9am–8pm; July–Aug daily 9am–10pm; Sept–Mar daily 9am–6pm. Tram: 9 to Madurodam.

Omniversum  This globe-shaped construction contains a digital planetarium and various multimedia theaters that explain humankind, the universe, foreign cultures, and space travel. It's truly another world.

President Kennedylaan 5. ☎ **070/416-8200**. www.omniversum.nl. Admission 9€ (\$11) adults, 7€ (\$8.75) children 4–11, free for children under 4. Mon 10am–3pm; Tues–Wed 10am–5pm; Thurs–Sun 11am–10pm. Tram: 10 or 17 to Gemeentemuseum.

MORE MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Escher in Het Paleis (Escher at the Palace) The small Paleis Lange Voorhout, from 1764, in the heart of the old city, was the home of Emma, the grandmother of Queen Beatrix, from 1901 to 1934. Since 2002, it has housed a museum to the Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher (1898–1972), who in his lifetime produced 448 lithographs, woodcuts, and engravings, and more than 2,000 drawings and sketches. The museum doesn't have them all, by a long way, but it does have a fair sampling, and a computer-animation section on the top floor. Plus, you get to see inside one of The Hague's royal palaces (see also “The Royal Palaces,” above), and even if it is a small, second-tier one, a visit is still worthwhile.

Lange Voorhout 74. ☎ **070/362-4061**. www.escherinhetpaleis.nl. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 6–16, free for children under 6. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 10, 16, or 17 to Korte Voorhout.

Museum Meermanno This charming museum occupies a spacious 19th-century town house with formal garden. Part of the collection was assembled by the 19th-century collector Baron W. van Westrenen, who resided here. His book collection includes rare medieval manuscripts, religious and secular, and early examples of the printed book; it integrated the collection of his second cousin Johan Meerman. On his travels, van Westrenen also amassed a charming collection of artifacts from ancient Egypt, Rome, and Greece that includes mummies, small statues of deities, and coins. In the garden house are temporary exhibitions of modern typography and displays explaining the printing process. The museum's subsequent curators have nursed a special interest in book design from the 1850s to the present.

Prinsessegracht 30. ☎ 070/346-2700. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, free for those under 19. Tues–Fri 11am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 9 to Zuid-Hollandlaan.

Panorama Mesdag ★ *Kids* The world's largest circular painting, with a total circumference of 119m (395 ft.), will take your breath away. You walk through a dark passageway, up a stairway, and out onto a circular platform—and suddenly you're in the 1880 fishing village of Scheveningen. Its dunes, beach, fishing boats, and everything else in the village are three-dimensional, an illusion enhanced by the artificial dunes that separate you from the painting. The panorama was the work of Dutch artist Hendrik Willem Mesdag, with the assistance of his wife and two other prominent artists.

Zeestraat 65 (just north of the city center). ☎ 070/310-6665. www.panorama-mesdag.com. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) seniors, 2€ (\$2.50) children 3–13, free for children under 3. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and public holidays noon–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Tram: 1 or 10 to Mauritskade.

WHERE TO STAY

VERY EXPENSIVE

Hotel des Indes ★★ Highly recommended for both its elegant accommodations and its location in the center of the oldest part of the city, this old-world hotel re-opened its doors in October 2004 after a top-to-bottom renovation and modernization (some rooms weren't due to be completed until May 2005). It began as the residence of Baron van Brien, and became a hotel in 1881. Since then it has welcomed royalty, diplomats, celebrities, and tourists, and has held a consistently prominent place in the social life of The Hague. The classically decorated guest rooms are the ultimate in comfort. Some bathrooms contain a whirlpool. Public rooms are lavishly fitted with marble, polished wood, chandeliers, and velvet upholstery. The gracious lobby lounge is a favorite place for residents of The Hague to meet for tea and other refreshments. Continental **Le Restaurant**, a stylish setting for good eating, is as popular with locals as it is with visitors and guests.

Lange Voorhout 54–56, 2514 EG Den Haag. ☎ 070/361-2345. Fax 070/361-2350. www.desindes.com. 92 units. 110€–425€ (\$138–\$531) double; from 475€ (\$594) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; lounge; health club; concierge; secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Parkhotel Den Haag This pleasant, centrally located hotel is on a quiet street, with doors opening from the spacious entrance lobby to a walled-in streetside terrace in fine weather. The grandiose breakfast room overlooks the gardens of the Noordeinde royal palace. The early-20th-century monument has original yellow brick and tile features on the staircases that demand a constant

process of preservation. Its spacious and attractive guest rooms have full marble bathrooms.

Molenstraat 53, 2513 BJ Den Haag. ☎ **070/362-4371**. Fax 070/361-4525. www.parkhoteldenhaag.nl. 120 units. 190€–275€ (\$238–\$344) double; 355€–375€ (\$444–\$469) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV.

MODERATE

Golden Tulip Corona ★★ This charming small hotel, once a lively coffee-house, is centrally located opposite the House of Parliament and between the Binnenhof and the Passage, a large covered shopping center. In the 18th century, the middle one of the three buildings that form the hotel was known as the Koffyhuys van Dalen, which in 1783 became De Beurs van Amsterdam. The name Corona was given to it in 1945. Public rooms feature contemporary decor, with touches of handsome marble and mahogany in the lobby. The guest rooms are done in soft pastel colors with graceful window drapes. The hotel's popularity dates back to the early 1900s. Politicians, antiques dealers, and gourmets still congregate here today. The elegant restaurant, full of French Provincial furnishings, soothing ecru, and brushed blues, is a favorite retreat for the good and the great in government circles. In balmy weather, part of the restaurant becomes a sidewalk terrace.

Buitenhof 39–42, 2513 AH Den Haag. ☎ **070/363-7930**. Fax 070/361-5785. www.corona.nl. 35 units. 109€–160€ (\$136–\$200) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 10, 16, or 17 to Buitenhof. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French, brasserie); bar; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Paleis Hotel ★ The intimate boutique hotel has spacious and elegant guest rooms furnished with soft chairs and settees in a quiet city-center setting. The beds are very comfortable. Bathrooms are a bit small but fitted out beautifully. There's a lavish breakfast buffet. The location is excellent both for shopping (the pedestrian shopping promenade is nearby) and for sightseeing. Some guest rooms are air-conditioned.

Molenstraat 26 (behind Paleis Noordeinde), 2513 BL Den Haag. ☎ **070/362-4621**. Fax 070/361-4533. www.paleishotel.nl. 20 units. 85€–145€ (\$106–\$181) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 17 to Gravenstraat. **Amenities:** Bar; sauna. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Delta Hotel This modern hotel has a smart designer feel without the stiff price tag, and its walls often host exhibitions of works by local artists. The reception is open to 11pm, and room service is available during the day. Other services include dry cleaning, and all rooms are equipped with a hair dryer. This is one of The Hague's nicest neighborhoods, with a good selection of local bars and restaurants.

Anna Paulownastraat 8, 2518 BE Den Haag. ☎ **070/362-4999**. Fax 070/345-4440. 11 units. 85€–95€ (\$106–\$119) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 1 or 10 to Mauritskade. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE EXPENSIVE

Saur ★ FRENCH/SEAFOOD The Saur, which overlooks a beautiful square in the city center, has been a favorite of residents of The Hague since 1928. In 2001 it was voted Best Restaurant of the Year in The Hague by the local newspaper, the *Haagse Courant*. The traditional French cuisine is superb, and the service is impeccable.

Lange Voorhout 47. ☎ **070/346-2565**. www.saur.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 26€–42€ (\$33–\$53); fixed-price menus 30€–50€ (\$37–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6–10:30pm; Sat 6–10:30pm. Tram: 10, 16, or 17 to Korte Voorhout.

MODERATE**Café-Restaurant Greve** ★ MEDITERRANEAN/INTERNATIONAL

This former car showroom is now a popular cafe-restaurant. The large windows of the cafe look out on the lively Torenstraat; the restaurant, however, is more intimate, with its low ceiling, candles, and wooden tables. You can choose a dish either as a starter or as a main course, which is an ideal solution for small appetites (or when you want a taste of everything!). Fish and lamb dishes, such as bouillabaisse or lamb cutlets with feta cheese and ouzo sauce, are popular.

Torenstraat 138 (at Veenkade). ☎ 070/360-3919. www.greve.nl. Main courses 12€–15€ (\$14–\$19); fixed-price menu 15€ (\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Cafe daily 10am–1am; restaurant Mon–Sat 6–11pm, Sun 6–10pm. Tram: 17 to Noordwal.

Garoeda INDONESIAN If it's *rijsttafel* you're hankering for, you couldn't find better than at this pleasant, very popular Indonesian restaurant in the city center. The waitstaff are dressed smartly in traditional Javanese silks, adding a classy touch to the authentic cooking. The split-level space gets crowded at lunch, so reserve or come early or late.

Kneuterdijk 18A. ☎ 070/346-5319. www.garoeda.nl. Reservations recommended for lunch. Main course items 4.75€–13€ (\$5.95–\$16); *rijsttafel* 50€–75€ (\$63–\$94). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 4–11pm. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk.

Le Bistroquet ★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL This small and very popular restaurant in the city center is one of The Hague's best, with lovely table settings in a quietly elegant setting. The menu is mostly French. Lamb, fish, and fresh vegetables are featured. Good choices include Irish salmon with lobster ravioli in a Thai curry sauce, and lamb filet with cashews, French beans, and a marjoram sauce.

Lange Voorhout 98. ☎ 070/360-1170. www.bistroquet.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 21€–35€ (\$26–\$44); fixed-price menus 37€–46€ (\$46–\$58). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 6–10:30pm; Sat 6–10:30pm. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk.

Le Haricot Vert BELGIAN/FRENCH A warm ambience awaits visitors to this long-standing favorite. In the summertime, tables are set outside on the sidewalk of the narrow pedestrians-only street. Indulge in the three-course "Verwen Menu" and you will be spoiled with enormous plates holding tasty selections of the best seasonal meat, fish, or vegetable dishes.

Molenstraat 9A. ☎ 070/365-2278. Reservations required. Main courses 15€–25€ (\$19–\$31); fixed-price menus 27€–35€ (\$34–\$44). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. Tram: 1 or 10 to Kneuterdijk.

Stadsherberg 't Goude Hooft ★★ DUTCH/CONTINENTAL There's a definite Old Dutch flavor to this wonderful, large, happy cafe-restaurant overlooking the city's old market square, yet its 1600s exterior cloaks a 1939 interior installed after a disastrous fire. In fact, the establishment's history dates back to 1423, when it was originally a tavern before being transformed in 1660 into a coffeehouse, and in 1939 into a cafe-restaurant. The wooden beams, brass chandeliers, and rustic chairs and tables blend harmoniously with the stained-glass windows, medieval banners, and wall murals. Some of the rooms that divide the interior are nonsmoking. There's a large sidewalk cafe on the "Green Market" square, pleasant on sunny days. An extensive menu covers everything from snacks to light lunches to full dinners. Look out for fine menu dishes like the guinea fowl with thyme sauce and the red perch with saffron sauce. This is a good place to drop by for a cocktail and snack, or for a beer or a coffee.

Dagelijkse Groenmarkt 13 (at the Grote Kerk). ☎ 070/346-9713. www.tgoudehooft.nl. Main courses 14€–20€ (\$18–\$25); fixed-price menus 16€–24€ (\$20–\$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon noon–6pm; Tues–Wed and Fri–Sat 10am–7pm; Thurs 10am–9:30pm; Sun 11am–6pm. Tram: 17 to Gravenstraat.

INEXPENSIVE

De Wankele Tafel VEGETARIAN Organic-food fanatics and vegetarians will love chowing down at the “Wobbly Table,” where the surroundings are casual and the prices diner-friendly. Start with a delicious soup of the day, followed by a tasty whole-grain pancake generously filled with tofu or tempeh and a variety of fresh vegetables and salad. You can choose from mild cheese and spicy chile sauces.

Mauritskade 79. ☎ 070/364-3267. Main courses 9.50€–14€ (\$12–\$17). No credit cards. Tues–Sat 4:30–11pm. Tram: 1 or 10 to Mauritskade.

Plato INTERNATIONAL Plato has perfected its formula and hums every night with keen return visitors. Most dishes on the menu can be ordered in small or large portions, according to your capacity or appetite, and you can choose the most appropriate from a list of five combo possibilities. Start with a soup, and then you can have two small-size dishes instead of a full main course. I go back just for the Greek-style succulent stewed lamb shank. Other appetizing (and unusual) menu dishes include ostrich tournedos.

Frederikstraat 32. ☎ 070/363-6744. Main courses 9€–14€ (\$11–\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 3–10:30pm. Tram: 9 to Dr. Kuyperstraat.

SHOPPING

Interesting shopping areas include Oude Molstraat and Denneweg in the city center, where you find a concentration of authentic Dutch stores. Connected to Centraal Station, the modern Babylon shopping mall has two floors of over 60 shops, restaurants, and a luxury hotel.

A network of pedestrian streets offers a big selection of stores on Spuistraat, Vlamingstraat, Venestraat, and Hoogstraat. The covered **Passage** is a beautiful 19th-century arcade running from Spuistraat to Gravenstraat, though the shops it contains are nothing to write home about.

De Bijenkorf, Wagenstraat 32 (☎ 070/426-2700), in a stunning example of functional early-20th-century architecture, stands on Grote Marktstraat; and the stiffly chic **Maison de Bonneterie**, Gravenstraat 2 (☎ 070/330-5300), stands on Buitenhof.

Noordeinde and Oude Molenstraat are home to fashion boutiques, antiquarian booksellers, and expensive delicatessens. Leading off from Lange Voorhout, Denneweg and Frederikstraat are lined with high-priced antiques, interior design stores, and boutiques catering to specialties such as fashion for pregnant women. One of the largest interior-design stores is the multi-location **Loft Interiors**, part of which is in a stunning 1899 iron-and-glass showroom at Denneweg 56.

Among the top shopping attractions are a number of fine antiques stores and a weekly **antiques and curios market** under the beautiful canopy of trees on Lange Voorhout. The market runs May to September on Thursday from 9am to 7pm and Sunday from 10am to 5pm; and October to May, on Thursday from noon to 5pm. Year-round, on Wednesday, there is an **organic farm market** on the square around the Grote Kerk from 10am to 4pm.

THE HAGUE AFTER DARK

There's nearly always something going on culturally. The monthly publication **The Hague Agenda**, available at the VVV offices and many hotels and restaurants, lists up-and-coming concerts and other cultural events. Spui, just behind

Centraal Station, is the city's modern cultural square. Here you find **Dr. Anton Philips Concert Hall**, Spui 150 (☎ 070/360-9810), home to the Residentie Orchestra; and the **AT&T Dance Theater**, Spui 152 (☎ 070/360-4930), where the three companies of the renowned Netherlands Dance Theater perform their virtuoso contemporary productions. If you're more into jazz and pop music, check out **t Paard**, Prinsengracht 12 (☎ 070/360-1618).

The Hague doesn't have a big student population, and the city's natural formality subdues its nightlife somewhat, but there is a thriving bar and cafe culture. The Plein, a large square in front of the Tweede Kamer (lower house of Parliament), is a favorite for recess with politicians and civil servants. If you want to combine eating and drinking, and hide from the masses in a quiet walled garden, head for close-by **Schlemmer**, Lange Houtstraat 17 (☎ 070/360-9000). The Grote Markt square is lined with busy bars and restaurants, ranging from traditional brown cafes to trendy designer spots. **De Zwarte Ruiter**, Grote Markt 27 (☎ 070/364-9549), is a popular drinking and eating place that makes a good starting point. Another lively area is the narrow **Maliestraat**, just off Denneweg, behind the Hotel Des Indes, where you find great bars such as **Ca l'Emile**, De Maliestraat 16 (☎ 070/365-5400), in which a more mature but lively professional crowd likes to greet the evening. One of The Hague's oldest lesbian and gay bars, **Cafe De Landman**, Denneweg 48 (☎ 070/346-7727), also is close by.

For a casino and other nightspots, head to nearby Scheveningen.

SCHEVENINGEN ★

5km (3 miles) NW of The Hague center

A chic beach resort with a notoriously hard-to-pronounce name, Scheveningen is virtually a part of The Hague. It sports a cast of upscale restaurants with international cuisine, accommodations in all price ranges, international-name boutiques, and abundant nighttime entertainment. Visitors often stay at Scheveningen, and make the 10-minute drive or tram ride into The Hague.

Until early in the 19th century, this was a sleepy fishing village. But as its beaches began to attract vacation crowds, Scheveningen evolved into an internationally known resort. The magnificent and beautifully restored 19th-century waterfront Kurhaus Hotel still draws Europe's crowned heads and celebrities from around the globe. Gamblers flock to the resort's casino, where tuxedoed croupiers ply their craft nightly.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent service from The Hague on **trams** 1, 7, 8, or 9 to Gevers Deynootplein in front of the Kurhaus Hotel. **Driving** from The Hague center, follow the many signs.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Scheveningen**, Gevers Deynootweg 1134, 2586 CK Scheveningen (☎ 0900/340-3505; fax 070/361-5495; www.scheveningen.nl; tram: 1 or 9), at the Palace Promenade mall, is open January to March and October to December, Monday from 11am to 5:30pm, Tuesday to

Code Name: Scheveningen

Just try to pronounce Scheveningen (skh-ay-fening-uhn) correctly! The name is so difficult to say that during World War II the Dutch underground used it as a code name for identification—the Germans just couldn't get it right.

Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 5pm; April to September, Monday from 1 to 6pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9:30am to 6pm, Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 1 to 5pm.

SPECIAL EVENTS Each year, for 3 days during the second weekend in July, jazz greats from around the world gather at the **Nederlands Congres Centrum**, Churchillplein 10 (☎ 070/900-9810; tram: 10), in Scheveningen for the North Sea Jazz Festival. This nonstop extravaganza features star performances by internationally acclaimed musicians, in 200 concerts on 15 stages, playing jazz, free jazz, blues, Be Bop, and world music. (In 2006, the festival moves to Rotterdam.)

The harbor, crowded with fishing boats and lined with restaurants that serve up just-caught seafood, is where the Dutch herring fleet is launched with a colorful *Vlaggetjesdag* (Flag Day) celebration each year on the last Saturday in May. Fishermen's wives dress up in their traditional costume. The fleet then returns with the first of the new season's herring catch. Amid much fanfare, they rush the first batch off to the queen and conduct a lively auction with leading restaurateurs for the rest.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

A wide, sandy beach bordered by a 3km (2-mile) Promenade, Scheveningen has as its highlight the **Scheveningen Pier** ★★ (☎ 070/306-5500; www.pier.nl; tram: 1 or 9), which has had a checkered history since it first opened in 1901. The Nazis destroyed the timber structure in 1943. After 2 years of construction, a new pier opened in 1961. In 1991, the Van der Valk restaurant and hotel concern purchased it, dilapidated and weather-beaten, for the nominal amount of 1 guilder (50¢). The refurbished walkway is now covered over for all-weather use, the restaurant and gaming arcade on the pier-end island has been renovated, and there are plans to build a theater and a futuristic 80m-high (260-ft.) hotel at the end of the pier. There is plenty to do for adults and kids, from indoor gaming arcades to an unusual inverted bungee-jump that throws you into the air on an industrial-size rubber band. The pier is open daily from 10am to 11pm. Admission is 1€ (\$1.25), free for children under 4.

In the **Scheveningen Museum**, Neptunusstraat 92 (☎ 070/350-0830; www.museumscheveningen.nl; tram: 1 or 9), you can learn all about the history of a former fishing village. The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm, and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 3.50€ (\$4.40) for adults, 2.25€ (\$2.80) for seniors and children.

Sea Life Scheveningen, Strandweg (aka the Boulevard) 13 (☎ 070/354-2100; www.sealife.nl; tram: 1), takes you under the sea in an aquarium with a walk-through underwater tunnel, from where you can see the denizens of the deep, including sharks, swimming above your head. The aquarium is open July to August, daily from 10am to 8pm; September to June, daily from 10am to 6pm; closed December 25. Admission is 9.50€ (\$12) for adults, 8.50€ (\$11) for seniors, 6€ (\$7.50) for children ages 3 to 11, and free for children under 3.

A few blocks away from the Kurhaus, you find a museum inside the dunes, its existence betrayed by giant masks looking out to sea, a surprisingly peaceful oasis amidst all the seaside entertainment. This museum, **Beelden aan Zee (Sculptures on the Seafont)**, Harteveltstraat 1 (☎ 070/358-5857; www.beeldenaanzee.nl; tram: 1), is dedicated to sculptures of the human body. Here you find changing exhibitions by modern sculptors from around the world, and an impressive permanent collection. The halls are different shapes, and some exhibits are outside on the patios. Wherever you are in the museum, you'll be

A Great Theme Park

For a theme park with rides galore—roller coasters, carousels, treetop cable cars, and Europe's largest tropical water paradise, head for **Duinrell** , Duinrell 1 (☎ 070/515-5258; www.duinrell.com), at Wassenaar, 5km (3 miles) north of The Hague. Watery activities include luge runs, a centrifugal "Waterspin," and floating plastic frogs. In addition to the amusement park, covered tropical swimming pools are ideal for wet-weather days with kids. September to March, you can ski on an outdoors artificial ski slope. The park is open April to October, daily from 10am to 5pm; the pool is open throughout the year. Admission is 16€ (\$20) for adults and children, 12€ (\$15) for seniors, and free for children under 4. You can get to the park on bus no. 491 from The Hague city center.

aware of the surrounding dunes and the wind playing in the grass. From the highest terrace, you can even glimpse the sea. Open Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm, it charges an admission of 6€ (\$7.50) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for children ages 5 to 12, and free for children under 5.

Scheveningen's southern neighbor beach resort, **Kijkduin**, is quieter and more family-oriented, and the main attractions are the sea and dunes. A covered mall has 50 interesting stores open daily, year-round.

SEA SPORTS & RECREATION

The North Sea's fair-to-middling waves make surfing fun for both the initiated and the uninitiated, who might prefer boogie boards. A wet suit is not an option but a necessity, unless you want to experience hypothermia. You can rent surfboards and wet suits at **Hart Beach Shop**, Vissershavenweg 55B (☎ 070/358-5900), which also runs a beach hut during the summer season. The unfortunately named **Go Klap**, Dr. Lelykade 44 (☎ 070/354-8679), also rents them, as well as windsurfing gear and sea kayaks.

You can head out from the harbor for a deep-sea fishing day trip aboard a converted trawler, operated by **Rederij Groen**, Dr. Lelykade 1D (☎ 070/355-3588).

Windsurfers congregate at the **Windsurfvereniging** beach hut opposite the lighthouse. For windsurfing and kite-surfing lessons, in and out of season, contact instructor **Harry Vogelesang** (☎ 065/132-3547).

Are you up for a plunge into the cold gray waters of the North Sea? **Bungy Jump** (☎ 070/310-6242) can accommodate you, with a 60m (262-ft.) freefall from their jump point on Scheveningen Pier. Jump times (weather permitting) are May to June and September, weekends from noon to 8pm; and July and August, Wednesday to Sunday from noon to midnight.

WHERE TO STAY

De Seinduin This rather plain, small hotel has clean, simply furnished guest rooms. Some large rooms are especially suitable for groups or families—the hotel offers a special group discount. The beach is just around the corner, and the beachfront is lined with cafes and restaurants where you can relax after a plunge in the sea.

Seinpostduin 15, 2587 CA Scheveningen. ☎ 070/355-1971. Fax 070/350-5829. www.hotelseinduin.nl. 15 units. 70€–110€ (\$88–\$138) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 1 to Gevers Deynootweg. In room: TV, minibar.

Steigenberger Kurhaus Hotel ★★ ★ The five-star Kurhaus, the undisputed grande dame of the North Sea coast, will give you a wonderful hotel experience. Its leather-bound guest register, which opens with the signature of the 13-year-old Queen Wilhelmina, is filled with the names of the world's greats and illustrated by leading artists who embellished their signatures with original drawings. The Kurhaus's Kurzaal concert hall has seen performances by leading musical artists as disparate as violinist Yehudi Menuhin and the Rolling Stones. The guest rooms, many with balconies facing the sea, are spacious and have elegant decor and furnishings, including trouser presses. The splendid **Kandinsky** restaurant has earned an international reputation. The **Kurzaal** has lavish lunch and dinner buffets, and even more lavish ones on weekends, spread in the gorgeous Kurzaal area, with after-dinner dancing on Friday and Saturday nights. The Kurzaal Café is for drinks and light meals.

Gevers Deynootplein 30, 2586 CK Scheveningen. ☎ 070/416-2636. Fax 070/416-2646. www.kurhaus.nl. 255 units. 215€–325€ (\$269–\$406) double; 445€–660€ (\$556–\$825) suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 1 or 9 to Circustheater. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French, Continental); bar; lounge; access to nearby health club and spa; concierge; secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; dry cleaning; laundry service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

Ducdalf ★ SEAFOOD This pleasant place is on a street along the wharf. You can rest assured that the fish you order is not long out of local waters. The menu lists an amazingly varied selection of main courses, including steak, veal, and chicken for non-seafood lovers. There's a very good mixed grill, and filet of sole appears in no fewer than 11 different guises. For dessert, try the *appelgebak* (apple pie); it's a contender for the best in Holland.

Dr. Lelykade 1. ☎ 070/355-7692. Main courses 18€–30€ (\$22–\$37); fixed-price menus 32€–38€ (\$39–\$47). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10pm. Tram: 11 to Dr. Lelykade.

Het Brouwcafe DUTCH/SEAFOOD This microbrewery puts up three or four of its house brand beers, depending on the season, and an impressive selection of domestic and foreign beers. The atmosphere is lively thanks to all this free-flowing beer, and the food is scrumptious and filling, too. The fixed-price three-course menu changes weekly and might include mouthwatering lasagna with tuna and lemon sole as a main course. Many dishes can be ordered as a starter or a main course, and alongside fish dishes, there are meat and vegetarian choices.

Dr. Lelykade 28. ☎ 070/354-0970. www.hetbrouwcafe.nl. Main courses 9.10€–16€ (\$11–\$20); fixed-price menu 16€ (\$20). AE, MC, V. Tram: 11 to Dr. Lelykade.

Herring Days

Scheveningen may be the place most obsessed by herring in this herring-obsessed land. It's the location of the colorful annual *Vlaggetjesdag* (Flag Day) event on the last Saturday in May, when fishing boats compete to land the season's first *nieuwe haring* (new herring). The fresh-caught fish is considered a delicacy and is eaten filleted whole (minus the head and the tail!), or chopped if you're squeamish, with minced onion. They can also be eaten year-round pickled as *maatjes*. You get herring from sidewalk vendors, beachfront fish stands, and trailers towed onto the beach by tractors. See also "A Taste of Holland," in appendix B.

SCHEVENINGEN AFTER DARK

Tuxedoed croupiers provide blackjack and roulette at **Holland Casino Scheveningen**, Kurhausweg 1 (☎ 070/306-7777; tram: 1 or 9), across from the beautifully restored 19th-century Kurhaus Hotel. There's roulette, blackjack, punto banco, fruit machines, and more. The dress code here is "correct" (collar and tie for men), and the minimum age is 18. You need your passport to get in. The casino is open daily (except May 4 and Dec 31) from 1:30pm to 3am. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75). These are "complemented" by video games and pin-ball machines at the old Scheveningen Pier jutting into the North Sea.

Look for nightclubs at Gevers Deynootplein in front of the Kurhaus, and for theater productions at the **Circustheater**, which may include opera, ballet, and musical theater.

2 Rotterdam

58km (36 miles) SW of Amsterdam; 23km (16 miles) SE of The Hague

Rotterdam is only a half-hour from The Hague and an hour from Amsterdam, but it is centuries away from them in both appearance and personality. Here, instead of the usual Dutch web of little streets, alleyways, and winding canals, there's a spacious and elegant shopping mall and the world's busiest ocean harbor. Rotterdam is a fascinating place to see and experience, particularly when you consider that this city was a living monument to Holland's Golden Age until it was bombed to rubble during World War II. The city retains traces of its ancient history in only two areas—Delfshaven (Delft Harbor) and Oude Haven (Old Harbor).

At the war's end, rather than try to re-create the old, Rotterdammers looked on their misfortune as an opportunity and approached their city as a clean slate. They relished the chance—unique in Holland—to create an efficient, elegant, and workable modern city. The results, though they're not always elegant, are a testimony to their ability to find impressive solutions to their problems.

Today this bustling metropolis (pop. 600,000) has the world's biggest port, created when its several harbors were opened directly to the sea, 32km (20 miles) away, by the dredging of a deepwater channel that accommodates even the largest oil tankers. **Europoort** (pronounced the same as "port" in English) handles more ships and more cargo every year than any other port in the world.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Rotterdam's **Zestienhoven Airport** (☎ 010/446-3455), 4km (2½ miles) north of the city, has flights from a few destinations in the Netherlands and Europe. Bus no. 33 takes you to and from the city center; a taxi to downtown is 16€ (\$20). Netherlands Railways has fast train service (30 min.) from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, for a fare of 9.40€ (\$12) one-way.

There's frequent **train** service to Rotterdam Centraal Station from around the Netherlands, and from Paris and Brussels. From Amsterdam, there are at least two trains each hour around the clock; the trip takes around 40 minutes. For information on train schedules, call ☎ 0900/9292.

The Hoek van Holland sea-ferry terminal, for **car ferries** from Harwich in England, is 20km (13 miles) away, and there's good bus and train connections. Rotterdam's Europoort, the terminal for P&O North Sea Ferries (also carrying cars) from Hull in England, is about a 30-minute drive.

By **car** from Amsterdam, take A4/E19, and then A13/E19.

Fun Fact Working People

So hardworking are the citizens of Rotterdam that they are said to be "born with their sleeves already rolled up."

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Rotterdam**, Coolingsingel 67, 3012 AC Rotterdam (☎ 0900/403-4065; fax 010/413-3124; www.vvvrotterdam.nl; Metro: Stadhuis), on the corner of Stadhuisplein, is open Monday to Thursday from 9:30am to 6pm, Friday from 9:30am to 9pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm, and Sunday (Apr–Sept) from noon to 5pm. Staff can arrange accommodations and provide a city map that shows major attractions. Before setting out to experience Rotterdam, stop by the office to pick up the helpful **Information Guide**.

GETTING AROUND Rotterdam's sprawling size makes it a city to be explored on foot one area at a time, using a taxi or the extensive public transportation network of bus, tram, and Metro (which runs on north-south and east-west axes) to move from one area to another. The VVV can furnish a map of public transportation routes. Taxi stands are sprinkled throughout the city; or call **Rotterdamse Taxi Centrale** (☎ 010/462-6060).

SPECIAL EVENTS The festival year kicks off with the **International Film Festival** (☎ 010/890-9090), which has established a reputation over 3 decades for presenting quality independent films. During 10 days in late January/early February, huge numbers of film buffs find their way to cinemas around the city center to watch one or more of about 300 films shown on 15 screens.

Another festival worth looking out for is the multicultural **Summer Carnival** (☎ 010/414-1772) and its colorful street parade, on the last weekend of July.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Rotterdam's modern urban planning has resulted in an unusually effective use of city-center space. Particularly attractive are the shingle paths and lazy lawns in the landscaped **Museumpark**, which serves as a central focus for two of the museums mentioned below. Between visits you can stretch your legs or sit down and have a picnic.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Euromast and Space Adventure ★★ *Kids* This slender tower, 188m (611 ft.) tall, is indisputably the best vantage point for an overall view of Rotterdam and its environs. More than that, though, the tower contains interesting exhibitions, a restaurant, and an exciting Space Cabin ride that emulates a rocket take-off. A super-fast elevator brings you up to the viewing platforms.

Parkhaven 20. ☎ 010/436-4811. www.euromast.nl. Admission 7.75€ (\$9.70) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 4–11, free for children under 4. Daily 10am–11pm. Tram: 8.

Maritiem Museum Rotterdam ★ *Kids* Devoted entirely to the history of Rotterdam Harbor, this marvelous museum consists of two sections: the main building, and *De Buffel*, a beautifully restored 1868 warship. Constantly changing exhibits give you new insight into the close relationship between the Dutch and the sea. In the museum harbor basin are moored some 20 vessels dating from 1850 to 1950. There's a bookstore and a coffeeshop.

Leuvehaven 1 (at the harbor). ☎ 010/413-2680. www.maritiemmuseum.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 4–16, free for children under 4. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (also Mon July–Aug and school vacations); Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Metro: Beurs, Churchillplein.

Rotterdam



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Arboretum **22**
- Blijdorp Zoo **1**
- Euromast & Space Adventure **9**
- Het Schielandhuis **19**
- Holland Casino Rotterdam **5**
- Kunsthal **13**
- Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen **14**
- Museum De Dubbelde Palmboom **7**
- Pancake Boat **8**
- Prins Hendrik Maritime Museum **18**
- Tropicana **20**

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Bazar **17**
- Bienvenue **2**
- Bilderberg Parkhotel **15**
- New York **11**
- Westin Rotterdam **4**

DINING ◆

- Brasserie Henkes **6**
- Brasserie La Villette **16**
- Café Rotterdam **12**
- Engels **3**
- In den Rustwat **21**
- Parkheuvel **10**



Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen ★★ Art lovers will find here a collection of works by 16th- and 17th-century Dutch and Flemish artists, such as Rubens, Hals, Rembrandt, and Steen. They share wall space with an international contingent that includes Salvador Dalí and Man Ray, Titian and Tintoretto, Degas and Daumier. Other galleries hold international modern art, sculpture, porcelain, silver, glass, and Delftware, and regular exhibits of prints and drawings. It's particularly enjoyable to walk among the modern sculptures in the gardens.

Museumpark 18–20. ☎ 010/441-9400. www.boijmans.rotterdam.nl. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) seniors, free for children under 19. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Tram: 5 to Witte de Withstraat.

Museum Het Schielandshuis ★ Lost between towering office blocks is the Schielandshuis, the city's sole survivor from the 17th century. The building has been gloriously restored and now shows off Rotterdam's cultural heritage. Period rooms are filled with furnishings rescued from mansions destroyed during World War II. The Atlas Van Stolk, a vast collection of prints and drawings relating to Dutch history, occupies an entire floor.

Korte Hoogstraat 31. ☎ 010/217-6767. www.hmr.rotterdam.nl. Admission 2.70€ (\$3.40) adults, 1.35€ (\$1.70) children 4–16, free for children under 4. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Metro: Beurs.

OTHER MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Arboretum Trompenburg ★ *Finds* This gorgeous garden has evolved from a family-owned 19th-century estate into a peaceful oasis east of the city center that is kept in good order by an army of gardeners. Originally landscaped as an English country garden, the arboretum today has more than 4,000 trees, bushes, and perennials. Oak, pine, cedar, hostas, and rhododendron are particularly well represented, and there are a rose garden, goldfish pond, aviary, and glasshouse full of cacti and succulents. With a variety of bridges and benches, the garden is a perfect antidote to exhaustion-inducing sightseeing.

Honingerdijk 86. ☎ 010/233-0166. www.trompenburg.nl. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, free for children under 13. Apr–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–4pm. Closed Easter, Dec 25–Jan 2. Tram: 1 to Woudestein.

Museum De Dubbelde Palmboom ★ On Voorhaven, in the old port district, is this historical museum, which consists of twin converted warehouses. Craftspeople work in the old Zakkendragershuisje (Grain Sack Carriers Guild House), using copies of 17th- and 18th-century molds to cast beautiful plates, bowls, tea urns, and other utensils—their products make great gifts.

Voorhaven 12, Delfshaven (at the harbor). ☎ 010/476-1533. www.hmr.rotterdam.nl. Admission 2.70€ (\$3.40) adults, 1.35€ (\$1.70) children 4–16, free for children under 4. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Metro: Delfshaven.

Fun Fact Dutch Heights

Maybe it's nature's way of compensating for their country being altitudinally challenged, but the Dutch are TALL. The average man tops out at 1.84m (6 ft.) and the average woman at 1.71m (5 ft. 7 in.), which in both cases is 5cm (2 in.) more than the European average. Not only that, but a government study showed that every decade the average height of the Dutch increases by 1.5cm (½ in.). Where will it all end?

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Rotterdam has some spectacular modern architecture. Just outside Centraal Station you encounter the office of the **Nationale Nederlanden** insurance corporation, the city's highest skyscraper at 152m (495 ft.). Down Coolsingel is the bottle-green **World Trade Center**; and east of this, on Overblaak, is a geometric chaos of quirky, cube-shaped apartments balancing atop tall concrete stalks. One of them, the **Kijk-Kubus**, Overblaak 70 (☎ **010/414-2285**; www.kubuswoning.nl; Metro: Blaak), is open for visits March to December, daily from 11am to 5pm; January to February, Friday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for seniors and children ages 4 to 12, and free for children under 4.

Two prominent bridges span the Nieuwe Maas River, the dark red **Nieuwe Willemsbrug**, and a single-span suspension bridge called the **Erasmusbrug** and nicknamed "The Swan" (or, if you're not quite as charmed by its looks, "The Dishwashing Brush").

To see a splendid surviving corner of Old Rotterdam, take the Metro to **Delfshaven** which, many years ago, was Delft's harbor. Of special interest to Americans is the old **Pilgrim Fathers Church**, on Voorhaven, in which the Pilgrims said their last prayers before setting off for the New World aboard the *Speedwell*. The *Speedwell* didn't prove to be very seaworthy, though, so after crossing the English Channel, the Pilgrims boarded another ship in Southampton—the *Mayflower*. The Pilgrims are remembered in special services every Thanksgiving Day.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Diergaarde Blijdorp (Blijdorp/Rotterdam Zoo) ★★ *Kids* The animals here feel right at home in an environment that attempts to re-create their homes in the wild. A large enclosed plaza contains elephants, crocodiles, reptiles, amphibians, and tropical plants and birds. An Asian section houses Javanese monkeys, a bat cave, and exotic birds. The newly opened Oceanium section presents a submarine world inhabited by sharks, jellyfish, and other creatures of the deep brought here from around the world.

Abraham van Stolkweg. ☎ **010/443-1431**. www.rotterdamzoo.nl. Admission 15€ (\$18) adults, 13€ (\$16) seniors, 12€ (\$14) children 3–11, free for children under 3. Oct–Mar daily 9am–5pm; Apr–Sept daily 9am–6pm. Bus: 32, 33, or 39 to Diergaarde Blijdorp.

Tropicana *Kids* This water-based amusement park simulates a luxuriant tropical setting. It has recreational facilities such as a swimming pool, a wave pool, a sauna, water slides, hot whirlpools, a wild-water strip, and a swimmers' bar.

Maasboulevard 100. ☎ **010/402-0700**. www.tropicana.nl. 13€ (\$16) adults, 10€ (\$13) children 4–12, free for children under 4. Mon–Fri 10am–11pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 10am–6pm. Tram 1: Oostplein.

ORGANIZED TOURS

One of the best things to do in Rotterdam is to take a **harbor cruise** ★★ from Spido Rondvaarten, Leuvehaven (☎ **010/275-9988**; www.spido.nl; Metro: Leuvehaven). Departures are April to September daily every 30 to 45 minutes from 9:30am to 5pm; October to March two to four times per day. The season of the year determines how much of the vast port you're able to see, but it's an unforgettable experience. The basic cruise, offered year-round, is a 75-minute tour of the city's waterfront. There also are extended tours; all-day excursions to the sluices of the Delta Works and along the full length of Europoort; music and dinner cruises; and more. Tours are from 8.50€ (\$11) for adults, 5.10€ (\$6.40) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4.

Grand Harbor

A dredged deepwater channel connects Rotterdam with the North Sea and forms a 32km-long (20-mile) harbor known as **Europoort** (“poort” is pronounced like “port” in English). This handles more ships and more cargo every year than any other port in the world—20,000 ships and 310 million metric tons of cargo. Holland owes a fair piece of its prosperity to these statistics, but the port has a dark side, too: Rotterdam is a center for big-time international drug-dealers and gunrunners.

You may think visiting a harbor is boring business on a vacation, but Rotterdam’s is one of the most memorable sights in Holland and makes any other harbor you’ve ever seen look like a Fisher-Price toy. Container ships, bulk carriers, tankers, sleek greyhounds of the sea, and careworn tramps are waited on by a vast retinue of machines and people. Trucks, trains, and barges, each carrying its little piece of the action, hurry into and out of the hub. You feel dwarfed by the hulking oil tankers and container ships that glide like giant whales into their berths along the miles of docks.

A big treat awaits your family aboard the **Pannenkoekenboot (Pancake Boat)** ★★, Parkhaven (☎ 010/436-7295; www.pannenkoekenboot.nl; tram: 8), moored at the foot of Euromast. As soon as the boat weighs anchor, it’s a free-for-all at the pancake buffet, with as many plain, bacon, or apple pancakes as you can eat during the 1-hour trip. Departures are Saturday and Sunday at 1:30, 3, 4:30, and 6pm; and Wednesday and Friday at 4:30 and 6pm. The cost is 12€ (\$15) for adults, 7€ (\$8.75) for children ages 3 to 12, and free for children under 3.

WHERE TO STAY

Bazar ★★ All that glitters at this intimate and warm, Asian-themed hotel is for sure not gold, but it can be a lot of fun. On a busy street near the main museums, much of the place oozes with the atmosphere of *The 1001 Nights*—golden pillars, frilly textiles, open-worked shutters, Persian rugs, stained-glass lamps, and brass fittings. And that’s just the main floor and the principal theme. By way of thematic variation, there’s also an African floor and a South American floor. The rooms follow these cues in both design and spirit, making for a distinctive experience, so long as you feel comfortable in whichever ambience you’re given. If not, ask for a change. The ground-floor international cafe-restaurant Bazar doubles as hotel reception, and the staff comprises more than a dozen nationalities—which is nice and international and all, but reportedly leads to mixed standards of service.

Witte de Withstraat 16, 3012 BP Rotterdam. ☎ 010/206-5151. Fax 010/206-5159. www.hotelbazar.nl. 27 units. 75€–120€ (\$94–\$150) double. Rates include Middle Eastern breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 5, 20, or 23. **Amenities:** Restaurant (international); bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Bienvenue This small, budget-priced hotel is one of the best in its price range. The bright guest rooms have soft red carpets, comfortable beds, and clean showers (two bathrooms have tubs). There’s a canal in front of the hotel, and rooms at the back open onto the terrace. The hotel offers a tasty breakfast buffet.

Spoorsingel 24 (behind Centraal Station), 3033 GL Rotterdam. ☎ 010/466-9394. Fax 010/467-7475. www.hotelbienvenue.nl. 10 units, 7 with bathroom. 72€ (\$90) double with bathroom; 62€ (\$78) double without

bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Metro: Centraal Station. *In room:* TV.

Bilderberg Parkhotel Rotterdam ★ For city-center convenience, you can't do better than this modern high-rise, set in its own private garden. The spacious guest rooms are the ultimate in classic luxury, furnished with soft couches and comfortable beds. Some of the rooms are air-conditioned. Bathrooms are elegant and supplied with every convenience. The hotel has private parking. The **Empress** restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Westersingel 70, 3015 LB Rotterdam. ☎ 010/436-3611. Fax 010/436-4212. www.parkhotelrotterdam.nl. 189 units. 122€–312€ (\$153–\$390) double; 795€–895€ (\$994–\$1,119) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ (\$19). Metro: Eendrachtplein. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; lounge; health club and sauna; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

New York ★ This building, one of Europe's first skyscrapers, was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century to house the headquarters of the Holland-America shipping line, which sailed to New York. Many of the city's emigrants passed through these portals with their trunks. The reception rooms retain some of their original features. In the bright guest rooms, stylish furnishings combine the old and the new; some rooms have stunning balcony views. The downstairs cafe-restaurant has a great view over the river and docklands. Open all day, it serves both teatime treats and dinner.

Koninginnenhoofd 1, 3072 AD Rotterdam. ☎ 010/439-0500. Fax 010/484-2701. www.hotelnewyork.nl. 72 units. 93€–208€ (\$116–\$260) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 5 to Westplein. **Amenities:** Restaurant (international/seafood); bar; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Westin Rotterdam ★ Welcome to a lodging where the “heavenly bed” has been specially designed, the minibar calls itself an “electronic refreshment center,” and laptop safes are provided for those who truly love their valuables. Shiny, modern, and somewhat impersonal, the hotel, which takes up the first 14 floors of the 32-story Millennium Tower, is the latest in five-star accommodations. It stands at the heart of a district of theaters, restaurants, shops, and a casino. In typical Westin fashion, the rooms are hushed oases of relative luxury, and their modernity fits that of the post-war boom city beyond the double-glazed windows. Rooms are big—in some of the upper-floor rooms you might need a bull-horn to cast your voice into the remotest nooks and crannies. The **Lighthouse Bar and Restaurant** is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Weena 686 (opposite Centraal Station), 3012 CN Rotterdam. ☎ 010/430-2000. Fax 010/430-2001. www.westin.com. 231 units. 190€–290€ (\$238–\$363) double; 325€–750€ (\$406–\$938) suite. AE, DC, V. Valet parking 23€ (\$29). Metro: Centraal Station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar; health club and sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE VERY EXPENSIVE

Parkheuvel FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL With two Michelin stars to his credit, patron/chef Cees Helder will amuse your palate with luxurious dishes made from the freshest ingredients. The seafood dishes are particularly astounding; Try the starter of *carpaccio* of sea bass, or a lobster salad with sun-dried tomatoes and rucola. Main courses range from *turbot gratinée* to poached filet of beef with truffles.

Heuvellaan 21. ☎ 010/436-0766. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 30€–40€ (\$38–\$50); fixed-price menus 40€–50€ (\$50–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 6–10pm; Sat 6–10pm. Tram: 5.

EXPENSIVE

In den Rustwat ★★ FRENCH You'd swear you're in the country at the "Rest Some," but then, back in the 16th century, this thatched farmhouse-style restaurant used to be an inn. Patron/cuisinier Marcel van Zomeren has turned it into one of the city's top establishments. Using only the freshest organic ingredients, he keeps himself and his staff inspired by constantly adapting the menu to seasonal produce. A salad of Bresse pigeon breast with poached quail's eggs and a ravioli of pigeon and goose liver is an example of a starter, which could be followed by crisp sautéed sea bass filet on a bed of warm tomatoes and young vegetables. Van Zomeren insists he has no specialties, and that everything he prepares meets his high standards.

Honingerdijk 96 (beside the Arboretum Trompenburg). ☎ 010/413-4110. www.indenrustwat.nl. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 22€–25€ (\$27–\$31); fixed-price menus 30€–55€ (\$38–\$69). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–3pm and 6–10pm; Sat 6–10pm. Tram: 1.

MODERATE

Brasserie Henkes ★★ DUTCH/CONTINENTAL The interior of the old Henkes *jenever* (Dutch gin) distillery has been completely transformed with the furnishings of a 19th-century Belgian insurance bank. Warm woodwork and brass chandeliers create a dining room on a grand scale. And this is an ideal place to appreciate the special atmosphere of old Delfshaven. The waterside terrace invites you to while away a sunny afternoon; later, you can take a leisurely stroll down to the harbor, then return for dinner. You can enjoy seafood and meat dishes or seasonal specialties like venison with a chocolate-and-port sauce.

Voorhaven 17 (at Delfshaven). ☎ 010/425-5596. www.henkes.nl. Main courses 15€–20€ (\$18–\$24); fixed-price menu 28€ (\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight; kitchen closes at 10pm. Metro: Delfshaven.

Brasserie La Vilette ★ CLASSIC FRENCH Elegant and filled with potted plants and flowers, this city center oasis has soft rose-colored walls and starched white table linen. Service is both polished and friendly. For starters, try the filet of beef *carpaccio*. The grilled sea bass with lobster sauce makes a fine main course, and the *crème brûlée* with ice cream flavored with sweet Pedro Ximenez sherry is a tempting dessert. This member of the Alliance Gastronomique is much favored by leading business executives.

Westblaak 160. ☎ 010/414-8692. Main courses 25€–28€ (\$31–\$35); fixed-price menu 45€ (\$56). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6–9:30pm. Tram: 4 or 5.

Café Rotterdam ★★ DUTCH As I savored the delicious flavors of skin-fried cod with truffle purée and spinach, a dramatic sunset lit up the low-lying barges gliding down the Nieuwe Maas outside. You might not be so lucky, but this café/restaurant—a jewel in Rotterdam's crown where royalty, dockworkers, and visitors can feel equally at home—is a good choice at any time. The architecture of the old cruise-ship terminal and the potted olive trees give its four floors a special atmosphere. Chef Albert Kooy recommends the shellfish platter as a starter, and caramelized apple pie with calves' liver, bacon, and onion for a main course.

Wilhelminakade 699. ☎ 010/290-8442. www.caferotterdam.nl. Main courses 13€–19€ (\$16–\$23); fixed-price menu 21€ (\$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11am–1am; Sun 10am–midnight. Metro: Wilhelminaplein.

INEXPENSIVE

Grand Café-Restaurant Engels ★ INTERNATIONAL/LIGHT MEALS This marvelous restaurant is actually a complex of four, each dedicated to a different international cuisine: Don Quijote (Spanish), Tokaj (Hungarian), The

Beefeater (British), and Engels (British). Tokaj and Don Quijote have live music. There's an a la carte menu (full dinners, light meals, sandwiches, omelets, snacks, and so on) and a vegetarian menu.

Stationsplein 45 (next to Centraal Station, in the Groothandelsgebouw). ☎ 010/411-9550. www.engels.nl. Main courses 16€–20€ (\$20–\$24); fixed-price menus and buffet 19€–24€ (\$23–\$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–1am. Metro: Centraal Station.

SHOPPING

You can shop till you drop in Rotterdam. On Lijnbaan, Holland's first car-free shopping promenade, which recently has been given a face-lift, you'll find dozens of small fashion boutiques. If you're pressed for time, the nearby **De Bijenkorf** department store, Coolsingel 105 (☎ 010/282-3700), sells a variety of designer labels under one roof. On one side, it opens onto the new Beurstraverse shopping mall, which runs below street level and has a mix of chain stores and small stores.

On the trendy south bank, the **Entrepot**, a 19th-century bonded warehouse, enjoys a new lease on life. In a place that defines the idea of fun shopping, you find distinct colonial overtones at **Konmar**, Vijf Werelddelen 33 (☎ 010/280-9888), the city's largest supermarket. There's also a colonnade of diverse restaurants overlooking a small marina and facing a row of exquisite interior design stores.

Back in the city center, a huge **general market** brings alive the Binnenrotte area all day on Tuesday and Saturday. Part of the market (still 200 stalls!) also opens from May to December on Sunday afternoon. Lovers of antiques, bric-a-brac, and old books should make their way to the **Sunday market** on Schiedamsdijk.

ROTTERDAM AFTER DARK

The world-class **Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra** plays at **De Doelen** concert hall, at Kruisstraat 2 (☎ 010/217-1717). If you want to see a global pop star, take a ride to **Ahoy** ⚓, Zuiderparkweg 20 (☎ 0900/235-2469). Megastars perform here to capacity audiences of 10,000.

You can try your luck at **Holland Casino Rotterdam**, Plaza Complex, Weena 624 (☎ 010/206-8206; Metro: Centraal Station). There's roulette, blackjack, punto banco, fruit machines, and more. The dress code here is "correct" (collar and tie for men), and the minimum age is 18. You need your passport to get in. The casino is open daily (except May 4, Dec 31) from 1:30pm to 3am. Admission is 4€ (\$5).

After nightfall a multitude of establishments in Rotterdam come alive with guests eager to eat, drink, and be merry. Along with drinking and dancing, late-night dining is on the menu in the 50m-long (164-ft.) tunnel called De Blauwe Vis, Weena Zuid 33 (☎ 010/213-4243). The close-by **Baja Beach Club Discotheque**, Karel Doormanstraat 12 (☎ 010/213-0534), guarantees a sunny ambience even when it rains, and the tanned, muscular bar staff effortlessly slip into the role of entertainers. A younger crowd frequents **Nighttown**, West-Kruiskade 26 (☎ 010/436-1210), for dancing and lounging and for hard-core and mellow music, both live and recorded.

If it can be played on a piano, you might hear it at **Crazy Pianos**, Maasboulevard 300 (☎ 010/280-0238), whose gaudy neon signs attract revelers under the ramp leading up Willemsbrug. The formula, which includes eating, drinking, and dancing, appeals to patrons of all ages.

Jazz cats should make their way to **Dizzy** ⚓, 's Gravendijkwal 127 (☎ 010/477-3014; www.dizzy.nl), an informal, long-established cafe where live music is

Windmills of Kinderdijk ★

The sight of windmill sails spinning in the breeze stirs the soul of a true Hollander. Kinderdijk, a tiny community between Rotterdam and Dordrecht, on the south bank of the Lek River, has 19 water-pumping windmills; that means 76 mill sails, each with a 14-yard span, all revolving on a summer day. It's a spectacular sight, and one important enough for Kinderdijk to have been placed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

By regulating the level of water, Kinderdijk's windmills guarded the fertile polders (reclaimed land) of the Alblasserwaard, which were constantly at risk of returning to the water. The Windmill Exposition Center at Kinderdijk treats its subjects as more than just pretty faces and gives a detailed explanation of windmills' technical characteristics and the part they played in the intricate system of water control. It also looks at the people and the culture that developed on the polders.

The mills are in operation on Saturday afternoons in July and August from 2:30 to 5:30pm; the visitors' mill is open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 9:30am to 5:30pm. To get here from Rotterdam, take the train from Centraal station to Lombardijen station; bus no. 154 goes from there to Kinderdijk. If you're driving, take N210 east to Krimpen aan de Lek, from where a ferry crosses over to Kinderdijk.

the name of the game. **Maastheater**, Boompjes 751 (© 010/413-4091), a waterside disco where DJs dictate the music styles, is popular with students. Some nights are hosted by Rotterdam's party organizer, Ted Langenbach, who also is associated with the ultra-cool **Now and Wow Club**, Lloydstraat 30 (© 010/476-2452).

Though Amsterdam's gay population is many times larger, Rotterdam has its homosexual haunts. One place where the gay scene parties the nights away is the **Gay Palace**, Schiedamsesingel 139 (© 010/414-1486).

3 Delft ★★

10km (6 miles) SE of The Hague; 14km (9 miles) NW of Rotterdam; 35km (22 miles) W of Gouda; 30km (19 miles) SW of Leiden

Delft is perhaps the prettiest little town in all of Holland. The facades of the Renaissance and Gothic houses here reflect age-old beauty, and a sense of tranquillity pervades the air. Indeed, it's easy to understand why Vermeer chose to spend most of his life surrounded by Delft's gentle beauty. It remains quiet, with flower boxes and linden trees bending over its gracious canals.

A good part of Holland's history is preserved in the tombs of Delft. William the Silent was assassinated in the Prinsenhof and now rests in a magnificent tomb in the Nieuwe Kerk; and every member of the House of Orange-Nassau since King Willem I has been brought here for burial as well. Delft is also the final resting place of someone named Karl Naudorff, who is suspected of being Louis XVII, dauphin of France. And two of Holland's greatest naval figures, admirals Tromp and Heyn, are entombed in the Oude Kerk.

Of course, to many visitors, Delft means just one thing—the distinctive blue-and-white earthenware still produced by the meticulous methods of old. Every piece of true Delftware is hand-painted by skilled craftspeople.

GETTING THERE There's frequent **train** service from Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and **tram** service from The Hague to Delft (it's a 3-zone trip by tram, so it costs 4 strips on a *strippenkaart*, or the equivalent of about 1.70€//\$2.15). By **car**, the town is just off A13/E19, the expressway from The Hague to Rotterdam.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Tourist Information Delft**, Hippolytusbuurt 4, 2611 HN Delft (☎ **015/215-4051**; www.delft.nl), is in the center of town. The office is open Sunday and Monday from 10am to 4pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, and Saturday from 9am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

It's only by strolling the streets that you can absorb Delft's special ambience. Just walking around is a pleasure. Around every corner and down every street, you step into a scene that might have been composed for the canvas of a great artist. Supplement your walks with a leisurely tour of the canals via the numerous water taxis that operate during the summer. The town's main square, the Markt, is a zoo on market day (Thurs), but on quieter days you get space to see how picturesque it is.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Koninklijke Porceleynse Fles ★ The Delft Blue stamped with the “De Porceleynse Fles” stamp you came to town to find is made here by a traditional and painstaking method. Here you can watch the hand-painting of each item and see an audiovisual show that explains the entire process. Delft potters have been at it since they met the competition of Chinese porcelain imported by the East India Company. And if you thought the trademark blue-and-white colors were the only Delft, here is where you see exquisite multicolored patterns. Your purchases can be packed carefully and shipped home directly from this factory.

Rotterdamseweg 196. ☎ 015/251-2030. www.royaldelft.com Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, free for children under 13. Apr–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 9:30am–4pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Sat 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25–Jan 1. Bus: 63, 121, or 129 to Jaffalaan.

Museum Lambert van Meerten You'll find the most fascinating collection of Delft earthenware, including lovely tiles, in this industrialist's mansion from 1893.

Oude Delft 199 (north of Markt, near Prinsenhof). ☎ 015/260-2358. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 12–16, free for children under 12. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Museum Paul Tétar van Elven ★ *Finds* The 19th-century artist van Elven (1823–96) lived and worked here, and the furnishings are just as he left them. The 17th-century-style studio looks like it's ready for the artist to enter and pick up his brushes. Van Elven was a noted copyist, and a lot of his reproductions hang on the walls. Except for a lousy Vermeer on the second floor, most of them are excellent, especially the Rembrandts and the Paulus Potter on the first floor. The furniture and porcelain collections are interesting, too. Watch your step on the exceptionally narrow and steep stairs going up to the attic exhibition room.

Koornmarkt 67 (just south of the Markt). ☎ 015/212-4206. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, free for children under 13. Mid-Apr to Oct Tues–Sun 1–5pm.

Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof ★ The Prinsenhof (Prince's Court), on the banks of Delft's oldest canal, Oude Delft, dates from the late 1400s and was originally a convent. This is where William I of Orange (William the Silent) lived from 1572 and had his headquarters in the years when he helped found the Dutch Republic, and where an assassin's bullets ended his life in 1584 (you can still see the bullet holes in the stairwell). The interior William would have known has been re-created, and a museum preserves the record of Dutch struggles to throw off the yoke of Spanish occupation between 1568 and 1648. There are impressive tapestries, silverware, pottery, and paintings as well.

This building also houses the **Nusantara Ethnographical Museum**, a stunning collection of ethnographical objects from Indonesia. Because Indonesia was a Dutch colony, Dutch academics have been specialists in this area for many years. The collection includes such beautiful objects as *wayang* shadow puppets and ceremonial attributes. The benches in the museum gardens are a nice place for a picnic lunch.

Sint-Agathaplein 1 (north of Markt, near Oude Kerk). ☎ 015/260-2358. www.prinsenhof-delft.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors and children 12–16, free for children under 12. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

HISTORIC CHURCHES

Two church spires grace the Delft skyline. One belongs to the **Nieuwe Kerk (New Church)** ★★, Markt (☎ 015/212-3025), which isn't all that new, since it was begun in 1383 and finally completed in 1510. Inside is the magnificent tomb of William the Silent, surrounded by 22 columns and decorated with figures representing Liberty, Justice, Valor, and Religion. The royal dead of the House of Oranje-Nassau lie in a crypt beneath the remains of the founder of their line. There's a marvelous panoramic view of the town from the 109m-high (357-ft.) church tower, the second tallest in the country.

The other, slightly leaning spire is attached to the **Oude Kerk (Old Church)** ★, at Heilige Geestkerkhof, founded around 1200. The tower is embellished with four corner turrets and is noted for its 27 stained-glass windows by Joep Nicolas. Inside are the tombs of the artist Jan Vermeer and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, the inventor of the microscope.

Both churches are open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 11am to 4pm and Saturday from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 5 to 14, and free for children under 5. Tickets are valid in both churches. Separate admission to the Nieuwe Kerk tower is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 5 to 14, and free for children under 5.

WHERE TO DINE

Spijshuis de Dis ★★ DUTCH Some of the best Dutch cooking in the country is dished up at this atmospheric restaurant east of the market. Look for traditional plates presented in modern variations. These include *Bakke pot*—a stew made from three kinds of meat (beef, chicken, and rabbit) in beer sauce, served in the pan; VOC mussels (named after the Dutch initials for the East India Company), prepared with garlic and spices such as ginger and curry; and asparagus in season (May–June). Steaks and lamb filet are other specialties. If you're feeling especially decadent, opt for a luscious dessert of vanilla ice cream with hot cherries, whipped cream, and cherry brandy.

Beestenmarkt 36 (2 blocks from the Markt). ☎ 015/213-1782. Main courses 14€–24€ (\$17–\$29); fixed-price menu 28€ (\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 5–9:30pm.

Stadsherberg De Mol TRADITIONAL DUTCH Food is served here in the medieval manner—in wooden bowls from which you eat with your hands. Prices are moderate and quantities copious, and there is fun, too, with live music and dancing.

Molslaan 104 (off Beestenmarkt). ☎ 015/212-1343. www.stadsherbergdemol.nl. Fixed-price menu 65€ (\$81). MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–11pm.

4 Gouda ★

40km (25 miles) S of Amsterdam; 25km (17 miles) NE of Rotterdam

You may know about its cheeses, but did you know that in Dutch its name is pronounced “*khow-dah*”? Try to come here on a Thursday morning (9am–noon) June to September.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station, via Leiden or Rotterdam, for Gouda. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A4/E19 and N207 south.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Gouda** is at Markt 27, 2801 JJ Gouda (☎ 0900/468-3288; fax 0182/583-210; www.vvvgouda.nl). The office is open April to May and September to October, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm; June to August, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, Sunday from noon to 5pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Try to come here on a Thursday morning between 9am and noon during July and August, when the lively Gouda (pronounced *Khow-dah*) **cheese market** 🍷 brings farmers driving farm wagons painted with bright designs and piled high with round cheeses in orange skins. Walk to the back of the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** to sample the Gouda cheese. This gray stone building, with stepped gables and red shutters, is reputed to be Holland's oldest Town Hall, and parts of its Gothic facade date from 1449.

Gouda is also noted for its **candles**. Every year from the middle of December, the Markt and the Town Hall are festively lit by candles.

Adrie Moerings Pottenbakkerij & Pijpenmakerij (Pottery & Pipemaker) 🍷

This interesting factory, just a 5-minute walk from Markt, presents fascinating demonstrations of the centuries-old craft of making beautiful pottery and clay pipes. You can watch the work going on and visit the pottery exposition and viewing room. This is a good place to pick up a uniquely Dutch memento of your visit.

Peperstraat 76. ☎ 0182/512-842. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat 11am–5pm.

Molen De Roode Leeuw (Red Lion Windmill) 🍷

This 1727 grain mill has been completely renovated and is now grinding away happily again. It's an impressive sight to see the mill at work—you can go out on the platform and watch the vanes swish past, while inside, the huge wooden cogwheels and beams work the millstones. There's also a shop where you can buy all kinds of flour ground in this mill.

Vest 65 (west of Markt). ☎ 0182/522-041. Admission 1.80€ (\$2.25) adults, 0.80€ (\$1) children. Thurs 9am–2pm; Sat 9am–4pm.

Museum De Moriaan During the 18th century, this was the home of a Gouda merchant who sold spices, tobacco, coffee, and tea. The interior of his shop remained unchanged over the centuries. Going through to the back rooms, you find a large and interesting pipe collection. Upstairs is Gouda's answer to Delftware: a beautiful display of *plateel*, a colorful local-made pottery.

Fun Fact Smoke It & See

Gouda has been the center of a thriving clay-pipe industry since the 17th century. One local style of pipe has a pattern on the bowl that's invisible when the pipe is new and only appears as the pipe is smoked and darkens. It's called a "mystery pipe," because the designs vary and the buyer never knows which one he'll get.



Westhaven 29. ☎ **0182/588-444**. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, free for those under 19. Ticket valid also in Museum Het Catharina Gasthuis. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Museum Het Catharina Gasthuis ★ This 1665 mansion, a former hospital near Sint Janskerk, houses Gouda's municipal museum. The jewel of its collections is a gold chalice that Countess Jacqueline of Bavaria presented to the Society of Archers in 1465. Its whereabouts were unknown for over a century before it was recovered in the Town Hall's attic and brought here. There are also colorful guild relics, antique furniture, and a terra-cotta plaque whose Latin inscription proclaims that the humanist Erasmus may have been born in Rotterdam but was conceived in Gouda. There's limited wheelchair access here.

Achter de Kerk 14 (at Oosthaven). ☎ **0182/588-440**. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, free for those under 19. Ticket also valid in Museum De Moriaan. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Sint-Janskerk (Church of St. John) ★★ This majestic 15th-century church is Holland's longest, and it holds some of Europe's most beautiful

stained-glass windows—64 in all, with a total of 2,412 panels. Some date back as far as the mid-1500s. To see the contrast between that stained-glass art of long ago and the work being carried out today, take a look at the most recent window, no. 28A, commemorating the World War II years in Holland.

Achter de Kerk 16 (south of Markt). ☎ **0182/512-684**. www.st-janskerkgouda.nl Admission 1.80€ (\$2.25) adults, 0.80€ (\$1) children under 12. Mar–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.

Waag (Weighing House) ★ *Kids* This monumental Weighing House, dating from 1668, is the pride of the town. The exhibition inside tells the story of cheese using ultramodern interactive audiovisual media. You'll get to know all about the manufacturing process, from grass through cow through milk to cheese, and have a chance to taste the finished product. The museum also explains the importance of Gouda as a center of Dutch dairy production.

Markt 35–36. ☎ **0182/529-996**. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors, 1€ (\$1.25) children under 12, free for children under 20kg (44 lb.). Apr–Oct Tues–Wed and Fri–Sun 1–5pm, Thurs 10am–5pm.

WHERE TO DINE

Mallemolen ★ CLASSIC FRENCH This excellent traditional restaurant is on what's known as "Rembrandt's corner." There's an ancient windmill on the same street. The restaurant has an Old Dutch look, though the cuisine is chiefly French. Dishes include tournedos with goose liver in a red-wine sauce.

Oosthaven 72. ☎ **0182/515-430**. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 18€–26€ (\$22–\$32); fixed-price menu 28€ (\$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm; Tues–Sun 5pm–midnight.

5 Leiden ★

36km (23 miles) SW of Amsterdam; 20km (12 miles) NE of The Hague

A visit to Leiden is in the nature of a pilgrimage (pardon the pun) for Americans, for it was here that the Pilgrim Fathers found refuge during the long years they waited to sail to a fresh beginning in the New World. Their sojourn was, however, but one small incident in Leiden's long history.

For the Dutch, the high point in Leiden's history is surely its display of heroism during the 5-month siege by the Spanish in 1574. Thousands of its residents perished, and the food situation became so intolerable that the mayor offered his own body to be used as nourishment for the starving population—talk about sacrifice! His offer was not accepted, but his memory is honored by a town park in which his statue stands.

The Dutch fleet finally rescued Leiden on October 3, after a dramatic advance over flooded fields as dikes were broken to open up a watery route to the beleaguered citizens. From that terrible siege came one of Holland's most beloved national dishes, *hutsot* (stew), so named for the bubbling kettle of stew left behind by fleeing Spaniards (the kettle is now ensconced in the Lakenhal Museum). If you should be in Leiden on October 3, you'll see the anniversary of the Spanish defeat observed when *haring en witte brood* (herring and loaves of white bread) are distributed just as they were in 1574.

Fun Fact Intelligence Test

As a reward for their heroic resistance during the 1574 Spanish siege, Prince William of Orange offered the people of Leiden a choice—a tax break or a university. They chose the university.



Leiden is also known in artistic circles as the birthplace of Rembrandt, Jan Steen, and Lucas van Leyden.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are frequent **trains** from Amsterdam Centraal Station. Leiden station is about a 10-minute walk northwest of the center. By **car**, take A4/E19.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Leiden**, Stationsweg 2D, 2312 AV Leiden (☎ **0900/222-2333**; fax 071/516-1227; www.leidenpromotie.nl), is just opposite the rail station. The office is open Monday from 11am to 5:30pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 4:30pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

With 14 museums, ranging from those for Antiquities, Natural History, and Anatomy, to those for Clay Pipes and Coins, this canal-side town seems perfectly justified in calling itself the *Museumstad* (Museum Town). A 13th-century

Walking in Fathers' Footsteps

To touch base with those courageous but humble Pilgrim Fathers, who lived in Leiden between 1609 and 1620, pick up the VVV brochure *A Pilgrimage Through Leiden: A Walk in the Footsteps of the Pilgrim Fathers*. The walk starts at the **Lodewijkskerk (Louis Church)**, which was used as a meeting-place by the cloth guild. William Bradford, who became the governor of New Plymouth, was a member of this guild.

The walk takes you past the **Groenehuis (Green House)** on William Brewstersteeg, where in an attached printing shop William Brewster's and Thomas Brewer's Pilgrim Press published the religious views that so angered King James and the Church of England. Plaques at the brick **Sint-Pieterskerk (St. Peter's Church)**, in a small square off Kloksteeg, memorialize the Pilgrims, who worshiped here and who lived in its shadow. Special Thanksgiving Day services are held each year in honor of the little band of refugees.

An almshouse, the **Jean Pesijnhofje**, now occupies the restored **Groene Port (Green Door)** house in Kloksteeg in which Rev. John Robinson and 21 Pilgrim families lived. Robinson was forced to stay behind because of illness and is buried in the church. The almshouse is named for Jean Pesijn, a Belgian Protestant who joined the Leiden community along with his wife Marie de la Noye, and whose son Philip would sail for North America in 1621, where his surname would in time contract to Delano.

On July 21, 1620, the 66 Pilgrims who were leaving boarded barges at Rapenburg Quay for the trip by canal from Leiden to the harbor of Delft, now Delfshaven in Rotterdam. From there they sailed on the *Speedwell* for England, where the *Mayflower* awaited them.

citadel, **De Burcht**, still stands on a mound of land in the town center between two branches of the Rhine, Oude and Nieuwe, providing a great view of the rooftops around.

THE TOP MUSEUMS

Leiden American Pilgrim Museum ★ This museum occupies a 16th-century house where one of the Pilgrim families may have lodged. Here you can study a variety of documents relating to the Pilgrims' 11 years of residence in Leiden. The museum also supplies a brochure that describes a self-guided walking tour of the city. The tour takes about an hour and leads you to the most important sites and monuments.

Beschuitsteeg 9. ☎ 071/512-2413. www.pilgrimhall.org/leidenmuseum. 2€ (\$2.50) adults, free for children under 6. Wed–Sat 1–5pm.

Naturalis (National Museum of Natural History) ★ If you follow the signposting around the modernistic hospital, behind it you'll find the old sanatorium, with the entrance, shop, and courtyard cafe of Naturalis. Then you take an aboveground walkway to the modern complex that opened in 1999. Well-designed displays, many with text in English and Dutch, trace and explain the development of the natural world, from its mineral treasures to ecosystems to

modern energy generation. Pickled specimens sit alongside stuffed and painted ones in the overview of plant and animal life. Kids love the simpler displays that let them look at topsoil through a periscope, and there's plenty of computer-based interactivity, too. Adults will enjoy anthropological displays comparing cultural views of nature: Ancient Egypt, the post-Renaissance western world, China, and Islam. Also intriguing is the Treasure Room on the fifth floor, open under guard from 1:30 to 4:30pm. Cases of precious stones include cut examples from the historical collection of William I, as well as examples of extinct animals and birds that fell into taxidermists' hands.

Darwinweg 2 (close to the rail station). ☎ 071/568-7600. www.naturalis.nl. Admission 9€ (\$11) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 4–18, free for children under 4. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm (summer school vacation daily 10am–6pm). Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities) ★★

No visit to Leiden is complete without seeing this museum, the most comprehensive of its kind in the Netherlands. It opened in 1818, and over the years it has acquired an impressive collection of Egyptian, Near East, Greek, and Roman artifacts. It's still a center for archaeological research. The first exhibit to catch your eye will be the magnificent Egyptian Temple of Taffeh from the 1st century A.D.—the museum's pride and glory. Greek and Roman sculpture are well represented, and there are some beautiful examples of Greek decorated ceramics. The top floor provides an overview of the archaeological finds in the Netherlands from prehistoric times to the early Middle Ages.

Rapenburg 28. ☎ 071/516-3163. www.rmo.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 5.50€ (\$6.90) children 6–18, free for children under 6. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays (also Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday) noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Oct 3, Dec 25.

Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal ★ This fine 17th-century guildhall is now home to Leiden's municipal museum. Its collection of paintings by Dutch artists of the 16th and 17th centuries includes works by Lucas van Leyden, Rembrandt, Steen, and Dou. Temporary modern art exhibitions are also organized regularly. The cloth merchants' guild (the original occupants of the building) is represented in historical exhibits; on the first floor you find the guild's splendid meeting hall.

Oude Singel 32. ☎ 071/516-5360. www.lakenhal.nl. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) seniors, free for children under 18. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Hortus Botanicus (Botanical Gardens) ★ The first tulip bulbs were brought to Holland in 1593 by the botanist Carolus Clusius, who planted them at the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden. Tulips soon became highly popular, especially among

Impressions

Within a year [the Pilgrims] had moved to the city of Leyden, of which a professor at the university had remarked that, as the Low Countries formed the best part of Europe, and Holland the finest of the United Provinces, so unquestionably the most beautiful city of Holland was Leyden.

—Kate Caffrey, *The Mayflower*, 1974

The immigrant Puritans displayed no religious tolerance, and in fact were some of the worst fanatics from Europe.

—John Chuckman, counterpunch.org (2002)

the aristocracy. The Hortus is near the Weddesteege, the small street where Rembrandt was born. This garden was established by students and professors of the University of Leiden in 1590. Researchers grew tropical trees and plants such as banana plants, ferns, and flesh-eating plants in greenhouses. Many of the old specimens are still thriving today. The original garden has been reconstructed in the Clusius Garden. There's also a minimalist Japanese-style garden.

Rapenburg 73. ☎ 071/527-7249. www.hortus.leidenuniv.nl. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children 4–12, free for children under 4. May–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct–Apr daily 10am–4pm. Closed Jan 1 and last week Dec.

Molen Museum (Windmill Museum) De Valk This small museum, in a monumental windmill nicknamed “The Falcon,” which sticks up like a sore thumb on Molenwerf in the middle of town, contains exhibits dedicated to various types of windmills. The focus is on the history of grinding grain and on the construction and workings of a corn mill.

Tweede Binnenvestgracht 1. ☎ 071/516-5353. www.home.wanadoo.nl/molenmuseum. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) seniors and children 6–15, free for children under 6. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays 1–5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel de Doelen This hotel is situated on one of the most beautiful and stately canals in Old Leiden. Part of the building was formerly a patrician's house, dating from 1435. The higher-priced rooms have open hearths; with their high ceilings, they're grand and comfortable. There's a wonderful painted ceiling fresco in the breakfast room.

Rapenburg 2, 2311 EV Leiden. ☎ 071/512-0527. Fax 071/512-8453. www.dedoelen.com. 16 units. 90€–105€ (\$113–\$131) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** In room: TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Annie's Verjaardag DUTCH/CONTINENTAL This lively restaurant at water level has vaulted cellars that are a favorite eating spot for both students and locals, who spill out onto the canal-side terrace in fine weather. When the canals are frozen, the view is enchanting, as skaters practice their turns. The dinner menu is simple but wholesome. During the day you can enjoy sandwiches or tapas.

Oude Rijn 1A. ☎ 071/512-6358. www.anniesverjaardag.nl. Main courses 8.75€–16€ (\$11–\$20). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 10am–1am; Fri–Sat 10am–2am.

Stadscafé van der Werff ★ CONTINENTAL A relaxed cafe-restaurant in a grand 1930s villa on the edge of the old town, this place is popular with the town's students and ordinary citizens alike. Even if you're not enjoying dinners

Fun Fact **Roots of a Love Affair**

In the spring of 1594, a highly respected yet perennially disgruntled botanist, Carolus Clusius, strode purposefully into the Hortus Botanicus, his research garden at the University of Leiden. He stopped beside a flower bed where an experiment begun the year before was coming to fruition, and cast a critical eye over splashes of color nodding their heads in the spring breeze. Clusius was no great admirer of humanity, but flowers were something else, so we may suppose that his dyspeptic disposition softened for a moment as he paused to admire the first tulips ever grown in Holland. A nation's love affair with a flower had begun.

An Excursion from Leiden

For a fun and educational excursion for the whole family, visit the unusual and fascinating archaeological theme park **Archeon**, Archeonlaan 1 (☎ 0172/447-744; www.archeon.nl), 12km (7½ miles) east of Leiden, outside Alphen aan de Rijn. It zips you through the history of the earth and humankind in a few hours. Your journey through time starts in the Expo building, where the story of the planet from its creation to the arrival of the human race is outlined. In the park itself you follow the trail of human development and join people in their everyday activities through the ages. You visit a Stone Age settlement populated by hunter-gatherers, and walk through a Roman village on your way to the amphitheater to watch a contest between gladiators. The last stop is a medieval town, where you watch artisans at work and are taken to the marketplace by a group of beggars and musicians to watch a farce unfold. The park is open mid-April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm (and on some Mon). Admission is 14€ (\$18) for adults, 12€ (\$15) for seniors, 10€ (\$13) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. Take the train to Alphen aan de Rijn, then bus no. 197. By car take N11 from Leiden towards Bodegraven.

like Indonesian satay or surf-and-turf *kalfsbiefstukje met gebakken gambas en een kreeftensaus* (beefsteak with fried prawns in a lobster sauce), you can while away your evening just having a drink and reading a paper. The cafe is open until 1am. Steenstraat 2. ☎ 071/513-0335. Main courses 8.95€–17€ (\$11–\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–10pm (cafe to 1am).

Friesland, Groningen & Drenthe

The country's northern provinces—Friesland, Groningen, and Drenthe—were home to the Netherlands' earliest settlers.

Almost another world, **Friesland** (pronounced *freess-luhnd*) has customs and a language all its own. Which is not to say the people are not Dutch; they are, but *first* they are Frisian. The windmill-speckled north is dotted by many of the province's 60 Iron Age-early medieval earth dwelling mounds called *terpen*, described in Roman times by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, built on land subject to frequent floods before dike-building began. In the southwest is a cluster of lakes, and in the southeast are woodlands and moorlands covered in heather. From its farms come world-renowned Frisian cattle. Four of Holland's five Wadden Islands belong to the province.

Although not as varied as Friesland, **Groningen** has its share of historical sites, among them its own numerous mound villages. The provincial capital,

the distinctly present-day city of Groningen, has the vibrant atmosphere of a university town, with architectural touches from a history that stretches back beyond the 12th century. The past is most eloquent, though, at places like the 15th-century Menkemaborg manor house in Uithuizen, the fortress town of Bourtange, a 15th-century monastery, and any number of picturesque old villages.

Lovely, sparsely populated **Drenthe** is a green, tranquil, rural haven. The Dutch call this land of deep forests, broad moors, small lakes, and picturesque villages *Mooi Drenthe* (Beautiful Drenthe). It's home to prehistoric *hunebedden* (giants' beds), huge megalith constructions that probably served early inhabitants as burial sites. Farming appears to provide a satisfactory living in Drenthe, to judge from the imposing size of farmhouses and barns. The church spires which elsewhere in the country stick up through the haze on the horizon are here

Independent Spirits

Frisian (*Frysk*) is spoken by two-thirds of the 600,000 inhabitants of Friesland, which is known to the natives as Fryslân. Road signs are in both Dutch and Frisian (I've put the Frisian name for localities in parentheses after the Dutch). These highly independent folk have their own flag, their own coat of arms, their own national anthem, and their own sense of belonging to a nation that long predated the Netherlands. They even have their own *nasjonale slokje* (national drink): potent, heart-warming Beerenburger herbal bitter. It's no surprise that other Netherlanders think of a visit to Friesland as going abroad in their own country.

Friesland, Groningen & Drenthe



mostly hidden behind oceans of trees. The province hosts two national parks, Dwingelderveld and Drents-Fries Forest.

1 Leeuwarden (Ljouwert)

168km (105 miles) NE of Amsterdam

Be sure to take time to look around Friesland's pleasant, unostentatious capital. But don't make a visit to Leeuwarden a substitute for getting out into the province's wide open spaces. It may be the provincial center, but the town's burghers themselves affirm wryly that visitors wash up on their doorstep only when it rains. An important trading town as far back as the 11th century, on a gulf of the Wadden Sea that has since been drained, Leeuwarden (pop. 85,000) is a university town and has a large student community.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Leeuwarden is the hub of Friesland's thin rail network and has good connections from around the country. **Trains** arrive hourly from Amsterdam. The rail and bus stations are both on Stationsplein, south of the center. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A1/E231 southeast to the Muiderberg intersection, then A6 north. Continue on a brief segment on A7/E22 east to Heerenveen, then drive north on N32 and A32. An alternative route is A7/E22 north across the Afsluitdijk, then north and east on N31 and A31.

Moments **Tale From the Crypt**

Care for a gruesome moment? The crypt of the village church in Wiuwert, 12km (7½ miles) southwest of Leeuwarden, evidently has the power to prevent corpses from decomposing. Eleven naturally mummified bodies dating from the early 17th century can be seen. The church is open April to September, Monday to Friday from 10 to 11:30am and 1 to 4:30pm; admission is 1.50€ (\$1.90).

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Leeuwarden**, Sophialaan 4, Leeuwarden (☎ 0900/202-4060; fax 058/234-7551; www.vvvleeuwarden.nl), is 2 blocks north of the rail station. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Pick up here a *Passpoort voor Fryslân* (Friesland Passport), which affords users discounted admissions and special offers around the province.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Fries Museum ★ Friesland's "national" museum started in 1881 in the Eysinga House, the 18th-century home of a local nobleman, which has since been extended several times. The ground-floor rooms have been restored to their appearance when Mr. Eysinga lived here with his family. On the second floor is a series of stylized 19th-century period rooms and folk costumes. The third floor holds a collection of colorfully painted traditional Hindeloopen furniture. There's also a gallery of paintings that include Rembrandt's portrait of his wife, Saskia, the mayor's daughter—they were married in 1634 in the nearby village of Sint-Anna Parochie (St. Anne). Finally, don't miss the exhibit on the World War I spy Mata Hari (see "Mata Hari," below), the highlight of which is a period re-creation of a Parisian salon.

A subterranean tunnel leads to a museum annex in the Renaissance **Kanselarij (Chancellery)** from 1571, the seat of the Frisian High Court of Justice during the reign of King Philip II of Spain (1555–81). Here you can trace the history of the Frisians by way of prehistoric artifacts dating back to the Ice Age, and by medieval and Renaissance treasures, and peruse a collection of modern Frisian art. A statue of Emperor Charles V adorns the roof. In the Kanselarij attic is the moving **Verzetmuseum Friesland/Frisian Resistance Museum** (☎ 058/213-2271; same admission and hours). A collection of photos, personal mementos, and other items documents the bravery of the Frisian Resistance in World War II and the daily rigors of life under Nazi occupation.

Turfmarkt 11 (east of the Stadhuis, across the canal). ☎ 058/255-5500. www.friesmuseum.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children 13–18, free for children under 13. Free admission for all on Wed. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Bus 2, 3, or 8 to Oosterkade.

Prinsessehof Leeuwarden/Nationaal Keramiekmuseum Het (Dutch Ceramics Museum) In the 18th century, this elegant neoclassical building in the town center was the home of Princess Maria van Hessen-Kassel, the mother of William IV and widow of *Stadhouder* Jan Willem Friso. One of the rooms is preserved just as it was in her time. The museum holds what's said to be the world's largest collection of tiles, among them Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Persian work, and a marvelous collection of Chinese porcelain and ceramics.

Grote Kerkstraat 11 (3 blocks northwest of the Stadhuis). ☎ 058/294-8958. www.prinsessehof.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 13–18, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

MORE PLACES OF INTEREST

A bronze plaque placed by the DeWitt Historical Society of Ithaca, New York State, adorns Friesland's **Provinciehuis (Provincial House)**, Tweebaksmarkt 52. The house dates from 1570 with a 1784 facade and is a few blocks south of the Fries Museum. The plaque was presented in 1909 to the people of Leeuwarden in gratitude for their having been the first to vote for recognition of the fledgling United States in 1782. (Holland was the first country to extend recognition to the U.S.) There's a letter written by John Adams in 1783 expressing his personal thanks. Another document of interest to Americans relates to one Petrus Stuijfsandt, the same Peter Stuyvesant who had such an important role in America's beginnings, and who was born in Friesland. The Provinciehuis is open at variable times; inquire at the VVV office. Admission is free.

Just west of here, beside the canal at Korfmakerspijp, is a statue of **Mata Hari**.

WHERE TO STAY

Bilderberg Oranje Hotel You'd never suspect that this beautiful hotel is actually over a century old, so successful has its modernization been. It's within an easy walk of everything you want to see in Leeuwarden. The management and the staff go out of their way to make you feel at home. The guest rooms are quite luxurious. Lots of locals come to the bright, moderately priced restaurant and cozy bar. There's also a sophisticated French restaurant, **l'Orangerie**.

Stationsweg 4 (facing the rail station), 8911 AG Leeuwarden. ☎ **800/641-0300** in the U.S. and Canada, or 058/212-6241. Fax 058/212-1441. www.bilderbergoranjehotel.nl 78 units. 120€ (\$150) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French); bar; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies.

Hotel de Pauw This old-fashioned budget hotel features Old Dutch lobby furnishings and a wood-paneled bar. Its basic rooms come with and without private showers (all toilets are down the hall). All the rooms are quite adequate, but of varying standards.

Stationsweg 10 (across the street from the rail station), 8911 AH Leeuwarden. ☎ **058/212-3651**. Fax 058/216-0793. 30 units, none with private bathroom. 45€–75€ (\$56–\$94) double. MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar. *In room:* No phone.

A LUXURY CHATEAU NEARBY

Hotel Lauswolt ★★ On the edge of the typically Frisian village of Beetsterzwaag (Beetstersweach), this is a gracious three-story château. Green lawns and huge shady trees surround the place. The grounds contain any number of beautiful forest walks. The decor throughout the château, in both public rooms

Mata Hari

The most famous figure in Leeuwarden's history was born here in 1876 as Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, but gained notoriety as Mata Hari. Margaretha grew up in a wealthy family, and at the age of 19 married an army officer and left for the Dutch East Indies. She returned to Holland in 1902.

With her marriage falling apart, Margaretha left for Paris, where she performed as an Asian dancer. There she adopted the name "Mata Hari"—meaning "eye of the day" or "sun" in Malaysian. Her nude dancing became a sensation. During World War I, she had affairs with high-ranking Allied officers, and allegedly passed pillow-talk military secrets to the Germans. In any case, her naiveté and yarn-spinning led to her downfall. She was executed by the French in 1917.

Tips Of Blades & Ice

Ice-skating stirs the blood of a true Frisian, and no event stirs it more than the **Elfstedentocht (Eleven Cities Tour)**, a tough ice-skating hyper-marathon that follows the canals on a 210km (130-mile) loop through 11 medieval Frisian towns, beginning in Bolsward. The first race was run in 1909, and it has been run only 13 times since, when the canals freeze solidly enough. When it was last run, in 1997, it drew 16,000 skaters and a half million onlookers. In 1985, skater Evert van Benthem clocked up a record time for the tour, getting around in 6 hours and 47 minutes.

and guest rooms, is one of quiet elegance. The high level of service, swimming pool, and sauna add to the attractions of this lovely place. The restaurant, where you dine by candlelight in a gracious paneled dining room overlooking a garden, enjoys a top reputation throughout this part of Holland and is a member of the prestigious Alliance Gastronomique Néerlandaise.

Van Harinxmaweg 10, 9244 CJ Beetsterzwaag, 45km (28 miles) southeast of Leeuwarden. ☎ **051/238-1245**. Fax 051/238-1496. 58 units. 175€ (\$219) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Take N31 from Leeuwarden to Drachten, then join Expwy. A7, heading towards Heerenveen, and take the Beetsterzwaag exit. Pass through the center of Beetsterzwaag, and look for the hotel on its outskirts, on the right. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); heated indoor pool; sauna, golf course; tennis courts. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Herberg de Waag ★ **FRISIAN/INTERNATIONAL** In the atmospheric 16th-century Weigh House, on a canalside packed with inexpensive eateries, this bistro serves local specialties and international fare. In summer you can be served on a terrace overlooking the canal that runs along the town's main shopping street.

Nieuwestad 148B (at Waagplein). ☎ **058/213-7250**. Main courses 9.50€–18€ (\$12–\$22). MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–9:30pm.

FRANEKER (FRJENTSJER)

17km (11 miles) W of Leeuwarden

Once an important Frisian cultural and trading center, Franeker is today an enchanting small town. A young Peter Stuyvesant, who would later be governor of the Dutch New Netherland (New York State) colony from 1646 to 1664, studied at the now closed university here. In the center of town, stop to admire the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, from 1591, a fine example of Northern Dutch renaissance architecture.

Eise Eisinga Planetarium ★ Franeker's highlight is in the simple, restored period house of wool comber Eise Eisinga. Over a period of 7 years between 1774 and 1781, he spent his leisure hours building a scale representation of the solar system on his ceiling. An amateur astronomer, he wanted to prove to fearful neighbors that the planetary conjunction of May 8, 1774 did not mean that the end of the world was nigh. Guides are on hand to explain the mechanism, which still functions perfectly and was accurate for the knowledge of that time, before the discovery of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

Eise Eisingastraat 3. ☎ **0517/393-070**. www.planetarium-friesland.nl. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40) adults, 2.75€ (\$3.45) children 4–13, free for children under 4. Apr–Oct Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun–Mon 1–5pm; Nov–Mar Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm.

2 The Eastern IJsselmeer Shore

From the long barrier of the Afsluitdijk, the east shore of Holland's great lake curves south through a string of historic towns that shelter behind the coastal dike. To complete the "Golden Circle" of the IJsselmeer, see also "The Western IJsselmeer Shore," in chapter 12, and "Lelystad & the Noordoostpolder," in chapter 15.

MAKKUM

30km (19 miles) W of Leeuwarden; 17km (11 miles) SW of Franeker

A small harbor town, 8km (5 miles) south of the Afsluitdijk, Makkum has been home to tile makers and ceramics craftspeople since the 1500s.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By public transportation, take the hourly local **train** from Leeuwarden to Sneek, then **bus no. 98** from outside the station.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Makkum**, Pruikmakershoek 2, 8754 ET Makkum (☎ **0900/540-0001**; fax 0515/232-920; www.friesekust.nl), is in the old Weigh House in the town center.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Connoisseur, polychrome Makkumware ceramics—fully the equal of (some would say superior to) Delft blue from Koninklijke Porcelyne Fles—are produced at the workshop of **Koninklijke Tichelaars Makkumer Aardewerk- en Tegelfabriek**, Turfmarkt 63 (☎ **0515/231-341**), founded in 1594 and now in its 10th generation of family management. Guides take you through the entire production process, in which craftspeople employ the same procedures as in the 17th century, and you can watch the exquisite designs being painted by hand. Tichelaar's is sold in specialized stores all over the country. At the salesroom you can buy anything from a simple tile to a larger piece with an elaborate design.

In the **Waag (Weigh House)**, from 1698, is the **Fries Aardewerkmuseum (Frisian Earthenware Museum)**, Pruikmakershoek 2 (☎ **0515/231-422**). Its five rooms are filled with examples of Makkum, majolica, and earthenware tiles from the 17th to the 19th century. The building itself, a square, towerlike structure, built of brick and topped with an elegant steeple, was used for weighing cheese and butter. The ground floor has quaint, oval windows; the upper floors have shuttered windows. The museum is open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 1 to 4pm. This building also houses the VVV office (see above).

Continuing south from Makkum to **Workum (Warkum)**, take in the intriguing modern art of beloved local artist Jopie Huisman (1922–2000). The **Jopie Huisman Museum**, Noard 6 (☎ **0515/543-131**; www.jopiehuismanmuseum.nl), is open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday and holidays from 1 to 5pm; March and November, daily from 1

Impressions

To be in nature with the cold and the silence and the elegant movement of skates, it's like flying. You feel free.

—Dutch ice-skating champion Riva Visser, *National Geographic*,
January 1998

to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 4 to 12, and free for children under 4.

HINDELOOPEN (HYLPEN)

39km (24 miles) SW of Leeuwarden; 20km (12 miles) S of Makkum

Like something out of a Dutch fairy tale, this tiny 13th-century Hanseatic League trading port on the IJsselmeer is filled with charming houses and crisscrossed by small canals with wooden bridges. Talented craftspeople from the village have for centuries adorned their homes, furniture, built-in cupboard beds, and even wooden coat hangers with the vivid colors and intricately entwined vines and flowers that we associate with the Pennsylvania Dutch in America. It's thought the designs were originally brought from Scandinavia by Hindeloopen sailors who sailed the North Sea in the days when the IJsselmeer was the Zuiderzee.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Hourly **trains** go from Stavoren and Leeuwarden to Hindeloopen station, just outside the village. **Cars** are not allowed in many of the village's narrow streets.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Hindeloopen**, Nieuwstad 26, 8713 JL Hindeloopen (☎ 0900/540-0001; www.friesekust.nl), is in the village center.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

A good place to view Hindeloopen's decorative designs is the **Hidde Nijland Museum Hindeloopen**, Dijkweg 1 (☎ 0514/521-420), across from the village's 17th-century **Grote Kerk (Great Church)**, on the northwest edge of town. Each room presents a varied collection of period furniture and local costumes. There's a splendid selection of Dutch tiles, and every wooden surface seems covered in bright designs. The museum is open March to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday and holidays from 1:30 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 1.80€ (\$2.25) for children ages 6 to 16.

Alternatively, you could visit one of the village workshops and see for yourself how the furniture is decorated. **Het Roosje**, Nieuwstad 19 and 44 (☎ 0514/521-251), is a workshop established in 1894 that also specializes in wood carving.

STAVOREN (STARUM)

46km (29 miles) SW of Leeuwarden; 7km (4½ miles) SW of Hindeloopen

Founded in 500 B.C. and once a capital of the ancient Frisian kings, then a medieval mercantile center and member of the powerful Hanseatic League,

A Heritage Trail

The engaging **Aldfaers Erf (Forefathers' Heritage) Route** passes through a trail of restored antique buildings—a grocer's, schoolhouse, bakery (that serves Frisian pastries), church, bird museum, farm, and more—in the villages of Exmorra, Allingawier, Ferwoude, and Piaam, which lie in the triangle formed by Makkum, Workum, and Bolsward. The route is clearly signposted on minor roads and through villages, and the buildings are open May to September, daily from 10am to 5pm. A map and a ticket for all sights cost 16€ (\$20) for adults and 8€ (\$10) for children ages 5 to 14. You can purchase the map and ticket from any of the sights and from **Stichting Aldfaers Erf**, Kanaalweg 4, Allingawier (☎ 0515/231-631; www.aldfaerserf.nl), open April to October, daily from 10am to 5pm.

Fun Fact Clogged Up

Friesland is great country for clog-fanciers. Farmers, country folk, and even some townspeople wear the genuine—as distinct from the tourist—version of these traditional shoes, made from poplar wood and leather. They do so not as an affectation but as plain, functional footwear.

Stavoren has shriveled considerably from those heady days. Yet it remains a handsome small harbor town, for fishing boats and pleasure craft. Small boats and antique Frisian *skûtsje* sailing vessels shuttle through the town's Johan Friso Canal between the IJsselmeer and the Frisian lakes.

An hourly **train** from Leeuwarden stops in end-of-the-line Stavoren. In summer months, you can make a 90-minute trip by passenger-and-bike ferry, operated by **Rederij V&O** (☎ 0228/326-006; www.veerboot.info), from Enkhuizen (see “The Western IJsselmeer Shore,” in chapter 12) on the IJsselmeer's western shore, from where there are train connections with Amsterdam. Visitor information is available from **VVV Stavoren**, Stationsweg 7, 8715 ES Stavoren (☎ 0900/540-0001; www.friesekust.nl).

3 Sneek ★

20km (12 miles) SW of Leeuwarden; 26km (16 miles) NE of Stavoren

The placid inland waterways—lakes, canals, and rivers—around Sneek (pronounced *snayk*, like “snake”) have made this Friesland's most important sailing center, with a marina and sailing schools in the bustling town (pop. 27,000).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Hourly **trains** go from Leeuwarden to Sneek. By **car** from Leeuwarden, take A32 south to junction 15, then go west on N354.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Sneek**, Marktstraat 18, 8601 CV Sneek (☎ 0515/414-096; fax 0514/423-703; www.vvvsneek.nl), is in the town center.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

In the old, canal-ringed center of town, note the rococo facade on the 16th-century **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** on Marktstraat, which is close to the landmark **Martinikerk (St Martin's Church)**, from the same century.

Interested in ships and the sea? Spare some time for the **Fries Scheepvaartmuseum en Sneker Oudheidkamer (Frisian Maritime Museum and Sneek Antiques Gallery)**, Kleinzand 14 (☎ 0515/414-057; www.friesscheepvaartmuseum.nl), in a canal-side house from 1844 east of Marktstraat. The first part focuses on Friesland's maritime traditions on the sea, lakes, and inland waterways. Models of old sailing ships, marine paintings, reconstructed boat interiors, and more allow you to just about smell the salt tang of the sea. Antique local silver, paintings, and re-created house interiors are in the second part. The museum is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for seniors and children ages 6 to 12.

Astride the entrance to the port in the south of the old town rise the twin octagonal turrets of the brick Renaissance **Waterpoort**, a gate from 1613 and the only remains of the town's defense walls, which were razed in the 18th century.

Sailing Days

During 2 weeks in July and August, Friesland falls under the spell of the *Skûtsjesilen* (Skûtsje Sailing) races between traditional flat-bottomed sailing barges. These boats, 20m (65 ft.) long, once used for transporting goods on the Zuiderzee, race on the lakes around Sneek, and on the IJsselmeer from Stavoren. More than a dozen boats compete, dating from 1910 to 1930. They don't look too maneuverable, but the crews have an arsenal of tricks designed to outwit their rivals. **VVV IJsselmeergebied Friesland** (☎ 0900/540-0001) can provide information on dates and places, and you can also visit the race organizers at www.skutsjesilen.nl.

THE FRIESE MEREN (FRISIAN LAKES) 🌊

The constellation of lakes south of Sneek—Pikmeer, Sneekermeer, Heegermeer, Slotermeer, and Tjeukemeer—is the main tourism region in Friesland. In summer you can rent powerboats, sailboats, rowboats, and canoes from a multitude of places and head out onto the water to join the fleets cruising there. The lakes are connected by rivers and canals so you can easily sail between them.

Among the most attractive places around is **Sloten (Sleat)**, beautifully sited on a tree-fringed canal south of the Slotermeer. The village's narrow streets lined by 17th-century houses make for a pleasant stroll. Just west of here is the forested **Gaasterland** district, which contains a hamlet called Nieuw Amerika and is good for hiking.

Southeast of the lakes, at **Wolvega (Wolvegea)**, you can snap a picture of the statue of Peter Stuyvesant, the governor of New Netherland (New York State), who was born in 1592 at the hamlet of Scherpenzeel (Skerpenseel), 10km (6 miles) west.

4 The Waddenzee Coast

Traveling north through Friesland along the Waddenzee coast, you won't actually see much of the sea unless you climb onto the sea dike from time to time for a better view. The sea is an important European staging area on bird migration routes, a stopover zone where waterfowl as well as shore and wading birds rest and feed.

HARLINGEN (HARNS)

24km (15 miles) W of Leeuwarden

This bustling seaport and former whaling center (pop. 16,000), founded in the 9th century, hunkers down behind a dike on the Wadden Sea. Fishing boats, cargo ships, and ferries to the offshore Wadden Islands shuttle in and out of the busy harbor, and canal boats and recreational craft ply the Van Harinxma Canal that leads east to Leeuwarden.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Frequent **trains** go from Leeuwarden to Harlingen and connect with ferries to Vlieland and Terschelling (see "The Wadden Islands," below); shuttle buses operate between the rail station and the ferry dock. By **car** from Leeuwarden, take N383 and N31 west.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Harlingen**, Voorstraat 34, 8861 BL Harlingen (☎ 0900/540-0001; fax 0517/415-176; www.friesekust.nl), is on the main shopping street in the center.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Harlingen is a maze of canals filled with fishing boats and recreational craft, and lined with gabled 16th- to 18th-century houses and warehouses in its carefully preserved old center. Close to the ferry dock is one of several statues around Holland that represent the legend of the boy who saved the community from a calamity by sticking his finger in a leaking dike.

Moderately interesting seafaring and whaling exhibits, ship models, seascape paintings, antiques, porcelain, and silver are all to be seen in the **Gemeentemuseum Het Hannemahuis**, Voorstraat 56 (☎ 0517/413-658), in the 18th-century Hannemahuis. The municipal museum is open April to June and mid-September to mid-November, Tuesday to Saturday from 1:30 to 5pm; July to mid-September, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday from 1:30 to 5pm. Admission is 1.55€ (\$1.95) for adults, and 1.10€ (\$1.40) for children ages 5 to 12.

Since 1973, craftspeople have produced and painted by hand traditional-style Frisian pottery and tiles at the **Harlinger Aardewerk en Tegelfabriek**, Voorstraat 84 (☎ 0517/415-362), open during shop hours through the year. Should you need to choose between a visit to this workshop or to Tichelaar's in Makkum (see above), Tichelaar's produces the more prestigious wares but Harlingen's are perhaps more individual.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hotel Anna Casparii This charming little canal-house hotel on the edge of the yacht harbor has comfortable and attractive guest rooms. Ask for one with a view of the boat dock. The moderately priced restaurant specializes in seafood fresh off the boats that sail into the town harbor.

Noorderhaven 67–71 (4 blocks east of the island ferry terminal), 8861 AL Harlingen. ☎ 0517/412-065. Fax 0517/414-540. 15 units, 11 with bathroom. 79€ (\$98) double without bathroom; 95€ (\$119) double with bathroom. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood/Dutch); lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar.

DOKKUM

19km (12 miles) NE of Leeuwarden; 42km (26 miles) NE of Harlingen

The northernmost terminus of the Eleven Cities Tours (see box "Of Blades & Ice," earlier), Dokkum is a pleasant small town, built on two *terpen* (earthen mounds). Remnants of its 16th-century walls and moat date from a period when the town was a seaport. St. Boniface, the English monk Wynfryth, was murdered here in 754 while on a mission to convert the pagan Frisians. That's about it history-wise until in 1618 Dokkum was made headquarters of the Friesland Admiralty.

In the restored former Admiralty building from 1618, the **Museum Het Admiraliteitshuis** (☎ 0519/293-134) exhibits a mixed bag of antiquities, antiques, and Frisian folk art and traditional costumes. The museum is open April to September, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm; October to March,

Moments Frisian High

In the Fochteloërveen fenlands, near Appelscha (Appelskea) in southeast Friesland, you can climb the highest natural elevation in the entire province. Unless you have a bad case of vertigo, you won't get dizzy up there—it's just 26.6m (87 ft.) above sea level.

Tuesday to Saturday from 2pm to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

AROUND DOKKUM

The scenic north Friesland country around Dokkum is speckled with windmills, and with villages and farmhouses built atop *terpen*. Friesland makes a big deal of its hundreds of *terpen*, but you'd have to be a genuine enthusiast for these small man-made hillocks to want to go out of your way to visit more than a few. **Hoogeteintum (Hegebeintum)**, 10km (6 miles) west, boasts the highest *terp*, 9m (30 ft.) above sea level—most are between 2 and 6m (6½ and 20 ft.) high—and a beautiful 17th-century church.

Southeast of Dokkum is the neat little village of **Veenklooster**, with thatched cottages around a *brink* (green), and a nearby abbey, the **Fogelsanghstate**, from 1725, which houses a branch of Leeuwarden's Fries Museum. **Bergumermeer** and Klein Zwitserland (Little Switzerland) are to the south.

THE LAUWERSMEER

Going northeast from Dokkum brings you to the **Lauwersmeer**, a man-made freshwater lake that was an inlet of the Waddenzee until it was cut off in 1969 by a barrier dam. Its sheltered waters provide a haven for birds, and for sailing and other watersports. Cross the dam-top road to Lauwersoog in Groningen province, from where ferries sail to Schiermonnikoog (see below). At **Expozee**, Strandweg 1 (☎ 0519/349-045), a visitor center on the Lauwersmeer shore beside the village, you can learn about the natural history of both the Waddenzee and the lake. It's open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

5 The Wadden Islands ★★

Like North Carolina's Outer Banks, Holland's Waddeneilanden (Wadden Islands) are low-lying, dune-laden, windswept barrier islands. The five beautiful and highly individual islands are connected by ferry across the Waddenzee (Wadden Sea) from adjacent mainland harbors. This shallow sea's depth ranges from about 1m (3 ft.) to 3m (10 ft.), and at low tide it virtually disappears. The Dutch treasure these small islands as romantic getaways. On a line curving north and east, they are: Texel, Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland, and Schiermonnikoog. Texel belongs to Noord-Holland and is covered separately (see "Den Helder & Texel," in chapter 12). The remaining four belong to Friesland.

These havens of wild natural beauty encompass miles and miles of white sand on wide beaches along the North Sea coasts, marshes, and wetlands that are sanctuaries for thousands of migratory seabirds, seals sunning on sandbanks, rare plants, old villages, and museums connected with the sea and seafarers. Most vacationers visit between the spring and fall; only a hardy few brave the winter gales for fresh air at any price.

Going by bike is the best way to get around, and bikes are available for rent on the islands, though they can get scarce during the busiest periods. The island VVV offices have information on bungalows, campsites, bed-and-breakfasts, and hotels.

VLIELAND (FLYLÂN)

A thin strip of beach and dunes, 19km (12 miles) long and a maximum of 3km (2 miles) wide, Vlieland (pop. 1,200) is an ideal hideout for the world-weary. Carefree and all but car-free, Vlieland is virtually deserted, except in summer. The

only disturbance here is the cries of sea birds—and an occasional howling fly past by Royal Netherlands Air Force F16 Fighting Falcons on training sorties.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Rederij Doeksen** (☎ 0900/363-5736; www.rederij-doeksen.nl) has three ferries a day from Harlingen (see above), and additional fast service by jet-catamaran. Private cars are not transported to Vlieland. The 1½-hour ferry trip is 19.15€ (\$24) for adults, and 9.60€ (\$12) for children ages 4 to 11. The jet-cat crosses over in 45 minutes, for an additional 3.85€ (\$4.80) one way; there is also a jet-cat service from Terschelling (25 minutes). In addition, a passenger ferry operates from Texel, crossing over in 25 minutes (see “Den Helder & Texel,” in chapter 12).

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Vlieland**, Hafenweg 10, 8899 BB Vlieland (☎ 0562/451-111; fax 0562/451-361; www.vlieland.net), is located beside the ferry terminal.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

There's not a lot to see and do; that's the main attraction here. Sunbathing—the island has what's said to be Europe's longest nudist beach—bird-watching (at least they're *supposed* to be watching birds through those binoculars), biking, and walking among the dunes and forests are the main activities. An important bird sanctuary is the **Natuurgebied De Kroonpolders**; look out for **De Posthuys**, a café from 1837, on the edge of the reserve.

In the old-time whaling port of **Oost-Vlieland (East-Flylân)**, the island's only village (its one-time sister village West-Vlieland vanished beneath the waves in 1736), the 16th-century **Tromps huys**, Dorpstraat 99 (☎ 0562/451-600), named for the 17th-century admiral Cornelis Tromp (though the house never belonged to him), hosts a local history museum, with a collection of antique clocks and other items. The museum is open May to September, Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm; April and October, Monday to Saturday from 2 to 5pm; and November to March, Wednesday and Saturday from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50).

Also in the village, the **Noordwester Visitor Center**, Dorpstraat 150 (☎ 0562/451-700), has displays on the island's flora and fauna, and can give advice on the best places for observing the hundred or so species of birds that show up here. The center is open May to September, daily from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm; October to April, Wednesday and Saturday from 2 to 4pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50).

The VVV office organizes guided tours on an observation vehicle, the **Vliehors expres**.

TERSCHELLING (SKYLGE) ⚓

The most accessible of Friesland's four Wadden Islands, Terschelling (pop. 5,000) is a strip of beach, dunes, nature reserves, and pine forest, 29km (18

Fun Fact For Whom the Bell Tolls

Lloyds of London's famous Lutine Bell, rung when a vessel insured by the company was reported missing, came from the British bullion ship *HMS Lutine*, which shipwrecked on Vlieland in 1799.

Fun Fact A “Gift” from America

Cranberry pie and cranberry wine are Terschelling specialties. These are produced from berries originally brought from America, allegedly by way of a barrel washed up after a North Sea storm and tossed away in disgust by its finder, who had hoped for something stronger.

miles) long and a maximum of 4km (2½ miles) wide. Large and popular enough to have some things for visitors to do besides soak up sun and admire the natural beauty, the island can be quite busy, though not crowded, in summer.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Rederij Doeksen** (☎ 0900/363-5736; www.rederij-doeksen.nl) has three **car ferries** a day from Harlingen (see above), and additional fast service by **jet-catamaran**. The 2-hour ferry trip is 19€ (\$24) for adults, and 9.60€ (\$12) for children ages 4 to 11. Taking a car is possible but not encouraged—the cost is 12€ (\$15) per 50cm (20 in.) of car, plus charges for above-average height and width, and reservations are essential. The jet-cat crosses over in 45 minutes, for an additional 3.85€ (\$4.80) one-way; there is also jet-cat service from Vlieland (25 min.). In addition, a passenger boat sails from Ameland (3 hr.).

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Terschelling**, Willem Barentszkade 19A, 8881 BC Terschelling-West (☎ 0562/443-000; fax 0562/442-875; www.vvv-tereschelling.org), overlooks the harbor.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

West-Terschelling (West-Skylge), the island's main village, a former whaling center set in a sheltered bay on the coast facing the mainland, is dominated by the square yellowish-colored **Brandaris Lighthouse**, 54m (177 ft.) high and built in 1594. A look into the lives of the islanders of yesteryear is available at **'t Behouden Huys Museum**, Commandeurstraat 30–32 (☎ 0562/442-389), in the gabled houses from 1668 built for two sea captains. You'll find period rooms and displays about whaling and other local traditions. The museum is open April to October, Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm (July–Aug also Sat 1–5pm). Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 2€ (\$2.50) for seniors and children ages 5 to 12.

To learn more about local geography, wildlife, and plants, visit the **Centrum voor Natuur en Landschap**, Burgemeester Reedekkerstraat 11 (☎ 0562/442-390). A small aquarium re-creates North Sea and Wadden Sea environments. The center is open April to October, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and weekends from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 5 to 12. An important nature reserve and bird sanctuary, **De Boschplaat Nature Reserve** 🌿, occupies the eastern half of the island (access is restricted during the breeding season, mid-Mar to mid-Aug).

More thrilling is sand-sailing on the North Sea beaches, aboard a wheeled sand-yacht that can sail along at an impressive clip when the wind is strong, as it often is. Rent one from **Strandzeilschool Beausi** (☎ 0562/448-055).

AMELAND (IT AMELÂN)

Ameland (pop. 3,500), 24km (15 miles) long and a maximum of 4km (3 miles) wide, can be thought of as the “median” Wadden Island—not as busy nor as

varied as Texel and Terschelling; not as quiet and remote as Vlieland and Schiermonnikoog, but every bit as scenic as the other four. You might well find it affords the ideal compromise.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Wagenborg Passagiersdiensten** (☎ 0900/455-4455 information; 0519/546-111 reservations; www.wpd.nl) runs a minimum of four **car ferries** daily, and additional ferries in summer. The ferries depart from a dock on a spit of land 4km (2½ miles) north of Holwerd (Holwert), which is itself 22km (14 miles) north of Leeuwarden. The 45-minute trip is 11€ (\$14) for adults, 9.10€ (\$11) for seniors, and 5.70€ (\$7) for children ages 4 to 11. Taking a car is possible but not encouraged; the fare is 73€ (\$91), and reservations are required. In addition, there is **passenger-boat** service from both Terschelling and Schiermonnikoog (3 hr. in each case).

Buses connect both Groningen and Leeuwarden rail stations with the ferry dock. Going by **car** from Leeuwarden, take N357 north.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Ameland**, Bureweg 2, 9163 KE Nes (☎ 0519/546-546; fax 0519/546-550; www.vvвамeland.nl), is located close to the ferry terminal.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The main village and ferry port, **Nes**, in the middle of the south coast, has 17th- to 18th-century sea-captains' houses. In Nes, the **Natuurcentrum**, Strandweg 38 (☎ 0519/542-737), takes you close to the island's natural history. It has a weather station and an aquarium containing denizens of the North Sea and Wadden Sea. The center is open April to October, daily from 10am to 5pm and 7 to 9pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 5 to 12.

In **Hollum**, on the west coast, the **Cultuur-Historischmuseum Sorgdrager**, Herenweg 1 (☎ 0519/554-477) is located in a sea captain's house from 1751. It employs cultural history as a cover for what's essentially a museum of whaling, an industry that once was the island's bread and butter. The museum is open April to October, daily from 1:30 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 5 to 12. Check out the cemetery of the village's old church for gravestones decorated with images of whaling ships.

Nearby, the **Reddingsmuseum Abraham Fock**, Oranjeweg 18 (☎ 0519/542-737), takes as its theme the sometimes grim, sometimes buoyant, but always uplifting history of the local lifeboats and the crews who risked—and often enough, lost—their lives. The museum is open April to October, daily from 1:30 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 5 to 12.

Birds do their avian thing in the **Oerduinen** and **Het Hon** nature reserves on the east coast. You can get your own bird's-eye view aboard a light aircraft from an **airfield** (☎ 0519/554-644) just north of **Ballum**, a village between Nes and Hollum. The 15-minute flights cost 30€ (\$38).

SCHIERMONNIKOOG (SKIERMÛNTSEACH) ⚓

Wild, scenic, remote, and invariably all but deserted, the easternmost and smallest of the Wadden Islands, Schiermonnikoog (pop. 1,000), 17km (11 miles) long and a maximum of 6km (4 miles) wide, was declared a national park in 1988.

Walking on Water

At low tide, the Wadden Sea virtually disappears, the seabed becomes visible, and sea birds feast on mollusks in the sand. Then the Wadden Islands seem even closer to the mainland, and if you feel like walking the mud flats, from May to October you can join a *Wadlopen* (Wadden Walking) trip and plow across to one of the islands. **Don't attempt this without an official guide—there is a real danger of being caught by a fast-incoming tide.** With a guide, it is safe, but every once in a while a group needs to be rescued by lifeboat.

Weather permitting, you start walking at ebb tide. Soon the mainland looks far away, and you feel lost in the middle of a salty mire trying to suck your feet in deeper with every step. But your attention will be drawn to the unusual landscape as you realize you're actually walking on the bottom of a sea, and in a few hours all this will disappear under water again. If you're lucky, you'll see seals disporting in pools or soaking up rays on a sandbar. When you reach the island, you need to wait for high tide to be able to go back by boat.

Tours cost 10€ to 25€ (\$13–\$31) a head and range from an easy round-trip of a few hours on the flats to difficult hikes to the islands lasting around 8 hours (including the wait for the boat). Wear shorts and close-fitting, ankle-high shoes or boots. The trips are popular; groups may be as large as 75 to 100 people, so you need to book ahead. Contact **Wadloopcentrum Friesland** (☎ 0518/451-491), in Holwerd; or **Wadloopcentrum Pieterburen** (☎ 0595/528-300), in Pieterburen.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Wagenborg Passagiersdiensten** (☎ 0900/455-4455 information; 0519/546-111 reservations; www.wpd.nl) offers ferry service from **Lauwersoog**, 36km (22km) northeast of Leeuwarden. The 45-minute round-trip costs 11€ (\$14) for adults, 9.70€ (\$12) for seniors, and 6.30€ (\$7.90) for children ages 4 to 11. A bus meets the ferry and takes passengers to the island's only village, also called Schiermonnikoog. In addition, there is passenger-boat service from Ameland (3 hr.).

If you're driving, you'll have to leave your car at Lauwersoog (only residents are permitted to transport their cars across). Buses connect both Leeuwarden and Groningen rail stations with Lauwersoog.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Schiermonnikoog**, Reeweg 5, 9166 PW Schiermonnikoog (☎ 0519/531-233; fax 0529/531-325; www.vvv.schiermonnikoog.nl), is on the village's main street.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

On the sheltered Wadden Sea coast, **Schiermonnikoog** village dates from the early 18th century, and life here doesn't seem to have speeded up much since then. A statue known as the *Schiere Monnik* (*Gray Monk*) recalls the island's early history as a refuge of Cistercian monks, and two nearby complete whale jaw bones, its 18th-century heyday as a whaling center.

Schiermonnikoog was made a national park partly because of its isolation, wild scenery, and migratory birds, and partly because of its flora—half of all native Dutch plant species can be found here. Housed in an old lighthouse, a short walk or bike ride from the village, Schiermonnikoog National Park's **Visitor Center** and **Natuurhistorische Museum**, Torenstreek 20 (☎ 0519/531-641), can provide information about wildlife on the island and offer guided tours. The center and museum are open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 5:30pm; November to March, Saturday from 1:30 to 5:30pm. Admission is 3.50€ (\$4.40) for adults, and free for children under 12.

A great way to get around the island's dunes, beaches, woodlands, and polders is aboard the **Balgexpress**, a tractor-drawn observation trailer, which departs from the Visitor Center.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Graaf Bernstorff Hotel/Apartments This hotel and apartment complex opened in 1998. The brand-new rooms and apartments are luxuriously appointed. The restaurant downstairs has a more Continental feel than the traditionally Dutch Van der Werff. Main courses start at 16€ (\$20). During the day you can get snacks on the terrace or at the bar.

Reeweg 1, 9166 PW Schiermonnikoog. ☎ 0519/532-000. Fax 0519/532-050. 69 units. 125€–150€ (\$156–\$188) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental), bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Hotel-Restaurant Van der Werff ★ This hotel has a certain stuffiness, which somehow lends to its charm. In the lounge, you find games as well as sagging leather armchairs. Guest rooms are more modern, though they retain some elegant features. The restaurant, with its wood-paneled walls and rich decor, is like a colonial officers' dining room. Guests can use the free hotel shuttle—sometimes an old charabanc is pressed into service—when going to and from the ferry dock.

Reeweg 2, 9166 PX Schiermonnikoog. ☎ 0519/531-203. Fax 0519/531-748. 55 units. 60€ (\$75) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch), bar, lounge. *In room:* TV.

6 Groningen ★

144km (90 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 51km (32 miles) E of Leeuwarden

The capital of Groningen province is important commercially and industrially, and sits at the heart of one of the world's largest natural gas fields. Cars are banned from the old center, which is enclosed by a moat. Part of the center was destroyed during World War II, but much of its medieval and 16th- and 17th-century heritage survived and has been preserved. The University of Groningen was founded in 1614, and a student population of 20,000 gives the town a lively character.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** every hour or so to Groningen from Amsterdam Centraal Station (trip time 3 hr.). The rail and bus stations adjoin each other about 1km (½ mile) south of the center of town. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A1/E231 southeast to the Muiderberg intersection, switch to A6 north to its intersection with A7/E22, then take this expressway northeast to Groningen. An alternative route is A7/E22 north across the IJsselmeer dike, north and east on N31 and A31 to Leeuwarden, then east on N355.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Groningen**, Grote Markt 25, 9712 HS Groningen (☎ **0900/202-3050**; fax 050/311-3855; www.vvvgroningen.nl), is opposite the Martinatoren in the center of town. The office is open Monday to Wednesday and Friday from 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 9am to 8pm, and Saturday from 10am to 5pm; in July and August, also Sunday from 11am to 3pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Among Groningen's highlights is its handsome central square, the **Grote Markt**, graced by the 1810 neoclassical **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**. Just adjacent to this, at Waagplein 1, is the sparkling 1635 Renaissance **Goudkantoor (Gold Office)**, which first housed a tax office, then a hallmarking bureau for precious metals, and is now a restaurant—should your Latin be rusty, the inscription on the building, *Date Caesari quare sunt Caesaris*, was spoken by Jesus and translates as: “Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.”

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Groninger Museum ★ Emerging like some exotic alien plant out of the gray waters of the Verbindingskanaal, this museum added a surprising touch to this sober northern city when it opened in 1994. Italian architect Alessandro Mendini dreamed up a structure as quirky and varied as the contents. Playful, garish, disjointed, all jutting beams and cantilevered panels, each of the four pavilions has a different style, thanks to designers as varied as Philippe Starck, Michele de Lucchi, and Vienna bureau Coop Himmelbau. One appears to be the victim of an exploded paint box, and another, as the locals say, of a plane crash. These surround a golden tower in which a spiral staircase leads upward, its walls and balustrade a mosaic of small, vari-colored tiles. After all this, you might find it hard to focus your attention on the collection. Each pavilion pursues a different theme: local archaeological finds and the history of the city and province; Eastern ceramics; decorative arts; and paintings—including works from the Expressionists of the Groningen school, and a watercolor by Vincent van Gogh, *Drawbridge in Nieuw-Amsterdam* (1883)—prints, and sculpture from the 16th century to the present. A visit here should last 2 hours and 5 minutes: 2 hours for looking around, and 5 minutes for gazing slack-jawed in front of the building before you enter.

Museumeland 1 (opposite the rail station). ☎ **050/366-6555**. www.groningermuseum.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) seniors, 3€ (\$3.75) children 5–16, free for children under 5. Sept–June Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; July–Aug Tues–Sun 10am–5pm, Mon 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Martinatoren ★ The 15th-century **Martinikerk (St. Martin’s Church)**, across from the Grote Markt, is not easily missed, thanks to its lofty tower. Begun in 1469, completed in 1482, and re-worked in 1627, the church is 96.8m (318 ft.) high from its base to the tip of a weather vane in the shape of

Fun Fact **Comfort Station**

Should you find yourself caught short in Groningen, relax. Relief is near at hand. And you can take full advantage of it by simultaneously appreciating a modern-design masterpiece. The *Urinoir* (1996), by Rem Koolhaas, in Kleine der A-straat, may not attract the same crowds as, say, the *Mona Lisa*, but those who pass this way might well derive an equal satisfaction from the experience.

Moments **Canal Tours**

From June to September, the *rondvaartboten* (tour boats) of **Rederij Kool Stationsweg** (☎ 050/312-8379) operate regular 1-hour cruises through the canals of Groningen. These depart from a dock outside Groningen rail station, beside the Groninger Museum. Or, during the same months, you can propel yourself around on a canoe or a water bike from **'t Peddeltje** (☎ 050-318-0330), from a dock under the Herebrug bridge, just east of the Groninger Museum.

St. Martin's horse, and that makes it the fourth tallest in Holland. You can climb most of *D'Olle Grieze* (The Old Gray Man), as the tower is known locally, for fine panoramic views over the city and the low-lying country roundabout. A 17th-century Hemony carillon rings out frequently. Inside the church are 16th-century frescoes depicting the Christmas and Easter stories, and an impressive organ from 1480.

Martinikerkhof 3 (☎ 050/311-1277). Tower: Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children 5–12, free for children under 5. Apr–Oct daily 11am–5pm; Nov–Mar daily noon–4pm (school vacations 11am–5pm). Church: Admission 1€ (\$1.25). June–Aug Tues–Fri noon–5pm.

Noordelijk Scheepvaart en Niemeyer Tabaksmuseum (Northern Maritime and Niemeyer Tobacco Museum) ★ Housed in two medieval buildings, the first part of this interesting twin museum traces the rich history of Groningen's shipping industry, through models, instruments, charts, paintings, and more. There's a fine section on Groningen's medieval Hanseatic trading period. Smokers and maybe even nonsmokers can revel in the tobacco museum's collection, which covers Holland's long involvement with the tobacco trade.

Brugstraat 24–26. ☎ 050/312-2202. www.noordelijkscheepvaartmuseum.nl. Admission 2.75€ (\$3.45) adults, 1.40€ (\$1.75) seniors and children 6–14, free for children under 6. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Aug 28, Dec 25.

ALMSHOUSES

With more than 30 *hofjes* (almshouses) within the city limits, Groningen shares with Amsterdam and Leiden the distinction of hosting the greatest number of these charitable medieval institutions in the country. Built around courtyards, these clusters of small cottages still provide homes for the poor and the aged. The **Heilige Geestgasthuis (Holy Ghost Guesthouse)**, Pelsterstraat 43, dating from 1267, is the oldest in town. Founded in 1405, the **Sint-Geertruidsgasthuis (St. Gertrude's Guesthouse)**, Peperstraat 22, started out as a lodging for pilgrims who came to Groningen to pay homage to a relic—a supposed arm of John the Baptist in the Martinikerk—and later became homes for seniors. There's a handsome courtyard garden behind the gate. Until midway through the 17th century, the **Sint-Anthonygasthuis (St. Anthony's Guesthouse)**, Rademarkt 29/1–30, functioned in part as an asylum for the mentally ill. Its red-brick and sandstone gate dates from 1644.

PARKS & GARDENS

The beautiful Renaissance **Prinsenhof Garden** was established in 1625 behind the Prinsenhof building at Martinikerkhof 23, which was a monastery before

becoming the seat of the bishop of Groningen in 1568. Later taken over for a royal residence, it houses today a television and radio studio. The hedges surrounding the herb beds, the rose garden, and a sundial are the result of more than 250 years of topiary. The garden is open April to mid-October, daily from 10am to sundown; admission is free.

When the city fortifications were demolished in the 19th century, part of the terrain in the north of town was given over to a pretty park, the **Noorderplantsoen**, laid out in the English landscape style.

TWO SCENIC LAKES NEARBY

The **Paterswoldsemeer**, a lake on Groningen's southern edge, is a sailing and watersports center with a holiday village on its shores. Just 8km (5 miles) south-east of here, the **Zuidlaardermeer** also attracts watersports enthusiasts. In October, the nearby village of **Zuidlaren** is the setting for one of Holland's largest horse fairs.

WHERE TO STAY

De Doelen De Doelen is about as centrally located as you can get, on the bustling Grote Markt square. The attractive guest rooms are done in muted colors, and feature soft carpets and a mixture of period and modern furniture. The Croissanterie Cave du Patron is a convenient drop-in spot for inexpensive sandwiches, salads, light meals, and snacks priced at 8€ (\$10) and under. There's also a moderately priced steakhouse restaurant on the premises.

Grote Markt 36, 9711 VL Groningen. ☎ 050/312-7041. Fax 050/314-6112. 59 units. 100€ (\$125) double. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Family Hotel Paterswolde To get to this lovely lakeside hotel, take A28 towards Assen, and then at the Haren intersection follow the signs for Paterswolde. From there the route to the hotel is signposted. The Paterswolde is set on 30 wooded acres and provides a restful respite from the city center. It offers spacious guest rooms, good wheelchair access, babysitting, a beauty salon, an indoor swimming pool, tennis courts, and bikes for hire. There's also a nice bar and good restaurant.

Groningerweg 19 (a 10-min. drive from Groningen), 9765 TA Paterswolde. ☎ 050/309-5400. Fax 050/309-1157. 71 units. 125€–175€ (\$156–\$219) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Hotel de Ville ★ Three old houses have been converted into this stylish, up-to-date hotel. Many rooms overlook the quiet gardens at the rear of the block. The breakfast room/bar is in a glass conservatory. Next door to the hotel is the excellent brasserie-style restaurant *Bistro 't Gerecht*, which will even deliver dinner to your room.

Oude Boteringstraat 43, 9712 GD Groningen. ☎ 050/318-1222. Fax 050/318-1777. www.hoteldeville.nl. 43 units. 105€–195€ (\$131–\$244) double. Breakfast included. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Schimmelpenninck Huys ★ This grand mansion was transformed from a derelict pile into an elegant hotel in the late 1980s, but it still retains many historical features. It's currently being further extended into neighboring buildings. The light, spacious rooms have modern furniture that blends with the classical atmosphere. Room amenities include coffee- and teamakers. There is a snug bar in a 14th-century wine cellar, as well as a spacious and beautiful Jugendstil lounge. There are plenty of dining facilities at this hotel, and they are well worth visiting even if you are not a guest here. The **Empire Room** is an elegant dining

room serving high-quality Dutch/French food, with a French-style garden terrace in the summer.

Oosterstraat 53, 9711 NR Groningen. ☎ 050/318-9502. Fax 050/318-3164. 26 units. 95€–145€ (\$119–\$181) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. In room: TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Binnenhof DUTCH/INTERNATIONAL This relaxed and friendly restaurant is part of an arts center in a former ballroom. It serves sandwiches and snacks throughout the day, and in the evening a range of entrees, including vegetarian options. In summer, you can take advantage of a quiet, shady terrace.

Oosterstraat 7A (in a courtyard near the Grote Markt). ☎ 050/312-3697. Main courses 9.50€–16€ (\$12–\$20). MC, V. Daily noon–1am.

Muller ★★ FRENCH For an exquisite experience amid classic French surroundings, come to Muller. Chef Jean Michel Hengge is the proud owner of a Michelin star. He uses local produce as often as possible, including game in season. The six-course chef's menu makes good use of the day's best market finds. Menu items include pumpkin soup, clams in cream sauce, and filet of lamb en croûte. There's also a vegetarian option.

Grote Kromme Elleboog 13. ☎ 050/318-3208. Fixed-price menus 40€–60€ (\$50–\$75). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

7 Exploring Around Groningen

The towns and places below can all easily be visited on day trips from Groningen by car or bus, some by train, and others by bike or canoe if you have the time and energy for it.

WARFFUM

20km (12 miles) N of Groningen

Warffum is typical of the “mound villages” built above flood level in past centuries. Before local people became expert at building dikes to hold back the water, they constructed mounds to provide places of safety for their families and livestock. These mounds, known as *terpen*, and sometimes in Groningen as *wierden* or *warffen*, often hold the oldest settlements in the area and look like islands rising a little way above the surrounding polders.

There are local trains and buses from Groningen to Warffum; by car, go north on N361 to Winsum, then north and east on N363.

Just outside the village, **Openluchtmuseum Het Hoogeland** (☎ 0595/422-233) is an open-air museum that holds fascinating relics from the mound settlements, medieval costumes, and other artifacts. It's open April to October, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday 1 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75).

UITHUIZEN

23km (14 miles) N of Groningen; 8km (5 miles) E of Warffum

A mound village with a 13th-century church that contains a beautiful organ from 1700 at its heart, Uithuizen is worth a quick look just for itself. But the

Deathly Silence

In the countryside just south of Uithuizen is a tiny hamlet with a name that says it all. It's called Doodstil (Dead Quiet).

Moments **Pedaling Pleasure**

Groningen province's tranquil Waddenzee coastline, from Lauwersoog to Eemshaven, a distance of around 50km (31 miles), makes a fine setting for a bicycling tour. From the dike you get views offshore to Schiermonnikoog and the low-lying, uninhabited islets of Rottumerplaat and Rottumeroog.

main reason for coming here is to visit the nearby Menkemaborg manor house. There are frequent trains and buses from Groningen; by car, take N46 north, then N999.

Menkemaborg ★★ A double-moated fortified manor house that dates back to the 14th century, this is the finest surviving example of such a *borg*, as the country seats of the local lords of Groningen were called. It was extensively rebuilt in the early 18th century and its interior has changed little since then, though the elegant furnishings, paintings, and fittings are a combination of Menkemaborg's own from this period and notable antiques drawn from other manors. Five rooms in which the upper crust could live in style are open to view, as is the kitchen where the lower orders labored with a mass of cooking utensils to keep things that way. Also established on the grounds, the **1939–1945 Museum** evokes the World War II period through a collection of armaments and military vehicles. The estate's formal gardens, which include a rose garden and a labyrinth, are a compelling attraction. A pancake restaurant occupies the old carriage house.

Menkemaweg 2 (1km/½ mile east of Uithuizen). ☎ **0595/431-970**. Admission 5€ (\$6.25). Apr–Sept daily 10am–noon and 1–5pm; Oct–Dec and Feb–Mar, Tues–Sun 10am–noon and 1 to 4pm.

DELFIJL

26km (16 miles) NE of Groningen; 19km (12 miles) SE of Uithuizen

The port town of Delfzijl has a busy, colorful harbor and looks out across the Eems estuary to Germany. From here, seagoing vessels sail up the Eems Canal to Groningen.

There are frequent trains and buses from Groningen; by car, go northeast on N360. Tourist information is available from **VVV Delfzijl**, Kornputplein 1, Delfzijl (☎ **0596/618-104**).

In the town is the **Museum Aquarium**, Zeebadweg 7 (☎ **0596/612-318**). Here you find North Sea aquatic life, corals, shells, and a geological museum with fossils, minerals, and archaeological and maritime exhibits. The aquarium is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 7pm; admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults and 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children.

East of Delfzijl, the shore of the **Dollard**, a wide bay rimmed by mud flats, is a great place to observe wading birds.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hotel Du Bastion This small hotel is in the town center. Its rooms are comfortable, clean, and bright, with whitewashed walls and period furniture. On the premises is a good, moderately priced restaurant that features traditional Dutch dishes as well as a tourist menu.

Waterstraat 78, 9934 AX Delfzijl. ☎ **059/661-8771**. Fax 059/661-7147. 40 units. 65€ (\$81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV.

SLOCHTEREN

16km (10 miles) E of Groningen

This village is at the center of Groningen's natural gas field. Its star attraction is the lovely Fraeylemaborg estate. To get here by car from Groningen, take N360 toward Delfzijl, turn right onto N986 just outside the city, and then take N387. Bus no. 78 goes from Groningen bus station.

Fraeylemaborg ★ Comparable with Menkemaborg (see above), this 16th-century moated manor house, surrounded by attractive woods and gardens in the 19th-century English landscape style, is a fine surviving example of a Groningen *borg*. The interior has a wealth of richly decorated period rooms from the 18th and 19th centuries. You'll also find collections of Asian porcelain and an exhibit about the Dutch royal house of Oranje-Nassau.

Hoofdweg 32 (on the eastern edge of Slochteren). ☎ 0598/421-568. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 5–12. Mar–Dec Tues–Sun and holidays 10am–noon and 1–5pm.

HEILIGERLEE

30km (19 miles) E of Groningen

The village of Heiligerlee is known to every Dutch school child, since it was here that one of the most famous battles in the country's history was fought. On May 23, 1568, Count Louis of Nassau defeated a Spanish army in a battle that sparked the Eighty Years War, which in turn led to the formation of the free Republic of the Netherlands.

To get here from Groningen by car, take A7/E22 east to Exit 46. Local trains and buses go from Groningen to nearby Winschoten.

A multimedia exhibit at the **Museum De Slag bij Heiligerlee (Battle of Heiligerlee Museum)**, Provincialeweg 55 (☎ 0597/418-199), takes you back to the famous battle of 1568 and the war that ensued. The museum is open April, Tuesday to Sunday from 1 to 5pm; May to September, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, Sunday from 1 to 5pm; and October, Tuesday to Friday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 6 to 13, and free for children under 6.

Just across the road, in the former Van Bergen Bell Foundry from 1795, which cast more than 10,000 bells, ranging from the smallest of dinner bells to massive church and carillon bells, is the **Klokkengieterijmuseum**, Provincialeweg 46 (☎ 0597/418-199). Exhibits explain the history of bell casting, and there are demonstrations (by appointment only) and carillon concerts. The museum has the same open hours as the Battle of Heiligerlee Museum.

LEEK

14km (8½ miles) SW of Groningen

Just northeast of this small town stands the wooded estate of **Landgoed Nienoord** (☎ 0594/512-604; www.nienoord-leek.nl), bordering the Leekstermeer, a

Fun Fact **Illustrious Son**

Abel Tasman (1603–1659), one of the greatest Dutch navigators, was born in the village of Lutjegast, 20km (12 miles) west of Groningen. In 1642, he discovered Tasmania and New Zealand, and the following year he reached Tonga and Fiji.

lake that offers swimming and sailing. At the heart of the estate, **Kasteel Nienoord**, a handsome manor house that was rebuilt in 1887 after fire and general deterioration had all but ruined the 1525 original, houses the **Nationaal Rijtuigmuseum (National Carriage Museum)**, Nienoord 1 (☎ 0594/512-260). This holds a wonderful collection of antique horse-drawn carriages, stagecoaches, and sleighs; the uniforms and accessories of their drivers; and related paintings and prints. There's a restaurant on the premises. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and weekends from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 4.50€ (\$5.65) for adults, 3.60€ (\$4.50) for seniors, and free for children under 13.

Around the estate, you'll find several other attractions. **Familiepark Nienoord**, Nienoord 10 (☎ 0594/512-230), is a park with rides and other activities for children. And you can swim both indoors and outdoors in a "subtropical pool" at **Nienoord Zwemkasteel**, Nienoord 12 (☎ 0594/517-500).

HAREN

6km (3½ miles) S of Groningen

The premier attraction of the small town of Haren is its excellent botanical garden.

Hortus Haren ★ Exotic flowers and plants of all climates, from alpine to tropical, are collected at the botanical garden of the University of Groningen, which has been here since the middle of the 17th century. You can visit a greenhouse where plants from the tropical rainforests are kept, and a section devoted to tropical insects. Among different European gardens is a re-creation of a Celtic garden. The Hidden Kingdom of Ming is a replica of a Ming dynasty (1368–1644) Chinese imperial garden. You can even sip Chinese tea in the teahouse.

Kerklaan 34. ☎ 050/537-0053. Admission 3.50€ (\$4.40) adults, free for children under 11. Daily 9:30am–5pm.

8 Assen

24km (15 miles) S of Groningen

With all due respect to the capital of Drenthe province, Assen (pop. 55,000) is a pleasant enough town but contains little of historical importance or unmissable visitor interest. It is, though, a good base from which to make forays into Drenthe's rural tranquillity—an ancient landscape in which life flourished long before the land on which most Dutch now live was reclaimed from the sea.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent service by **train** and **bus** from Groningen to Assen station, a little way east of the center. By **car**, take A28/E232 south, or the parallel and more scenic N372.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Assen**, Marktstraat 8–10, 9401 JH Assen (☎ 0900/202-2293; fax 0592/317-306; www.assen.nl), is located in the town center.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Drents Museum ★ The provincial museum is spread out over five neighboring historical buildings on the town's main square, including the church of the Cistercian Convent of Maria-in-Campis from 1260, and the former provincial Gouvernementsgebouw (Government Building) from 1885. Among many

A Moving Side Trip from Assen

After the German army occupied the Netherlands in World War II, **Camp Westerbork**, a refugee camp for Jews who had escaped from Germany in the forest near Hooghalen, south of Assen, became a transit center for Jews, Gypsies, captured Resistance fighters, and other victims on their way to Nazi death camps. Some 102,000 people were transported from here to concentration camps, most never to return. In their memory, 102,000 stones have been laid out on the camp's parade ground, and at the **Memorial Center** (☎ 0593/592-600), exhibits and film footage afford some idea of the fate of those brought here. Among those who "transited" through Westerbork were Anne Frank and her sister Margot, en route to Bergen-Belsen where they died of sickness and exhaustion in March 1945. The camp is open February to December, Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Entrance to the camp is free, and to the museum section is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 8 to 18, and free for children under 8.

To drive there from Assen, take the minor road parallel to A28/E232 south to Hooghalen and then turn east for 4km (2½ miles). By public transportation, take the train to Beilen, then bus no. 22 from outside the station to the center of Hooghalen. The camp is a signposted, 15-minute walk. You can also go by *treintaxi* (combined train and taxi journey) from Assen rail station; buy the 8€ (\$10) round-trip taxi ride from Beilen to Westerbork along with your train ticket from Assen to Beilen.

The adjacent Radio Astronomy Center, where an array of 19 radio-telescopes tunes in to the music of the spheres, is a fantastic and—after the sad experience of visiting the camp—reassuring sight.

archaeological finds on display are Stone Age artifacts from Drenthe's *hunebedden* (megaliths), weapons, pottery, Roman sarcophagi, and Celtic and Merovingian jewelry. Among the well-preserved items recovered from Drenthe's peat bogs is the mummified corpse of *Het Meisje van Yde* (The Yde Girl). The highlight of the art collection is Vincent van Gogh's oil painting *Peat Boat With Two Figures* (1883).

Brink 1-5. ☎ 0592/312-741. www.drentsmuseum.nl. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

MORE PLACES OF INTEREST

A brief visit to the **Draaiorgelmuseum (Barrel Organ Museum)**, Rode Heklaan 3 (☎ 0592/345-885), gets you close to some beautiful examples of these old music-makers, similar to those you might see grinding away on town streets across the land. Tours are guided and by appointment only.

Just south of the center, the large **Asserbos** public park contains the remnants of an ancient oak forest, though only around one-tenth of the park's area is covered by original forest, the remainder having been planted in 1760. On the grounds is a children's farm.

Moments **Biking the Wide Green Yonder**

The bicycle might have been invented with Drenthé in mind. A myriad of bike paths, signed routes, and remote byways lead deep into the heart of farming country, heathland, and forest. Local tourist offices have details of suggested bicycling routes. Other routes touch the main towns, Assen and Emmen, and yet others weave in and out of *hunebed* territory.

Further south, just outside of town, is Holland's national **TT (Tourist Trophy) Circuit**, where the annual Dutch grand prix motorcycle race takes place on the last Saturday in June. On preceding days, Assen's peaceable streets fill up with leather-clad bikers and fab-looking bikes from around Europe.

9 Emmen

32km (20 miles) SE of Assen

Drenthé's largest town (pop. 55,000) is a delightful mix of old buildings left over from its village origins and new ones reflecting its prosperity in recent years. It has dubbed itself *Vlinderstad* (Butterfly Town), by way of drawing attention to some of the most notable denizens of its large zoo (see below).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent **bus** service from Assen to Emmen. By **car**, take N376 east from Assen to Rolde, then go southeast through scenic country to its intersection with N381; go east on this highway and its continuation, N364, into Emmen.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Emmen**, Hoofdstraat 22, 7811 EP Emmen (☎ 0900/202-2393; fax 0591/644-106; www.vvvemmen.nl), is located in the town center. The office is open Monday from 1 to 5:30pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

A GREAT ZOO

Noorder Dierentpark (Northern Zoo) ★  *Kids* Animals from around the world roam freely at this large zoo, in habitats that have been made as natural as can be for a park in the middle of Drenthé. For instance, cliffs, pebble beaches, and realistic underwater scenery are the setting in which Humboldt penguins disport. Among around 500 different species, you'll see elephants, tigers, white rhinoceroses, giraffes, hippopotamuses, impalas, apes, baboons, kangaroos, and snakes, and on a children's farm a bunch of cute domesticated animals. Emmen takes its moniker of "Butterfly Town" from the magnificent tropical *vlindertuin* (butterfly garden).

Hoofdstraat 18. ☎ 0591/850-850. www.noorderdierentpark.nl. Admission 17€ (\$21) adults; 14€ (\$17) seniors, visitors with disabilities, and children 3–10; free for children under 3. Mar–May and Oct daily 10am–5pm; June–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Sept daily 10am–5:30pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–4:30pm.

SIDE TRIPS FROM EMMEN

TER APEL

15km (9 miles) NE of Emmen

Hidden away in a forest of oak and beech trees on the northern edge of this village, the **Museum-Kloosterenclave Ter Appel** ★  Boslaan 3 (☎ 0599/581-370;

www.museumklooster-terappel.com), is housed in Holland's oldest remaining monastery (or former monastery), founded in 1465 by the Order of the Holy Cross and beautifully preserved. It contains a collection of religious art and artifacts, church furniture that includes carved misericords, and an idyllic *herbarium* planted with rose bushes and 80 different herbs. Nearby, the "Twelve Apostles Tree" is said to be the oldest in Holland. The museum is open March to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday and holidays from 1 to 5pm; November to February, Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday and holidays from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 3.50€ (\$4.40) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. You can get there by bus from Emmen; by car, go north on N391.

BOURTANGE

31km (19 miles) NE of Emmen; 17km (11 miles) NE of Ter Apel

This unique fortress village has been restored to its former glory. Constructed from 1580 onward, it withstood many a battle over the centuries, only to fall into disrepair as methods of warfare changed. Two wooden drawbridges span a star-shaped moat and lead to traffic-free streets within the ramparts, where you can visit barracks, gunpowder storage rooms, a synagogue, and officers' quarters. Various relics of military life are displayed. The fortress is permanently open and admission is free. Its museums are open April to October, Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 5pm; November to March, Saturday and Sunday from 12:30 to 4:30pm. Admission to the museums

Stone Age Giants

Drenthe can count more than 50 Stone Age chambered tombs or temples called *hunebedden* on its territory. These fascinating monuments consist of large, free-standing stones, or megaliths, often capped by lateral stones. They are scattered along a stretch of scenic, relatively high ground known as the *Hondsrug* (Dog's Back). The terminal moraine of a long-vanished Ice Age glacier, the Hondsrug's rugged spine angles northwest from Emmen to the southeastern edge of Groningen. Finds of pottery, tools, jewelry, and other items have enabled archaeologists to date the tombs to around 3400 B.C., and to attribute their construction to the farming communities of the Funnel-beaker Culture, so-called after the characteristic style of pottery they created.

You find the most interesting *hunebedden* along N34, the Emmen–Groningen highway, in the northern reaches of Emmen itself and around the pretty Hondsrug villages of Odoorn, Borger, Rolde, Eext, Annen, and Anloo. The VVV tourist offices in Emmen and Assen have details on where they are and how to get to them. Also worth a visit is the **National Hunebedden Information Center** ( 0599/234-855), in Borger, open May to September, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 1 to 5pm; and October to April, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 1 to 4pm. Close to the center is the largest *hunebed*, #D27, which has nine capstones still in place.

is 5.50€ (\$6.90) for adults, and 3.50€ (\$4.40) for children ages 6 to 12. Bour-tange's **Visitor Center** is at Willem Lodewijkstraat 33 (☎ **0599/354-600**; www.bourtange.nl), on the west side of the village. In July and August, military living-history events take place, the highlight being a uniformed re-enactment of the 1640 Battle of Bourtange during the Eighty Years War of liberation from Spain.

BARGER-COMPASCUUM

10km (6 miles) E of Emmen

Set outside this village, on 1.6 sq. km (¾ sq. mile) of the peat moors along the German border, is the **Open-Air Museum Veenpark (Peat Park)**, Berkenrode 4 (☎ **0591/324-444**; www.veenpark.nl). At a reconstructed peat cutters' village, 't Aole Compas, you can watch demonstrations of peat cutting, butter churning, weaving, and clog making, as they were done at the end of the 19th century. There are nostalgic stores and an antique barbershop, and you can take a short canal trip onboard a turf boat. The park is open Easter to June and September to mid-October, daily from 10am to 5pm; and July to August, daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 9.80€ (\$12) for adults, 8.80€ (\$11) for seniors, and free for children under 5. To get there, take bus no. 45 from outside Emmen rail station to Barger Compasum, or drive on minor roads via Nieuw Dordrecht.

SCHOONOORD

12km (7½ miles) NW of Emmen

Named after Ellert and Brammert, two giants who once upon a time robbed travelers in these parts, the **Open-Air Museum Ellert en Brammert**, Tramstraat 73 (☎ **0591/382-421**), is a trip down Drenthe's memory lane. Sculptures of Ellert and Brammert stand guard at the gates, behind which are sod huts, a Saxon farmhouse, a tollhouse, an old school, a prison, a smithy, a sawmill, an apiary (bee farm), geological exhibits, and a children's farm. You can watch living crafts, like pottery making, and the re-created farming methods of yesteryear, and then enjoy a snack and a drink at an old country inn. Children can relive the legend of the two bandits in their cave hideaway. You'll need a couple of hours to make a visit here worthwhile. The museum is open April to October, daily from 9am to 6pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for seniors and children ages 4 to 11.

To get to Schoonoord, take bus no. 21 from outside Emmen rail station. By car, go west on N364 and north on N376.

ORVELTE

18km (11 miles) NW of Emmen; 6km (3½ miles) W of Schoonoord

Set in a beautiful, forested landscape, **Museumdorp Orvelte** 🏡 is a genuine old village, but one that has been preserved as a living-history monument that gives a fine insight into the way things were in Drenthe in times gone by. Rustic, thatched-roof buildings are grouped around the village square, the Brink. Real people live here and go about their daily lives, and though you can visit some houses and buildings that have been opened for display by masters of traditional crafts and trades, like the clog maker, the blacksmith, and the carpenter, others are private and can't be visited. There's an old-fashioned country cafe and a restaurant. For more information, call by the **Visitor Center**, Schapendrift 3 (☎ **0593/322-288**).

Vincent's Vision of Drenthe

It would take a van Gogh to capture Drenthe's many moods of landscape and light, and when the summer fields are heavy with ripening crops it seems unjust that he is no longer here to record them. The traditional lives of its peasant farmers and peat cutters drew Vincent to the province for a 3-month sojourn in 1883, early in his career as a painter. "I am in a wonderful country," he wrote to his brother Theo.

Vincent lodged for 2 months at a ferry-house-cafe in the village of Nieuw-Amsterdam, 8km (5 miles) south of Emmen. He had to leave because he couldn't afford the rent. Then owned by one Hendrik Scholte, the house, in Van Goghstraat (☎ 0591/555-600), has been restored to its 1883 condition and contains archival material on the artist. It's open Tuesday to Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 4.50€ (\$5.65) for adults, and 3.50€ (\$4.40) for children under 13.

Among the works Vincent created during his Drenthe period is an oil painting, *Peat Boat With Two Figures*, which you can view at the Drents Museum in Assen; and a watercolor, *Drawbridge in Nieuw-Amsterdam*, on display at the Groninger Museum in Groningen.

You can reach Orvelte by signposted country roads off N364 (leave your car at one of the car parks just outside the village), and by bus from Emmen, Assen, and the rail station in nearby Beilen.

Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel & Flevoland

The provinces of Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel, and Flevoland spread before you a tapestry of history, scenic beauty, and feats of civil engineering.

Utrecht, the smallest of the nation's 12 provinces, is a center of learning and, formerly, of religion. Queen Juliana chose to live here when she abdicated in favor of her daughter, Beatrix, and châteaux dot the landscape. The provincial capital, the 2,000-year-old city of Utrecht, is a progressive commercial center. Medieval centuries are recalled in Amersfoort and Oudewater.

To the east is the largest province, **Gelderland**—and a river runs through it: the Rhine. National parks, nature reserves, and recreation centers here are favorite holiday venues for the Dutch. Gelderland's towns beckon with attractions like the Het Loo royal palace museum at Apeldoorn, and Arnhem's

Netherlands Open-Air Folklore Museum. Here, too, was fought the great and tragic World War II airborne battle for the Rhine bridge at Arnhem—the famous “bridge too far.”

A parklike landscape of beautiful forests, meadows, and lakes, punctuated by châteaux, steep-roofed and half-timbered farmhouses, tranquil villages, and picturesque medieval and Hanseatic towns, distinguishes rural **Overijssel**.

Holland's newest province, **Flevoland**, was created on land reclaimed in recent decades from the IJsselmeer, and officially inaugurated in 1986. The new polders cover some 1,800 sq. km (695 sq. miles), dotted with oddly integrated old villages that were once islands, and with modern towns like Lelystad. Straight roads run through its flat fields crossed by equally straight canals.

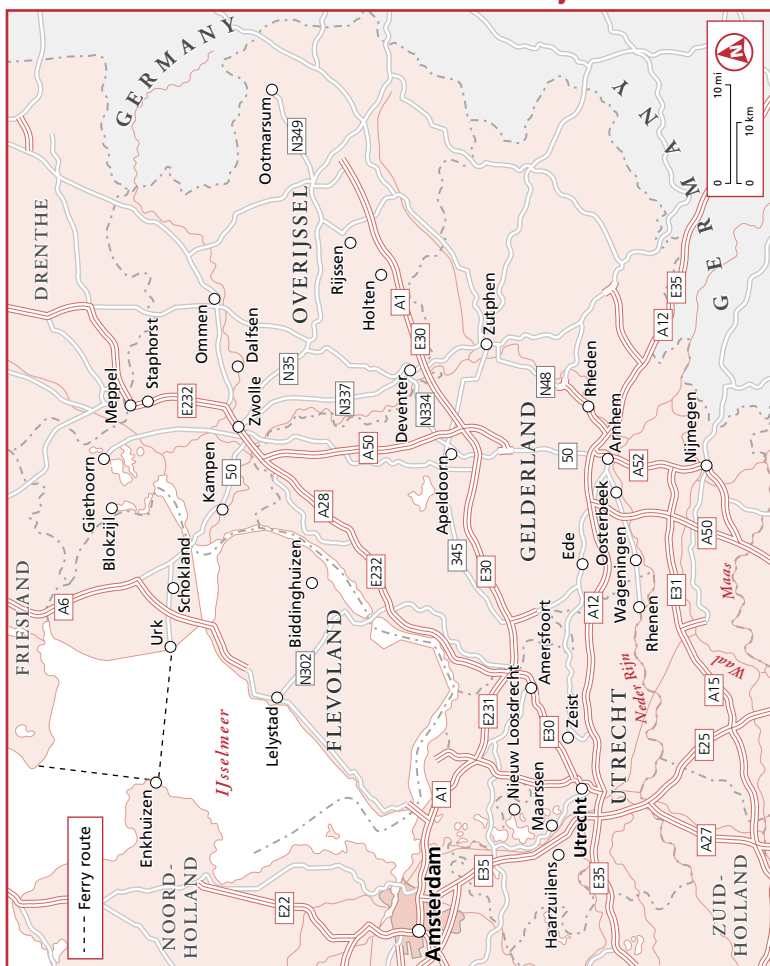
1 Utrecht ★★

42km (26 miles) SE of Amsterdam

The capital city of Utrecht province is a good starting point for exploring the area. When the Dutch Republic was established in the late 16th century, Utrecht was one of its more powerful political centers, having been an important bishopric since the earliest centuries of Christianity in the Lowlands. As a result, this is a city of churches, with more restored medieval religious structures than any other city in Europe.

Utrecht's modern face hits you right between the eyes when you arrive by train at Centraal station, in the multitiered Hoog Catherijne mall that spreads over a 6-block area to the edge of the Old Town. But don't let that dampen your interest in visiting this well-preserved city. Holland's fourth largest (pop. 240,000) city was founded by the Romans as the fortress of Trajectum ad Rhenum (Ford on the Rhine) in A.D. 47. When the Dutch Republic was established here in 1579, Utrecht had already been a powerful political player from the earliest days of

Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel & Flevoland



Christianity in the Low Countries, since the English missionary St. Willibrord founded a bishopric here around 690. As a result, this is a city of churches, with many restored medieval religious structures in the old heart of town.

The city has a thriving cultural life. Every year, during the last week of August, churches are filled with the sounds of Renaissance and baroque music during the Holland Festival of Early Music, an international event that attracts the world's top performers.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Utrecht is a central interchange point for Netherlands Railways. **Trains** arrive around every 15 minutes from Amsterdam, and about as frequently from many other places, traversing both the web of rail tracks and a multilane highway. By **car**, take A2/E35 southeast from Amsterdam.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Utrecht** is at Vinkenburgerstraat 19, 3512 AA Utrecht (☎ 0900/128-8732; fax 030/236-0037; www.utrechtstad.nl). The

office is open Monday from noon to 6pm; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10am to 6pm; Thursday from 10am to 9pm; Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm; and Sunday (in summer and occasionally in winter) from 10am to 2pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Unique to Utrecht is its tree-shaded wharf, 5m (17 ft.) below street level, along Oudegracht, a canal that winds through the Old Town. Restaurants, stores, and sidewalk cafes have replaced the hustle and bustle of the wharfside commercial activity of former times, when Utrecht was a major port along an arm of the Rhine—the adjacent sunken **Nieuwegracht** canal follows a former course of the river—and these quays were used for offloading into the vaulted storage cellars. Much of the old center has been transformed into a pedestrians-only zone, with many secondhand bookshops and antiques outlets.

Centraal Museum ★ The emphasis at this convent-turned-museum is on an impressive collection of Dutch modern art and Dutch 20th-century applied art from the De Stijl group, displayed in the former stables on the grounds. But elsewhere there are historical displays about Utrecht, including a preserved Viking longboat found in the city that dates from around 1100, and an exquisite dollhouse from 1680. Then there are paintings by artists of the 16th-century Utrecht school, in particular those of Jan van Scorel (1495–1562), whose group portraits planted the seeds of a genre that would flower in Holland in the next century. A 2-hour visit should suffice.

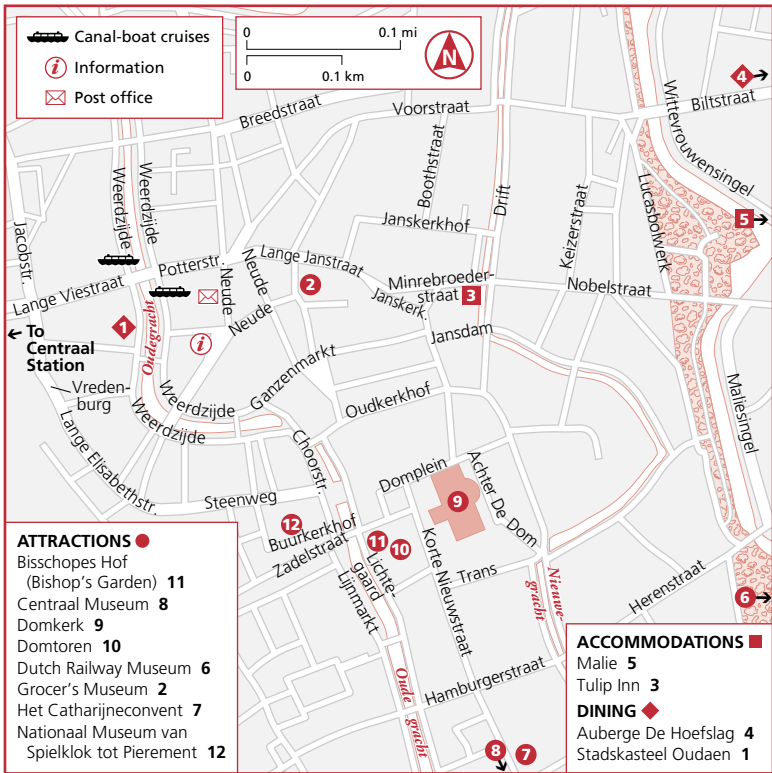
Nicolaaskerkhof 10. ☎ 030/236-2362. www.centraalmuseum.nl. Admission 8€ (\$10) adults; 4€ (\$5) seniors, students, and children 13–18; free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25.

Domkerk (Cathedral) ★★ This magnificent cathedral in the city center took almost 3 centuries to build, from 1254 to 1517. The original Romanesque structure was replaced bit by bit; first the choir, then the tower, and finally the nave and transepts. The nave collapsed during a violent storm in 1674 and was never rebuilt; the choir and transepts survived and remain disconnected from the tower. Standing in the cloisters and looking up at the church, you get an impression of how imposing this cathedral must have been. The interior bears traces of the fierce wave of iconoclasm that spread over Holland in the second half of the 16th century. There's a battered altarpiece in one of the side chapels. A sandstone Holy Sepulcher, dated 1501, shows a defaced Christ in a tomb under a badly damaged Gothic arch.

Other worthwhile sights nearby are **Bisschopes Hof**, or Bishop's Garden (daily 11am–5pm); and **Dom Kloostergang**, a cloister arcade built in the 15th century, with magnificent stained-glass windows depicting scenes from the legend of St. Martin. The cathedral cloisters are connected to the former **Hall of the Chapter**, where the signing of the 1579 Union of Utrecht (which united the seven Protestant Dutch provinces in their rebellion against Catholic Spanish rule) took place.

Achter de Dom 1. www.domkerk.nl. ☎ 030/231-0403. Admission free. Sun 2–4pm year-round; May–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Nov–Apr Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.

Domtoren ★★ The cathedral's 110m (365-ft.) tower, from 1321 to 1383, dominates old Utrecht's skyline and is the tallest in the Netherlands. It stands on the site of St. Willibrord's original 8th-century church and across a square from its mother building, since the nave collapsed during the great storm of 1674, leaving the tower unharmed. In the paving on the square, you can see the outline of the missing section. One of the best views of Utrecht is from the top of



the tower, a climb of 465 steps if you have the stamina and the inclination (about halfway up is the 14th-century St. Michael's Chapel where you can stop and ease the panting!). The climb goes past the church carillon's 50 massive bells you hear all through your stay in Utrecht. Restored and extended in 1999, the carillon has since then been Europe's largest. Its bourdon (largest bell) weighs 10,000 kilograms (9.8 tons) and has a diameter of 2.7m (9 ft.).

Domplein 9. ☎ 030/233-3036. www.domtoren.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 5–12, free for children under 5. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 11am–3:30pm; Sun 2–4pm.

Museum Het Catharijneconvent Housed in the old **St. Catherine's Convent**, this museum holds an exceptional collection of medieval religious art—paintings, relics, carvings, and church robes—that help illustrate the occasionally violent development of Christian denominations in Holland from the 8th to the 20th century. The courtyard of the convent where the museum is housed has a cafe terrace where you can take a meditative pause.

Lange Nieuwstraat 38. ☎ 030/231-7296. www.catharijneconvent.nl. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 4–12, free for children under 4. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1. Bus: 2 or 22.

Nationaal Museum van Speelklok tot Pierement (National Museum from Chimes to Barrel Organs) *Kids* Housed in a 13th-century former church, a short walk from Centraal Station, this museum's delightful collection consists of 600 mechanical music machines of all descriptions from the 17th

Moments Sweet Satisfaction

Tucked away in a little courtyard, the **Museum voor het Kruideniersbedrijf**, Hoogt 6 (☎ 030/231-6628), a grocery store with a tiny grocers' museum upstairs, is the place to satisfy your sweet tooth. The interior and equipment are original; an aroma of cinnamon, ginger, and other spices pervades the air; and the ageless ladies behind the counter help you with old-fashioned friendliness. It's difficult not to buy an ounce or two of each kind of candy or cookie. The museum is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 2€ (\$2.50) for children.

century to the present, including fairground organs and those barrel organs you see on Dutch streets. There's also a player piano controlled by punched rolls. The most overwhelming exhibits are the music-hall organs of yesteryear, with which you can sing and dance at the end of your tour.

Buurkerkhof 10. ☎ 030/231-2789. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 4–12, free for children under 4. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm; guided tours on the hour. Bus: 2.

Nederlands Spoorwegmuseum (Dutch Railway Museum)  In the town that hosts the national headquarters of Netherlands Railways, you don't have to be a rail buff to be fascinated by this former rail station and its marvelous collection of more than 60 steam engines, carriages, and wagons. There are also moving models, paintings, and films relating to train travel. The new multimedia project will have you and the kids stuck to your seats with presentations on the latest trains, such as the Thalys and the TGV.

Maliebaanstation. ☎ 030/230-6206. Admission 8€ (\$10) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–5pm. Bus: 3 to Maliebaan.

Rietveld–Schröder House ★ Built in 1924, this family home was something of a shocker at the time and represents a high point of the De Stijl movement that so influenced contemporary art. It was designed by Utrecht architect and designer Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964)—famous for his angular, red-and-blue chair (1918)—and a female would-be architect, Truus Schröder. The plaster exterior bears De Stijl's signature red, yellow, blue, and gray tones, and the innovative interior is a model of space-saving and efficiency. Rietveld and Schröder both lived here until their deaths. The house was restored in 1985 and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, owned by the Centraal Museum.

Prins Hendrikklaan 50. ☎ 030/236-2310. Admission 16€ (\$20) adults; 8€ (\$10) seniors, students, and children 14–18. By appointment only for guided tours Thurs–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Apr 30, Dec 25. Bus: 4 from Centraal station.

BOAT TOURS

One-hour **boat tours** through the Utrecht canals are available year-round from **Rederij Lovers** (☎ 030/231-6468) and **Rederij Schuttevaer** (☎ 030/272-0111); both lines depart from Nieuwekade. Tours are daily every hour on the hour from 11am to 5pm, and cost 8€ (\$10) for adults, 5€ (\$6.25) for children ages 3 to 13, and free for children under 3. From mid-May to September, there are boat trips on the Vecht River to the pretty village of Loenen aan de Vecht, with a stop to visit the Terra Nova estate. There is also a boat trip on the Kromme Rijn to the Rhijnauwen estate. Book through **Rederij Schuttevaer**,

whose office is at the corner of Lange Viestraat and Oudegracht (☎ 030/272-0111).

WHERE TO STAY

Malie Hotel Two 19th-century mansions in a quiet residential neighborhood near the university Uithof complex are the setting for this lovely small hotel. The small lobby is furnished with modern black leather chairs. The guest rooms have large windows and are very bright. Both the breakfast room and the bar overlook the peaceful garden at the back.

Maliestraat 204, 3581 SL Utrecht. ☎ 030/231-6424. Fax 030/234-0661. 29 units. 95€–120€ (\$119–\$150) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 4 or 11. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Tulip Inn Utrecht ★ This excellent hotel is literally in the shadow of the cathedral and also within a 2-minute walk of the canal, with its bi-level wharf, restaurants, and stores. The intimate guest rooms have comfortable wooden furniture and large beds. Some windows still retain the original early-20th-century stained glass.

Janskerkhof 10, 3512 BL Utrecht. ☎ 030/231-3169. Fax 030/231-0148. 45 units. 130€ (\$163) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 3. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch). *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

De Hoefslag ★★ INTERNATIONAL/FRENCH This beautiful dining spot, located on wooded grounds just a little northeast of Utrecht, is considered by many to be Holland's top restaurant. Amsterdammers think nothing of driving the 48km (30 miles) down here for dinner. There's a Victorian-garden feel to the lounge, while the dining room is reminiscent of an upscale hunting lodge, with lots of dark wood, an open hearth, and ceiling-to-floor doors opening to the terrace. The de Hoefslag changes its menu daily, deciding on specials after the chef has returned from the market. The seafood is superb, as are pork, lamb, and game dishes.

Vossenlaan 28, Bosch en Duin. ☎ 030/225-1051. www.hoefslag.nl. Fixed-price menus 43€–60€ (\$53–\$74). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm.

Stadskasteel Oudaen CONTINENTAL This medieval fortified town house from 1320 has been transformed into a culinary palace. Downstairs, in what once was the main hall, you can sit in the cafe and savor beer brewed on the premises, according to medieval recipes. Upstairs is the restaurant “Tussen hemel en aarde” (“Between heaven and earth”), with its original fireplace still intact and a rustic tile floor. The menu changes weekly, according to what is freshest and in season.

Oudegracht 99. ☎ 030/231-1864. Main courses 18€–23€ (\$23–\$29); fixed-price menus 28€–40€ (\$34–\$49). AE, DC, MC, V. Cafe daily 10am–2am; restaurant Mon–Sat 5:30–9pm.

SIDE TRIPS FROM UTRECHT

At the **Loosdrechtse Plassen (Loosdrecht Lakes)** ★, 8km (5 miles) north of Utrecht, old peat diggings brim with water and the land has been reduced to straggly ribbons between a checkerboard of lakes. These have become popular recreational sailing and watersports zones, based on the busy harbor at Oud-Loosdrecht. A handsome old village off the western end of the lakes is **Loenen aan de Vecht**, on the bank of the Vecht River.

NEARBY CASTLES

In and around the area between Utrecht and the Loosdrecht lakes are three of the finest of the many castles and stately châteaux in the province of Utrecht.

Kasteel De Haar ★★ If you have time for only one castle jaunt, make it to richly furnished De Haar. Like most castles, it has had its ups and downs—fires and ransackings and the like—over the centuries, but thanks to an infusion of Rothschild money in the early 1900s, it now sits in all its 15th-century moated splendor in the middle of a gracious Versailles-like formal garden. This imposing 15th-century castle suffered a disastrous fire in the 1800s but was reconstructed in 1892 according to the designs of the neo-Gothic architect, P. J. H. Cuypers—who also was responsible for Centraal Station and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Cuypers's craftsmen worked with medieval techniques to an extraordinary degree of detail. The only trouble now is that the weight of this construction atop the original foundations is making them subside into the moat! The castle's owners, who use the place as their primary residence, had to hold a sale of family heirlooms in 1998 to fund measures to prevent further subsidence. Its walls are, however, still hung with many fine paintings and precious Gobelin tapestries of the 14th and 15th centuries; its floors are softened with Persian rugs; and its chambers are furnished in the styles of Louis XIV, XV, and XVI of France. And don't miss the formal gardens, for which a whole village was transported down the road to afford a better view—they're magnificent.

Kasteellaan 1, Haarzuilens. ☎ 030/677-3804. Castle and park: 8€ (\$10) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 5–12, free for children under 5. Park only: 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children 5–12, free for children under 5. Castle: mid-Nov to Nov 30 and Jan to mid-Mar Sun 1–4pm; mid-Mar to May Tues–Sun 1–4pm; June to mid-Aug Mon–Fri 11am–4pm and Sat–Sun 1–4pm; mid-Oct to mid-Nov Tues–Sun 1–4pm. Guided tours every hour. Gardens: Mon–Fri 11am–4pm; Sat–Sun 1–4pm. The castle is 10km (6 miles) northwest of Utrecht off Junction 6 A2/E35 Amsterdam–Utrecht.

Kasteel-Museum Sypsteyn A castle turned art gallery and museum, Sypsteyn was rebuilt in the early 1900s on the foundations of a late-medieval manor house that was destroyed about 1580. Today it holds some 80 paintings from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, representing the work of artists such as Moreelse, Maes, and Mierevelt. There are also collections of old weapons, glassware, silverware, pottery, porcelain, and furnishings dating from the 16th to the 18th century. The parklike grounds are laid out in 17th-century landscape style, and include a lovely rose garden.

Nieuw Loosdrechtsedijk 150, Nieuw Loosdrecht (a few km/miles northeast of Maarssen). ☎ 035/582-3208. Admission 7€ (\$8.75). Apr Sat–Sun noon–5pm; May–Sept Tues–Fri 10am–5pm. Tours Tues–Fri at 11am, 12:30pm, 2pm, 3pm, and 4pm; Sat and Sun at 1, 2, 3, and 4pm. Train to Hilversum, then Treintaxi (a shared taxi that picks up train passengers).

Slot Zuylen ★ This is one of Holland's best examples of a medieval castle. It was built in the late 13th century and was inhabited until the early 1900s. Since 1952 the castle has been a museum. Period rooms are furnished in 17th- to 19th-century styles, along with family portraits. A special feature in the landscaped gardens is a so-called "snake wall" that creates a sun trap, thus protecting southern fruit trees from the harsher northern European climate.

Fun Fact **The Breukelen Bridge**

Noo Yawkers might want to take in Breukelen, a tiny village on the Vecht River northwest of Utrecht. Treat yourself to a crossing of the *original* Brooklyn Bridge—all of 6m (20 ft.) long, one car wide, and definitely not for sale!

Moments A Painterly Place

Visit the scene of a rich historical canvas, at *Wijk bij Duurstede*, on the bank of the *Neder Rijn*, 20km (12 miles) southeast of Utrecht. A windmill at the village was the star of Jacob van Ruysdael's painting *The Mill at Wijk bij Duurstede* (1670), now in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. An old windmill standing on the riverside ramparts of the town might be the very one he painted.

Tournooiveld 1, Oud-Zuilen, near Maarssen, 5km (3 miles), north of Utrecht. ☎ 030/244-0255. Admission 6€ (\$7.50). Mid-Mar to mid-Nov Sat 2–4pm, Sun 1–4pm; mid-May to mid-Sept Tues–Thurs 11am–4pm. Guided tours hourly. Bus: 36.

OUDEWATER

18km (11 miles) SW of Utrecht

You'd never guess that back in the 1500s, this charming little village was the scene of some of Europe's most bizarre witch trials. During this time, accused women were weighed on scales in the **Heksenwaag (Witches' Weigh House)**, Leeuweringerstraat 2, to determine whether or not they were witches who, it was believed, lacked souls and so weighed little enough to fly through the air supported only by a broomstick. So many women were weighed and convicted of witchcraft that the town's reputation for having accurate scales was in serious jeopardy. To remedy this, the town fathers devised a system of judging accused witches by having them stand on scales clad in nothing but a paper costume and paper broom. Present for this "trial" were the mayor, the alderman, the weighmaster, and the local midwife. When the weighmaster had finished juggling his weights and balancing the scales, he could then proclaim with confidence that the accused could not possibly be a witch, and a certificate was issued to that effect. For obvious reasons, Europe's accused witches flocked here in droves (maybe they even parked their broomsticks outside). Nowadays, if you have some doubt about anyone in your party (or yourself!), you can step on the scales in the **Heksenwaag** and—provided you're not too skinny—walk away with your very own certificate.

As you walk through the quaint streets of this village, take a look at the storks' nests on the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** roof. The big birds, traditionally associated with the arrival of a new child, have been nesting here for over 3 centuries.

ZEIST

9km (6 miles) E of Utrecht

This village gem set in a green landscape was once a fashionable country retreat for Utrecht's wealthy nobility. There are frequent **buses** from Utrecht. By **car**, take N225 east then south, or A28/E34 northeast, from Utrecht. The tourist information office, **VVV Zeist**, Het Rond 1, Zeist (☎ 0900/109-1013; fax 030/692-0017), has details on walking and biking tours through the parks and forests surrounding Zeist.

Slot Zeist ★ The castle was built between 1677 and 1687 for Willem Adriaan van Nassau. The simple brick facade conceals a lavish interior designed by French architect Daniël Marot, who was also responsible for decorating Het Loo Palace (see below). Many of his baroque murals and ceiling paintings have survived, as well as the ornate gilded wood paneling and stucco. The grand drive is

lined by elegant houses belonging to the *Hernhutters*, a religious order that had its origins in Switzerland in the first half of the 18th century. The vast formal gardens were re-landscaped in the 19th century to create a pleasant park.

Zinzendorfflaan 1. (C) 030/692-1704. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children. Guided tours year-round Sat–Sun 2pm, 3:30pm; July–Aug tours also Mon–Thurs 2:30pm.

Where to Stay & Dine in Zeist

Golden Tulip Hotel Figi Should you fall for the charms of Zeist, this modern, four-star hotel will ensure a pleasant stay. The guest rooms are decorated in a colorful, Mediterranean style. Four cinemas and the cozy brown Theatercafé are part of the hotel complex, accessible via the hotel and through their own street entrances.

Het Rond 3, 3701 HS Zeist. (C) 030/692-7400. Fax 030/692-74-68. 96 units. 180€–240€ (\$225–\$300) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Dutch/Continental). *In room:* TV, minibar.

2 Amersfoort ★

42km (26 miles) SE of Amsterdam; 20km (12 miles) NE of Utrecht

This lovely medieval town (pop. 115,000) on the Eem River has held onto its ancient character despite industrial development. Indeed, its medieval heart is guarded by a double ring of canals—the only city in Europe to have this feature. The De Stijl artist Piet Mondrian was born here in 1872.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** arrive every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station and from Utrecht. **Buses** arrive every half-hour on average from Utrecht. By **car**, take A1/E231 southeast from Amsterdam; or A28/E34 northeast from Utrecht.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Amersfoort** is at Stationsplein 9–11, 3818 LE Amersfoort ((C) 0900/112-2364; fax 033/465-0108). The office is open May to September, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 9am to 5pm; October to April, Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

On entering the town, you pass the oldest standing gateway, the **Kamperbinnenpoort**, constructed on the inner canal around 1260. The two other surviving gates are the **Koppelpoort**, a land and water gate from around 1400; and the **Monnikendam**, a water gate from 1430, both on the outer canal. Look for examples of 15th-century *muurhuizen* (wall houses) built into the ramparts and fortifications. If you visit Amersfoort on a summer Saturday, you may be lucky enough to encounter the colorful trumpeters who show up from time to time in the city center.

An impressive landmark is the tall, 15th-century **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwetoren (Our Lady's Tower)**, in the west of the old town, which stands 100m (328 ft.) high, and is the third tallest tower in the land; if you're here on a Friday, listen for its carillon concert between 10 and 11am. Other ancient religious buildings include the **Sint-Joriskerk**, started in 1243 and completed around 1534, and the beautifully restored 16th-century **Mariënhof Monastery**.

Housed in this monastery, the unusual **Culinair Museum Mariënhof**, Kleine Haag 2 ((C) 033/463-1025), at the northern end of the inner canal, offers a playful journey through the history of the culinary vices and virtues, from prehistoric times to the present day. A series of dioramas that include pieces of Meissen

porcelain traces how the hunter-gatherer gradually transformed into the mass-production consumer. You can sample historical cooking in the restaurant. The museum is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm; and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children.

For an illuminating look at Amersfoort's history, make a brief sojourn among the large collection of artifacts, models, and displays at the **Museum Flehite**, Westsingel 50 (☎ 033/461-9987). The museum is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm; and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children.

A NEARBY ATTRACTION FOR FAMILIES

Dolfinarium Harderwijk ★ *Kids* Harderwijk, a lakeside town on the Veluwemeer, 26km (16 miles) northeast of Amersfoort, boasts one of Europe's largest sea wildlife centers. This has both a dolphin research and rehabilitation station, as well as entertaining performances by the resident dolphins, sea lions, walruses, and seals. A visit here is a thrilling and interesting day out, especially for families. There is a series of open-air pools, underwater viewing galleries, and a touch-tank filled with fish.

Strandboulevard Oost 1, Harderwijk. ☎ 0900/365-3456. www.dolfinarium.nl. Admission July–Aug 21€ (\$26); Sept–June 20€ (\$24) adults, 18€ (\$23) seniors, free for children under 3. Daily 10am–6pm. From Amersfoort you can get here by frequent trains, and by car on A28/E232; the Dolfinarium is beside the Veluwestrand leisure center and beach, and is clearly signposted all around town.

3 Apeldoorn

76km (47 miles) E of Amsterdam; 40km (25 miles) E of Amersfoort; 26km (16 miles) N of Arnhem

“Royal Apeldoorn” is a title often bestowed on this city, which has hosted the likes of Willem III in 1685, Louis Napoléon in 1809, Queen Wilhelmina from 1948 until her death in 1962, and Princess Margriet from 1962 to 1975. It's a city of many parks and gardens, and a good place in which to base yourself for a visit to Hoge Veluwe National Park (see below).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station and from Amersfoort and Arnhem. **Buses** leave every half-hour on average from the bus stations in Amersfoort and Arnhem. By **car**, take A1/E30 east from Amersfoort; A50 north from Arnhem.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Apeldoorn** is at Stationsstraat 72, Apeldoorn (☎ 0900/168-1636; fax 055/521-1290). The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

A ROYAL RETREAT

Rijksmuseum Paleis Het Loo ★★ The 1685 Het Loo palace and estate, just outside Apeldoorn, has sheltered generations of Dutch royalty, being the favorite summer residence and hunting lodge of *Stadhouders* (Heads of State) and the royal house of Oranje-Nassau until 1975. Since 1984 it has served as the magnificent home of this museum, which celebrates the history of the House of Orange. After a complete renovation, in which it was stripped of its 19th-century trappings to reveal the original paneling and colorful damasks, this splendid palace is now an ideal setting for paintings, furniture, silver, glassware, and ceramics, as well as memorabilia of the royal family. Highlights include the

Fun Fact Do Call Us

Being home base to the country's biggest insurance company has given Apeldoorn some reflected glory. In a long-running ad campaign, the company advises victims of sundry light-hearted "disasters" to *Even Apeldoorn Bellen* (Just Call Apeldoorn), and the slogan has become something of a catchphrase, used when people are confronted by an unexpected difficulty.

lavish silk-and-damask-embellished private study (1690) and bedroom (1713) of *Stadhouder* William III, and the dining room (1686) decorated with tapestries illustrating themes of Ovid.

The vintage car and carriage collection in the stable block is also fascinating, and includes smooth models like a royal 1925 Bentley. But the jewel in the crown is the formal gardens. These were laid out during the renovation, using the original 17th-century plans and thus re-creating an appropriately small-scale Dutch Versailles. They are in four sections: the King's Garden, Queen's Garden, Upper Garden, and Lower Garden—a harmonious mélange of plants, flowers, trees, pathways, statues, fountains, and pools.

Koninklijk Park 1, Oude Loo (on the northwest edge of Apeldoorn). ☎ 055/577-2400. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25.

WHERE TO STAY

Bilderberghotel de Keizerskroon ★ This attractive hotel is set on the edge of town, adjacent to Het Loo Palace. Each of the spacious rooms is furnished with a writing desk; some have balconies overlooking the landscaped grounds.

Koningstraat 7, 7315 HR Apeldoorn. ☎ 055/521-7744. Fax 055/521-4737. 96 units. 140€–190€ (\$175–\$238) double; 220€–290€ (\$275–\$363) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; indoor pool; health club and spa. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Hotel-Pension Berg en Bos This little hotel has a quiet, peaceful setting near the Berg en Bos park and Het Loo Palace. The comfortable rooms are bright and airy. Some overlook the garden.

Aquamarijnstraat 58, 7314 HZ Apeldoorn. ☎ 055/355-2352. Fax 055/355-4782. 17 units. 65€ (\$81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Restaurant De Echoput ★ DUTCH/CONTINENTAL This widely acclaimed restaurant is named after the old well at which travelers once watered their horses (the "echoing well"). It's on the edge of the Royal Wood, about 10km (6 miles) west of Apeldoorn. From the outside it has the look of a modern hunting lodge, and the surprise comes when you enter the ultra-sophisticated lounge and dining room done up in shades of chocolate and pewter. Windows look out on pools and fountains and forest greenery. The specialty here is seasonal game (fall and winter), and summer specialties include lamb, beef, and poultry. No matter what the season, you can be sure your meal will be both classically superb and memorable.

Amersfoortseweg 86, Hoog Soeren/Apeldoorn, just off the N344 Apeldoorn–Amersfoort rd. ☎ 055/519-1463. Fixed-price menus 43€–48€ (\$54–\$60). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm; Tues–Sat 6–9:30pm; Sun 1–9:30pm.

HOLLAND'S LARGEST NATIONAL PARK

A beautiful nature reserve between Apeldoorn and Arnhem, **Hoge Veluwe National Park** ★★ (☎ 0900/464-3835; www.hogeveluwe.nl) covers some 55 sq. km (21 sq. miles) of gently rolling heath, pine and birch woodland, fens, and sand dunes, populated by red and roe deer, wild boar, pine martens, badgers, polecats, and other wildlife, including non-native species like the long-haired mouflon Mediterranean wild mountain sheep, along with around 150 different bird species. You can observe the wildlife from various hides and observation posts.

The park has solved its transportation issues in a way that's both user-friendly and nature-friendly. Cars are not permitted in the reserve proper, and a fleet of 800 free white bikes, which you can pick up from one of several convenient spots next to the perimeter car parks, makes getting around both easy and pleasant—though some visitors have an unfortunate tendency to “borrow” other people's bikes as soon as the original rider's back is turned. The scheme has proved successful, and these bikes are the perfect way to explore the park. You might have to overcome a certain moral barrier before you hop on a bike that isn't yours, but then again it isn't anybody else's either, and you'll be able to discover more of the park than if you go on foot.

It's no more than a leisurely ride to the splendid **Jachtslot Sint-Hubertus** (☎ 055/378-1237) ★, an extravagant hunting lodge on the northern edge of the park, with a tower that soars high above it. The Art Deco lodge was designed in 1920 by architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage for the Kröller-Müllers (see below). Inside, stained-glass windows tell the story of St. Hubert, the patron saint of hunters, and the house is full of symbolic references to his life. You can stroll through the rose garden or sit on the banks of the swan-shaped lake.

The reserve offers camping facilities (but doesn't permit uncontrolled camping), bungalow and other vacation accommodations, and picnic facilities. Hoge Veluwe is separated by just 5 km (3 miles) and the A50 expressway from Veluwezoom National Park, to the east (see “Arnhem,” below).

Entrances are at Otterloo, Rijzenburg (at Schaarsbergen), and Hoenderloo. The national park is open daily from 8am to sunset. The St. Hubert Hunting Lodge is open for guided tours April to October, daily every half-hour from 11am to 4:30pm (except 1pm); November to December and February to March, Monday to Friday at 2 and 3pm. Admission to the park alone is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6; a combination ticket including the St. Hubert Hunting Lodge and the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Möller is 8€ (\$10) for adults, 4€ (\$5) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6. Parking is 6€ (\$7.50). Free white bikes are available at several places, among them Hoenderloo, Otterloo, and Rijzenburg (near Schaarsbergen). Buses depart for the Hoge Veluwe every hour or so from outside both Apeldoorn and Arnhem rail stations.

Rijksmuseum Kröller-Möller ★★ ★ An unexpected treasure is embedded like a flower in the middle of Hoge Veluwe National Park. Perhaps a sunflower or iris would be the appropriate bloom, because the Kröller-Möller National Museum is home to 278 works by Vincent van Gogh, whose paintings of such fragile creations are valued by millions for their beauty, and at tens of millions as an investment. This major museum is where you find most of the van Gogh paintings that aren't in Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum (see “Seeing the Sights,” in chapter 11). Named after the art collector Helene Kröller-Möller,

Fun Fact In the Saddle

The average Hollander rides about 1,000km (620 miles) annually by bike.

who gathered up some 120 works by van Gogh around the turn of the century, the museum is a friendly rival to the van Gogh Museum.

However, the Kröller-Müller's pastoral setting and the light, airy structure of glass-walled pavilions add another dimension to a museum visit. It seems somehow surprising to find paintings like the *Café Terrace in Arles* (1881) by the great artist whose work inspires such passion—and prices—hanging on the wall of this fairly isolated place. The collection includes paintings by Mondrian, Picasso, Braques, and Seurat, as well as Chinese porcelain and Delftware. An adjacent **sculpture garden** hosts pieces by equally renowned artists, like Rodin, Moore, Dubuffet, and Lipchitz, among others

Houtkampweg 6, Otterloo. ☎ 0318/591-041. Tues–Sun and holidays 10am–5pm. Admission included in Hoge Veluwe National Park's combination ticket (see above).

4 Arnhem ★

82km (51 miles) SE of Amsterdam; 55km (34 miles) E of Utrecht; 26km (16 miles) S of Apeldoorn

Gelderland's capital, founded in the 13th century and later a prosperous member of the Hanseatic League trading alliance, Arnhem became a household name during World War II, when its strategic road bridge over the Rhine River became the target of a massive Allied airborne assault (see box "A Bridge Too Far," below). The city center was entirely destroyed during the fighting and rebuilt after the war.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Direct **trains** to Arnhem Centraal Station depart every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station, going via Utrecht. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A2/E35 southeast to Utrecht and A12/E35 east to Arnhem; from Apeldoorn go south on A50.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Arnhem**, Stationsplein 45, 6811 KL Arnhem (☎ 0900/202-4075; fax 026/442-2644; www.arnhem.nl), is just outside the rail station.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

One of the most emblematic yet most ordinary-looking sights in Arnhem is the road bridge over the Rhine in the center of town. A replica of the bridge destroyed during World War II, it is known as the **John Frost Bridge**, in honor of the commander and troops of the British 2nd Parachute Battalion. In September 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Frost's 600 valiant "Red Devils" took and for 4 days held the north end of the bridge against overwhelming German numbers and firepower, when the entire 10,000-man 1st Airborne Division had been expected to reach it and hold out for just 2 days against light opposition.

Contemporary and classic artworks, with an emphasis on modern Dutch painting and sculpture, can be found in the **Museum voor Moderne Kunst (Museum of Modern Art)** ★, Utrechtseweg 87 (☎ 026/351-2431). This is housed in a handsome 19th-century villa beside the road to Oosterbeek (see below), and has a sculpture garden, a coffee room, and an open-air café overlooking the Neder Rijn.

Moments Silent Running

Arnhemers do it on trolley buses—and since this is the only place in the Benelux lands where such an experience is possible, be sure to join them. The town's fleet of blue, electrically powered trolley buses glides smoothly through the streets, justifying Arnhem's self-perception as the *trolley-busstad* (trolley-bus town), and making you wonder why so many other communities around the world have junked this environmentally friendly—and blessedly quiet—mode of transportation. A ride to Oosterbeek (see below) from outside Arnhem Centraal Station neatly combines that trolley-bus feeling with good views of Arnhem and an interesting destination.

Historisch Museum Het Burgerweeshuis, Bovenbeekstraat 21 (☎ 026/442-6900), contains archaeological relics found in the province and an interesting topographical map of the Netherlands. Both museums are open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday and holidays from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, and 2€ (\$2.50) for children.

ORGANIZED TOURS

Boat trips from Arnhem by **Rederij Scheers** (☎ 026/322-9439) depart from a quay below the John Frost Bridge and include daylong excursions on the busy Rhine and IJssel rivers. Some cruises cross the border into Germany, stopping at Emmerich; another visits the Dutch Hanseatic towns of Deventer, Doesburg, Zutphen, Zwolle, and Kampen (see “The Hanseatic Towns,” below). Trips are in July and August, and start at 14€ (\$17) for adults, 11€ (\$13) for children ages 11 to 16, and free for children under 11, for 11/2-hour trips. Daylong cruises, including lunch and refreshments, are 33€ (\$41) for adults, 24€ (\$30) for children.

OUTSIDE OF TOWN

Outside of town to the northeast begins **Veluwezoom National Park** ★, 46 sq. km² (18 sq. miles) of pine and silver birch forest and heathland crisscrossed by riding, walking, and biking trails. This park is an extension of the larger Hoge Veluwe National Park to the west (see “Apeldoorn,” above), the two being separated by about 5km (3 miles) and the A50 expressway. The **Visitor Center** (☎ 026/495-1023) is open daily from 10am to 5pm.

TWO GREAT ESCAPES FOR KIDS

Burgers' Zoo Bush and Safaripark ★ *Kids* You can drive slowly through the grounds of this park on .4 sq. km (½ sq. mile) on the northwestern edge of the town and watch more than 300 animals roam freely behind protective fencing. Its chimpanzee and gorilla enclosures are internationally acclaimed. Tropical rain-forest and subtropical desert habitats have been re-created in two enormous greenhouses, together with the animal life indigenous to these regions.

Schelmseweg 85 (near the Nederlands Openluchtmuseum). ☎ 026/442-4534. Admission 16€ (\$20) adults, 10€ (\$13) children 4–10, free for children under 4. Daily 9am–7pm in summer, 9am–5pm in winter.

Nederlands Openluchtmuseum ★ *Kids* Don't miss this delightful open-air museum, which brings to life Dutch history, customs, dress, and architecture from about 1800 to 1950. On its 44 hectares (109 acres), step-gabled town

A Bridge Too Far

On September 17, 1944, the greatest airborne assault in history, Operation Market Garden, began. On this and subsequent days, the U.S. 101st Airborne Division landed near Eindhoven, and the 82nd Airborne Division parachuted onto the Nijmegen area. After hard and bloody fighting, the Americans captured both of these cities along with bridges over the Maas and Waal rivers and several canals and streams. Meanwhile, the British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish 1st Parachute Brigade landed near Arnhem to capture the vital bridge over the Rhine. In all, 35,000 Allied paratroops and glider infantry were employed.

The plan called for a ground force to break through the German front line along the Dutch-Belgian border; charge 100km (62 miles) north along a single road through Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem; cross the captured bridges; and get across Hitler's last big defensive barrier, the Rhine, before the Germans could react.

As one of the Allied commanders feared, it turned out to be "a bridge too far." The British airborne troops landed close to the tanks and artillery of the German 2nd SS Panzer Corps and were plunged into a fight for survival. Bad weather prevented reinforcements and supplies being flown in on schedule. A single battalion of paratroops made it to the Rhine bridge and held it in 4 days of bitter fighting, but they were finally overwhelmed. The division's tenuous bridgehead across the Rhine at nearby Oosterbeek was overwhelmed when the relief column was held up along what was being called "Hell's Highway."

The British survivors withdrew across the Rhine on September 27, having suffered 13,000 casualties. American losses were around 3,500.

houses, farmhouses, windmills, antique means of transport, and colorful costumes of the past from around the country have been gathered together. It's a living museum, in the sense that frequent demonstrations of old arts and hand-crafts are given.

Schelmseweg 89 (at Hoeferlaan). ☎ 026/357-6111. Admission 10€ (\$13) adults, 6€ (\$7.50) children 4–10, free for children under 4. Mid-Apr to Oct daily 10am–5pm. By car take A12/E35 and follow the signs to Arnhem-Noord/Openluchtmuseum; by bus take no. 3 from Arnhem Centraal Station to Altevier.

OOSTERBEEK

Adjoining Arnhem on the west, Oosterbeek (pronounced *Ohst*-uhr-bayk) traces its history back to the Roman era, and in the 19th century was beloved by artists, who built handsome villas here. Stop by the old Catholic church to view Jan Toorop's *Fourteen Stations of the Cross*. The village was badly damaged during heavy fighting that accompanied the September 1944 Allied airborne offensive to capture the Rhine bridge at Arnhem during World War II; it was rebuilt after the war. In Oosterbeek is the Airborne Cemetery, where 1,748 of the Allied fallen rest. Local schoolchildren lay flowers on the graves for the annual day of remembrance, in a moving echo of the support Dutch civilians gave their liberators during the battle.

Airborne Museum Hartenstein ✨ The former Hotel Hartenstein housed headquarters of the British 1st Airborne Division during the Battle of Arnhem. Most of that proud command was killed, wounded, or captured while trying to fight its way through strong German opposition to Arnhem and, after the failure of that assault, to maintain a bridgehead on the north bank of the Rhine at Oosterbeek until relief came from the south—relief that arrived too little and too late. The museum, surrounded by beautiful grounds and a park, is packed with exhibits that detail the savage fighting, when for a week the hotel and its surroundings were under constant attack.

You can walk the paratroop survivors' withdrawal route south through the park and suburban streets, to the Rhine at Westerbouwing. A passenger-and-bike ferry shuttles back and forth across this scenic stretch of the river, to dock near Driel on the south bank. This village has a monument to Polish paratroops who landed here in the face of heavy German fire during Operation Market Garden.

Utrechtseweg 232 (on the western edge of the village). ☎ **026/333-7710**. Admission 4.50€ (\$5.65) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

After sustaining heavy damage in World War II, **Kasteel Doorwerth**, Fonteinallee, Doorwerth (☎ **026/333-5375**), beside the river 5km (3 miles) west of Oosterbeek, the former residence of a Rhine baron, was rebuilt in its original architectural style. The moated castle was started in the 13th century and extended during the 15th and 16th centuries. Today the castle is home to both the **Museum voor Natuur en Wildbeheer (Nature and Wildlife)**, with interesting exhibits on game animals and nature, and antique weapons; and the **Museum Veluwezoom**, with paintings by 19th-century artists of the influential Oosterbeek school. You can visit the rest of the castle also during the summer months. The museums are open April to October, Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and weekends and holidays from 1 to 5pm; November to March, weekends from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 8€ (\$10) for adults, and 4€ (\$5) for children under 16.

A visit to the zoo, at **Ouwehand's Dierenpark**, Grebbeweg 111 (☎ **0317/650-200**; www.ouwehand.nl), makes the trip to Rhenen, 26km (16 miles) west of Arnhem, worthwhile, especially for kids. In addition to royal Bengal tigers, lions, elephants, reindeer, polar bears, and many other animals and birds, it has an aquarium and a dolphinarium with daily performances. There's also a playground for children and a terrace cafe. The zoo is open April to October, daily from 9am to 6pm; November to March, daily 9am to 5pm. Admission is 16€ (\$20) for adults, 14€ (\$18) for seniors, 13€ (\$16) for children ages 3 to 9, and free for children under 3. To get there from Arnhem, take N225 via Oosterbeek, Doorwerth, and Renkum.

5 Nijmegen

58km (36 miles) SE of Utrecht; 15km (9 miles) S of Arnhem

Nijmegen (pop. 160,000) has a long recorded history, and boasts dibs on being, officially, the oldest city in the Netherlands. In A.D. 104, the Roman Emperor Trajan granted city rights to the trading town of Ulpia Noviomagus Batavorum, which had grown up around a legionary fortress that protected this sector of the empire's Rhine frontier. The city lies in the orchard country of Gelderland's Betuwe (Fertile Wetlands) district, a peninsula squeezed between the Neder Rijn and Waal rivers, which in ancient times had been the heartland of the Batavians.

An important Catholic center in the mainly Protestant north of Holland, it is home to the prestigious Catholic University of Nijmegen.

GETTING THERE **Trains** depart every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station and Arnhem to Nijmegen. **Buses** depart every half-hour on average from outside Arnhem rail station. By **car**, take A52 south from Arnhem.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Nijmegen**, St-Jorisstraat 72, 6511 TD Nijmegen (☎ 0900/112-2344; fax 024/360-1429), is at Keizer Traianusplein. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Nijmegen's road bridge over the Waal was a key objective of Operation Market Garden during World War II. A combination of the destruction wrought by that battle, and an earlier raid by U.S. bombers that mistakenly struck the city instead of their intended target in Germany, devastated the old center. It has been rebuilt, mostly along different lines. Around the handsome **Grote Markt**, look for the 1612 **Waal (Weigh House)** and the **Kerkboog** vaulted passageway from 1545 with a gable from 1605.

The city's strategic position is clearly visible from the **Valkhof (Falcon Court)**, a park affording magnificent views. It's situated high on the south bank of the Waal—this is actually the main continuation of the Rhine, which splits in two after entering Holland—on the site of a 9th-century Frankish castle. Here, too, are the ruins of the 12th-century **Sint-Maartenskapel (St. Martin's Chapel)**, and the octagonal **Sint-Niklaaskapel (St. Nicholas's Chapel)** from 1030, called the Carolingian Chapel because of the erroneous belief that it was built by Charlemagne. More excellent views are available from the nearby 15th-century **Belvedere**, a watchtower that now houses a restaurant.

Museum Het Valkhof The daring glass structure was designed by Ben van Berkel and opened in 1999 to accommodate this historical and art museum; it also integrates two older, smaller museums. The structure is worth viewing in its own right. Nijmegen's Roman period is a major emphasis of the museum, when the city was the home base of the Tenth Legion and an important trade gateway between the Romanized Batavians and the "barbarians" to the north. The later Frankish era, when Nijmegen was a favorite residence of Charlemagne, also is covered by the museum. In addition, there's an interesting array of fine-art objects and sculptures, and modern art.

Kelkensbos 59. ☎ 024/360-8805. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children under 18. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 1–5pm.

THE GROESBEEK HEIGHTS

The loftiest peak in this range of hills just off Nijmegen's southeastern flank, along the German border, soars to all of 99m (325 ft.). But for the Netherlands that's more than respectable. In any case, the wooded hills and open country make good strolling and biking terrain, and host a cluster of surprising attractions.

Bijbels Openluchtmuseum (Biblical Open-Air Museum) ★★ Step back in time, into the world of the New Testament. Life-size period replicas of homes and street scenes from the biblical lands inhabit the 49-hectare (121-acre) site of this fascinating museum, run by the Dutch Heilig Landstichting (Holy Land Foundation). The figurines might leave something to be desired, but otherwise the commitment to historical verisimilitude in the exhibits—Jewish, Roman,

Greek, and Egyptian homes; a synagogue; a Sea of Galilee fishing village; a stretch of Roman road—is impressive. During the Christmas period there's a crib exhibit. In the visitor center are archaeological finds and exhibits on Christian, Jewish, and Islamic scriptures. Due to the sheer size of the place, you'll need a few hours to get much out of your visit, and a full morning or afternoon to do it any kind of justice.

Profetenlaan 2 (southeast of town on the road to Groesbeek). ☎ 024/382-3110. Admission 8€ (\$10) adults, 4€ (\$5) children under 14. Late Mar to Nov 9am–5:30pm.

Liberation Museum 1944 ★ During Operation Market Garden, the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division jumped onto drop zones around Groesbeek, to capture the bridges over the Maas River at Grave and the Waal at Nijmegen, and thereby allow the tanks of Britain's Guards Armored Division to roll north toward Arnhem. The museum—which resembles an open parachute canopy—records the heavy fighting that ensued. This included U.S. paratroops converting themselves into “airborne Marines” and crossing the Waal in flimsy assault boats through a hail of fire to take the Nijmegen road bridge. It begins, however, with the rise of National Socialism between the two World Wars. Then a series of photographs, films, a slide show, and a model of the area evoke Holland's period of occupation during World War II, leading up to the story that began on September 17, when the skies above Groesbeek suddenly blossomed with thousands of parachutes. Not far away, on Zevenheuvelenweg, is the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery.

Wylersbaan 4, Groesbeek, 9.5km (6 miles) from Nijmegen. ☎ 024/397-4404. Admission 5€ (\$7.50) adults, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children under 15. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm. Bus: 5 from Nijmegen.

6 The Hanseatic Towns ★

The Hanze Route (Hanseatic Route) runs along the IJssel River, which was the quick way from the Rhine to the Zuiderzee long before the sea was dammed in and became the freshwater IJsselmeer. Seven towns—Doesburg, Zutphen, Deventer, Hattem, Zwolle, Hasselt, and Kampen—along the 125km (78-mile) route through Gelderland and Overijssel played important roles in the international trade of yesteryear and profited handsomely from their membership in the medieval Hanseatic League, an association of more than 150 trading towns and cities in north and northwest Europe. You can tell this today by viewing the many old churches, public buildings, merchants' houses, and gateways that are still standing.

ZUTPHEN

26km (16 miles) NE of Arnhem; 18km (11 miles) SE of Apeldoorn

A handsome walled medieval town, Zutphen (pop. 32,000) stands on the east bank of the IJssel. From Arnhem, **trains** arrive every hour and **buses** every half-hour or so; by **car**, take N48. For tourist information, visit **VVV Zutphen**, Stationsplein 39, Zutphen (☎ 0575/519-355; fax 0575/517-928; www.achterhoektoerisme.nl).

Zutphen's magnificent Gothic **Sint-Walburgiskerk (St. Walburga's Church)**, 'sGravenhof (☎ 0575/514-178), in the center of town, houses important works of art and the **Librije (Library)** from 1564. The medieval books and manuscripts there are still in use, chained to reading desks.

Zutphen is itself a gateway into Gelderland's **Achterhoek** district, which stretches east from the IJssel to the German border. You can make a rewarding foray by bike or car into this tranquil landscape of farms, forests, and châteaux.

DEVENTER

14km (9 miles) N of Zutphen; 14km (9 miles) E of Apeldoorn

Just across the province line in Overijssel, Deventer (pop. 70,000) had its beginnings in the 11th century and later became a fountain of religious and intellectual scholarship, with Thomas à Kempis, Erasmus, and Descartes among those who passed through its monastery school of the Brethren of the Common Life. You still see fine medieval and Renaissance buildings along its streets. The town is known for its spicy gingerbread, *Deventer koek*.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** every hour from Arnhem via Zutphen. **Buses** depart every half-hour on average from Zutphen. By **car**, take N348 north from Zutphen.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Deventer** is at Keizerstraat 22, Deventer (☎ 0900/353-5355; fax 0570/643-338; www.hansedeventer-home.nl). The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The old center and the IJssel waterfront are dominated by the magnificent Gothic **Sint-Lebuiuskerk (St. Lebuin's Church)** (✠, Groote Poot (☎ 0570/612-548), named after an 8th-century Saxon missionary. Its 17th-century Hemony carillon is among the finest in Holland. The church is open Monday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm; admission is free. In the neighboring 17th-century **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, Grote Kerkhof 4 (☎ 0570/649-959), is a large library of medieval books and manuscripts that's well worth a look. It's open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm; admission is free.

Artifacts relating to the area and a marvelous collection of local costumes are exhibited in the **Museum De Waag**, Brink 56 (☎ 0570/693-780), in the extravagant **Waag (Weigh House)** from 1528 on Deventer's main square. The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 6€ (\$7.50) for adults, and 3€ (\$3.75) for children.

Organized Tours

Rederij Scheers (☎ 0570/613-254) and **Rederij Eureka** (☎ 0570/643-151) both operate boat trips on the IJssel from Deventer, going north to Kampen and south to Arnhem.

Nearby Places of Interest

Just north of the pretty little village of **Holten**, 19km (12 miles) east of Deventer, are the ancient heathland and forests of the **Sallandse Heuvelrug (Salland Hills)** (✠). These rear up all of 76m (250 ft.) at the Holterberg, and mark the spot where the northern glaciers ground to a halt during the last Ice Age. Part of the

Moments Ferry Tales

Following the course of the IJssel, you might want to cross back and forth from one bank to the other. A good place to do this is the scenic stretch north of Deventer, and a nice way to do it is by vehicle ferry rather than at a bridge in one of the towns. There are ferries at the villages of Olst and Wijhe. The trip takes just a few minutes.

area is a protected nature reserve, but the rest makes good and none-too-strenuous hiking and biking country.

ZWOLLE ★

28km (17 miles) N of Deventer; 34km (21 miles) N of Apeldoorn

The capital of Overijssel, Zwolle (pop. 100,000) was founded in the 9th century and flourished during the 14th and 15th. In that boom time, churches and civic buildings were enlarged or embellished, and Zwolle became an important religious and cultural center, as well as a hub of trade. Thomas à Kempis (1379–1471), who wrote the influential *Imitation of Christ*, was a monk at the Agnietenberg Augustinian monastery just north of Zwolle and is buried in the town. The fortified bastions and the distinctive star-shaped moat that makes an island of the old center date from the 17th century.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** every hour from Deventer and from Apeldoorn. **Buses** depart about every half-hour from Deventer and every hour from Apeldoorn. By **car**, take N337 north from Deventer; A50 north from Apeldoorn.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Zwolle**, Stadhuis, Grote Kerkplein 15, 8011 PK Zwolle (☎ **0900/112-2375**; fax 038/422-2679; www.vvzwolle.nl), is in the center of town. The office is open Monday from 10am to 5pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Sint-Michaëlskerk (St. Michael's Church) ★ Not to be confused with the small St. Michael's Church just outside the town center, where Thomas à Kempis is buried, this one dates from 1370 to 1446. Its dedication to the Archangel Michael, the winged guardian of Israel, is signified by a sculpture portraying him slaying the dragon, as told in *Revelations*, and by a relief on an earlier, Romanesque tympanum from around 1200 of Abraham with Michael and two other archangels. The interior is interesting for its octagonal vestry and the massive 4,000-pipe Schnitger organ from 1722, which is often used for concerts and recordings.

Grote Kerkplein. ☎ **038/421-7596**. June–Aug Wed–Sat 2–4pm.

More Places of Interest

Most of the original city wall has been demolished. Following the walkways along what's left is a perfect way to discover Zwolle's hidden charms. Particularly impressive is the red-brick **Sassenpoort (Saxon Gate)**, Sassenstraat 54, a fortified gateway from 1406 adorned with four octagonal towers. It accommodates a **Visitor Center** (☎ **038/421-6626**), which has information about the town's history, and is open Wednesday to Friday from 2 to 5pm, and weekends and holidays from noon to 5pm; admission is 1€ (\$1.25).

Affectionately dubbed the *Peperbus* (Peppermill), the recently restored 1487 tower of the massive **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwbasiliek (Basilica of Our Lady)**, Ossenmarkt (☎ **038/421-5491**), west of the Grote Markt, is Zwolle's primary landmark. You can climb it and treat yourself to wide views over the town and the IJssel valley. Inside the 15th-century church are interesting medieval relics and statues. The church is open May to September, Monday to Saturday from 10:30am to 4:30pm; October, Monday to Saturday from 1:30 to 4:30pm; and November to April, Monday to Saturday from 1:30 to 3:30pm. Admission is 1€ (\$1.25) for adults, and 0.50€ (65¢) for children under 12.

Especially for Kids

Ecodrome Zwolle  *Kids* The different displays at this educational theme park allow you to get close to the earth's nature and environment. You start out in the Geology Pavilion, where you learn about the earth's past, and then head into the Biology Pavilion, to see how plant and animal life started—and how people began to interact and exercise influence over nature. Along the way you pass through the Piranha Tunnel, for a fish's-eye view of these needle-toothed little monsters, and visit the Rio Negro tropical rainforest and river. You come face-to-face with dinosaurs in the Dinorama, and can even dig up fossilized bones.

Willemsvaart 19 (10 min. on foot from the main rail station). ☎ 038/421-5050. www.ecodrome.nl. Admission Apr–Oct/Nov–Mar 10€/9.40€ (\$13/\$12) adults, 8.50€/7.80€ (\$11/\$9.75) seniors/children 3–11, 5.50€/5.40€ (\$7) visitors with disabilities, free for children under 3. Apr–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar Wed, Sat–Sun; 10am–5pm; school vacations Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25, 31. By car, from A21 take the Zwolle-Zuid exit.

KAMPEN

13km (8 miles) NW of Zwolle

With its handsome, bustling IJssel River waterfront and more than 500 historical monuments, including medieval merchants' houses, towers, and town gates, Kampen (pop. 33,000) still displays the signature of its boom period from 1330 to 1450, when it was an important member of the Hanseatic League. The Dutch Golden Age artist Hendrik Avercamp (1585–1663) lived, worked, and died in the town. Kampen is a good base from which to make bike and walking tours of the beautiful riverside landscape and nature reserves around the nearby mouth of the IJssel.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Zwolle, **trains** depart every hour and **buses** about every half-hour; by **car**, take N50 northwest.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Kampen**, Oudestraat 151, 8261 CL Kampen (☎ 038/331-3500; fax 038/332-8900; www.vvvkampen.nl), is in the town center. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm (to 5pm Nov–Apr), and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The **Oude Raadhuis (Old Town Hall)**, Oudestraat 133 (☎ 038/339-2999), was rebuilt in 1543 after a fire that grievously damaged the original, from 1345 to 1350. Pass by for a look at the onion-shaped tower, and the oak-paneled 14th-century **Schepenzaal (Aldermen's Chamber)** with its carved-stone chimneypiece from 1545 and bust of Habsburg Emperor Charles V at its center. In the adjacent **New Town Hall** is an almost complete collection of portraits of scions of Holland's royal House of Orange. The Town Hall is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.

Across the way, the imposing Gothic **Sint-Nicolaaskerk (Church of St. Nicholas)**, also known as the **Bovenkerk**, Koornmarkt 28 (☎ 038/331-6453), achieved its final form around 1500. It has a massive organ with 3,200 pipes, and a tower that's 70m (230 ft.) high.

To gain some idea of Kampen's illustrious history, visit the **Stedelijk Museum**, Oudestraat 158 (☎ 038/331-7361), in the Gotische Huis (Gothic House) house, a late-15th-century merchant's store where herbs and spices were sold. In back is a working mill. The museum is open February to mid-June and mid-September to December, Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 12:30pm and 1:30

Boat People

The Royal Huisman Shipyard at Vollenhove, 14km (9 miles) north of Kampen, builds luxury sailboats for the world's wealthy and world-class racing yachts that have won an occasional Admiral's Cup trophy and Round-the-World Race. Silicon Graphics and Netscape Communications founder Jim Clark is something of a regular customer. Huisman built his 89m (292-ft.) three-masted schooner *Athena*, and his 52m (170-ft.) sloop *Hyperion*.

to 5pm; mid-June to mid-September, Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm, and Sunday from 1 to 5pm.

A few doors along, the **Nieuwe Toren (New Tower)**, Oudestraat 146, from 1664, was built by Amsterdam architect Philips Vingboons and has a 47-bell Hemony carillon in its octagonal belfry. All you need do to gain a fine view over the town is climb the 152 interior steps. The tower is open May to August, Wednesday and Saturday from 2 to 5pm.

There's no better way of getting close to the spirit of the Hanseatic League traders than by stepping aboard the **Kamper Hanze Kogge** ⚓, IJsselkade 91 (☎ 038/331-0515), on the IJssel waterfront. Built of oak using original construction methods, this is a replica of the broad-beamed, deep-draft, single-masted merchant vessels, called cogs, that in the 13th and 14th centuries plied the stormy Baltic and North Sea trade routes, connecting Lübeck, Bergen, London, Bruges, and other ports. Each could carry up to 200 tons of bulk cargo—salt, furs, wax, dried and salted fish, grain, cod-liver oil, beer, textiles. Without the sturdy Hanse cogs, the flourishing trade of medieval northern Europe would have been impossible. The ship's aftercastle was a kind of redoubt to defend against pirates and other enemies. The **Kamper Hanze Kogge** is open to visitors Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and at other times on request.

Out of seven original fortified gates in the demolished town walls, three survive. The riverside **Koornmarkspoort**, IJsselkade 1, from the first half of the 14th century, is the oldest gate and for a long time was used as a prison and garrison quarters. West of the center, the **Broederpoort**, Tweede Ebbingestraat 50, dates from 1465 and was partly rebuilt in 1615 to 1617 in Renaissance style after losing its military role when the town defenses were pushed further out. Like this gate, its near neighbor **Cellebroederpoort**, Tweede Ebbingestraat 1, with twin towers, was constructed in the second half of the 14th century and, between 1615 and 1617, was partly rebuilt for the same reasons. On its town side are two sculptured lions bearing shields.

GIETHOORN ⚓

26km (16 miles) N of Zwolle

This picture-postcard village has no streets, only canals (and walking and biking paths). You can get here by hourly **bus** from Zwolle. By **car**, take N331 north along the Zwarte Water River to Zwartsluis, and N334 northeast across the beautiful Overijssel lakes. Then leave your car at a car park on the edge of Giethoorn and follow a signposted path to the main canal. Visitor information is available from **VVV Giethoorn**, Beulakerweg 114A, 8355 AM Giethoorn (☎ 0521/361-248; fax 0521/362-281), housed aboard a boat at the southern end of this canal.

The comparison with Venice is inevitable, if more than a tad overdone, but though a rented punt may not be as romantic a mode of transport as a gondola,

gliding under the village's humpback bridges, past farms, meadows, and enchanting old canal-side cottages with reed-thatched roofs and carefully tended gardens is still a fine experience. Should punting seem too much like work, you can instead rent a launch with an electric motor and still enjoy the experience in tranquillity.

For an insight into the rural area's way of life, visit the **Museumboerderij (Farmhouse Museum)**, Olde Maat Uus, Binnenpad 52, in an 1826 house decked out with local craft and farming displays. The museum is open May to October, daily from 11am to 5pm; and November to April, daily from noon to 5pm. North of Giethoorn stretches **De Weerribben National Park**, an extensive landscape of reed marshes and moorland crisscrossed by narrow water channels.

Just 8km (5 miles) to the west, the now inland village of **Blokkzijl**, which lost its port to the IJsselmeer project, is a fair monument to past trading, fishing, and whaling wealth, from its days as a member of the Hanseatic League to the 17th and 18th centuries, when ships of the Dutch East India Company sheltered in its harbor while storms raged on the Zuiderzee. A maritime museum, **In De Coop'ren Duikhelm (In the Copper Diving Helmet)**, Binnenpad 62, takes as its theme the changing seascape of the Zuiderzee-IJsselmeer and, as its odd name suggests, has a section on diving. The museum is open March to October daily from 10am to 6pm; and November to February daily from 11am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Kaatje bij de Sluis ★★ CONTINENTAL Weary travelers on the polders should settle in nicely at this charming 17th-century mansion hotel in the heart of picturesque Blokkzijl. Its name means "Kate's by the Sluice," which is appropriate enough, since it is located right beside a canal sluice and drawbridge. You can see these, along with passing boats and bikes, when you look out of one of the big picture windows of the tastefully furnished, comfortable rooms. The finest views are from room nos. 12 and 14. Breakfast is served in a bright winter garden, and in summer when the weather's fine, both breakfast and lunch are served on a water-side terrace. Across the canal, the restaurant deserves its fine reputation. The menu is not extensive and changes seasonally according to what's special and available. You can expect a couple of fish dishes and three or four meat dishes, two of which are likely to be duck and beef tournedos.

Zuiderstraat 1, 8356 DZ Blokkzijl. ☎ 0527/291-833. Fax 0527/291836. www.katje.nl. 8 units. 150€ (\$188) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental). **In room:** Minibar, coffeemaker, safe.

Moments Step Back into Staphorst

Staphorst, 16km (10 miles) north of Zwolle on the Meppel road, is the Dutch village of your imagination, with colorfully dressed residents living as their ancestors did. This is no tourist act—you seldom get an enthusiastic welcome from these devout and strict Calvinists, especially on Sunday, when the entire population observes a tradition that dates back centuries: With downcast eyes, separate lines of men and women form a silent procession to the churches. No automobiles are allowed into the village on the Sabbath—even bike riding is forbidden. Cameras are always frowned upon. Whenever you come to Staphorst—on Sunday or a weekday—be sure to respect the townspeople's conservative ways and keep cameras out of sight.

7 Lelystad & the Noordoostpolder

41km (25 miles) NE of Amsterdam; 30km (19 miles) W of Kampen

This ultramodern city (pop. 100,000) and capital of Holland's newest province, Flevoland, has little—nothing, really—in the way of traditional Dutch character to offer. Yet a number of standout attractions here justify an expedition across the flat, bare polders; indeed, a drive across those polders themselves, newly wrested from the IJsselmeer, has its own peculiar fascination. Should you visit Lelystad on a Saturday, be sure to go by the town square to see vendors clad in traditional dress hawking everything from smoked eels to crafts to cheese, in a delightful example of a people holding onto tradition in the middle of modern-day progress.

To complete the “Golden Circle” of the IJsselmeer, see also “The Western IJsselmeer Shore,” in chapter 12; and “The Eastern IJsselmeer Shore,” in chapter 14.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** arrive in Lelystad every hour from Amsterdam Centraal Station. **Buses** arrive every half-hour on average from Amsterdam. By **car** from Amsterdam, take A6 northeast; from Kampen take N307 and N309 west.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Lelystad** is at Stationsplein 186, 8232 VT Lelystad (☎ 0320/243-444; fax 0320/280-218; www.vvvflevoland.nl). The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Nationaal Scheepshistorisch Centrum (Maritime History Center) ★★ (Kids

Step aboard the moored, faithful reconstruction of the *Batavia*, a three-masted sailing ship of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie/V.O.C. (United East India Company), and imagine yourself en route to the fabled Spice Islands. Launched in 1628 at the V.O.C.'s Amsterdam yard, the original *Batavia* sailed in 1629 on her maiden voyage to the East Indies, but struck a reef off Australia and broke up. The survivors' subsequent experience of mutiny, murder, rescue, and retribution electrified Dutch society.

This replica, 50m (160 ft.) long, cluttered with spars, sails, and rigging, was built at the Bataviawerf (Batavia Wharf) between 1985 and 1995 mostly by unemployed teens using 16th- and 17th-century tools and construction techniques. You can clamber over her and stand above the bowsprit, entertaining visions of the cruel sea and the romantic age of sailing. You can also visit the onshore workshops where the ship pieces were assembled.

Also taking shape at the wharf, amidst a clattering of hammers on wood, is a man-o'-war, a replica of the 80-gun ship of the line *De Zeven Provinciën* (*The Seven Provinces*), built in Rotterdam in 1664 to 1665 and later the flagship of Adm. Michiel de Ruyter. During a 30-year career, the ship saw action in many a hard-fought sea battle in the wars against England and France. Construction of the replica began in 1995 and is not due to be completed before 2005. (If you're fascinated by these replica sailing ships, be sure to visit the *Amsterdam*, at the Maritime Museum in Amsterdam; see “More Museums & Galleries,” in chapter 11.)

The Batavia Wharf also hosts the **Netherlands Institute for Marine and Underwater Archaeology** (☎ 0320/269-700). This unique museum exhibits ships and relics from ships that went to a watery grave in the Zuiderzee as far back as Roman times. Their remains were revealed as water was pumped out to

make way for polders. The process of reconstructing old, sunken ships, after finding and recovering them, is made both visible and accessible to visitors.

Oostvaardersdijk 1–9 (just off the Markerwaard dike rd.). ☎ 0320/261-409. 9€ (\$11) adults, 7€ (\$8.75) seniors, 4.50€ (\$5.65) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Daily 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

Nieuwland Poldermuseum  The Dutch themselves have created a fair part of the solid ground their country stands on by taking new land from the sea, as polders. This fascinating museum affords an understanding of how they did it, in particular around the old Zuiderzee. You learn about the construction of dikes, the pumping process, the final drying up operation, and making the new-won land habitable. Appropriately, the museum is housed in a building that represents a cross-section of a polder dike. Children can get down and dirty with the “Play with Water” interactive exhibit, where they get to construct their own dikes.

Oostvaardersdijk 1–13 (just off the Markerwaard dike rd.). ☎ 0320/260-799. 4.50€ (\$5.65) adults, 4€ (\$5) seniors, 2.50€ (\$3.15) children 5–16, free for children under 5. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11:30am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

All kind of thrills and enjoyment for the whole family are on offer at **Six Flags Holland**, Spijkweg 30 (☎ 0321/329-999; www.sixflagsholland.nl), near Biddinghuizen, 22km (14 miles) east of Lelystad. Top billing goes to The Goliath, the highest, longest, fastest, and steepest roller coaster in the Benelux lands. There’s plenty of other rides, a minitrain for young children, theme areas like Bugs Bunny World and Sherwood Forest, a Wild West show, and restaurants and snack bars. The park is open mid-April to mid-October, daily from 10am to 6pm (to 5pm weekdays Apr–May and Sept–Oct). Admission is 23€ (\$29) for visitors ages 12 to 54; 19€ (\$23) for seniors, travelers with disabilities, and children ages 3 to 11; and free for children under 3. To get here from Lelystad, take N309 and N306.

Just outside Lelystad is Holland’s largest wetlands nature reserve, the **Oostvaardersplassen**, covering 60 sq. km (23 sq. miles). While this might not be wildly exciting to everybody, it should be for birders, since every year this area is visited by 100,000 nesting and migrating birds. The marshes lie west of town, on either side of the A6 Amsterdam expressway. There’s a visitor center at Knardijk with information and several observation hides.

URK

19km (12 miles) N of Lelystad

This quaint fishing village was a Zuiderzee island for more than 700 years, its isolation undisturbed until the IJsselmeer reclamation project joined it to the mainland in 1942. Urk now lies on the west coast of the Noordoostpolder

Moments Art of Earth & Sun

In 1977, American sculptor Robert Morris created a kind of modern Stonehenge, with his *Observatorium*, a little way northeast of Lelystad on N307. From inside twin concentric rings of embanked earth, 3m (10 ft.) high, you can look through openings that spot the sunrise on the first day of summer, the first day of winter, the vernal equinox (Mar 21), and the autumnal equinox (Sept 23).

Tips Eel Selection

When buying smoked eels, you show yourself to be an expert by selecting only the skinny ones (the fat ones aren't as tasty).

(Northeast Polder), a flat, reclaimed farm-landscape in the north of Flevoland province covering 480 sq. km (185 sq. miles).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Buses** leave every hour on average from the bus station outside Lelystad rail station. By **car**, take A6 north from Lelystad, then go west on N352. While you will certainly encounter cars in the narrow brick-paved streets, it's a good idea to park outside the village and take to your feet. In summer months, you can make a 90-minute trip by passenger-and-bike ferry, operated by **Rederij Duurstede** (☎ 0343/577-111; www.urk-enkhuizen.nl), from Enkhuizen (see "The Western IJsselmeer Shore," in chapter 12) on the IJsselmeer's western shore, from where there are train connections with Amsterdam.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Urk** is at Wijk 2/2, Urk (☎ 0527/684-040; fax 0527/686-180). The office is open April to October, Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm and Saturday from 10am to 1pm; November to March, it's open Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

As you walk past picturesque brick homes lining tiny streets, notice the decorated wooden doors and elaborate wrought ironwork. At the long piers in the busy harbor are moored sturdy fishing boats that sail in search of eels. Smoked eel is sold everywhere in Urk, and there's a busy fish market.

The small **Museum Het Oude Raadhuis**, Wijk 2/2 (☎ 0527/683-262), in the old Town Hall, has exhibits about Urk's ancient and recent history, fishing traditions, and displays of local costumes and architecture. It's open Easter to September, Monday to Friday from 11am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 6pm; and limited hours during the spring and fall school vacations. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1€ (\$1.25) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

SCHOKLAND ★

12km (7½ miles) E of Urk

Like Urk, this used to be an island, but it was uninhabited by the time the polders were created. Because of the threat of inundation, the island community was evacuated in 1859. Nowadays Schokland seems like a phantom island, outlined by trees emerging from the flat polder, with a lonely church, a cannon that was fired to warn of rising waters, and a few old anchors as witnesses to its past. It's special enough, though, to have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Standing on slightly raised ground, **Museum Schokland** (☎ 0527/251-396), in the 1834 church, is not to be missed. It holds Bronze Age tools, mammoth bones, and other prehistoric relics, as well as stone coffins from the 1100s and pottery dating as far back as 900. All were discovered on the sea bottom when the polder was drained. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm; and November to March, weekends from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, and 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children.

Zeeland, Noord-Brabant & Limburg

A rich vein of travel experience is waiting to be mined in southern Holland. History, recreation, and beautiful scenery—all are here in abundance.

So smooth is **Zeeland's** three-part harmony of sea, land, and sky, it's sometimes hard to say where one begins and another ends. The province's islands have been stitched together by a succession of great dams and barriers that bring a measure of security to the inhabitants of this low-lying delta, where the Rhine, Waal, Maas, and Scheldt rivers drain into the North Sea. Elegant harbor towns like Zierikzee and Veere, as well as tiny villages, retain the character of past centuries, when Zeeland's seafarers plied the world's oceans.

Scenic **Noord-Brabant (North Brabant)** has waterways and polders in the north and west; sand drifts, moors, and fir and deciduous forests in the south and east; and picturesque villages and ancient towns everywhere. The province lies along the Belgian border,

south of the “three rivers”—Rhine, Waal, and Maas. Its residents share with their southern neighbors a relaxed view of the world and place emphasis on life's pleasures, like eating well.

Coming into **Limburg** from the north, you notice a gradual transformation taking place in the landscape. Gone are the flat fields interlaced with canals. Contours appear. The change becomes more pronounced the further south you go, and culminates in steep hills. Truth be told, the hills aren't that high, yet in a country where you can get a view just by standing on a match, Limburg has hidden depths. The province, shaped like a leg stepping into the space between Germany and Belgium, somehow combines Germany's capacity for organization with Belgium's embrace of the good life, adding its unique interpretation of Dutchness. Limburgers have a frontier vitality and relish the differences between themselves and their fellow countrymen north of the Maas.

1 Zierikzee ★

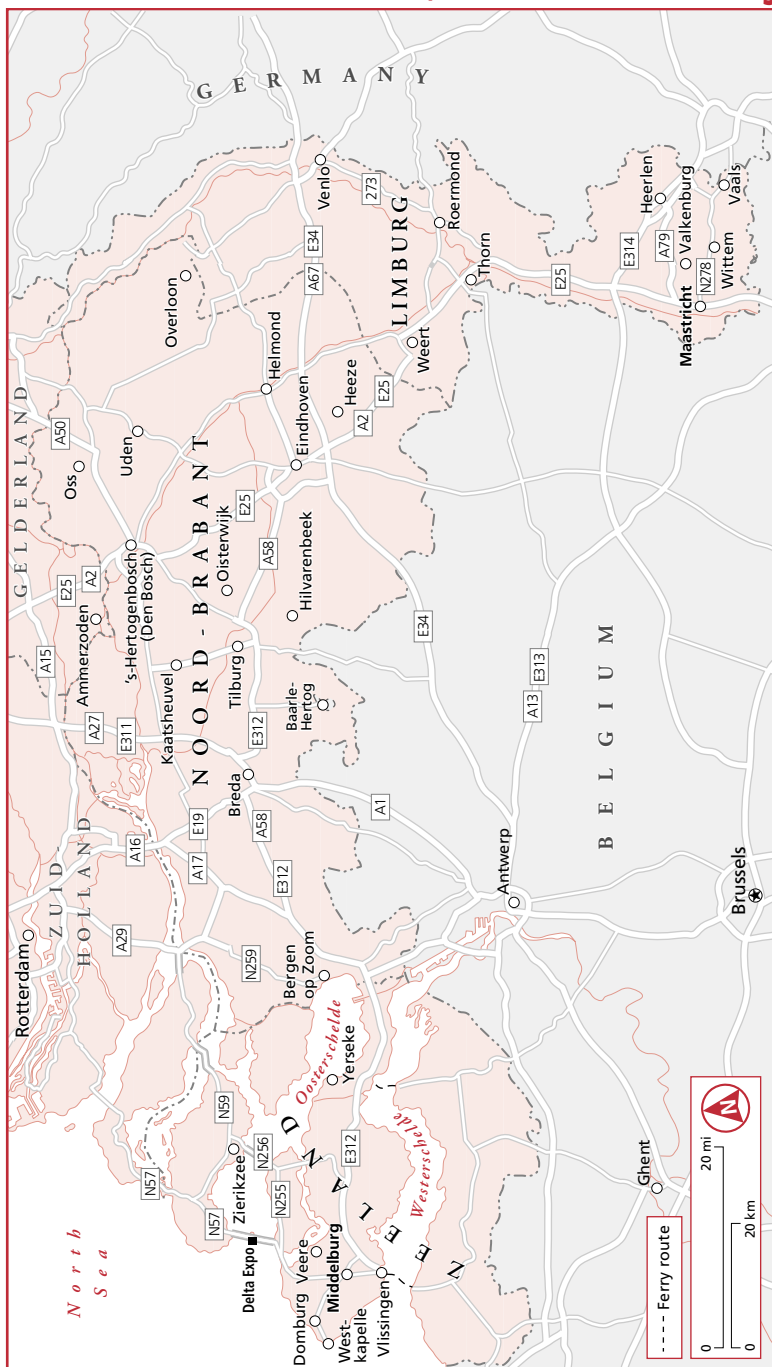
48km (30 miles) SW of Rotterdam

This harbor town on the Oosterschelde (Eastern Scheldt) shore of the now joined-together former islands of Schouwen and Duiveland is reputedly the best-preserved town in the Netherlands. Just big enough (pop. 11,000) to escape from the “sleepy” category, and still guarded by the town walls built during the Middle Ages, it has whitewashed 16th- to 18th-century houses that speak of an age of elegance.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Buses** arrive every hour from outside the rail station in nearby Goes. By **car** from Rotterdam, take A29 and N59 south and west. An

Zeeland, Noord-Brabant & Limburg



alternative route, skirting the coast, is N57 south to the junction with N59, and then east on this road into town.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Zierikzee**, Nieuwe Haven 7, 4301 DG Zierikzee (☎ 0900/202-0233; fax 0111/417-273; www.recreatieschouwendeive.nl), is located at the harbor.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Strolling Zierikzee's narrow, cobblestone streets, you'll find it easy to imagine the everyday life of its citizens in earlier times, especially if you're here for a colorful Thursday market day. The entrance to the old harbor is guarded by two impressive fortified gates, the 14th- to 15th-century **Zuidhavenpoort** on the south side of the waterway, and the 15th- to 16th-century **Noordhavenpoort** on the north side.

In the center of the Old Town, the **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** started out around 1550 as a covered market. Its carillon tinkles merrily at frequent intervals. The **Stadhuismuseum** (☎ 0111/454-454) inside traces the town's history through archaeological finds and other relics. It's open May to November, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1€ (\$1.25) for seniors and children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

On the corner of Poststraat, across from the Town Hall, is the oldest house in town, the 14th-century **Huis De Haene** (or Templiershuis). Look for the **Sint-Lievensmonstertoren (Great Tower)** on the cathedral, west of the Town Hall. This 60m-tall (197-ft.) tower, begun in 1454, is actually incomplete, since townspeople lacked the funds to take it to its planned 204m (670-ft.) height.

Zierikzee's surprisingly rich history as a maritime trading town is presented by way of antique model ships and other exhibits at the **Maritiem Museum**, Mol 25 (☎ 0111/454-493), across from the Town Hall in the 16th-century 's-Gravensteen building. This was originally the town prison, and its upstairs cells still bear the marks of bored prisoners who carved their names and other graffiti on the oak walls. It's open April to October, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and Sunday from noon to 5pm; November to March, school vacations only from 10am to 5pm. It's closed January 1 and December 25. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1€ (\$1.25) for seniors and children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

WHERE TO STAY

Hostellerie Schuddebeurs ★ Amid an area of villas in the wooded countryside outside the nearby village of Schuddebeurs, this hotel is a lodging of standing. The bungalow-style, 3-centuries-old restored farmhouse and its modern wings have some rooms on the ground floor with their own garden terrace. Golfers can take advantage of the nearby course. The hotel will make various gastronomic and golf arrangements. A top-class restaurant goes with it, locally sourcing some of its products—mussels, oysters, and Schouwen lamb, for instance—and in summer taking advantage of garden terraces.

Donkereweg 35, 4317 NL Schuddebeurs (3km/2 miles north of Zierikzee). ☎ 0111/415-651. Fax 0111/413-103. www.schuddebeurs.nl. 24 units. 122€–197€ (\$153–\$246) double. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Dutch); bar; nearby golf course. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

Auberge Maritime SEAFOOD This informal bar-cafe-restaurant in the town center makes a pleasant stop for a meal or for drinks and snacks. It overlooks the

harbor and Zierikzee's fishing fleet. The atmosphere inside is reminiscent of high seas and boasting sailors. In summer you can dine on the terrace. Try the sea bass in a pastry crust with dill sauce, or the lamb cutlets with thyme and honey. Oysters and lobsters are kept fresh in a special aquarium.

Nieuwe Haven 21. ☎ 0111/412-156. Main courses 15€–33€ (\$18–\$41); fixed-price menu 28€ (\$34). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:45am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11:45am–10pm.

AROUND SCHOUWEN-DUIVELAND

On a wide Zeeland horizon from which an occasional church steeple rises amid a hazy cluster of red-roofed houses, the former islands of Schouwen and Duiveland are fine country for touring by bicycle or by car. The handsome little village of **Dreischor**, 7km (4 miles) north of Zierikzee, is a good target for an excursion. It is ringed by a canal and has a 14th- to 15th-century church with a leaning tower at its heart.

Some 17km (11 miles) west of Zierikzee is a great North Sea **beach** backed by sea dunes, centered on the resort of Nieuw-Haamstede. It curves around from Westenschouwen in the south to Renesse in the north. Many summer visitors' activities in Zeeland stretch no farther than a stint on this beach. At Westenschouwen is the northern access to the monumental Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier (see below).

The Oosterschelde estuary is an important feeding ground and stopover point for migrating birds, and birdwatchers flock to these parts to admire them.

THE DELTA WORKS

For as long as people have lived in Zeeland and those parts of neighboring provinces that together form the delta of the rivers Rhine, Maas, Waal, and Scheldt, they have been in a position similar to that of Californians whose homes straddle the San Andreas Fault, or that of farmers perched on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius—their continued tenancy was strictly with the consent of nature. On the cold, dark morning of February 1, 1953, that consent was withdrawn. A fierce hurricane sent the North Sea surging across the land to a record depth of 4.55m (15 ft.), drowning more than 1,800 people.

Following the disaster, a massive system of dams, dikes, sluice gates, and storm-surge barriers, known collectively as the Deltawerken (Delta Works), was begun. This colossal feat of engineering aimed to prevent a repeat performance. It took 3 decades of dredging, dumping, towing, and building to create the network's component parts. Dams on the seaward side close off the Haringvliet and Grevelingenmeer inlets, and more dams protect the mainland coast.

The most impressive among the engineering marvels of the Delta Works is the **Eastern Scheldt Storm**

Surge Barrier—a tongue-twisting *Oosterscheldestormvloedkering* in Dutch. This string of 65 gigantic sluice-gates across the tidal inlet between Schouwen-Duiveland and Noord-Beveland can be opened and closed as storms and tidal variations demand. The barrier's towers support a four-lane highway.

Waterland Neeltje Jans ★★ Even if you don't think you have any interest in dams, engine rooms, and the like, a visit to the intriguing Delta Expo on a man-made island called Neeltje Jans in the middle of the Oosterschelde is well worthwhile. To give visitors an overall view of the massive undertaking of the Delta Works, a huge scale model of the complex is accompanied by an easily

Impressions

He who cannot master the sea is not worthy of the land.

—Dutch saying

understood explanation of how everything works. You are treated to a film history and map demonstration, after which you descend into the innards of one of the Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier's 36 sluice-gate engine rooms. Other attractions include an exposition on whales and a seal park. The attraction has recently added a seal basin, a 3D film, and Holland's largest exhibit on whales. Allow yourself no less than 2 hours, and additional time for a boat trip that takes you around the barrier during the summer months.

Neeltje Jans island (15km/9 miles west of Zierikzee, off N57). ☎ 0111/652-702. www.neeltjejans.nl. Apr–Oct daily 10am–5:30pm; Nov–Mar Wed–Sun 10am–5pm. Admission 8.50€ (\$11) adults and children over 4, seniors 7€ (\$9), free for children under 4.

2 Middelburg ★

74km (46 miles) SW of Rotterdam; 27km (17 miles) SW of Zierikzee

At the center of Zeeland is Walcheren (often still called Walcheren Island even though it has long been connected to the mainland), which holds the bustling provincial capital, Middelburg (pop. 40,000). A medieval town that has restored its 1,000 historical landmarks so successfully you'd think they have stood undisturbed through the centuries, it began as a 9th-century fortress, erected as a defense against the Vikings. The fortifications expanded into a settlement around 1150, when an abbey was established.

Middelburg's colorful **market day** is Thursday, when you can mingle in the Markt square with locals, some of whom wear native dress.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** arrive every hour from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and other points. By **car**, take A29 and N259 south from Rotterdam to Bergen op Zoom, then go west on A58/E312.

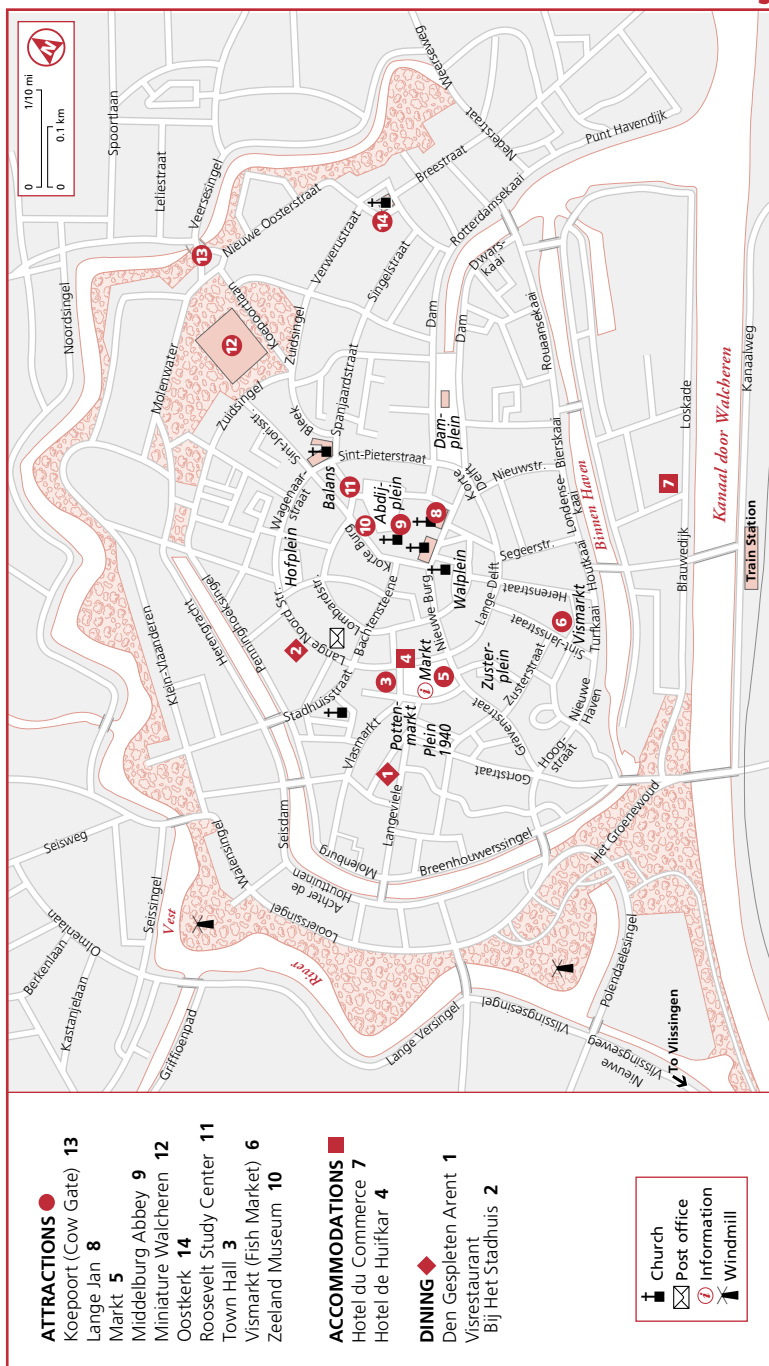
VISITOR INFORMATION **Tourist Shop Middelburg** is at Markt 65C, Middelburg (☎ 011/867-4300; fax 011/867-4333; www.touristshop.nl). The office is open Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Middelburg sights you shouldn't miss include the **picturesque streets** of Spanjaardstraat (crowned by the monumental Oostkerk), Kuiperspoort, and Bellinkstraat; the 1559 **Vismarkt (Fish Market)**, with its Doric columns and little auctioneers' houses (where summer Thursdays are **arts and crafts market** days); the **Blauwepoort (Blue Gate)**; and the **Koeipoort (Cow Gate)**.

The side of the elaborate **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, Markt (☎ 0118/675-450), facing the market square, is Gothic and dates from the 15th century, while the Noordstraat side, from the 17th and 18th centuries, is classic in style. Inside are Belgian tapestries from the 1600s, a brass model of Admiral De Ruyter's flagship, 17th-century Makkum tiles, and the Middelburg coat of arms. The banquet hall, originally the first cloth market in the Netherlands, is now used for official receptions and periodic concerts. The doors to the left of the main entrance open to the spacious vaulted Vleeshal (Meat Hall), which hosts contemporary art exhibitions. The Town Hall is open for guided tours March to October, Monday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm, and Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children.

Abdij (Abbey) ★★ Middelburg's sprawling 13th-century abbey in the center of town had a life of traumatic ups and downs over the centuries, as it went from



Moments **Living Traditions**

As you explore Zeeland, keep an eye out for the local costume, a long, simple black dress with a blue pinafore, still worn on occasion in Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland (in the latter, the women wearing bonnets shaped like conch shells are Protestant, while those wearing trapezoidal bonnets with a light-blue underbonnet are Catholic). The gold-and-silver ornaments you see worn by both men and women with the national costume can be bought as souvenirs. Also, if you're lucky, you'll happen on the traditional game of *ringsteken*, in which contestants ride on bare horseback and try, as they gallop past, to thrust a pointed stick through a ring dangling from a line strung high between two poles.

Catholic to Protestant to secular usages, all the while suffering from fires and careless alterations at the hands of whoever happened to be in charge. What you see today is a replica of the original, rebuilt following World War II bombings. Soaring 87m (289 ft.) into the sky, the 14th-century **Lange Jan (Long John) Tower** can be seen from any point on the island, and of course has magnificent panoramic views from its summit.

Part of the complex is occupied by the **Abdij Historama**, in which the abbey's history is revealed during a fascinating walk through the cloisters, down to the cellars and the crypt, and back again. You'll be introduced to historical figures such as the Norbertine monks and William of Orange.

Another occupant of the abbey is the **Zeeuws Museum (Zeeland Museum)** , which houses a collection of antiquities. Highlights include a Roman altar to pagan sea-goddess Nehallenia recovered from the beach after a 17th-century storm, a medieval stone coffin that was used to water cattle, and 16th-century tapestries depicting the victory of Zeeland over the Spanish. National costumes are also displayed.

Finally, there's the **Roosevelt Study Center**, established in honor of Theodore, Franklin Delano, and Eleanor Roosevelt, whose ancestors emigrated to the New World in the 1640s from the Zeeland town of Tholen. The library here holds extensive research material, including audiovisual and slide presentations. The annual Four Freedoms Medals (based on FDR's famous 1941 "four freedoms" speech) are awarded in Middelburg in even-numbered years, and in New York in odd-numbered years.

Abdijplein (at Onder de Toren). Lange Jan: ☎ **0118/675-450**. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1.20€ (\$1.50) children. Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Abdij Historama: Abdij 9. ☎ **0118/626-655**. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Zeeuws Museum: ☎ **0118/653-000**. Admission 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Roosevelt Study Center: ☎ **0118/631-590**. Free admission. Apr–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–12:30pm and 1:30–4:30pm; other times by appointment.

Miniatuur Walcheren   You can play giant at this miniature version of Walcheren Island, where model villages and farms give a different perspective on the area. This marvelous one-twentieth-scale model is a faithful replication of more than 200 buildings, moving trains and ships, and windmills. A delight for both young and old, it's a good place to visit before exploring Walcheren, where you see the real structures on which these models are based.

Molenvater Park, at Nieuwe Haven (near the Abbey). ☎ **0118/612-525**. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 4€ (\$5) children. Apr–Oct daily 10am–5pm. Closed Nov–Mar.

WHERE TO STAY

De Huifkar This pleasant little hotel overlooks the Market Square, right in the heart of the city. While not luxurious, the guest rooms are furnished in a modern style. Downstairs is a good restaurant with moderate prices, serving its own tourist menu. In summer you can dine on the lively terrace spilling onto the Market Square.

Markt 19, 4331 LJ Middelburg. ☎ **0118/612-998**. Fax 0118/612-386. 6 units. 65€–90€ (\$81–\$113) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar. *In room:* TV.

Hotel du Commerce This canal-side hotel is just opposite the rail and bus terminal and an easy walk from the town center, in one of the most convenient locations in town. The guest rooms are simply decorated. In the mornings you can treat yourself to a varied breakfast buffet. There's also a good restaurant serving French and Spanish specialties at moderate prices.

Loskade 1, 4331 HV Middelburg. ☎ **0118/636-051**. Fax 0118/626-400. 46 units. 70€–85€ (\$88–\$106) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Den Gespleten Arent CONTINENTAL Meals here, though a bit more expensive than at most local restaurants, are exceptional, yet still good value. The friendly owner has created a warm and intimate atmosphere in this patrician-house setting. Food is prepared with an imaginative use of ingredients. Specialties include lambs' tongue with fennel and pine nuts, and turkey stuffed with *pancetta* (Italian bacon).

Vlasmarkt 25 (near the Town Hall). ☎ **0118/636-122**. Main courses 15€–20€ (\$19–\$25); fixed-price menu 25€ (\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon 5:30–9pm.

Visrestaurant Bij Het Stadhuis SEAFOOD You'll find this cozy restaurant on a street next to the Gothic Town Hall. The place is full of small tables decked in yellow and brown. Besides serving almost any variety of fried and grilled fish, the restaurant's specialties include a succulent mussels au gratin Ste. Marie topped by a cream sauce, and *waterzooï*, a delicious Belgian fish stew.

Lange Noordstraat 8. ☎ **0118/627-058**. Main courses 13€–20€ (\$16–\$25); fixed-price menu 19€ (\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm.

AROUND WALCHEREN & ZUID-BEVELAND

VEERE ★

6km (4 miles) N of Middelburg

On the one-time island of Noord-Beveland, by the shore of a former sea inlet that is now a lake called the Veerse Meer, stands this charming village which was an important port for Scottish wool from the 14th to the 18th century. Those bygone trading links earned Scottish mariners the right to free hospitality—a right they surely took full advantage of. Veere's streets are lined with houses and buildings straight out of the past, and its original fortifications are still intact, the ancient harbor tower now housing an excellent hotel/restaurant (see below).

Buses go every hour from Middelburg. For visitor information, go to **VVV Veere**, Oudestraat 28, 4351 AV Veere (☎ **0900/202-0280**; fax 0118/501-792; www.vvwnb.nl), in the center of the village.

What to See & Do

The Gothic **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, Markt 5, dates in part from 1474—look outside for the *kaak*, an iron brace that locked around a wrongdoer's neck to

hold him or her in place as townspeople threw refuse and insults. Over the *kaak* hang the “stones of the law,” which an offender was forced to drag through the town in penance. Although today it is stripped to the bare bricks, the **Grote Kerk (Great Church)**, Oudestraat 26, constructed between 1405 and 1560, is awe-inspiring for its sheer size.

After a stroll through streets filled with venerable buildings, head for the handsome waterfront and the old harbor, which is now a haunt of leisure-time mariners busy with the comings and goings of sailboats. You’ll pass the 16th- to 17th-century **Schotse Huizen (Scottish Houses)** at Kade 25–27, waterfront mansions that belonged to Scottish wool merchants, and arrive finally at the cannon-studded **Campveerse Toren (Campveer Tower)** from around 1500, which was the key to the harbor defenses.

Where to Stay & Dine

De Campveerse Toren ★ You couldn’t ask for a more romantic location than the 16th-century waterfront fortress of which this delightful hotel, one of the oldest in the country, is a part. It offers simple but comfortable rooms with good light, wooden floors, and antique furniture. The Veerse Meer lake is right below the windows. The proprietors also run the expensive adjoining restaurant, perched in a 16th-century tower room overlooking the lake, so various gastro-nomic arrangements are available. The breakfast and dining room have been furnished in a 17th-century style, with wooden floors, wainscoted walls, and a huge stone fireplace, creating an intimate atmosphere.

Kade 2, 4351 AA Veere. ☎ 0118/501-291. Fax 0118/501-695. 16 units. 65€–150€ (\$81–\$188) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood); bar. *In room:* TV.

Hotel de Burg You’ll find this modern hotel on Domburg’s main street, just a short walk from the dunes and the sea. Guest rooms are decorated in bright colors, with attractive wooden furniture and comfortable beds. Showers are small but clean. The hotel restaurant serves simple, hearty meals.

Ooststraat 5, 4357 BE Domburg. ☎ 0118/581-337. Fax 0118/582-072. 23 units. 50€–65€ (\$63–\$81) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar. *In room:* TV.

Hotel Zuiderduin ★ A variety of accommodations are offered at this modern hotel set just behind the dunes. There are spacious rooms with private bathrooms and kitchenettes, each with either a private balcony or a terrace, as well as complete apartments that can sleep up to five people.

De Bucksweg 2, 4361 SM Westkapelle. ☎ 0118/561-810. Fax 0118/562-261. 67 units. 90€–120€ (\$113–\$150) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood/Continental); bar; heated indoor swimming pool; tennis courts; spa. *In room:* TV, minibar.

The Zeeland Riviera

The western shore of Walcheren is a string of delightful small seaside villages, often called the Zeeland Riviera ★ because of its long stretches of wide, white-sand beaches. A few miles northwest of Vlissingen are **Koudekerke**, **Westkapelle**, and **Domburg**—all family-oriented resorts. Beaches are safe for swimming, and there are activities aplenty, including boating, golf, tennis, fishing, and walks in wooded areas near the beaches. This prime vacation country abounds with accommodations, including upscale hotels, bungalows, rustic cabins, and camping sites.

VLISSINGEN

6km (4 miles) S of Middelburg

The port city of Vlissingen is also a popular resort. New Yorkers are likely to feel at home, since Vlissingen's name translates to Flushing.

Essentials

GETTING THERE There are trains every hour from Rotterdam and Amsterdam to Vlissingen, via Middelburg, and there are frequent buses from Middelburg. By car from Middelburg, drive south on N57. Car ferries cross the Westerschelde (Western Scheldt) from Breskens on the coast of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (Zeeland Flanders) to Vlissingen, opening up easy travel options from the neighboring Belgian coast resorts, and from Bruges and Ghent.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Vlissingen**, Oude Markt 3, 4381 ER Vlissingen (☎ **0900/202-0280**; fax 0118/422-191; www.vlissingen.nl), is in the center of town.

What To See & Do

Stick to the Old Town, where the **Oude Markt** and the neighboring 14th-century **Sint-Jacobskerk (St. James's Church)** are worth visiting. And be sure to take a stroll down the **seafront promenade** that's named variously De Ruyter, Bankert, and Evertsen, in honor of those Dutch naval heroes.

For an overview of the town's and region's history, interesting ship models, and archaeological relics, visit the **Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum)**, Bellamypark 19. The museum is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75).

Iguana Reptile Zoo  This zoo is full of the animals that childhood nightmares are made of, but that kids seem to love just the same. It's a fascinating introduction to the lives of reptiles, amphibians, and insects from all over the world. There are more than 500 specimens on display, from tiny, creepy scorpions to endless tiger pythons, but they're not all scary—you can also watch frogs, turtles, and salamanders. In the baby room, you can even see eggs hatching and young animals crawling out of their shells.

Bellamypark 35 (south of Oude Markt). ☎ **0118/417-219**. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults and children; free for children under 4. June–Sept Sun–Mon 2–5:30pm, Tues–Sat 10am–12:30pm and 2–5:30pm; Oct–May daily 2–5:30pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25.

YERSEKE

30km (19 miles) E of Middelburg

This busy little fishing port in the eastern reaches of the Oosterschelde is noted for its extensive offshore mussel beds (see the box, "Mussel-Bound," below) and oyster farms, and for seafood restaurants that serve up these and other marine delights. Buses go to Yerseke every hour from the rail station at Goes.

Where to Dine

Restaurant Nolet Het Reymerswale   **SEAFOOD** Fish can't get much fresher than at this special waterfront restaurant, where most of what lands on your plate comes right off the local fishing boats in the harbor below. Try the decadent oysters and champagne, or a more restrained dish like grilled turbot with a béarnaise sauce.

Jachthaven 5, Yerseke. ☎ **011/357-1642**. Fixed-price menus 45€–65€ (\$56–\$81). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–3pm and 6–9pm.

Mussel-Bound

The waters of the Oosterschelde are ideal for building mussels. Whip-like branches sticking out of the shallow water off Yerseke mark the location of mussel merchants' "parcels"—stretches of water where mussels lie on the sandy bottom. In April and May, mussel boats are busy "planting" mussel-seed: young mussels that will form the next year's crop. By the time they have grown to 4cm (1½ in.), they have joined together in dense mats for mutual support against tidal pull. These are scooped up and moved for 2 weeks to other parcels, called "wet warehouses," which are freer of sand, for the final growth to maturity. Once they reach 6cm (2½ in.) or larger, they are ready for harvesting, destined for Belgium, Holland, and France. But as any skipper will tell you: "The biggest ones are for me."

From the start of the mussel season in July until it ends the following April, fishing boats ply back and forth between port and parcels. On a good outing a skipper can return to Yerseke with a thousand mussel-tonnes glistening in his hold—a mussel-tonne is 100 kilograms (220 lb.). In an average season 100 million kilograms (2.2 million lb.) of mussels pass through here.

3 Bergen op Zoom

47km (29 miles) E of Middelburg

The center of this small town (Zoom is pronounced *zome*, as in "home"), close to Zeeland and the Belgian border, is alive with many cafes and restaurants.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The town lies on the Amsterdam–Rotterdam–Vlissingen rail line, with **trains** every hour in both directions. By **car**, take A58/E312 east from Middelburg and west from Breda.

VISITOR INFORMATION Contact **Toerisme Bergen op Zoom**, Stadhuis, Grote Markt, Bergen op Zoom (☎ **0164/277-482**; fax 0164/240-176; www.bergsnet.com).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Part of the monumental **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**, on the Grote Markt, is a beautiful 14th-century castlelike structure (reconstructed after being destroyed by a fire). Three more buildings were attached to the complex in subsequent centuries.

Het Markiezenhof (The Marquis's Court) Remnants of Bergen op Zoom's past as a small but powerful city-state can be found all over the city center, and this unique town palace is perhaps the most impressive example. It was built between 1485 and 1525, and was once home to the Marquis of Bergen op Zoom. Behind the striped facade of red brick and yellow sandstone, you find a museum dedicated to the city's history, and a kids-oriented fairground museum.

Steenbergsestraat 8. ☎ **0164/242-930**. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hotel Mercure de Draak 🦊 Modern comfort awaits you in Holland's oldest hotel, founded in 1397, which now occupies three adjacent buildings—which themselves date from the beginning of the 17th century—overlooking the lively Market Square in the heart of town. The guest rooms are luxuriously decorated with antiques, flowery chintzes, and stylish wallpapers. Period furniture and a grand old fireplace lend the convivial lounge and bar a medieval character. The in-house restaurant is furnished in a 17th-century style, and in summer you can dine outdoors on a large sidewalk terrace.

Grote Markt 30 and 36–38, 4611 NT, Bergen op Zoom. ☎ **0164/233-661**. Fax 0164/257-001. www.hotel-draak.com. 51 units. 140€–195€ (\$175–\$244) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Italian); lounge/bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

4 Breda

36km (22 miles) NE of Bergen op Zoom; 38km (25 miles) SW of Den Bosch

Historic Breda was granted its charter back in 1252. In 1625 the town withstood a 9-month siege before surrendering to superior Spanish forces. In 1660 England's exiled Charles II took refuge here, and in 1667 the Treaty of Breda (between England, France, the United Provinces, and Denmark) awarded the New World colonies of New Amsterdam and New Jersey to the English. Today, life in Breda centers around the rectangular Grote Markt and the town's many fine parks.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** arrive at least every hour from Amsterdam, via Rotterdam and The Hague. By **car**, Breda lies just off the junction of A16/E19 from Rotterdam and Antwerp (in Belgium it's designated A1/E19) and A27/E311 from Utrecht.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Breda**, Grote Markt 48, 4811 XS Breda (☎ **0900/522-2444**; fax 076/521-8530), is in the town center. A second office is at Willemstraat 17–19, 4811 AJ Breda (same phone and fax nos.) across from the rail station.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

In the Old Center, **Kasteel Breda (Breda Castle)**, dating from 1536, is now a military academy. The **Grote Kerk (Great Church)**, dedicated to Our Lady, contains a striking tomb of Count Engelbert II and his wife.

The **Breda Museum**, Parade 12–14 (☎ **076/529-9300**), in the former Chassé Barracks (Kazerne), has an extensive collection focusing on the town's history and on products manufactured in the region. It also has a collection of religious artifacts belonging to the Bishop of Tilburg. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm; admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, and 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children under 13.

Parks that offer open-air relief from city sightseeing include Valkenburg, Brabant, Sonsbeek, and Trekpot. Breda is surrounded by beautiful **rural estates**, many of which open their grounds to the public, and by great **public forests** such as the **Mastbos** and **Liesbos**, whose ancient trees form peaceful retreats.

Art lovers will want to stop by the village of **Zundert**, which is 15km (9 miles) southwest of Breda, on N263. This is the birthplace of Vincent van Gogh. There's a touching statue here of the painter and his devoted brother, Theo, commissioned by the townspeople and sculpted by Zadkine.

De Biesbosch National Park

The Biesbosch (Forest of Reeds) National Park, embedded in the Hollandse Diep south of Rotterdam and shared between the provinces of Noord-Brabant and Zuid-Holland, bears the imprint of constant flooding by tidal surges and overflow from the rivers Maas and Waal. Once dry land, this area of marshland, meadows, and willow woods was formed during the St. Elisabeth floods of 1421, when 16 villages were submerged and the former polders became an inland sea. It has since been shaped by the interplay between the rivers and the tides. A unique culture developed on these isolated and partly drowned islands, where islanders harvested reeds that grew on the marshy land.

Since 1970, when the Haringvliet Dam, part of the Delta Works (see earlier in this chapter), was constructed at the seacoast, the Biesbosch has been a freshwater delta of creeks and inlets on and around the two rivers. Ecologically rich and one of the prized wetlands threatened worldwide by agriculture and urban sprawl, the Biesbosch is slowly being dried out by the flood-control measures that bring security to the coastal cities.

The marshes and islands are a habitat that supports a large and varied population of bird life. A boat trip into the Biesbosch is a journey into a different world from the nearby polderland. Kingfishers dart along reed-clogged channels, while a discord of bleeps, twitters, and honks—music to any bird-watcher's ears—escapes from ponds and marshes where heron, storks, geese, spoonbills, ducks, and cormorants make their homes. Beavers, last seen in the wild here in 1826, have been successfully reintroduced in recent years.

Leisure activities in the Biesbosch include rowing and canoeing along its labyrinth of creeks, and hiking. The northern visitor center, Baanhoekweg 53, Dordrecht (☎ 078/630-5353), is open January to April and September to December, Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 5pm; May to June, Monday from 1 to 5pm and Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 5pm; July to August, daily from 9am to 5pm. To get there from Rotterdam, on A15/E31 take Exit 23, pass through Papendrecht, and then follow the signs. From Breda, take A16 to Dordrecht and N3 toward Papendrecht, then follow the signs east across the Merwede River. The southern visitor center is the **Biesbosch Informatie Centrum**, Biesboschweg 4, Drimmelen (☎ 0162/682-233), 17km (11 miles) north of Breda.

A SIDE TRIP TO BAARLE-NASSAU/BAARLE HERTOEG

20km (12 miles) SE of Breda

This is the town that can't make up its mind whether to be in Belgium or in Holland, so it exists in both. Houses use colored number plates to identify their citizenship—if the figures are blue, the occupants are Dutch; if they're black on a white plate with a black, yellow, and red vertical stripe, the occupants are Belgian. Must get confusing!

To get to Baarle-Nassau/Baarle-Hertog from Breda, take N268. You'll get information from **VVV Baarle-Nassau**, Nieuwstraat 16, 5111 CW Baarle-Nassau (☎ **013/507-9921**; fax 013/507-3108).

5 Den Bosch

74km (51 miles) SE of Amsterdam; 64km (40 miles) SE of Rotterdam

The full name of the Noord-Brabant province capital is 's Hertogenbosch, meaning The Duke's Wood, but the place is generally referred to simply as Den Bosch (The Woods)—maybe the locals, too, have given up on trying to pronounce the longer version! This cathedral town is more than 800 years old. Parts of the center have retained their medieval atmosphere, in particular around the crooked alleys leading up to the odd triangular market square.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are frequent **trains** from Amsterdam via Utrecht, and from Rotterdam, The Hague, and Maastricht. By **car**, take A2/E35 and E25 southeast from Amsterdam.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV 's Hertogenbosch** is at Markt 77, 5211 JX 's Hertogenbosch (☎ **0900/112-2334**; fax 073/612-8930). The office is open Monday from 11am to 5:30pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Het Zwanenbroedershuys The Brotherhood of Our Illustrious Lady, a charitable body founded in the 14th century that grew into an organization of considerable influence, is housed in this neo-Gothic building. Membership became a matter of prestige, attracting rich citizens and nobility, including Queen Beatrix and Crown Prince Willem-Alexander. Illuminated books of music especially commissioned for its choir are on display, as well as gifts from its members and other memorabilia documenting the Brotherhood's history.

Hinthamerstraat 94. ☎ **073/613-5098**. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15). Guided tours: Sept–July Fri 11am, 12:15pm, 2:30pm.

Noordbrabants Museum A 17th-century neoclassical building that was the official residence of the Queen's Commissioner to Noord-Brabant from 1820 to 1983, this is now the stylish, centrally located provincial museum. Exhibits on local history focus on archaeological finds, such as Roman remains, religious artifacts, manuscripts, maps, weapons, and coins. The paintings on display emphasize the Dutch still life, with two rooms full of painted flowers from the 16th to 18th century. In the gardens are contemporary sculptures.

Verwersstraat 41. ☎ **073/687-7800**. Admission 6€ (\$7.50). Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays noon–5pm.

Sint-Janskathedraal (St. John's Cathedral) ⚔ Parts of this magnificent cathedral date back to the 1200s, though most of the present Gothic structure was finished in 1529. The cathedral suffered considerable damage during a fire in 1584, when the cupola and its tower collapsed. Some of the original 15th-century frescoes were revealed during recent restoration, among them the beautiful *Joshua Tree* and *Saint James* in the ambulatory. Also, have a look in the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament on the north side of the choir, where there is a 15th-century brass chandelier. This elegant structure, finished in 1497, is lavishly

decorated and imbued with a soft light. Notice the little stone figures on the flying buttresses and up the copings (miniature copies of these delightful figures are on sale in local gift shops). The 50-bell carillon in the rump of the 13th-century, late-Romanesque tower is played every Wednesday from 11:30am to 12:30pm.

Parade/Torenstraat 16. ☎ 0900/112-2334. Nov–Easter daily (except during services) 9:30am–4pm; rest of year daily 8am–5pm.

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

Beekse Bergen Safari Park ★ *Kids* You can either stay in your own car or take a guided bus tour through this extensive open-air safari park. Some 125 different species live together here in a free, natural environment.

Beekse Bergen 31, Hilvarenbeek. ☎ 013/549-0049. Admission 15€ (\$18) adults, 13€ (\$17) children 3–11. Dec–Jan daily 10am–4pm; Feb and Nov daily 10am–4:30pm; July–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Mar–June and Sept–Oct daily 10am–5pm.

De Efteling Family Leisure Park ★★ *Kids* Just outside the town of Kaatsheuvel, this 284-hectare (700-acre) recreational park has amusements, restaurants, and facilities for boating. Most remarkable, however, is the miniature city, with towers, castles, and characters based on just about every fairy tale that ever stirred a child's imagination, as well as slightly weird and wacky figures dreamed up by the park's own creative team. Many of the characters are animated or played by an actor in costume. Watch out for the exciting water rides. Organization is good, so queuing is kept to a minimum even in busy school-holiday periods.

Kaatsheuvel (a few km/miles north of Tilburg). ☎ 041/628-8111. www.efteling.nl. Admission 23€ (\$29), children under 4 free. Apr–Oct daily 10am–6pm (July–Aug to 9pm). From Den Bosch, take A59 westbound, Exit 37.

Kasteel Ammersoyen ★★ One of the best-preserved medieval castles in Holland has had a colorful array of inhabitants over the centuries, serving as a nunnery and later as a depot for a manufacturer of washing machines. It is now owned by a foundation which has restored it and on the inside re-created the plain, austere atmosphere the castle would have had in the 14th century. Outside, a moat and four sturdy towers are connected to make a square, virtually impregnable building. You enter the castle through the cellar and go up staircases built inside the thick walls. Upstairs you find a magnificent hall and some smaller tower rooms. In the attic is a small exhibition of objects found during restoration on the grounds and in the moat.

Kasteellaan 7, Ammersoyen, 11 km (7 miles) northwest of Den Bosch. ☎ 073/599-1270. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children. Mid-Apr to Oct Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; last tour 4pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Eurohotel The friendly owners of this small hotel in the center have succeeded in making it a very convivial lodging. Reached by cream-colored marble stairs from the reception, the guest rooms are attractive and intimate, decorated in pastels and print fabrics, and furnished with stylish chairs and comfortable beds. The restaurant overlooks a bustling pedestrian shopping street.

Hintherstraat 63, 5211 MG Den Bosch. ☎ 073/613-7777. Fax 073/612-8795. 42 units. 80€ (\$100) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. In room: TV.

Golden Tulip Hotel Central You couldn't ask for a more romantic location than this, right on the city's medieval market square. The Central is large and modern, but somehow manages also to be cozy. The guest rooms are nicely appointed. The restaurant **De Hoofdwacht** occupies a 14th-century cellar.

Burg Loeffplein 98, 5211 RX Den Bosch. ☎ 073/692-6926. Fax 073/614-5699. www.hotel-central.nl. 121 units. 125€ (\$156) double; 195€–295€ (\$244–\$369) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch); bar; coffeeshop. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

De Raadselder ★ REGIONAL For an excellent meal at a moderate price, visit this huge, vaulted cellar restaurant under the Gothic Town Hall. The interior is medieval in theme: Lighting is provided by brass chandeliers and lanterns, and there are massive pillars and a grand stone fireplace. The imaginative menu includes fried pike perch with salsify, black olives, and *beurre blanc*, as well as veal stewed in a sauce of Kriek Lambic (Belgian cherry beer) and celeriac root.

Markt 1A. ☎ 073/613-6919. Main courses 16€–22€ (\$20–\$28); fixed-price menus 26€–45€ (\$33–\$56). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 10:30am–5pm and 5:30–10:30pm.

Pilkington's BRITISH/CONTINENTAL As you enter this lovely cafe-restaurant that has the atmosphere of an English country home, you see a display of luscious cakes, sandwiches, quiches, and homemade pâtés. People sit at small tables along the wall on wicker chairs. At the back, overlooking a lovely garden with clipped hedgerows and rosebushes, is a roofed terrace where you can have a romantic dinner in summer. Seasonal specialties include wild boar, venison, and hare, all with delectable sauces. Try the tasty *speculaas* pudding—made with traditional Dutch spicy biscuits—for dessert.

Torenstraat 5 (across from Sint-Janskathedraal). ☎ 073/612-2923. Main courses 11€–19€ (\$14–\$24); fixed-price menu 22€ (\$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon 11:30am–5pm; Tues–Sun 10am–10pm.

6 Eindhoven

32km (22 miles) SE of Den Bosch; 120km (82 miles) SE of Amsterdam

Eindhoven, whose charter dates from 1232, limped along for centuries as not much more than a small village southeast of Den Bosch. Yet today it ranks as Holland's fifth-largest metropolis, with all the attributes of a modern industrial city. That transformation is due almost entirely to the Philips electronics company, which has been headquartered here for over 100 years. Despite its size, Eindhoven has only a few points of genuine interest.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** to Eindhoven every half-hour on average from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague; and every hour from Maastricht. By **car**, Eindhoven lies on the main north-south A2/E35-E25 Amsterdam–Maastricht Expressway.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Eindhoven** is at Stationsplein 17, 5611 AC Eindhoven (☎ 0900/112-2363; fax 040/243-3135).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

De Tongelreep Swimming Paradise *Kids* This park on the southern edge of Eindhoven is the perfect place for a time-out from sightseeing. The park contains a subtropical wave pool, chute-the-chute, bubble pools, a paddling pool, whirlpools, a 50m (165-ft.) indoor swimming pool, and an outdoor pool with a sunbathing area.

Antoon Coolenlaan. ☎ 040/238-1112. Admission 4€ (\$5), free for children under 4. Wave pool: Mon–Fri 10am–10pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm. Outdoor pool: May–Aug Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm.

Kempenland Museum This museum features exhibits depicting the history of this city and region. It's housed in an Italianate basilica that was constructed

between 1917 and 1919 and contains stained-glass windows. There's also a collection of 19th- and 20th-century art and sculpture by Dutch and Belgian artists.

St Antoniusstraat 5-7. ☎ 040/252-9093. Admission 2€ (\$2.50). Tues-Sun 1-5pm.

WHERE TO DINE

De Karpendonkse Hoeve ★ INTERNATIONAL This first-class restaurant, a member of the prestigious Alliance Gastronomique Néerlandaise, specializes in game in season and always uses the best of local products. It's on the outskirts of town, in an 18th-century farmhouse surrounded by trees and overlooking a small lake. Tables are decked stylishly in green and pink. The menu offers delicacies like a "triple quail fantasy": mousse, sautéed breast and aspic of quail, or brill filet topped with steamed carrot and cucumber with a Noilly Prat sauce. In summer you can dine on the terrace overlooking the lake.

Sumatralaan 3. ☎ 040/281-3663. Reservations required. Fixed-price lunch 40€ (\$49); fixed-price dinner 50€ (\$62). AE, MC, V. Tues-Fri noon-2:30pm; Tues-Sat 6-9:30pm. Closed during Carnival (Feb 8-11).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE NEARBY

Hostellerie van Gaalen ★ In the village of Heeze, a 20-minute drive from Eindhoven, this 18th-century coaching inn is directly across from a 17th-century château. The place has been redone with a curious Mediterranean touch that disavows its rustic heritage, and the guest rooms have opulent furnishings and tasteful decor. The restaurant belongs to the Alliance Gastronomique Néerlandaise and serves delicious food with a Mediterranean accent. In summer you can dine on the outdoor terrace.

Kapelstraat 48, 5591 HE Heeze (8km/5 miles SE of Eindhoven). ☎ 040/226-3515. Fax 040/226-3876. 15 units. 75€ (\$94) double; 125€ (\$156) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. From Eindhoven take A67 east, then Exit 34 south to Heeze. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Mediterranean). *In room:* TV, minibar.

A NEARBY BELL MUSEUM

The small town of Asten, 19km (12 miles) east of Eindhoven, is home to Royal Eijsbouts, the world leader in producing large-scale carillon and swinging bells. Its bells grace church towers, town halls, university campuses, and memorials in Holland, Belgium, elsewhere in Europe, the U.S., and beyond.

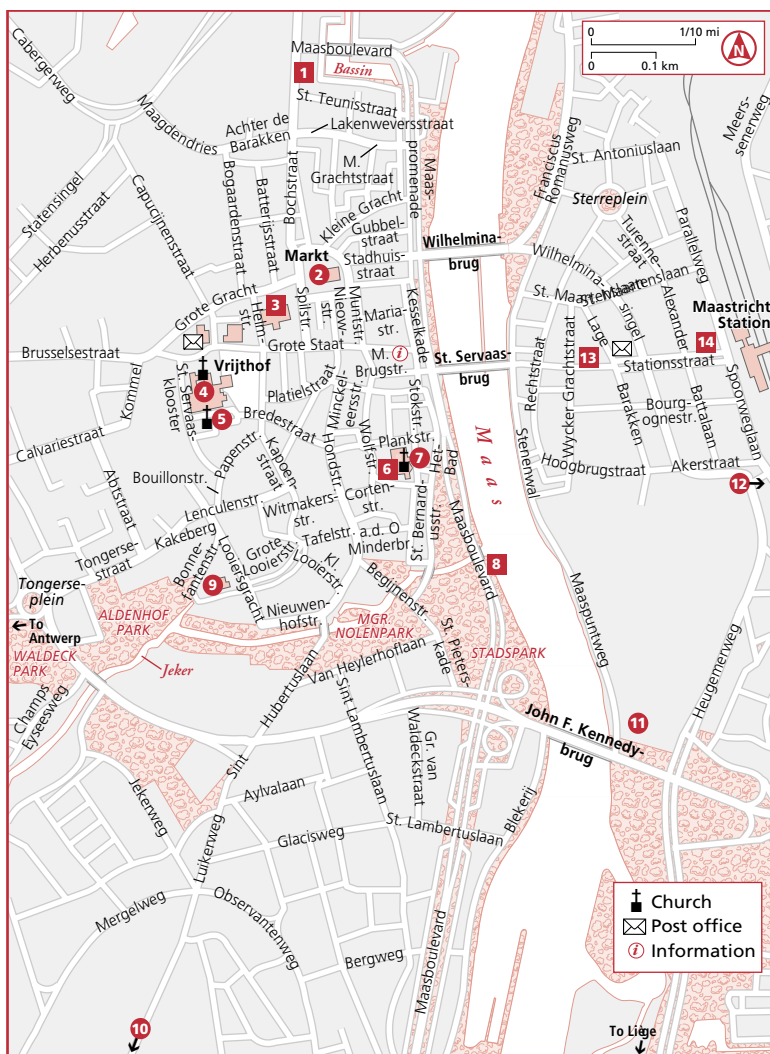
Nationaal Beiaardmuseum (National Carillon Museum) ★ The Eijsbouts bell-foundry's location in the town explains the existence of this fascinating museum, which embraces the centuries-old love in the Low Countries for bells clustered together as musical instruments. Here you can see the oldest surviving swinging bells in the Netherlands, from the 11th century, and carillon bells cast by the brothers François and Pieter Hemony in the 17th century.

Ostaderstraat 23, Asten. ☎ 0493/691-865. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15). Tues-Fri 9:30am-5pm; Sat-Mon 1-5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25, and during Carnival.

7 Maastricht ★★

215km (147 miles) SE of Amsterdam; 124km (85 miles) SE of Den Bosch

An exuberant center of history, culture, and hospitality, Maastricht (pop. 120,000) is a city of cafes and churches, and which of these has the upper hand is hard to tell from the daily contest between carousing and carillons. Thanks in part to its many cafes, and to some of the finest restaurants to be found in any Dutch city, Maastricht is generally reckoned to be Holland's most user-friendly city, blessed with a quality of life the northerners haven't quite learned to match.



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Bonnefanten Museum 11
- Margraten U.S. Military Cemetery 12
- Natuurhistorisch Museum (Natural History Museum) 9
- Onze-Lieve-Vrouwbasiliek (Basilica of Our Lady) 7
- Sint-Janskerk 5
- Sint-Pietersberg Caves 10
- Sint-Servaasbasiliek (Basilica of St. Servatius) 4
- Stadhuis (Town Hall) 2

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Bastion Deluxe Hotel Maastricht/Centrum 1
- Best Western Grand Hotel de l'Empereur 14
- Best Western Hotel du Casque 3
- Botel Maastricht 8
- Derlon 6
- Hotel Residence Beaumont 13

Fun Fact The Lost Musketeer

Maastricht was the last earthly place seen by the hero of Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*. It was here that d'Artagnan lost his life during King Louis XIV's 1673 siege of the city. (The musketeers, of course, are fictitious characters, but the siege actually happened.)

Somehow—in between eating, drinking, church-going, stepping out for Carnival, and hanging onto their rich heritage—the people of Maastricht are building a modern, prosperous, and vibrant city. Discovering how they do it all can be quite an education.

The capital of Limburg province owes its name and existence to the Maas River and repays the debt with a handsome riverfront. The city traces its roots back to the Roman settlement of Mosae Trajectam, founded in 50 B.C. at a strategic bridge across the Maas at the foot of Sint-Pietersberg (Mount St. Peter).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE You can go by air from Amsterdam to Maastricht–Aachen Airport, 10km (6 miles) north of the city, with **KLM Exel** (☎ 020/474-7747), which has daily flights; flying time is 40 minutes. Maastricht has frequent **train** connections with Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, with hourly trains from each. If you're going by **car**, take A2/E25.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Maastricht**, Kleine Staat 1 (☎ 043/325-2121; fax 043/321-3746; www.visitmaastricht.nl), in a building from 1470 called Het Dinghuis, formerly the local law courts, is both helpful and friendly. The office is open year-round Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm; January to April and November to December also Saturday from 9am to 5pm; and mid-May to October also Sunday from 11am to 3pm. A monthly magazine, *Uit in Maastricht*, tells you what's going on; it's in Dutch, but you can glean useful listings from it.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Coming from the rail station to the center, you cross the Maas on the pedestrian-only **Sint-Servaasbrug (St. Servatius Bridge)**, which dates from 1289 and is one of the oldest bridges in the Netherlands.

The **Vrijthof**, the city's most glorious square, is a vast open space bordered on three sides by restaurants and cafes with sidewalk terraces, and on the fourth by the Romanesque Sint-Servaas Church and the Gothic Sint-Jan's with its soaring red belfry. This is Maastricht's forum, especially in good weather, when the terraces are filled with people soaking up the atmosphere and watching the world go by.

In the **Markt (Market Square)**, vendors, some from as far away as Belgium and Germany, gather on Wednesday and Friday mornings to open colorful stalls, watched over by the cheerful little **'t Mooswief (Vegetable Woman)** statue. The 17th-century **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** in the Markt is more sober-looking than those of other Dutch cities, but its dignified gray stones are surmounted by a tower containing a 43-bell carillon that breaks into song at every conceivable opportunity, and in a special concert on Saturday from 3:30 to 4:15pm.

Maastricht packs 1,590 protected monuments inside the city limits. This shows another side of Maastricht's character, its essential Dutchness, in the

determination to hold what it has and display it to the best possible effect. The **Stokstraat Kwartier**, known also as the Roman district because this quarter was the ancient city center, is a case in point. It experienced a decades-long restoration that made of its 17th- and 18th-century buildings a baroque shopping and restaurant area. Between here and the medieval wall lies the **Jeker Kwartier**, a haunt of the sizeable student population and location of some offbeat bars and boutiques. These narrow cobbled alleyways, where the past intersects the present, are an essential element of the city's charm.

Keep your eye out for the little square called **Op de Thermen**, off Stokstraat, a couple of blocks inland from the Maas, where you can still see the outline of a Roman thermal bath in the cobblestones; and for the small, impish **Mestreechter Geis** statue (he embodies the *joie de vivre* of Maastrichters, and his name in local dialect means "Spirit of Maastricht") in a tiny square at nearby Kleine Stokstraat.

Walking along the remaining stretches of **fortifications**, in particular the triple line of bastions in the western suburbs and the south wall along the Jeker River, it is hard not to be impressed by their strength. The besieged could probably afford to poke fun at the besiegers, discounting the improbable chance of them getting in—and having a good memory for faces.

MUSEUMS & OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Bonnefanten Museum ★ Designed by Italian architect Aldo Rossi and opened in 1995, the otherwise restrained riverside museum, amid the relentlessly modern architecture of the new Céramique district, is instantly recognizable from its striking, bullet-shaped dome. Works of art from the Maasland School include sculpture, silverwork, and woodcarvings from the Maas Valley in Limburg and Belgium (where the river is called the Meuse). This art dates as far back as the 13th century and had its apogee during the 15th and 16th centuries. Internationalism is illustrated in the museum's collection of Italian and Flemish Masters. These include works by Filippo Lippi and Bellini, and Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *Wedding In Front Of A Farm* and *Census At Bethlehem*. Also on display are archaeological finds dating from 250,000 B.C. to the Middle Ages, with emphasis on the Roman period. In the Wiebengahal next to the museum are changing exhibitions by contemporary artists.

Céramique 250 (next to the John F. Kennedy Bridge). ☎ 043/329-0190. Admission 7.50€ (\$9.40) adults, 6€ (\$7.50) seniors and children 13–18, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Bus: 1, 5, 53, or 54.

Natuurhistorisch Museum (Natural History Museum) Visit this museum after you've seen the Sint-Pietersberg Caves (see below), for then you can more fully appreciate the fossils that have come from the marlstone walls of those caverns. These include the skeletons of Mosasaurier dinosaurs and giant turtles. In addition, there are other rocks and minerals, and both rough and cut gemstones. The courtyard contains a botanical garden, where you find some beautiful examples of the local flora.

De Bosquetplein 6–7 (near the Music Conservatory). ☎ 043/350-5490. Admission 4€ (\$5) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 2–5pm. Closed holidays.

Sint-Pietersberg Caves ★★ You shouldn't miss these mysterious caverns that tunnel into the heart of high cliffs. The Romans and all who came after them took from Mount St. Peter great chunks of marlstone, a type of limestone that's as soft to carve as soap and gradually hardens when exposed to air. Many of Maastricht's buildings are constructed of marlstone. As over the centuries more and more marlstone was extracted, the interior of Mount St. Peter became

honeycombed with 20,000 passages boring into its interior. From the Roman times, to the days of medieval sieges, to the 4 years of enemy occupation during World War II, their passages have served as a place of refuge. Many people have left behind drawings and signatures on the marlstone walls. During World War II, the caves sheltered such Dutch masterpieces as Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* and other treasures that were hidden away from the Nazis. You follow your guide's lantern through a labyrinth of 6- to 12m-high (20- to 40-ft.) tunnels. Stay close to that lantern—tales are told of those who entered the 200km (120 miles) of tunnels and were never seen again (ask about the four monks). The temperature underground is about 50°F (10°C), and it's damp, so bring a cardigan or a coat to protect yourself against the chill.

Entrance at Fort Sint-Pieter (southwestern edge of the city). ☎ 043/325-2121. Guided tours 4€ (\$5) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) children under 12. Tours in English July–Sept daily 2:45pm. Bus: 4 from city center.

CHURCHES

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwbasiliek (Basilica of Our Lady) ★ The west wing and crypts of this medieval Romanesque cruciform structure date from the 11th century, and there's evidence of an even earlier church and a pagan place of worship on the site. But it is the side chapel sheltering the statue of Our Lady Star of the Sea that is the focus for most pilgrims. The richly robed statue, fronted by a blaze of candles, is credited with many miracles, even during long years when it had to be hidden away because of religious persecution. In the early 1600s, as many as 20,000 pilgrims came to worship at the shrine every Easter Monday. When the Calvinists came into power in 1632, the statue went into hiding, and legend has it that in 1699 Our Lady herself established the “prayer route” by stepping down from her pedestal and leading a devout parishioner through the muddy streets. It is recorded that the morning after the miraculous walk there was indeed mud on the hem of Our Lady's robe! The church treasury contains a rich collection of tapestries, reliquaries, church silver, and other religious artifacts.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouweplein. ☎ 043/325-2121. Basilica: free admission; Treasury: 2€ (\$2.50) adults, 1€ (\$1.25) children. Basilica: daily 11am–5pm, except during services. Treasury: Easter to mid-Oct Mon–Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm.

Sint-Janskerk (St. John's Church) The sober, whitewashed interior of the city's main Dutch Reformed (Protestant) church, dating from the 14th century and given to the Protestants in 1633, makes a study in contrast with the lavish Catholic decoration at St. Servatius's next door. But there are murals, sculpted corbels of the 12 Apostles, and grave monuments of local dignitaries and wealthy individuals. Most people come here, though, to climb the 218 narrow, winding steps to the 70m (230-ft.) belfry's windy viewing platform, 43m (141 ft.) above the streets; and a fine view of the city it provides.

Henric van Veldekeplein (next to the Vrijthof). ☎ 043/325-2121. Church free admission; Tower 1€ (\$1.25). Easter to mid-Oct Mon–Sat 11am–4pm.

Sint-Servaasbasiliek (Basilica of St. Servatius) ★ The oldest parts of this majestic medieval cruciform church with a rich, glittering interior date back to the year 1000, though the building was considerably enlarged in the 14th and 15th centuries. St. Servatius, Maastricht's first bishop, appointed around 380, is buried in the crypt, and a statue of Emperor Charlemagne stands in the church. Over the centuries people have honored the saint with gifts, so the Treasury has a collection of incredible richness and beauty, including two superb 12th-century

reliquaries fashioned by Maastricht goldsmiths. The southern tower of the cathedral's west wall holds Grameer (Grandmother), the largest bell in Holland and a beloved symbol of the city. In the summer, the carillon performs a concert daily from 8:30 to 9:30pm.

Keizer Karelplein (next to Vrijthof). ☎ 043/325-2121. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 2€ (\$2.50) seniors, 1€ (\$1.25) children under 13. Treasury and basilica, Sept–June Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; July–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 1–5pm.

A NEARBY MILITARY CEMETERY

Margraten U.S. Military Cemetery This cemetery is the final resting place for American troops who died in Holland in World War II and whose remains were not repatriated. It is much revered by the Dutch, who tend the graves and often leave wreaths and flowers behind as symbols of gratitude for the sacrifices that liberated them from Nazi oppressors.

5km (3 miles) east of Maastricht on N278. ☎ 043/458-1208. Free admission.

ORGANIZED TOURS

One of the most pleasant ways to view Maastricht and the riverbanks upstream and down are the cruises provided by **Rederij Stiphout**, Maaspromenade 27 (☎ 043/351-5300). From April to October, generally daily from noon to 4pm on the hour (some days start and/or finish later); and in November and December on Saturday and Sunday at 2 and 4pm, a riverboat leaves the landing stage on Maasboulevard beside the Sint-Servaas bridge for a 50-minute cruise past Sint-Pietersberg (you can leave the boat, tour the caves, and catch the next boat to continue the cruise) and on to the sluices at the Belgian border. The fare without the caves tour is 8€ (\$10) for adults, and 4€ (\$5) for children under 13. In addition, there are brunch trips, day trips to Liège, and a romantic Candlelight Cruise that includes dancing and dinner; call for schedules, fares, and booking—reservations are required for all but the basic cruise.

The same company also organizes landlubber tours by **double-decker bus**, departing from the Vrijthof July to September on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Contact Rederij Stiphout (see above) for the program and prices.

To begin your tour of this lovely and lively city, go by the VVV tourist office and pick up its **City Walk** and **Fortifications Walk** self-guided tour brochures. From March to November, the VVV conducts **guided walking tours** that depart from the VVV office and cost 3€ (\$3.75) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children under 13. These include walks through the old city and among the fortifications. Contact the VVV (see above) for information on tours in English.

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

Golden Tulip Hotel Derlon ★ This jewel of a four-star hotel sits on one of the loveliest of the city's small squares. In summer it operates a terrace cafe out under the trees (as does just about every other establishment on the square). The hotel is built over the city's ancient Roman forum, and in its cellar museum, you can view excavated foundations and artifacts. The guest rooms are bright and airy, and beautifully blend classic and modern decor. There's a brasserie on the premises.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouweplein 6, 6211 HD Maastricht. ☎ 043/321-6770. Fax 043/325-1933. 42 units. 260€–285€ (\$325–\$356) double; 410€ (\$513) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited paid parking. **Amenities:** Sec-retarial services; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; newspaper delivery; conference facilities; express checkout. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Maastricht Carnival Capers

The city seems to have gone mad. A tumult of garishly clad people with painted faces dance and sing through the elegant Vrijthof. Crowds flow and sway through the maze of narrow cobbled alleyways beyond. Music from a hundred bands, merged into a discordant medley of tunes and tempos, blares out into the chill February air. The city's 500 bars and cafes, popular enough in ordinary times, burst their seams and spill revelers into the streets. A visitor from another world might well reach in puzzlement for his *Encyclopedia Galactica* to check the item under "Earth; the Netherlands"; for such a display of fervid celebration contradicts the sober-sided character generally attributed to the Dutch.

Welcome to the Maastricht Carnival, a lighthearted event that dates back to the 15th century. On the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, the mayor of Maastricht hands over the keys of the city to Prince Carnival, who will reign over the city and turn it completely upside-down over the next few days. The people dress up and prepare colorful floats for the parades that take place each day. When the sun goes down, everyone gradually disappears into the cafes and restaurants, continuing the party with more than enough wining and dining.

MODERATE

Bastion Deluxe Hotel Maastricht/Centrum Sightseeing, shopping, dining, and just plain people-watching couldn't be more convenient than at this modern hotel on the edge of the city center, overlooking the old inner harbor called the *Bassin*. Guest rooms are large and have modern furnishings and comfortable box-spring beds. The hotel offers a continental breakfast buffet, and there's a restaurant and a convivial bar overlooking a covered winter garden.

Boschstraat 27 (at Maasboulevard), 6211 AS Maastricht. ☎ 043/321-2222. Fax 043/321-3432. www.bastionhotels.nl. 123 units. 106€ (\$133) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; laundry. **In room:** Hair dryer.

Best Western Grand Hotel de l'Empereur This lovely old turreted hotel has comfortable, attractive guest rooms, as well as apartments that can sleep up to four people. Some rooms have trouser presses. There's a cozy lounge bar that draws a local clientele, and a fine brasserie/restaurant.

Stationsstraat 2 (across from the rail station), 6221 BP Maastricht. ☎ 043/321-3838. Fax 043/321-6819. www.bestwestern.nl. 80 units. 130€–160€ (\$163–\$200) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited paid parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor swimming pool; sauna; solarium; whirlpool. **In room:** A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Best Western Hotel du Casque ★ There's been an inn at this location since the 15th century. The present family-run hotel carries on the proud tradition, with modern facilities, comfortable rooms, and good old-fashioned friendliness. Renovated in 2000, it faces the lively Vrijthof square; those rooms overlooking the Vrijthof have the finest view in town. If you're of a carnivorous nature, Gaucho's Grill steakhouse out front should please you.

Helmstraat 14 (at Vrijthof), 6211 TA Maastricht. ☎ 043/321-4343. Fax 043/325-5155. 41 units. 125€–150€ (\$156–\$188) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited paid parking. **In room:** TV, minibar.

Hotel Residence Beaumont ★ This well-established hotel, halfway between the rail station and the river, is just a short walk from the city center. The decor is warmly classical, and the guest rooms are comfortable and attractive. A 1999 extension added 40 rooms and a fitness room. The cozy but stylish in-house **Restaurant Alsacien** serves moderately priced meals with Alsatian specialties and wines.

Wijcker Brugstraat 2 (between the rail station and St. Servaas Bridge), 6221 EC Maastricht. ☎ 043/325-4433. Fax 043/325-3655. www.beaumont.nl. 117 units. 110€–160€ (\$138–\$200) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited paid parking. In room: TV.

INEXPENSIVE

Botel Maastricht Leggy guests aboard this converted river cruiser will appreciate Abraham Lincoln's rueful remark, after spending a night in a cramped U.S. Navy ship's bunk, that "You can't put a long blade into a short scabbard." The Botel's sparsely furnished cabins have a compact form factor, but so do its rates, and the shipboard ambience and a nautically themed bar prove attractive to youthful travelers. If you can, get a cabin on the riverside, and then make due allowance for the fact that the Maas isn't the Seine—though, since we're reminiscing about U.S. presidents, the boat does have a view of the John F. Kennedy bridge.

Maasboulevard 95 (on the Maas, at Stadspark), 6211 JW Maastricht. ☎ 043/321-9023. Fax 043/325-7998. 28 units, 20 with bathroom. 50€ (\$63) double without bathroom; 60€ (\$75) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. Limited parking on nearby streets. In room: TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Maastricht is filled with good places to eat. Menus tend to be broadminded, drawing as they do on the culinary traditions of at least three nations—and that's just those that serve "local" cuisine. The VVV office provides the *Maastricht Culinair* brochure, for a taste of the best in town.

EXPENSIVE

Toine Hermesen REGIONAL/FRENCH One of the city's top restaurants is the proud possessor of a Michelin star. You can expect good portions of impeccable food and superb but relaxed service. The chef cooks up classics of French cuisine and also exploits more regional seasonal ingredients such as Limburg's famous asparagus and chicory.

Sint Bernardusstraat 2–4 (corner of Onze Lieve Vrouweplein). ☎ 043/325-8400. Reservations required. Fixed-price menus 30€–65€ (\$38–\$81). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm and 6–11pm; Sat 6–11pm.

MODERATE

Au Premier DUTCH/FRENCH You are given pink table napkins under the timber-beamed ceiling of this refined, intimate spot, which has space for just 32 diners. In summer, you can eat outside on a pretty garden patio with a view of old Maastricht around you. The cuisine, prepared by owner/chef Rudy Gassman, whose wife Hanneke acts as hostess, features regional specialties utilizing local produce, in addition to provincial French dishes. Try the

Tips Eating the Proof

Pampering its collective stomach is a way of life in Maastricht. A culinary fair, the **Preuvenemint**, showcases this love affair with food annually during the last weekend of August (Fri–Mon). The Vrijthof is filled with stalls set up by top city restaurants, and visitors pile in. It's accompanied by a live-music program. The fair usually takes place during the last weekend in August.

Hemel en Aarde (Heaven and Earth), a traditional Limburg stew that combines apples, potatoes, black pudding, and goose liver. The locally renowned home-made ice-cream specialties include heavenly creations like honey-and-poppy-seed ice cream.

Brusselsestraat 15 (1st floor). ☎ 043/321-9761. Main courses 18€–26€ (\$23–\$28); fixed-price menus 33€–45€ (\$41–\$56). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Sat 5:30–10pm.

India House TANDOORI INDIAN For a change of pace from the city's general focus on regional and French cuisine, try this excellent Indian offering. It easily lives up to the local standard of elegance, in a tastefully reworked town house just off the main square. Any such comparison ends with the food. The line of *balti* menu dishes is superb, and these are backed up by *tandoori* and curry items. Fish and prawn dishes are at the high end of the price range, but opting for vegetarian takes you into “inexpensive” territory. Sadly, a pretty little garden terrace at the back where you could dine in summer seems to be closed permanently.

Bredestraat 45 (off Vrijthof). ☎ 043/325-8186. Main courses 13€–24€ (\$16–\$29); fixed-price menu 20€–25€ (\$24–\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 5–11pm.

't Plenkske REGIONAL/FRENCH This fine restaurant, with its light, airy decor and outdoor patio overlooking the Thermen (site of the city's ancient Roman baths), is a great local favorite. Regional specialties from both Maastricht and Liège are prominent on the menu, with a number of French classics thrown in for good measure. Menu dishes include duck breast with lime sauce, and Limburg lamb with thyme and honey, garnished with garlic marmalade.

Plankstraat 6 (Stokstraat Quarter). ☎ 043/321-8456. Main courses 15€–24€ (\$18–\$29); fixed-price menu 20€–34€ (\$25–\$43). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6–10:30pm.

INEXPENSIVE

In de Moriaan DUTCH/FRENCH The Netherlands's smallest café, or so it claims and might well be (who has the time or inclination to check this out?), was the country's Wine Café of the Year 1997 and hasn't deteriorated one whit since that *annus mirabilis*. You can settle down in the cozy nook inside or, in fine weather, on an outside terrace on Op de Thermen, delineated by hedges and shaded by umbrellas. The menu is on the minimalist side, but the few items, such as bouillabaisse with big chunks of tuna and cod, and *salade niçoise* (for two) are excellent and the servings big.

Stokstraat 12. ☎ 043/321-1177. Main courses 8.50€–14€ (\$11–\$17). No credit cards. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

Sagittarius SEAFOOD At this breezy restaurant in a long, glass-lit room, the chef prepares both modern and classic variations of local and French fish

Tips Southern Taste

Look out for locally produced **asparagus**, known as the “white gold of Limburg” (though most folks just call it asparagus), and for **vlaai**, a handcrafted fruit pie into which goes a lip-smacking quantity of fruit. The province's six breweries—Brand, Gulpen, Ridder, Leeuw, Alfa, and Lindeboom—make **beers** that are popular around the country. Last, but by no means least, is white wine, produced in modest quantities by the Apostelhoeve and Slavante vineyards near Maastricht, in the southernmost sliver of the Netherlands, close by the Belgian border.

dishes and grilled meats in his open kitchen as you watch. The menu changes daily to employ the freshest ingredients. The *bouillabaisse et sa rouille*, a Provençal fish stew served with a spicy chile and garlic sauce, is excellent. In the summer months, there's pleasant garden dining.

Bredestraat 7 (off Vrijthof). ☎ 043/321-1492. Main courses 17€–23€ (\$21–\$28); fixed-price menu 29€ (\$36). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE NEAR THE CHÂTEAU

Château Neercanne ★ FRENCH This gracious château (restaurant only) on a hill above the Jeker River was built in 1698 for a Dutch nobleman. Its wide stone terrace, where you can dine or have drinks in fine weather, affords views of the beautiful Jeker Valley. Inside, tasteful renovations have created a classic, romantic ambience, with baroque wallpaper, shades of beige and burgundy, and Venetian glass chandeliers. Marlstone caves in the hillside serve as wine cellars. A room with an arched ceiling is reserved for private candlelit dinner parties. Fresh herbs and vegetables from the château's own gardens and the best of local ingredients assure top quality. The menu changes daily. If you can get it, try the rack of lamb in truffle gravy, or the cod in a simple tarragon butter sauce, both cooked to perfection. An unusual dessert is the locally produced Valdieu cheese in a caramel beer sauce.

Cannerweg 800, 5km (3 miles) southwest of Maastricht. ☎ 043/325-1359. Main courses 20€–35€ (\$25–\$44); fixed-price menus 45€–60€ (\$56–\$75). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:15pm; Tues–Sun 6–9:15pm. From N278 southwest, turn left on Bieslanderweg.

Kasteel Wittem ★★ For a taste of southern charm at its most alluring, stop by this romantic 15th-century castle where stately swans adorn an ancient moat. If you're lucky, you draw one of the two tower rooms (one even has panoramic windows in the bathroom). Castle guests over the centuries have included the Knights of Julemont, the duke of Burgundy, William the Silent, Emperor Charles V, other noblemen, and humble folk such as traveling monks. The guest rooms have a cozy charm with country-style decor and beautiful furnishings, and the hotel offers a variety of gastronomic arrangements. The beautiful and expensive French restaurant (reservations required), paneled in French oak, has a warm, clubby atmosphere.

Wittemerallee 3, 6286 AA Wittem, 16km (10 miles) east of Maastricht. ☎ 043/450-1208. Fax 043/450-1260. 12 units. 120€–160€ (\$150–\$200) double. From Maastricht, take N278 east through Gulpen, then exit left to Wittem. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; lounge. *In room:* TV, minibar.

SHOPPING

Olivier Bonbons, Kesselskade 55 (☎ 043/321-5526), has been turning out chocolates and other handmade candy for more than 30 years. One of

its specialties is a porcelain reproduction of the much-loved Bell of Grameer filled with luscious chocolates, a lovely gift to take home to friends or family.

Frans Stols, Maastrichter Smedenstraat 17 (☎ 043/321-1493), also does a fine line in chocolates; and **Maison Florop**, Maastrichterbrugstraat 14 (☎ 043/321-2155), is an excellent delicatessen. For a bakery that prides itself on its Limburg specialty *vlaai* fruit tart, you need look no farther than **Sjef Duchateau**, Spilstraat 7–9 (☎ 043/321-3079).

Antique Virtue

One of the world's premier art and antique shows, the annual **European Fine Art Fair**, is held at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Center (MECC); see "Holland Calendar of Events," in chapter 10.

A general **street market** takes place on Wednesday and Friday from 8am to 1pm at the Markt; a **food market** on Thursday from 2 to 8pm on Stationsstraat; and a **flea market** on Saturday from 10am to 4pm on Stationsstraat.

MAASTRICHT AFTER DARK

During the winter months the city hosts frequent performances of opera, classical music, dance, and (mostly in Dutch) theater. Check with the VVV, and pick up a copy of *Uit in Maastricht*, for current happenings.

Theater aan het Vrijthof, Vrijthof 47 (☎ 043/350-5555), is the city's main performance venue; the box office is open Monday to Saturday from noon to

6pm (or until the evening performance begins), and Sunday for 1 hour before the evening performance begins. Among frequent performers here is the highly rated **Limburg Symphony Orchestra** (☎ 043/350-7025). The **Conservatoire**, Bonnefantenstraat 15 (☎ 043/346-6680), hosts regular musical performances by students from the Maastricht Conservatorium.

Impressions

The people down south are the true drinkers of the Netherlands, and this is especially true where the beverage concerned is beer.

—Michael Jackson,
The World Guide To Beer

Maastricht is no place for a teetotaler. Much of the after-dark action takes place in the more than 500 bars and cafes around town. One of the best of these is **In den Ouden Vogelstruys** ★, Vrijthof 15 (☎ 043/321-4888). The traditional bar's rustic interior and faithful local clientele make it a great place to stop for a drink inside or, in fine weather, on a sidewalk terrace. A light-snacks menu is written in local dialect, so look out for items like *Mestreechter pâté* and *Ardenner sjink* (ham). Ask about the cannonball in its wall that lodged there in 1653.

NORTH ALONG THE MAAS

The Maas slides into the North Sea at Rotterdam, but it is above all the river of Limburg, a silver thread that runs the length of the province, an artery of commerce and a glistening arena for watersports. The river gets its share of day-trippers on tour boats departing from Maastricht. There are marinas filled to the gunwales with pleasure boats, stretches for water- and jet-skiers, and fishermen casting such quantities of hooks that it seems surprising any fish can run the gauntlet. You can hop back and forth cheaply on an armada of little car ferries that link the opposite banks along most of the river's length. In the Maasplassen, north of Maastricht, the stream has been diverted into worked-out gravel quarries, creating miniature lakes for watersports. The Maas bids farewell to Limburg at the village of Mook, south of Nijmegen, and sweeps away to the west and the polders of a different Holland.

Northern Limburg shelters holiday parks and villages in a landscape of wooded hills and broad heaths. At its hour-glass waist you seem almost to have to breathe in to squeeze through the narrow gap between Belgium and Germany.

THORN ★

48km (33 miles) N of Maastricht; 42km (29 miles) SE of Eindhoven

Early morning mist from the Maas sifting through the cobbled streets adds a ghostly air to the medieval village's whitewashed buildings, which seem to float free from their foundations. Thorn (*torn*), dubbed the "White Village," looks almost too good to be true, as if it has been specially treated to preserve the

graces of a bygone age. For centuries, the village was ruled by women, abbesses of a cloister founded in 992. The nobility of the Holy Roman Empire sent their daughters here to be educated in the ways of a Christian life.

Whether they succeeded or not is uncertain—there were back doors to each of the cottages where the girls lived—but Thorn itself has brought its own uplifting presence safely down the centuries. The old center seems like a page torn straight out of a history book, with its white walls, cobbled courtyards, and wall-mounted lamps. It's reason enough to be diverted off the highway before the day gets fairly started, and stroll through the streets, sniffing the wood-smoke-scented air, freshly baked bread, and a timeless atmosphere that will struggle later to cope with tour-bus crowds.

The huge stone abbey, the **Kerkberg**, has a fine baroque interior and high altar, and a small museum well worth a visit. There's also a **Radio and Gramophone Museum**, Wijngaard 14 (for information, call ☎ 047/556-2761), and a **Doll Museum**, Bogenstraat 2 (☎ 047/556-3327).

The nearest rail station to Thorn is Weert (on the Amsterdam–Maastricht line), from where buses connect to Thorn. By car, leave A2/E25 southeast of Weert, and drive southwest. Visitor information is available from **VVV Thorn**, Wijngaard 14 (☎ 047/556-2761).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hostellerie La Ville Blanche In the village center, this small hotel offers nicely done-up guest rooms. Amenities include the Cellar Bar and **La Ville Blanche** restaurant, which serves excellent food.

Hoogstraat 2, 6017 AR Thorn. ☎ 047/556-2341. Fax 047/556-2828. 23 units. 80€–130€ (\$100–\$163) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, minibar.

8 Valkenburg ★

13km (9 miles) E of Maastricht

Southern Limburg occupies the highest ground in the Netherlands, with wooded slopes and cyclists pedaling against the gradient. Nestled among gently sloping hills where lush forests alternate with pastures unfolding towards the Geul River, Valkenburg is best known for its spa, casino, and a ruined fortress up a steep hill that still seems to guard this tranquil little town. Surrounded by parks and farms built in Limburg's characteristic half-timbered style, this is where the action is in summertime. Folks generally come to Limburg to unwind, but the pace is faster in Valkenburg. Even the Geul races through town, as though it's just gotten away with the casino takings. Out of season, Valkenburg is more like a ghost town of last summer's dreams.

GETTING THERE From Maastricht, there is hourly **train** service, and two **buses** an hour from outside Maastricht rail station. By **car**, take A79 northeast.

VISITOR INFORMATION **VVV Valkenburg** is at Spaans Leenhof, Th. Dorrenplein 5, Valkenburg (☎ 043/609-8600; fax 043/609-8608). The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Some of Valkenburg's most intriguing sights are hidden. The rocks beneath Valkenburg are like Swiss cheese—for centuries (beginning with the Romans), people have excavated the soft marlstone for use as building material. Nowadays six of these caves are open to the public.

Gemeentegrot (Cauberg Cavern) You can visit this cave on foot or aboard a little train. The interesting formations within include a subterranean lake that has formed over the centuries. If you return in about a million years, you might see some stalactites and stalagmites.

At the foot of the Cauberg (the main hill in town). ☎ 043/601-2271. Admission 3€ (\$3.75) on foot, 4€ (\$5) by train. Guided tours daily every hour Apr–Oct 10:30am–4pm; July–Aug 9:30am–5pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Fri at 2pm, Sat–Sun 10:30am–4pm.

Holland Casino Valkenburg Winning is not exactly guaranteed at this modernistic, hilltop casino, but losing is more a state of mind. The place offers French and American roulette, blackjack, and mini-punto banco. A separate area has slot machines of all shapes and sizes, plus two restaurants, two bars, and reception rooms. For an entire evening's entertainment, you can sit down to a dinner show. Note that a dress code is observed (jacket and tie, or turtleneck, for men; dress or dressy pantsuit for the ladies), and you need your passport to show you're over 18 years of age.

Kuurpark Cauberg 28 (across from Thermae 2000). ☎ 043/609-9600. Admission 3€ (\$3.75). Daily 1:30pm–2am.

Sprookjesbos (Fairy Tale Forest) ★ *Kids* Aimed mostly at younger kids, ages around 2 to 6 or 7, this sweet little theme park features children's fairy-tale favorites like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, and Hansel and Gretel. Most of the "action" takes place in tiny houses and miniature castles dotted at intervals along a winding pathway through a "magical forest"; you stop to look in the doors and windows, behind which mechanical puppets act out scenes from fairy tales. There are a few low-intensity rides, including an artificial river with falls, and a puppet Western show. Some attractions are in need of refurbishment, and older kids will find the park's excitements limited. You need 2 hours to get around, longer if you plan on having a picnic or snack.

Sibbergrubbe 2A (off Gulpen Rd.). ☎ 043/601-2985. Admission 7€ (\$8.75) adults, 6€ (\$7.50) children 2–9, free for children under 2. Mid-Apr to 1st week of Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun and holidays 10am–6pm; weekends in Sept after 1st week 10am–5pm. From Valkenburg center, take Gulpen Rd. to southern suburbs, where park is signposted to the right. Parking lot is on Gulpen Rd., about 180m (200 yd.) from park entrance.

Thermae 2000 The waters that simmer below Valkenburg's hills are the source of this futuristic health spa where you can relax completely in the soothing thermal baths, have a session in the sauna, and work out in the fitness center. Extra pampering possibilities include a massage and floating in a warm bath in an herbal body-wrap. The entrance fee includes all services except massages, floats, and beautician and therapeutic treatments. There's an excellent hotel here (see below).

Kuurpark Cauberg 27. ☎ 043/601-9419. Admission 18€ (\$23) for 2 hr., 30€ (\$38) for a day. Daily 9am–11pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Thermaetel ★ This is the place to overnight in Valkenburg. After checking in, you can put on your bathrobe and walk to the pool. The price of a room includes admission to the health spa for the length of your stay, including the day you arrive and the day you leave (so if you stay for 2 nights, you can use the spa for 3 days). The water in your hotel room comes from the spa's spring. Each room has a hillside garden terrace. The restaurant offers a tasty array of health-

oriented dishes—it's your choice whether to load up on calories or try to lose some.

Kuurpark Cauberg 27, 6300 AD Valkenburg. ☎ 043/601-9445. Fax 043/601-4777. 69 units. 195€ (\$244) double; 250€ (\$313) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Dutch/French); bar; lounge; heated indoor pool; health club and spa; massage; babysitting. *In room:* TV, minibar.

NEARBY PLACES OF INTEREST

You can get high in Limburg—at the **Drielandenpunt (Three-Country Point)**, near Vaals in the southeast corner of Limburg, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany share a common backyard in the “Land Without Frontiers.” The elevation is the highest in Holland, a full 322m (1,056 ft.) above sea level—a veritable mountain! The landscape offers a particularly excellent opportunity to look across miles of countryside in three different countries. From the timber King Baudouin Tower, surrounded by extensive forest, you can see Charlemagne's capital Aachen merging with the haze in one direction. In another, the green waves of Belgium's Ardennes Hills wash over the horizon. The “Dutch Alps” are behind you. Vaals is 30km (19 miles) east of Maastricht on N278; the Drielandenpunt is a further .5km (½ mile) south.

Thermenmuseum (Roman Baths Museum) ★ Sixteen centuries have passed since anyone last had a bath in Heerlen—at the city's Roman bath, that is. Ancient Coriovallum's 2nd-century A.D. *thermae* are among Holland's most important classical sites. Heerlen, which back then was a major point on Roman roads, has preserved the remains of the sudatorium (sauna), natatio (swimming pool), and gymnasium. Aided by a sound-and-light show depicting “Lucius the Potter” on his first visit to the bath, you can re-create the intricate ritual of a Roman bath that was such an important part of life in the Empire.

Coriovallumstraat 9, Heerlen; 24km (16 miles) northeast of Maastricht. ☎ 045/560-4581. Admission 6€ (\$7.50) adults, 5€ (\$6.25) children 5–12, free for children under 5. Daily 10am–5pm. You get to Heerlen by hourly train from Maastricht; by car on A79.

Planning Your Trip to Luxembourg

Like the other two Benelux countries, Luxembourg is an easy country in which to travel (easier, if anything, since the Grand Duchy is that much smaller than the others). Outside of Luxembourg City are two main areas of interest to visitors: the Ardennes region in the north, which spreads across the border into Belgium; and the wine country of the Moselle River valley. This chapter provides nuts-and-bolts information you will need before setting off for the Grand Duchy. For information that covers the Benelux countries in general, see chapter 2.

1 Visitor Information

VISITOR INFORMATION

International addresses for the Luxembourg National Tourist Office are given in “Visitor Information,” in chapter 2. In Luxembourg, contact the **Luxembourg National Tourist Office**, BP 1001, 1010 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 42-82-82-10; fax 42-82-82-38; www.ont.lu).

There are local tourist offices in Luxembourg City and in towns and even in villages around the Grand Duchy. You’ll find the addresses and other contact information for these offices in the “Visitor Information” sections of the destination chapters.

2 When to Go

“In-season” in Luxembourg, as in the rest of the Benelux countries, means from about mid-April to mid-October. The peak of the tourist season is in July and August, when the weather is at its finest. The weather, however, is never really extreme at any time of year, and if you’re one of the growing numbers who favor shoulder- or off-season travel, you’ll find the Grand Duchy every bit as attractive during those months. Not only are airlines, hotels, and restaurants cheaper, less crowded, and more relaxed during this time, but some very appealing events are going on. Theater is most active during winter months in Luxembourg City. Outside the city, on the second weekend in September, Grevenmacher

celebrates its Wine and Grape Festival with a splendid folklore procession.

CLIMATE

Luxembourg has a moderate climate, with less annual rainfall than either Belgium or the Netherlands, since North Sea winds have usually wept their tears before they get this far inland. The vineyard-replete Moselle Valley in the southeast has the lowest annual rainfall, with between 30 and 41cm (12–16 in.), and the western districts have the highest, with around 100cm (40 in.) a year. July and August temperatures in Luxembourg City average 63°F (17°C). Winter temperatures average 32°F (0°C), and snowfalls, which open up the cross-country

Luxembourg



The Euro

Luxembourg's currency is the euro (see "Currency," in chapter 2).

and a few downhill skiing pistes in the Ardennes, are common but not guaranteed.

HOLIDAYS

National holidays in Luxembourg are New Year's Day (Jan 1), Shrove Monday (the Mon before Ash Wednesday), Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1), Ascension Day (40 days after Easter), Whitmonday (the Mon following the seventh Sun after Easter), Luxembourg National Holiday and the Grand Duke's birthday (June 23), Assumption Day (Aug 15), All Saints' Day (Nov 1), Christmas Day (Dec 25), and Boxing Day (Dec 26).

LUXEMBOURG CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

Carnival Parade, Pétange. Mid-Lent Carnival. Contact **Pétange Tourist Office** (☎ 50-12-511). Refreshment Sunday (3 weeks before Easter).

April

L'Emaïs'chen Folk Festival, Luxembourg City. Young lovers buy pottery items for each other. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09). Easter Monday.

Wine Fair, Grevenmacher. Contact **Grevenmacher Tourist Office** (☎ 75-82-75). Thursday after Easter.

Musical Spring. Festival of music, including classical, jazz, and folk, at venues around Luxembourg City. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09). April and May.

May

Grand Wine Tasting Day, Remerschen. In the Cooperative Cellars.

Contact **Caves Coopératives des Vignerons** (☎ 23-66-41-65). May 1.

International Classical Music Festival, Echternach. National and visiting orchestras play in the Basilica and the Church of Saints Peter and Paul. Contact **Echternach Tourist Office** (☎ 72-02-30). Mid-May to end of June.

Octave of Our Lady of Luxembourg, Luxembourg City and Diekirch. Grand religious processions in honor of the Virgin Mary. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09) and **Diekirch Tourist Office** (☎ 80-30-23). Fifth Sunday after Easter.

Féerie du Genêt Flower Parade, Wiltz. The festival includes a street market. Contact **Wiltz Tourist Office** (☎ 95-74-44). Monday after Pentecost.

Dancing Procession, Echternach. Colorful and internationally renowned 1,200-year-old folk-dancing procession in honor of St. Willibrord. Contact **Echternach Tourist Office** (☎ 72-02-30). Tuesday after Pentecost, beginning at 9am.

June

International Open-Air Theater Festival, Wiltz. Performances every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Incorporates a music program at the Château de Wiltz. Contact **Wiltz Tourist Office** (☎ 95-74-44). June to July.

National Day, Esch-sur-Alzette. Gala celebration with fireworks. Contact **Esch-sur-Alzette Tourist Office** (☎ 54-16-37). June 22 to June 23.

Luxembourg National Day, Luxembourg City. Gala celebration featuring festival activities, the Grand Duke reviewing his guards with all the pomp and ritual of centuries past, and fireworks. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09). June 23.

Wine Festival, Remich. Open-air celebrations and wine tasting. Contact **Remich Tourist Office** (☎ 23-69-84-88). End of June to August.

July

Open-Air Concerts. Evening concerts in the place d'Armes, Luxembourg City. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09). Throughout July.

Remembrance Day, Ettelbruck. Celebration in honor of U.S. Gen. George S. Patton, whose troops liberated Luxembourg in World War II. Contact **Musée Patton**, rue du Dr. Klein 5 (☎ 81-03-22). Second weekend of July.

Old Diekirch Festival, Diekirch. Folklore events, music, and street market. Contact **Diekirch Tourist Office** (☎ 80-30-23). Second weekend of July.

Beer Festival, Diekirch. A popular event in this beer-brewing town. Contact **Diekirch Tourist Office** (☎ 80-30-23). Third Sunday in July.

August

Pottery Festival, Nospelt. The center of Luxembourg's pottery industry opens its workshops and hosts a street market for pottery

and handicrafts. Contact **Musée de la Potterie** (☎ 30-01-99). First weekend in August.

Riesling Day, Wormeldange. Wine tasting at Cooperative Wine Cellars. Contact the **Caves Coopératives des Vignerons** (☎ 76-82-11). First Saturday in August.

Agricultural Fair, Ettelbruck. Contact **Ettelbruck Tourist Office** (☎ 81-20-68). First weekend in August.

Procession of the Holy Virgin, Girsterklous. Pilgrimage dating back to 1328. Contact **Echternach Tourist Office** (☎ 72-02-30). Sunday after August 15.

Schobermesse, Luxembourg City. A big amusement fair and street market. Contact **Luxembourg City Tourist Office** (☎ 22-28-09). Two weeks, beginning next-to-last Sunday in August.

September

Liberation Remembrance Day, Pétange. Ceremony in front of the American soldier monument. Contact **Pétange Tourist Office** (☎ 50-12-511). September 9.

Wine and Grape Festival, Grevenmacher. A splendid folklore procession celebrates the local grape harvest. Contact **Grevenmacher Tourist Office** (☎ 23-69-66-01). Second weekend in September.

Wine and Grape Festival, Greiveldange. Contact **Caves Coopératives des Vignerons** (☎ 69-83-14). Third weekend in September.

3 Special-Interest Vacations

FISHING

The rivers of the Grand Duchy are something of an anglers' paradise, but one that's strictly controlled by the authorities. Licenses are issued by the district commissioners in Luxembourg City, Diekirch, and Grevenmacher,

and by a few communal administrations, such as those in Ettelbruck, Vianden, and Wiltz—there's sure to be a source close by. Complex and changeable regulations govern fishing in private waters and some rivers. For complete details on all types of fishing,

contact the **Administration des Eaux et Forêts**, 2513 B.P., 1025 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 40-22-01-350).

GOLF

The course maintained by the Grand-Ducal Golf Club in Luxembourg City is known throughout Europe for its difficult, narrow fairways. Visitors can arrange to play the course by contacting **Golf Club Grand-Ducal**, Senningerberg/Luxembourg (☎ 34-00-901). The Hotel Association of Clervaux also offers attractive golf holiday packages at country hotels; contact the Clervaux Tourist Office (see “The Luxembourg Ardennes,” in chapter 18 for the address).

HIKING

There are marked walking paths throughout the Grand Duchy. During

the summer, organized walking tours of 10 to 40km (6–25 miles) are conducted from Luxembourg City. Contact the **Fédération Luxembourgeoise de Marche Populaire**, av. de la Gare 14, 1610 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 48-46-69), for more information.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Riding is a favorite sport in Luxembourg, with several very good stables offering mounts at about 10€ (\$13) per hour. For a full list of stables and riding schools, contact the **Fédération Luxembourgeoise des Sports Equestres**, av. de la Gare 14, 1610 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 48-49-99; fax 48-50-39). The organization also puts together horseback tours in Luxembourg City and in the countryside.

4 Getting Around

Walking is perhaps the best way of all to travel through this beautiful land. Luxembourgers have set out some 20 walking paths, most of them signposted. Bookshops carry maps of some 142 walking routes, and many local tourist offices have brochures of walking tours. The **Luxembourg Youth Hostels Association**, place de la Gare 24–26, 1616 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 26-29-35-00; fax 26-29-35-03), issues Ordnance Survey maps on which walking paths are marked in red. All youth hostels are linked by walking paths designated by white triangular signs.

BY TRAIN & BUS

Chemins de Fer Luxembourgeois/Luxembourg National Railways (☎ 49-90-49-90; www.cfl.lu) operates fast and frequent trains throughout the Grand Duchy, with good connecting bus service to those points the rails don't reach. Travelers over 65 are eligible for a 50% reduction in both first and second class except when traveling to or from a frontier

point. In addition, special half-fare weekend and holiday round-trip tickets are offered throughout the system except from frontier points. A **1-day network ticket**, good for unlimited travel by train and bus, costs 4.60€ (\$5.75). For 5 days, the cost is 19€ (\$23), and travel may be for any 5 days within a 1-month period.

BY CAR

Roads within the Grand Duchy are kept in good repair and are well signposted, though some roadways are narrow, with many curves, especially in the Ardennes region.

To park in the towns and in Luxembourg City, you may need a **parking disc**. These are cardboard or plastic discs with a revolving hour scale. When you park, you set your arrival time by turning the disc to the appropriate hour, displayed in a slot in the card, so that the parking inspectors know when you have overstayed your welcome. The discs—which are available from stores and banks, often at no charge—are required in “blue zones”

in Luxembourg City, Esch-sur-Alzette, Dudelange, Remich, and Wiltz. In many other places, there are parking meters or parking-ticket dispensers.

RENTALS If you plan to rent a car after your arrival in the Grand Duchy, you need a driver's license valid in your own country. Car-rental rates begin at about 55€ (\$69) a day and 65€ (\$81) for a weekend. Leading car-rental firms in Luxembourg City are: **Budget**, rue de Longwy 300 (☎ 44-19-38) and Luxembourg Airport (☎ 43-75-75); **Avis**, place de la Gare 17 (☎ 48-95-95) and Luxembourg Airport (☎ 43-51-71); and **Hertz**, Luxembourg Airport (☎ 43-46-45).

GASOLINE Gas (*benzine* in these parts) will run about 0.85€ (\$1.05) per liter, a large enough saving over prices in neighboring countries that filling up cars from Germany, Belgium, and France has become big business locally; diesel fuel costs 0.70€ (90¢) per liter.

DRIVING RULES Speed limits are 50kmph (31 mph) in built-up areas, 90kmph (56 mph) on rural roads, and 120kmph (74 mph) on expressways. The use of seat belts is compulsory, and horn blowing is permitted only in case of imminent danger.

ROAD MAPS An excellent road map of the Grand Duchy, which shows

camping grounds, swimming pools, and tourist attractions in addition to main roads, is available at no cost from the Luxembourg National Tourist Office in Luxembourg City. Other good road maps include the Ordnance Survey maps (two sheets) and Michelin map no. 214, both available at local bookstores and newsstands.

BREAKDOWNS/ASSISTANCE
Automobile Club du Grand Duché de Luxembourg, route de Longwy 54, Luxembourg-Helfenterbruck (☎ 450-04-51), offers a 24-hour emergency road service.

BY BIKE

The Luxembourg countryside lends itself to biking, and while you're free to ramble down any road that strikes your fancy, there are also several biking tracks leading through some of the most scenic regions. Local tourist offices can provide suggestions for biking tours on these tracks or on less-traveled roadways. Also, tourist offices in Luxembourg City, Diekirch, Echternach, Mondorf-les-Bains, Reisdorf, and Vianden can arrange **bike rentals**. Bikes can be transported by train for a small fee, regardless of distance traveled, but this is subject to space availability (which is usually not a problem).

FAST FACTS: Luxembourg

American Express See "Fast Facts: Luxembourg City," in chapter 18.

Business Hours Banks are open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 4:30pm. Shops generally are open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and many also open on Sunday for shorter hours.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," above.

Currency See "Money," in chapter 2.

Drugs Possession or use of controlled narcotic drugs is illegal in Luxembourg, and tough penalties are imposed on offenders.

Electricity Luxembourg runs on 220 volts electricity (North America uses 110 volts). So you need to take with you a small voltage transformer and a European-style adapter plug (available in drug and appliance stores and by mail order) that plugs into the round-holed European electrical outlet.

Embassies **U.S.:** bd. Emmanuel-Servais 22, 2535 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 46-01-23; fax 46-14-01). **U.K.:** bd. Roosevelt 14, 2450 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 22-98-64; 22-98-67)—the embassy was due to relocate in April 2005 to bd. Joseph II 5, 1840 Luxembourg-Ville; it was probable, but not certain, that the phone and fax numbers would remain the same. **Ireland:** route d'Arlon 28, 1140 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ 45-06-10; fax 45-88-20). Australia, Canada, and New Zealand do not have embassies in Luxembourg; the closest embassies for these countries are in Brussels (see “Fast Facts: Belgium,” in chapter 3).

Emergencies For police assistance, call ☎ 113. For an ambulance or the fire department, call ☎ 112.

Holidays See “When to Go,” earlier in this chapter.

Mail Postage charges are 0.52€ (65¢) for postcards or letters under 20 grams (.7 oz.) mailed to European addresses, 0.74€ (95¢) mailed to places outside Europe.

Pharmacies A pharmacy is called a *pharmacie* in French. Regular pharmacy hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm (some close earlier on Sat). Each pharmacy has a list of after-hours pharmacies posted on its door.

Police For emergency police assistance, call ☎ 113.

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Safety You've got about as much chance of being a victim of crime here as you have of eating badly in a Luxembourg restaurant—which is to say, about none at all. But it can't hurt any to wear a money belt and keep an eye on your possessions, just in case.

Telephone The country code for Luxembourg is 352. The entire country is in the same local dialing area, so no **area codes** are used. For example, if you're calling a Luxembourg City number from outside Luxembourg, you dial the international access code (which is 011 when calling from North America, and 00 from elsewhere in Europe) and then 352, and then the local number.

When you're calling a Luxembourg number from anywhere in Luxembourg, you need only dial the local number. These numbers can be confusing enough, since you might need to dial a five-, six-, seven-, eight-, or even nine-digit subscriber number.

Coin telephone boxes that display stickers showing flags of different countries can be used to place international calls with operator assistance. Almost all public telephones now accept plastic phone cards; these cost 5€ (\$6.25), 10€ (\$13), and 25€ (\$31), and are sold at post offices and newsstands. Coin telephones accept 0.20€, 0.50€, and 1€ coins.

To charge a call to your calling card, phone: **AT&T** (☎ 0800/0111); **MCI** (☎ 0800/0112); **Sprint** (☎ 0800/0115); **Canada Direct** (☎ 0800/01119); or **British Telecom** (☎ 0800/0044).

Time Luxembourg is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time in the U.S. (when it's 3pm in Luxembourg, it's 9am in New York, 8am in Chicago, 7am in Denver, and 6am in San Francisco). Clocks are moved ahead 1 hour each year at the end of March and back 1 hour at the end of September.

Tipping Restaurants and hotels will almost always include a 16% service charge and the 15% value-added tax (TVA) on the bill. If you've had really exceptional service, you may want to add a little more, but it isn't necessary. Porters at Luxembourg's Central Station charge 1.50€ (\$1.90) per bag.

Water You need have no concerns about Luxembourg's water—it's clear, pure, and safe.

Luxembourg

Two distinct regions comprise the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, creating a landscape of sparkling scenic beauties in this tiny corner of Europe. In the north lie the richly forested Ardennes, part of a range of high hills gouged by rushing narrow rivers like the Our and the Sûre. The range spreads into neighboring Belgium, France, and Germany. South of the Ardennes are the rich farmlands of the Bon Pays (Good Land), a rolling plateau traversed by narrow and flat valleys, and by Luxembourg's stretch of the Moselle River, with its famous vineyard terraces. Both regions have been liberally sprinkled with pretty villages, picture-book castles, wineries, and idyllic holiday retreats.

Luxembourg City, in the center of the Bon Pays, was for centuries a thorn in Europe's side. The "Gibraltar of the North" occupies a natural fortress, and the immensely powerful fortifications constructed around it by a parade of invaders made it a tough nut to crack, until they were dismantled in 1867. Today, the beautiful parks that distinguish the face of the city cover ground once occupied by forts. The city is an attractive mixture of reminders of Europe's past battles, Luxembourgers' own efforts to create a comfortable lifestyle, and modern Europe's achievement of peaceful cooperation.

1 Luxembourg City

315km (195 miles) SE of Amsterdam; 189km (117 miles) SE of Brussels; 122km (76 miles) SE of Liège

Luxembourg's diminutive capital is a marvelously contrasting mix of the old and the new. The old part of the city runs along a deep valley beneath brooding casemates—given World Heritage status in 1995—that have lent themselves readily to defense in times of war, while the more modern part of town crowns steep cliffs overlooking the old. The city (pop. 120,000) is the headquarters of the European Court of Justice and of the European Investment Bank, and is one of the three seats of the European Parliament. But despite the banks and Euro-office towers, the city has retained plenty of its small-scale, provincial ambience.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **Findel Airport** (☎ 47-98-50-50) is 6km (4 miles) outside Luxembourg City. Regular flights arrive from all major European countries. A Luxair bus service to Luxembourg City's Gare Centrale, with several stops en route, is 4€ (\$5). Bus line 9 from the airport to Gare Centrale, a 40-minute ride, costs 1.20€ (\$1.50), plus 1€ (\$1.25) for each piece of baggage. Between one and four buses depart every hour. Taxi fare from the airport into the city is around 20€ (\$25); add 10% from 10pm to 6am, and 25% on Sunday and holidays.

Tips Passport to Luxembourg

Should you plan to do a lot of sightseeing and traveling on public transportation, both in Luxembourg City and around the Grand Duchy, a sound investment is the Luxembourg Card. This comes with a 32-page booklet listing around 50 attractions that offer cardholders free admission, and others that offer reduced admission. In addition, the card lets you ride free on all public transportation buses and trains.

The Luxembourg Card is available from tourist offices. For a single person, it is valid from Easter to October for 1, 2, or 3 days for 9€ (\$11), 16€ (\$20), and 22€ (\$28), respectively. A family card for two to five people costs 18€ (\$23), 32€ (\$40), and 44€ (\$55).

By Train Luxembourg City is linked by train to Belgium, France, and Germany. Gare Centrale, in the southern part of town, is also a terminus for city bus lines, and has a tourist information office, currency exchange, and luggage-storage facilities. For train information (and for bus service outside Luxembourg City), call ☎ **49-90-49-90**.

By Bus Luxembourg City has connections by bus with London, Brussels, Paris, and other cities. The main bus station is outside the rail station (see above).

By Car Highways A1/E44, A4/E25, A31/E25, N6, and N4 converge on Luxembourg City from Germany, France, and Belgium.

VISITOR INFORMATION Luxembourg City Tourist Office, place d'Armes, 2011 Luxembourg-Ville (☎ **22-28-09**; fax 46-70-70; www.lcto.lu), is in the center of town. The office is open April to September, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 7pm, Sunday and holidays from 10am to 6pm; October to March, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, Sunday and holidays from 10am to 6pm.

The Luxembourg National Tourist Office operates a **Bureau d'Accueil (Welcome Desk)** at Gare Centrale (☎ **42-82-82-20**; fax 42-82-82-30; www.ont.lu). This desk is open June to September, Monday to Saturday from 8:30am to 6:30pm, Sunday from 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm; October to May, daily from 9:15am to 12:30pm and 1:45 to 6pm.

The English-language weekly *Luxembourg News* has a "What's On" section. For information on cultural and tourist events and exhibits around the Grand Duchy, visit www.agendalux.lu.

CITY LAYOUT The heart of Luxembourg City revolves around two main squares in the Old Town. The small **place d'Armes** was once a parade ground, and this is where you find the tourist office, lots of outdoor cafes, and band concerts during summer months. Much larger, **place Guillaume** is the setting for the Town Hall and for statues of William II and Luxembourg poet Michel Rodange; it also hosts morning markets on Wednesday and Saturday during the summer months.

Main arteries bordering the Old Town are **boulevard Grande-Duchesse Charlotte** to the north, and **boulevard Franklin D. Roosevelt** to the south. The principal shopping street is **Grand Rue**. A pleasant walkway, the **promenade de la Corniche**, connects the Bock Casemates to the Citadelle du St-Esprit fortifications. There are steps, in addition to an elevator, from **place St-Esprit** down to the **Grund** neighborhood in the valley below.



ACCOMMODATIONS

- Carlton **20**
- Grand Hôtel Cravat **5**
- Hôtel Français **2**
- Hôtel le Châtelet **19**
- Italia **17**
- Le Royal **1**

DINING

- Broken Heart
- Café-restaurant **3**
- Chigieri **10**
- La Lorraine **18**
- Le Bouquet Garni/
- Salon Saint-Michel **13**
- Mousel's Cantine **16**
- Speltz **4**

ATTRACTIONS

- Bock Casemates **14**
- Castle of Sigefroi **15**
- Monument du Souvenir **7**
- National Museum of
- Art and History **11**
- Notre-Dame Cathedral **9**
- Palace of the
- Grand Dukes **12**
- Pétrusse Casemates **8**
- Place de la Constitution **6**
- U.S. Military Cemetery **21**

The tourist office on place d'Armes provides a free, detailed city map that lists the main attractions.

GETTING AROUND

BY BUS Because of the city's small size, you may have little need to use the bus network. Service is extensive but not always frequent. The fare (valid for 1 hr.) is 1.20€ (\$1.50); a 10-ticket pack costs 9.20€ (\$12). There's also a money-saving **day ticket** for 4.60€ (\$5.75); and a 5-day pack for 19€ (\$23). For Luxembourg City bus information, call ☎ **47-96-29-75**.

BY TAXI During the day, taxis charge 2.48€ (\$3.10) when the meter starts, and 0.79€ (\$1) per kilometer, with a 10% surcharge from 10pm to 6am, and 25% on Sunday and holidays. For 24-hour taxi service, call **Benelux Taxis**, route d'Esch 218 (☎ **800/25151** or 40-38-41).

BY CAR Driving in Luxembourg City is not difficult, but my best advice is to park your car and save it for day trips outside the city. You'll find that most in-town attractions are within easy walking distance. For information on car rental and driving rules, see "Getting Around," in chapter 17. Street parking can present a problem, but there are many parking garages. The street map supplied by the tourist office (see above) has parking areas clearly marked. The three most centrally located underground parking garages are just off boulevard Royal near the post office, just off rue Notre-Dame, and at place du Théâtre.

ON FOOT Luxembourg is a city made for walking—that's really the only way to do it justice. Few attractions are no farther than an easy walk through picturesque streets. The many green spaces and parks invite either a soul-refreshing sit-down or a leisurely stroll to slow your sightseeing pace.

FAST FACTS: Luxembourg City

Airport See "Essentials," above.

American Express There is no office in Luxembourg City. The nearest is in Brussels (see "Fast Facts: Brussels," in chapter 4).

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," in chapter 17.

Currency Exchange One thing Luxembourg City isn't short of is banks. To change money or use an ATM close to Gare Centrale, go to **Kredietbank Luxembourg**, place de la Gare 5-7 (☎ **47-97-60-01**). Currency-exchange offices are open daily at the airport and at the Gare Centrale rail station in Luxembourg City.

Doctor/Dentist Call ☎ **112** for referrals to English-speaking doctors and dentists.

Embassies See "Fast Facts: Luxembourg," in chapter 17.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ☎ **113**. For an ambulance or the fire department, call ☎ **112**.

Hospitals The most centrally located hospital is the **Clinique Ste-Elisabeth**, av. Emile Reuter 19 (☎ **45-11-21**).

Police In an emergency, call ☎ **113**. For routine matters, go to central police headquarters, rue Glesener 58-60 (☎ **40-94-04-400**).

Post Office The main post office, rue Aldringen 25 (☎ **47-65-1**), is open Monday to Saturday from 7am to 7pm.

Safety Luxembourg City is a safe, low-crime city. There are no dangerous or unsafe areas. That's not to say that being a victim of crime is impossible, just that it's extremely unlikely.

Taxis See "Getting Around," above.

Telephone See "Fast Facts: Luxembourg," in chapter 17.

Transit Info Call ☎ **47-98-29-57** for bus service in Luxembourg City, and ☎ **49-90-49-90** for train and bus service around the Grand Duchy.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Luxembourg City is a delight for the sightseer. Most of its attractions are in a compact, easily walked area, and inexpensive coach tours can take you to those sites of interest farther afield. One of your greatest pleasures in Luxembourg may come on a balmy summer evening at a sidewalk cafe on tree-shaded **place d'Armes**, a band playing on the square in front of you.

THE FORTIFICATIONS ★★

Luxembourg City grew up around Count Sigefroi's 10th-century castle at Montée de Clausen on the Bock promontory. The count's choice of location was particularly astute—the 48m (156-ft.) cliffs overlooking the Alzette and Pétrusse river valleys were persuasive obstacles to invading forces. In time there came to be three rings of battlements around the city, including the cliff bastions, 15 forts surrounding the bastions, and an exterior wall interspersed with nine more forts, three of them cut right into the rock.

Even more impressive than these aboveground fortifications were the 25km (16 miles) of underground tunnels that sheltered troops by the thousands, as well as their equipment, horses, workshops, artillery, arms, kitchens, bakeries, and slaughterhouses. Legend says that within these tremendous rocky walls of the fortress sits a beautiful maiden named Mélusine, whose knitting needles control the fate of Luxembourg (see "The Mysterious Maiden Mélusine," in appendix C).

Over the centuries, Burgundian, French, Spanish, Austrian, and German Confederation forces managed to take control of these strategic fortifications, each in turn adding to the already formidable defenses. Europe's fears of the city's strength stood in the way of Luxembourg's very freedom and independence. Finally, in 1867, the Treaty of London ordered the dismantling of all these battlements, and what you see today represents only about 10% of the original works.

You can visit the impressive **Casemates** (☎ **22-28-09**) by entering from two points: The entrance on Montée de Clausen leads to the Bock Casemates, and the entrance on place de la Constitution leads to the Pétrusse Casemates. In the Bock Casemates is the **Crypte Archéologique (Archaeological Crypt)**, in which an audiovisual presentation runs through the highlights of the history of the Luxembourg fortress. The Bock Casemates are open March to October, daily from 10am to 5pm; the Pétrusse Casemates are open during school vacations daily from 11am to 4pm. Admission is 1.75€ (\$2.20) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

OTHER TOP SIGHTS

Cathédrale de Notre-Dame (Notre-Dame Cathedral) ★★ This magnificent Gothic structure was built between 1613 and 1621. It holds the royal family

Following the Money

The Grand Duchy's high-taxation-addicted neighbors take an understandably jaundiced view of the avalanche of prime taxable cash that nimbly sidesteps the eager clutches of their own internal revenue services and lands with a satisfying, tax-evading clunk in the vaults of Luxembourg City's many and varied banks. There, taking full advantage of the local laws on banking secrecy, it rests undisturbed. "Who, us?" spoken in a tone of injured innocence is a rough paraphrase of Luxembourg's response.

vault and the huge sarcophagus of John the Blind, in addition to a remarkable treasury (which can only be viewed on request, so ask the sacristan, whose office is on the right as you enter). This is also the scene of the **Octave of Our Lady of Luxembourg**, an annual ceremony on the fifth Sunday following Easter, when thousands of pilgrims arrive to pray to the miraculous statue of the Holy Virgin for protection. They then form a procession to carry the statue from the cathedral through the streets to an altar covered with flowers in the avenue de la Porte Neuve, north of place d'Armes.

Bd. Roosevelt (entrance on rue Notre-Dame). Free admission. Daily 10am–noon and 2–6pm.

Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art (National Museum of History and Art) ★★

In the oldest part of the city, this museum holds fascinating archaeological, geological, and historical exhibits, in addition to the exquisite Bontinek-Thyssen Collection of works of art by 15th- to 18th-century Low Countries artists, including Rubens, van Dyck, Breughel, and Rembrandt.

Marché-aux-Poissons. ☎ 47-93-301. www.mnha.lu. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm.

Palais Grand-Ducal (Palace of the Grand Dukes) ★★ This magnificent palace evokes all the opulence of the Grand Duchy's medieval splendor. The oldest part of this interesting and recently renovated building dates back to 1572 (its "new" right wing dates from 1741). Next door is the Chamber of Deputies (Luxembourg's Parliament).

Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes. ☎ 46-70-70. Admission only for guided tours 5.50€ (\$6.90) adults, 2.75€ (\$3.45) children. Tickets from Luxembourg City Tourist Office in place d'Armes. Mid-July to Aug Mon–Fri 2:30–5pm (in English 4:30pm only); Sat 10–11am (not in English).

TWO MORE FINE MUSEUMS

As its name suggests, the **Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg (Luxembourg City Historical Museum) ★**, rue du Saint-Esprit 14 (☎ 47-96-45-00; www.musee-hist.lu), takes you back along the corridors of the city's eventful history from the 10th century onward, by way of original objects and an interactive multimedia system. It's open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm (Thurs 10am–8pm). Admission is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults; 3.70€ (\$4.65) for seniors, students, and children ages 12 to 18; and free for children under 12.

The **Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle (National Museum of Natural History)**, rue Münster 25 (☎ 46-22-331; www.mnhn.lu), is open mid-May to mid-September, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm; mid-September to mid-May, Tuesday to Friday from 2 to 6pm and weekends from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 5€ (\$6.25) for adults, 3.70€ (\$4.65) for children 6 to 18, and free for children under 6.

MORE PLACES OF INTEREST

Place de la Constitution affords a marvelous view of the Pétrusse Valley and the impressive Adolphe Bridge that spans it. In the center of the square, the tall **Monument du Souvenir (Remembrance Monument)**, a gold-plated female figure on a tall stone obelisk, is a memorial to those who have perished in Luxembourg's wars. Known affectionately as the **Gëlle Fra (Golden Lady)**, the monument was erected in 1923, destroyed by the Nazis in 1940, partly rebuilt in 1958, and finally restored to its original form in 1985.

The suburban areas of **Clausen, Grund, and Pfaffenthal**, south of the Pétrusse Valley, are among the oldest, most picturesque sections of Luxembourg City, and each merits at least an hour's visit, though be warned—you'll probably want to loiter at least half a day. Take a stroll alongside the Alzette River, and look up at the fortifications on the hills. There are many nightlife possibilities here, as well as cafes and restaurants, often with open-air terraces in good weather.

Belts of dense greenery ring the city, giving the visitor an easy, close-at-hand escape from city sightseeing. Take your pick: **Bambesch**, to the northwest, contains play areas for children, tennis courts, and footpaths through the **Grenge-wald** forest. **Kockelscheuer**, to the south, holds a campsite, ice rink, tennis courts, and a pond for fishing.

The ultramodern Euro-zone on the **Kirchberg** plateau northeast of the city, home to the European Court of Justice, the European Investment Bank, and the European Parliament, has all the charm intrinsic to any such modern-architecture desert-with-windows.

TOURS OF THE CITY

WALKING TOURS The Luxembourg City Tourist Office has an excellent brochure entitled **A Walk Through the Green Heart of Europe** to self-guide you through town. The tour can be covered in 1 to 2½ hours, depending on your route and how long you choose to tarry.

TRAIN TOUR One of the city's best tours is on the *petit train touristique*, a brightly painted "little tourist train" on rubber wheels that takes the weight off your feet when you tour the city. Don't worry: You don't have to be a "little tourist"

A Visit to the U.S. Military Cemetery

The peaceful and beautiful U.S. Military Cemetery at Hamm, 5km (3 miles) east of Luxembourg City's center, is the final resting place of some 5,076 of the 10,000 American troops who fell in Luxembourg during World War II, in the course of liberating the Grand Duchy and fighting the Battle of the Bulge (1944–45). There are 101 graves of unknown soldiers and airmen, and 22 sets of brothers buried side by side. The identical graves are arranged without regard to rank, religion, race, or place of origin, the only exception being the grave of Gen. George S. Patton (because of the many visitors to his gravesite). The inscription **HERE IS ENSHRINED THE MEMORY OF VALOR AND SACRIFICE** hangs over the doorway of the nondenominational chapel.

To get to the cemetery, take bus no. 5 from Gare Centrale; by car, take bd. Général Patton east, which becomes N2 outside of town.

to board it. The train, called the **Pétrusse Express** ★ (📞 23-62-61), departs twice each hour from place de la Constitution and travels paved pathways through the Pétrusse and Alzette valleys, and on through some of the oldest sections of town to one of the original city gates. You can simply sit back and enjoy the passing scenery, or don earphones and listen to a historical commentary (given in English, among other languages). The train runs from mid-March to October, daily every 30 minutes (except 1pm) from 10am to 6pm. The 50-minute ride is 6.50€ (\$8.15) for adults, 4.25€ (\$5.30) for children ages 4 to 15, and free for children under 4.

BUS TOURS A 2¼-hour **coach tour** brings you to the cathedral, the Grand Duke's palace, the remains of the fortress, the European Center, the U.S. and German military cemeteries, Radio Television Luxembourg, and some of Luxembourg's most important avenues, and adds a foray to several outlying destinations, including a restored castle, the Grengewald forest, and the airport. The tour operates mid-March to mid-November daily, and mid-November to mid-March Saturday only, and departs at 2:15pm from place de la Constitution. It is 12€ (\$15) for adults, 6€ (\$7.50) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6. Book at Sales-Lentz, rue du Curé 26 (📞 23-62-61). In addition, the company offers several well-planned bus tours that cover the most scenic locations around the Grand Duchy.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Wednesday and Saturday are the bustling and colorful **market days**, when place Guillaume is awash with the color and exuberance of country folk tending stalls filled with brilliant blooms, fresh vegetables, and a vast assortment of other goods. It will have you pitting your bargain-acquisition skills against the monymaking instincts of wily traders.

If you're in town during Lent, you'll find plenty of **street carnivals** and general festivity to keep you entertained. A more solemn—but still colorful—seasonal celebration is the **Octave of Our Lady of Luxembourg** procession on the fifth Sunday after Easter (see the Notre-Dame Cathedral listing in “Other Top Sights,” above).

On Luxembourg's **National Day**, June 23, it's fun to watch as the Grand Duke reviews his troops. City streets continue to ring with festive sounds until well after dark, when the celebration concludes with spectacular fireworks over the Pétrusse Valley.

WHERE TO STAY

VERY EXPENSIVE

Le Royal The Royal fully deserves its recognized status as one of the Leading Hotels of the World. There isn't much that this hotel doesn't offer in the way of luxury service. It's on Luxembourg City's main financial street in the old city

Band Concerts

From June to October, place d'Armes hosts excellent open-air band concerts, performed by the Grand Ducal Big Band for Military Music or bands from other towns around Luxembourg. The program ranges from classical to light classics to show tunes. The concerts usually take place on Sunday at 11am and 8:30pm.

center, across from a park. The guest rooms are big and tastefully modern in style; some have balconies overlooking the park. There are two top-notch restaurants, the international **La Pomme Cannelle**, and the Mediterranean-style **Le Jardin**, with terrace dining in summer. The Piano Bar features live music after 6pm.

Bd. Royal 12, 2449 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ **241-61-61**. Fax 22-59-48. www.hotelroyal.lu. 210 units. 330€ (\$413) double; from 540€ (\$675) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 12€ (\$15). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (international/Mediterranean); bar; heated indoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; bike rental; concierge; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Grand Hôtel Cravat ★★ The century-old hotel has retained much of its old-world charm, high standards, and friendly hospitality. It's a classy place, but not in-your-face classy. The guest rooms are beautifully furnished. Some have balconies overlooking place de la Constitution and the Gëlle Fra monument. **Restaurant Le Normandy** serves fine French cuisine and seafood. In the gracious Le Trianon Bar, you often see Luxembourg's leading businesspeople gathered at the end of the day. Casual meals are served in the traditional restaurant **La Taverne**.

Bd. Roosevelt 29 (at the Gëlle Fra monument), 2450 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ **22-19-75**. Fax 22-67-11. www.hotelcravat.lu. 60 units. 230€–275€ (\$288–\$344) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French/Luxembourgeois, Continental); bar; concierge; secretarial services; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer.

MODERATE

Carlton ★ The Carlton is one of the best deals in its category in Europe, particularly, but not exclusively, for young travelers. Reconstruction work completed in 2002 provided each guest room with its own bathroom and with greater all-around comfort. The manager, Mr. Gianni, is multilingual and seems as comfortable with English, German, and Chinese as with his native Italian, and may be his hotel's strongest asset. He will serve you orange juice when you check in, bring the *International Herald Tribune* to your breakfast table, and treat you like a person, not a number.

Rue de Strasbourg 9, 1027 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ **29-96-60**. Fax 29-96-64. www.carlton.lu. 39 units. 98€–123€ (\$123–\$154) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer.

Hôtel Français ★ The small, conveniently located Français is one of the nicest moderately priced hotels in town. The guest rooms have all been recently refurbished and redecorated in a bright, modern style; although some are on the small side, they are all well laid out. The hotel is in a pedestrian-only zone, but cars and taxis are allowed to drop off and pick up people and baggage. On the ground floor is the popular French/Italian brasserie **Restaurant Français**, with a terrace on the square in summer. Four of the units are apartments.

Place d'Armes 14 (in the old city center), 1136 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ **47-45-34**. Fax 46-42-74. www.hotelfrancais.lu. 25 units. 125€ (\$156) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Italian). *In room:* TV.

Hôtel Le Châtelet ★ This small hotel, owned and operated by the friendly and gracious Mr. and Mrs. Ferd Lorang-Rieck, is a longtime favorite of visiting academics and businesspeople. Its rooms are divided between two lovely old Luxembourg homes; all have modern, comfortable, and attractive furnishings.

The rustic restaurant, a local favorite, serves traditional Luxembourg specialties and a nice variety of fish and meat dishes at very moderate prices.

Bd. de la Pétrusse 2 (near the Pétrusse Valley on the edge of the new city center), 2320 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ 40-21-01. Fax 40-36-66. www.chatelet.lu. 37 units. 85€–120€ (\$106–\$150) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ (\$10). **Amenities:** Exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, iron, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Italia ★ This lovely small hotel is not far from the central rail station in a quiet location in the new city center. The attractive and comfortable guest rooms are above a fine restaurant that serves Italian and other Continental dishes. There's a long a la carte menu, with outstanding specialties such as *scampi al ferri* and *entrecôte ala peperonata*.

Rue d'Anvers 15–17, 1130 Luxembourg-Ville. ☎ 48-66-261. Fax 48-08-07. italia@euro.lux. 20 units. 78€ (\$98) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Italian/Continental); bar; limited room service. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE VERY EXPENSIVE

La Lorraine ★ SEAFOOD/FRENCH The popular, atmospheric La Lorraine excels in its preparation of seafood specialties. There are two dining sections here: Downstairs is a casual and airy brasserie-style room, with an oyster bar in the corner whose wooden roof models the underside of a fishing boat's hull; upstairs, formal elegance reigns in the Art Deco–style main *salle*. Bouillabaisse is a standout, and there's also a gigantic selection of Breton oysters, but the menu is not limited to fish; there's a deft French touch to the duck with honey-vinegar sauce and the succulent lamb. *Cuisine de nos grand-mères*, says the menu (“Just like grandma used to make”).

Place d'Armes 7. ☎ 47-14-36. Main courses 52€–69€ (\$65–\$86); fixed-price menus 35€–50€ (\$44–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; daily 6–10:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

Le Bouquet-Garni ★★ and **Salon Saint-Michel** ★ FRENCH Bare stone and wooden beams mark this cozy place in the Old City, down a narrow side street near the Palace of the Grand Dukes. Actually, it's two places (sadly, not for the price of one), on different floors. On the first floor is the informal bistro Salon Saint-Michel, and on the second floor, critically acclaimed Le Bouquet Garni. Flawless service and classic French cuisine combine to make the upstairs part of this family-run restaurant one of Luxembourg's most highly regarded. Seafood occupies a prominent place on the menu, but look also for meat dishes such as game poultry with truffles in season. The contents of the dessert trolley will make true believers of even the most waistline-conscious. The wine list has some 330 fine performers.

Rue de l'Eau 32. ☎ 26-20-06-20. Reservations required. Main courses 22€–36€ (\$28–\$45); fixed-price menus 33€–70€ (\$41–\$88). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 7–10pm; Sat 7–10pm.

Speltz ★ LUXEMBOURGEOIS/FRENCH Speltz, set in an atmospheric, wood-paneled town house, is both refined and renowned. It serves traditional Luxembourg favorites such as game, in addition to superb fish and lobster dishes. The desserts are excellent, and there's a good wine list as well. Owners Isabelle and Carlo Speltz-Jans are food enthusiasts, and it shows in their delicious cuisine and friendly service. You can dine outdoors on the terrace in good weather.

Rue Chimay 8 (corner of Rue Louvigny). ☎ 47-49-50. www.restaurant-speltz.lu. Main courses 25€–34€ (\$31–\$43); fixed-price menus 40€–64€ (\$50–\$80). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:45am–2pm and 6:45–10pm, Sat 6:45–10pm.

MODERATE

Broken Heart Café MEDITERRANEAN The dark, southern-European ambience of this place brings a certain zest to the often traditional-to-the-point-of-stuffy approach common in the Old City. The downstairs cafe serves snacks as well as drinks, and there are several other dining rooms scattered around the building. You might dine on seafood or a fine steak to the strains of Puccini. There's a wide choice of wines as well.

Rue de Louvigny 10. ☎ 22-88-85. Main courses 12€–16€ (\$15–\$20); fixed-price menu 8€–10€ (\$10–\$13). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:45am–2:30pm and 6:45–10:30pm.

Chiggeri ★★☆☆ *(Finds)* MEDITERRANEAN This remarkable place is housed in a rambling mansion in a quiet side street. The main dining room on the second floor employs African-influenced decorative motifs, including a ceiling-mounted dugout canoe, and has a friendly but professional style, along with notably elegant table settings. The menu changes seasonally, and the Mediterranean dishes with Asian influences are always inventive. Grab, or reserve, the bay-window table if you can, for its fine views over the Alzette valley. When the weather's good, you'll likely want to dine on the outdoors terrace, which has even better views. Downstairs, there's a New Age-look cafe (and cybercafe) that serves 30 different kinds of beer. In addition, a Saharan oasis-style *jardin d'hiver* (winter garden) patio-restaurant provides a light, airy space for serving raclettes, fondues, and other light meals. Different kinds of music, from rock to world music to classical, set an appropriate tone for each of the rooms. The word *chiggeri* is *Lëtzebuergesch* for chicory and also refers colloquially to that pleasant state of well-being induced by a glass of wine too many—Chiggeri's thousand-label wine list has won several *Wine Spectator* magazine awards for excellence.

Rue du Nord 15 (off Grand-Rue). ☎ 22-82-36. www.chiggeri.lu. Main courses 9.50€–18€ (\$12–\$22); fixed-price menus 20€ (\$25) lunch, 25€–50€ (\$31–\$63) dinner; 8€ (\$10) Sun brunch. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–1pm; Fri–Sat 9am–3am.

INEXPENSIVE

Mousel's Cantine ★ LUXEMBOURGEOIS The Cantine is an excellent place to sample regional treats. Although much renovated, it's still rustic in decor, with plain wooden tables and oil paintings in the back room. The front room overlooks the quaint street outside. The friendly staff serves up large portions of Luxembourg favorites such as sauerkraut with sausage, potatoes, and ham. To wash down this hearty fare, try a stein of the unfiltered local brew.

Montée de Clausen 46 (next to the Mousel Brewery, beside the Alzette River). ☎ 47-01-98. Main courses 7.50€–13€ (\$9.40–\$16); plat du jour 9.50€ (\$12). MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6–10pm.

SHOPPING

In the Old City, upmarket shops are clustered around the **Grand Rue** and adjacent streets and **rue de la Poste**. Many of Europe's leading designers are represented in boutiques in this area, and there are good art galleries as well. In the station area, **avenue de la Gare**, which joins the Passerelle (bridge) to the new city, is lined with stores, most in the moderate price range.

Souvenir stores abound, selling attractive **handcrafted items, clocks, pottery**, and miscellaneous objects. **Paintings** are featured at many fine galleries in the city. **Porcelain plates**, decorated with painted landscapes of the Grand

Duchy, and **cast-iron wall plaques** produced by Fonderie de Mersch, depicting castles, coats of arms, and local scenes, are excellent mementos of a Luxembourg visit. The best place to find all these items is the streets leading off place d'Armes.

Two good sources of English-language books are **Chapter One**, rue Astrid 42 (☎ 44-07-09); and **Librairie Ernster**, rue du Fossé 27 (☎ 22-50-77).

LUXEMBOURG CITY AFTER DARK

Luxembourg City stays up late, and there are numerous nightspots, jazz clubs, theater performances, concerts, and other after-dark activities to choose from. Clubs come and go rather frequently, however, so it's a good idea to stop by the tourist office on place d'Armes and pick up a copy of *La Semaine à Luxembourg* (*The Week in Luxembourg*) to see what's happening during your visit. Also, get the *Luxembourg News*, an English-language newspaper (published every Fri) that lists current events. *City Luxembourg Agenda* also lists leading entertainment venues in addition to restaurants.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

CONCERTS, MUSIC & DANCE From May to October, the **Théâtre Municipal**, rond-point Robert Schuman (☎ 47-08-95), presents major concert artists from around the world, in addition to concerts by the **Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg** (☎ 22-99-01-1; www.opl.lu) and by the Orchestre Symphonique RTL. There are also dance (ballet and modern) performances and musical revues by visiting artists year-round. Admission varies according to what's on, but on average you can expect to pay around 20€ (\$25). Local **dance** and **jazz** school students have periodic performances at Théâtre des Capucins (see below).

THEATER The Round Tower Players present high-caliber productions (in English) at **Théâtre des Capucins**, place du Théâtre 9 (☎ 22-06-45). Admission is around 12€ (\$15).

DANCE CLUBS

A cool club popular with students is **Melusina**, rue de la Tour Jacob 145 (☎ 43-59-22), which alternates between rock and jazz groups; it's open on Friday and Saturday from 11pm to 3am. For techno and house, head for **Pulp**, bd. d'Avranches 36 (☎ 49-69-40), which will give you as much of both as you can handle; it's open Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11pm to 3am. If Latin is more your style, there's the hot-blooded **Cuba Libre**, 5 place des Bains (☎ 47-27-08); it's open Monday to Thursday from 9pm to 1am, Friday and Saturday from 9pm to 3am.

BARS

Two lively, youthful, interesting bars in the Old City are **Um Piquet**, rue de la Poste 30 (☎ 47-36-87); and **Club 5**, rue Chimay 5 (☎ 46-17-63), a trendy bar with a good upstairs eatery. Down in the valley, Grund is blessed with several good pubs: **Scott's**, Bisservée 4 (☎ 22-64-74), which serves Guinness and English ale to a mostly expatriate crowd; **Trader's Café**, Bisservée 9 (☎ 26-20-04-15), a popular watering hole across the street from Scott's, in an atmospheric old building; **Pygmalion**, rue de la Tour Jacob 19 (☎ 42-08-60), a typical Irish pub; and **Malou**, rue de la Tour Jacob 57 (☎ 43-45-34), a favored hangout for both locals and visitors.

A SIDE TRIP TO MONDORF-LES-BAINS 🌟

16km (10 miles) SE of Luxembourg City

Luxembourg's only casino and a widely recognized health club are located at this spa town. Buses depart every hour from Luxembourg City. By car, take N3 south, and turn east at Frisange.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Casino 2000 For those whose preference runs to indoor activities, Mondorf-les-Bains is home to Luxembourg's only casino. In fact, dedicated gamblers may well want to begin their Grand Duchy tour here. Within the casino are the lively Bonne Chance bistro and La Calèche restaurant (which stays open until midnight and often has dinner/entertainment specials featuring first-class musical revues and leading musical artists). A dress code requires jacket and tie (or turtle-neck) for men and suitable dress for women, and you must have your passport to prove you're over 18.

Rue Th. Flammang. 🕒 **23-61-11.** Admission 3€ (\$3.75) per day. Open year-round (except Dec 23–24) 7pm–3am (opens 4pm on Sun).

Domaine Thermal ★★ This health resort is known for its idyllic location, with vineyards and woods to the east and the Lorraine Hills to the west. Its thermal baths, health center, fitness center, and recreation facilities (tennis, golf,

Moments Touring the Valley of the Seven Castles

It's really just the valley of the Eisch River, but somehow that doesn't have the same panache as "Valley of the Seven Castles," which is what Luxembourg tourist literature calls it. This scenic little area holds one of Europe's finest concentrations of castles.

Steinfort, 16km (10 miles) northwest of Luxembourg City on N4, is the entry point to the valley. Thereafter your route is northeast to **Koerich**, and its ruined medieval castle. As you continue, following the course of the river (which is really no more than a stream), next up is **Septfontaines**, a high-sited village dominated by its ruined 13th-century castle. Below the castle are the seven springs (*sept fontaines*) that give the village its name.

From here the valley road turns east to **Ansembourg**, which has two castles, a 12th-century one with later modifications high on a hill, and a 17th-century one in the valley. A little way north is **Hollenfels**, with an 18th-century castle built around a 13th-century keep dramatically situated on a cliff top (it's now a youth hostel). From there you go northeast on a minor road to the castle at **Schoenfels**.

Go north now, to **Mersch**, the geographical center of the Grand Duchy. In addition to the early-feudal Pettingen Castle, you also find here the remains of a Roman villa that exhibits mosaics, sculpture, and wall paintings.

The airline distance from Steinfort to Marsch is 16km (10 miles), but the winding nature of even the most direct roads will about triple that distance on the ground.

squash, fencing, archery, horseback riding, and an outdoor pool) are all excellent. There are frequent concerts by the health-center orchestra.

Av. Dr. Feltgen. ☎ 23-66-10-93. Admission free. Open year-round.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel-Restaurant Casino 2000 ★ If gambling's your main interest in this little town, you can't get much closer to the action than this four-star, first-class hotel at the northern end of town. Guest rooms and suites are elegantly furnished. There's ballroom dancing every Sunday, and there are often special events on Saturday evening. And, of course, the casino itself is right at hand. In 2002, the French restaurant **Les Roses** was awarded a Michelin star.

Rue Th. Flammang, 5618 Mondorf-les-Bains. ☎ 23-61-11. Fax 23-61-12-29. www.casino2000.lu. 31 units. 133€ (\$166) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (French/Luxembourgais/Continental); bar; lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hair dryer.

Hôtel-Restaurant du Grand Chef ★★ Set in its private park facing the spa center, within walking distance of the casino, this gracious hotel occupies the 1852 home of a French nobleman. Although completely modernized, it has lost none of the charm and elegance of its beginnings. If it's peace and quiet you're after, take note that this hotel is a member of the Relais du Silence. Some rooms have heated terraces.

36 av. des Bains, 5610 Mondorf-les-Bains. ☎ 66-80-12. Fax 66-15-10. www.grandchef.lu. 40 units. 89€–98€ (\$111–\$123) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar. *In room:* TV.

2 The Luxembourg Ardennes ★

This northern region, which spills over from the Belgian Ardennes, is a treat for the nature lover and a gift for those in search of a quiet holiday. Handsome castles are everywhere, with especially impressive examples at Clervaux and Esch-sur-Sûre. The area also has its share of holiday resort towns, perhaps most notably in medieval Vianden, the proud site of a huge restored fortress surrounded by beautiful forests. In this area is Luxembourg's highest point, the Buurgplatz, 559m (1,835 ft.) high.

For Americans, the Ardennes area holds another fascination, for it was here, in places like Berdorf, Clervaux, Ettelbruck, and Wiltz, that U.S. forces engaged German troops in the Battle of the Bulge (winter 1944–45), and it bears more visible scars of World War II than any other part of Luxembourg. Memorials abound to the valiant GIs who fell in these fierce encounters (see also chapter 9).

While easily explored from a base in Luxembourg City, the Ardennes also rewards more extended visits. The region has excellent country inns and small hotels in all price ranges. Reserve accommodations as far in advance as possible because this is a popular summer vacation spot, and hotel rooms can be hard to come by. Restaurants in the hotels listed (indeed, in most hotels in the Ardennes) are excellent.

ETTELBRUCK

25km (16 miles) N of Luxembourg City

The first thing Americans may note about this crossroads of tourist routes (pop. 7,500) is **Patton Square**, on the edge of town in Patton Park. The square holds a 3m (9-ft.) statue of the general. Nearby is a Sherman tank similar to the ones that arrived to liberate Ettelbruck in September 1944. Patton's boys then had the

job to do all over again at Christmas after the German army overran the town during the Battle of the Bulge.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** and **buses** depart every hour or so from Luxembourg City. By **car**, take N7 north.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is at Place de la Gare 1, 9044 Ettelbruck (☎ 81-20-68; fax 81-98-39; www.sit-e.lu). The office is open July to August, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to noon and 2 to 4pm; September to June, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Musée Général Patton ★ This museum is dedicated to the flamboyant, hard-driving commander of the U.S. Third Army in World War II, whose troops liberated Ettelbruck and did so much to turn the tide in the Battle of the Bulge. More than 1,000 photographs and other documents portray the war years in Luxembourg. There are displays of military equipment, some of it excavated from the battlefield in recent years.

Rue Dr. Klein 5. ☎ 81-03-22. Admission 2.50€ (\$3.15) adults, 1.20€ (\$1.50) children 10–17, free for children under 10. July to mid-Sept Daily 10am–5pm; mid-Sept to June Sun 2–5pm.

DIEKIRCH

4.5km (2¾ miles) E of Ettelbruck

Diekirch (pop. 6,000) was a Celtic stronghold in the days before recorded history. Ask the tourist office for directions to the town's prehistoric **dolmen**, also known as the "Devil's Altar."

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** and **buses** every hour or so from Luxembourg City, via Ettelbruck. By **car**, take N15 east from Ettelbruck.

VISITOR INFORMATION For information, go to Place de la Libération 3, 9255 Diekirch (☎ 80-30-23; fax 80-27-86; www.diekirch.lu). The tourist office is open July to August, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and weekends from 10am to 4pm; September to June, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm, and Saturday from 2 to 4pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Be sure to view the ancient **Eglise St-Laurent**—the church dates back to the 7th and 9th centuries, and is open at no charge from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm daily. The **Musée Municipal (Town Museum)**, place Guillaume, contains Roman mosaics from as far back as the 4th century. It's open Easter to October, daily from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; admission is 1.30€ (\$1.65) for adults, and 0.65€ (80¢) for children.

Musée National d'Histoire Militaire (National Museum of Military History) ★★ This is the best museum of the Battle of the Bulge in either Belgium or Luxembourg, better even than the big museum at Bastogne. It displays a series of superb life-size dioramas depicting U.S. and German military forces, in addition to wartime civilians; perhaps the best is the one that portrays the crossing of the Sauer River by Allied forces near Diekirch in January 1945, an event that marked a turning point in the Battle of the Bulge. The dioramas all give an eerie glimpse of what it might have been like to be there, struggling and

fighting through the snow. Even veterans of the Bulge—who can see things among the hills and forests and hear sounds on the crisp Ardennes air that no other visitor ever will—are impressed by Diekirch’s museum, and there can be no higher praise. This incredibly realistic and moving display is augmented by military equipment, uniforms, weapons, maps, and several large items such as a tank, artillery pieces, and tracked vehicles. Besides the events of the Bulge, the museum also covers the occupation and liberation of Luxembourg and the history of Luxembourg’s army.

Rue Bamertal 10. ☎ **80-89-08**. www.nat-military-museum.lu. Admission 5€ (\$6.25) adults, 3€ (\$3.75) children 10–18, free for children under 10. Jan–Mar and Nov–Dec daily 2–6pm; Apr–Oct daily 10am–6pm.

WHERE TO DINE

Hiertz REGIONAL This small hotel in the town center has been widely recognized for the excellence of its kitchen, which has won it a coveted chef’s toque in the Gault-Millau rating system. Local produce is featured in creative Luxembourg specialties. The hotel also has seven guest rooms for rent.

Rue Clairefontaine 1, 9220 Diekirch. ☎ **80-35-62**. Fixed-price menu 38€–55€ (\$48–\$69). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 7–9:30pm.

WILTZ

40km (25 miles) NW of Luxembourg City; 18km (11 miles) NW of Ettelbruck

Wiltz is split right down the middle, with a 150m (500-ft.) difference in height between “uptown” and “downtown.” This popular holiday town (pop. 4,600), which lies in a beautiful and heavily wooded setting and is a great place for hiking and other outdoor activities, witnessed fierce fighting in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Trains** and **buses** depart every hour or so from Luxembourg City, via Ettelbruck. By **car**, take N15 northwest from Ettelbruck.

VISITOR INFORMATION The local tourist office is at Château de Wiltz, 9516 Wiltz (☎ **95-74-44**; fax 95-75-56; www.wiltz.lu). The office is open July to August, daily from 10am to 6pm; September to June, Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm, and Saturday from 2 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Just as the town itself is divided geographically, the town’s attractions are divided historically between the medieval and the modern. Witness the **1502 stone cross** at whose feet the powerful lords of Wiltz once meted out justice; and the **1944 battle tank** that sits at the bend of the approach road. The 12th-century **Château (Castle)**, “modernized” in the 1600s, perhaps best represents the town’s dual traditions, since its ancient left wing houses a museum commemorating the fighting in 1944 and 1945.

The town also contains a memorial to those who were killed following a general strike protesting military conscription during the Nazi occupation (the Nazi response to the general strike was predictably brutal—participants were killed both during the strike and in reprisals after it had been crushed).

The **Niederwiltz Church**, a Romanesque and Renaissance marvel, holds richly ornamented tombs of the counts of Wiltz, and also a beautiful 1743 Renaissance altar made by a local artist in the Oberwiltz church.

A good side trip to make is southeast through the scenic wooded Wiltz Valley for 11km (7 miles) to **Kautenbach**.

ESCH-SUR-SÛRE

6km (4 miles) S of Wiltz; 14km (9 miles) NW of Ettelbruck

The scenically situated village, which stands on a bend in the Sûre River, has a ruined medieval castle that's floodlit on summer evenings. But it's the outdoor activities in the nature park just outside town that bring visitors here in large numbers. There are buses every hour or so from Wiltz and Ettelbruck. By car, take N15 south from Wiltz and northwest from Ettelbruck.

PARC NATUREL DE LA HAUT-SÛRE ★

Though tiny by North American standards, the nature park occupies a significant chunk of Luxembourg's real estate. More important, it occupies a protected and very scenic part of the Grand Duchy, in the hills and forests around the artificial Upper Sûre Lake and on the water itself. This is the place for fishing, boating, hiking, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities, including cross-country skiing in winter. There's also good bird-watching. For the low-down, stop by the visitor center in the Maison du Parc, route de Lultzhausen 15, Esch-sur-Sûre (☎ 89-93-31-1; www.naturpark-sure.lu). The center is open Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm, and weekends and holidays from 2 to 6pm (Nov–Mar closed Wed and at 5pm). Admission is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults and 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children. The park itself is open permanently and admission is free.

CLERVAUX ★

48km (30 miles) N of Luxembourg City; 13km (8 miles) NE of Wiltz

The handsome old town (pop. 1,800) occupies an incredibly scenic location in a steep valley of the Clerve River.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains and buses depart every hour or so from Luxembourg City, via Ettelbruck. By car, take N7 north from Luxembourg City.

VISITOR INFORMATION The tourist office is at Château de Clervaux, 9712 Clervaux (☎ 92-00-72; fax 92-93-12; www.tourisme-clervaux.lu). The office is open April to June, daily from 2 to 5pm; July to August, daily from 9:45 to 11:45am and 2 to 6pm; September, daily from 9:45 to 11:45am and 1:30 to 5:30pm; October, daily from 9:45 to 11:45am and 1 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Dominating this little town is its 12th-century **Castle** (Château; ☎ 92-96-57), which was restored after suffering heavy damage in World War II. U.S. troops cut off during the Battle of the Bulge held out in this Luxembourg "Alamo" until the Germans used a tank as a battering-ram to break through the wooden gates. The castle houses scale models of several other medieval fortresses, uniforms and arms from World War II, and Edward Steichen's moving *Family of Man* photographic essay. It's open March to December, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 4.50€ (\$5.65) for adults, 3€ (\$3.75) for children ages 10 to 15, and free for children under 10.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Grand Hôtel du Parc ★ This lovely old manor house is on the outskirts of town, surrounded by a beautiful wooded park. Its interior has been completely modernized. The attractive and comfortable guest rooms eschew a determinedly modern look in favor of something a bit more timeless. The restaurant and lounge have a refined old-world charm. Outside terraces overlook the picturesque little

town. An excellent chef presides over the restaurant, which is also graced with a good wine list. Other hotel amenities include a sauna and solarium.

Rue du Parc 2, 9701 Clervaux. www.hotelduparc.lu. (C) 92-06-50. Fax 92-10-68. 7 units. 70€ (\$88) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Luxembourgeois); sauna; solarium. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

VIANDEN ★

34km (21 miles) NE of Luxembourg City; 18km (11 miles) SE of Clervaux

In 1871 an exiled writer-resident of Vianden—Victor Hugo by name—described this town (pop. 1,600) as a “jewel set amid splendid scenery, characterized by two both comforting and magnificent elements: the sinister ruins of its fortress and its cheerful breed of men.”

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **trains** every hour or so from Luxembourg City to Diekirch, which connect with buses to Vianden. By **car**, take N7 north from Luxembourg City to Ettelbruck, then go northeast on N19 and N17.

VISITOR INFORMATION For information, go to the **tourist office** at Rue du Vieux-Marché 1A, 9419 Vianden (C) 83-42-57-1; fax 84-90-81; www.tourist-info-vianden.lu). The office is open April to June, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 1 to 5pm, and weekends and holidays from 10am to 2pm; July and August, Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and weekends and holidays from 10am to 2pm; September to March, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 1 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

For the best view of Vianden's narrow winding streets, castle, and the river valley, take the **chairlift** that operates Easter to mid-October Tuesday to Sunday (also Mon July–Aug) from 10am to 6pm. The round-trip fare is 4.25€ (\$5.30) for adults and 3€ (\$3.75) for children.

Vianden also has a charming **Musée d'Art Rustique et Musée des Poupées et des Jouets (Folklore, Dolls, and Toys Museum)**, Grand-Rue 96–98 (C) 83-45-91). It's open from Easter to October, Tuesday to Sunday (also Mon July–Aug and holidays) from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults, 2€ (\$2.50) for children ages 3 to 14, and free for children under 3.

Maison Victor Hugo (Victor Hugo House), rue de la Gare 37 (C) 26-87-40-88; www.victor-hugo.lu), where the great French writer stayed during his sojourn in Vianden, reopened in the spring of 2002 after extensive refurbishment. The museum in the house is open Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm. Admission is 4€ (\$5) for adults, 3.50€ (\$4.40) for ages 13 to 25, 2.50€ (\$3.15) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

Château de Vianden ★ A mighty 9th-century fortress castle perched on a hill above town draws most of Vianden's visitors. It has been restored to its original plans, so you can now see the 11th-, 12th-, and 15th-century additions that are even more impressive than the earlier sections.

Montée de Château. (C) 84-92-91. www.castle-vianden.lu. Admission 4.50€ (\$5.65) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.90) children. Jan–Feb and Nov–Dec daily 10am–4pm; Mar and Oct daily 10am–5pm; Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Nov 2, Dec 25.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel-Restaurant Heintz ★ The Heintz is in one of the Grand Duchy's oldest buildings, a former Trinitarian monastery—but you needn't worry about

bare cells and being woken up for prayers at 3am. This lovely place has thoroughly modernized rooms, which manage to keep some old character and ambience. Twelve of the rooms face south and have large balconies.

Grand-Rue 55, 9410 Vianden. ☎ **83-41-55**. Fax 83-45-59. www.hote-heintz.lu. 30 units. 60€–78€ (\$75–\$98) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Luxembourgish/French); bar. *In room:* TV.

ECHTERNACH

30km (19 miles) NE of Luxembourg City

This little town (pop. 5,100) is a living open-air museum, from its patrician houses and picturesque market square to its medieval walls and towers, its beautiful 1444 **Town Hall (Mairie)**, and its 18th-century **Abbey** and **Basilica**. Echternach has been the repository of the ages since St. Willibrord arrived from Northumberland in 658 and established the abbey that made this one of the area's earliest centers of Christianity. Allow yourself enough time in this enchanting town to soak up the medieval atmosphere that permeates the very air.

If you arrive on Whit Tuesday (the sixth Tues after Easter), you encounter the spectacular and unique Dancing Procession. Pilgrims from all over Europe come to join this parade, during which they march, chant, sing, and dance to an ancient tune performed by bands. This event mixes religious solemnity with a liberal dose of native gaiety. The procession forms at 9am and ends at the basilica.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There are **buses** every hour or so from Luxembourg City. By **car**, take N7/E421 northeast from Luxembourg City.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is at Porte St.-Willibrord (☎ **72-02-30**; fax 72-75-24; www.echternach-tourist.lu), 6401 Echternach, at St. Willibrord Basilica. The office is open July to August, daily from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm; September to June, Monday to Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel-Restaurant Bel-Air ★ This luxury hotel is a member of the Relais & Châteaux hotel chain, which is composed exclusively of converted manor houses and châteaux. It lies in its own park overlooking the Sûre Valley. Hotel features include lovely terraces and serene wooded walking paths just outside the door.

Route de Berdorf 1 (.8km/½ mile outside town), 6409 Echternach. ☎ **72-93-83**. Fax 72-86-94. www.belair-hotel.lu. 39 units. 103€–167€ (\$129–\$209) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Luxembourgish/French); lounge; tennis courts. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

3 The Moselle Valley ★

This vineyard and winery region of Luxembourg is set in a landscape quite different from that of the Ardennes. A tour of the area will take you along the flat banks of the broad Moselle River, with the gentle slope of low hills rising on both sides of the river. For miles, these slopes are covered with vineyards. The riverbanks themselves are alive with campers, boaters, and anglers. Several wineries open their doors to visitors. They take you on a guided tour, explain just how their still or sparkling wine is made, and top off your visit with a glass of what comes out of their vats.

To explore the Moselle Valley, begin at Echternach, and follow the well-marked *Route du Vin* (Wine Route) south through Wasserbillig, Grevenmacher,

Machtum, Wormeldange, Ehnen, Remich, and Wellenstein. You can do this as an easy day trip from Luxembourg City. Should you find yourself beguiled by this peaceful part of the country, there are plenty of accommodations along the route, and excellent small local restaurants.

GREVENMACHER

12km (7 miles) SE of Echternach

This scenic Moselle town, on the riverside road southeast of Wasserbillig, is noted both for its wine and its waters. There are regular buses from Echternach. The **tourist office**, Route du Vin 10, 6701 Grevenmacher (☎ 75-82-75; fax 75-86-66; www.moselle-tourist.lu), is open Monday to Friday from 8am to noon and 1 to 5pm (also Sat 10am–1pm July–Aug).

For interesting tours of their wine cellars, visit the **Caves Coopératives des Vignerons (Cooperative Wine Cellars)**, rue des Caves 12 (☎ 75-01-75). They're open May to August, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm (by appointment other months). The tour is 1.75€ (\$2.20) for adults and 1€ (\$1.25) for children. **Bernard-Massard**, rue du Pont 8 (☎ 75-05-45-1), also has wine tours. These are held April to October, daily from 9:30am to 6pm; admission is 2.75€ (\$3.45) for adults and 1.75€ (\$2.20) for children.

The tourist cruiser MS *Princesse Marie-Astrid*, which has an onboard restaurant, plows a furrow up and down the Moselle from Grevenmacher from Easter to the end of September. For details of the timetable and fares, contact the tourist office, or visit www.moselle-tourist.lu.

A FINE NEARBY RESTAURANT

Chalet de la Moselle ★ SEAFOOD This charming chalet restaurant on the Wine Route between Grevenmacher and Ahn specializes in fish and other seafood dishes, and it prides itself on its wine list. The best choices on the extensive seafood menu are *moules au Riesling* (mussels in a Riesling sauce), *sole meunière* (sole with lemon sauce), and the wonderful *cassolette de crustacés et de fruits de mer* (seafood casserole) for two. The Chalet also offers two lovely upstairs guest rooms at modest rates.

Route du Vin 35, 6841 Machtum. ☎ 75-91-91. Main courses 12€–28€ (\$15–\$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed noon–3pm; Fri–Tues 6–11pm.

WORMELDANGE & EHLEN

8km (5 miles) SW of Grevenmacher

By bus and car, it's a quick trip on the riverside road from Grevenmacher to **Wormeldange**, where the **Caves (Wine Cellars) Poll-Fabaire**, route du Vin 115 (☎ 76-82-11), are open May to October, Monday to Friday from 7am to 8pm, Saturday from 10:30am to 8pm, and Sunday from 3 to 8pm (tastings are on a more restricted schedule). The tour is 2€ (\$2.50) for adults and 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children.

Less than 1km (½ mile) farther on is **Ehnen**. The pretty village's **Musée du Vin (Wine Museum)** ★, route du Vin 115 (☎ 76-00-26), is set in a beautiful old winegrower's mansion that has been lovingly restored. It serves as an information center for the region's wineries. A comprehensive exhibit explaining viniculture processes now occupies what was once the fermenting cellar. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30 to 11:30am and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 3€ (\$3.75) for adults (includes glass of wine), and 1.25€ (\$1.55) for children.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel-Restaurant Bamberg's ★ This lovely, small, traditional hotel overlooking the river is also known for its very good restaurant. The guest rooms are beautifully decorated and nicely furnished, and the public rooms have a relaxed, homey feel. The restaurant, which draws locals in addition to visitors, has an old-world atmosphere, with a fireplace, dark wainscoting, and exposed rafters. This is a good place to stop for lunch or dinner, even if you're not staying in the hotel.

Route du Vin n131, 5416 Ehnen. ☎ **76-00-22**. Fax 76-00-56. 12 units. 90€ (\$113) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Luxembourgish). *In room:* TV.

REMICH

6km (3½ miles) S of Ehnen

On the riverside road south from Grevenmacher, the town of Remich (pop. 3,000) is an important wine center. The **Caves St-Martin (St-Martin Wine Cellars)**, route de Stadtbredimus 53 (☎ **23-69-97-74**), offer an interesting and informative tour. They're open April to October, daily from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 6pm. Admission is 2.50€ (\$3.15) for adults and 1.50€ (\$1.90) for children.

Remich tourist office, Esplanade, 5533 Remich (☎ **23-69-84-88**; fax 23-69-72-95; www.moselle-tourist.lu), at the bus station, is open July to August, daily from 10am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Hôtel Saint-Nicolas ★ Overlooking the Moselle on a broad promenade beside the river, with a view across the water to Germany, this large terraced hotel has tastefully modern guest rooms. The French restaurant **Lohengrin** is excellent.

Esplanade 31, 5533 Remich. ☎ **69-88-88**. Fax 69-90-69. www.saint-nicolas.lu. 40 units. 97€–122€ (\$121–\$153) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; lounge; health club; spa. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer.

WELLENSTEIN

4km (2½ miles) SW of Remich

Wellenstein's **Caves Coopératives des Vignerons (Cooperative Wine Cellars)**, rue des Caves 13 (☎ **23-69-93-21**), offer guided tours. They're open May to August, daily from 11am to 6pm. Admission is 1.75€ (\$2.20) for adults, and 1€ (\$1.25) for children.

Appendix A:

Getting to Know Belgium

Belgium is a small country. Not quite so small that if you blinked you'd miss it, but small enough that a couple of hours of focused driving will get you from the capital, Brussels, to any corner of the realm you care to mention. Yet the variety of culture, language, history, and cuisine crammed into this small space would do credit to a country many times its size. Belgium's diversity is a product of its location at the cultural crossroads of Europe. The boundary between the continent's Germanic north and Latin south—Europe's Mason-Dixon line—cuts clear across the country's middle, leaving Belgium divided into two major ethnic regions, Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia.

The stresses and strains of living on such a cultural fault line show up in regional antagonisms that might tear another country apart. That they haven't done so is a tribute to the Belgians' good sense. Belgians are, of course, proud of their Flemish or Walloon origins and of their Dutch or French mother tongue, but while some politicians are constantly pushing the separatist agenda, ordinary citizens are for the most part too busy getting on with the good life to pay much attention. Not much of the talk in the multitudinous cafes and restaurants across the land is of the minutiae of regional politics. It may turn out to be Belgian Railways that saves the country in the end, as the trains are filled with Walloons heading for the beaches and seafood restaurants of Flanders, and Flemings going the opposite way, to the rolling hills and country eateries of the Ardennes.

1 Belgium Today

After a long history of occupation by foreign troops, Belgium has emerged as a site for the coming together of European nations. Its many centuries of accommodation and its strategic location have made Belgium the natural choice to host the headquarters of NATO and the European Union, both of which are in Brussels. Scores of other international organizations are headquartered in Belgium; Brussels is home base for possibly the world's largest concentration of international diplomats.

Politically, modern Belgium is a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarch, Albert II, who succeeded his brother Baudouin as king in 1993. The legislature is composed of a senate and chamber of representatives, both of whose members are elected for 4 years. The government exists in a more-or-less permanent state of crisis due to the cultural and linguistic divide, with ambitious regional politicians, particularly in Flanders, often pushing the country to the brink of dissolution. Still, rumors of Belgium's demise have been heard before and have always proven greatly exaggerated, and it seems likely that the federation of autonomous regions will remain stable enough to see the country through.

Impressions

Belgium suffers severely from linguistic indigestion.

—R. W. G. Penn, *Geographical Magazine* (Mar 1980)

Famous, That's All

Let there be no more jokes along the lines of "Name me one famous modern Belgian." Here is more than one: Adolphe Sax (1814–94) invented the saxophone; architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) was one of the founders of Art Nouveau; Belgian-American Leo Baekeland (1863–1944), in 1909, invented Bakelite and was called the "father of plastics"; Georges Simenon (1903–90) wrote the Inspector Maigret books; Hergé (Georges Rémi; 1907–1983) created Tintin. Also Belgian was the great surrealist painter Renée Magritte (1898–1967); so, too, was the singer/songwriter Jacques Brel (1929–78); as was Agatha Christie's fictional detective Hercule Poirot (ageless). And how about the still very much alive "French" rocker Johnny Halliday, Hollywood star Jean-Claude Van Damme, schmaltzy singer Helmut Lotti, Formula One racing champ Jacky Ickx, and Tour de France bike-racing ace Eddy "the Cannibal" Merckx? Belgians, or Belgian-born, every last one of them.

The inhabitants of Flanders speak a derivation of German that evolved into Dutch and its Flemish variation (sometimes called *Vlaams*, but more often just referred to as Dutch; or *Nederlands*). The inhabitants of Wallonia speak French (a minority still speak the old Walloon dialect). In Brussels, the two languages mingle. So strong is the feeling for each language in its own region, however, that along the geographic line where they meet it's not unusual for French to be the daily tongue on one side of a street and Flemish on the other. And throughout the country, road signs acknowledge both languages by giving multiple versions of the same place name—Brussel/Bruxelles or Brugge/Bruges, for example. There's also a small area in eastern Belgium where German is spoken. Belgium, then, is left with not one, but three, official languages: Dutch, French, and German.

History has left its stamp on more than just language in Belgium. In both Flanders and Wallonia, people cling as tightly to their traditions and customs as they do to their language. Religious lines are sharply drawn as well, with little mingling of Catholics, Protestants, and anti-clerics. In the area of public life that will most affect you as a visitor, you find three separate national tourism agencies offering assistance: one for Flanders, another for Wallonia, and yet another for that special case, Brussels. If that sounds complicated, it's not, for there's very little overlap, and the three agencies work together almost seamlessly.

In short, far from being a homogeneous, harmonious people with one strong national identity, Belgians take considerable pride in their strongly individualistic attributes. Do they get along with one another? Well, in a manner of speaking. After all, for hundreds of years both the Flemish and the Walloons were forced to adopt an outward appearance of compatibility with all sorts of alien rulers, yet time and again events revealed their strong inner devotion to independence.

Virtually every Belgian is bilingual, with English thrown in for good measure. So they not only get on tolerably well with each other, but they also make it easy for the foreign visitor. Belgians are quite willing to adapt their language to the occasion, all the while fiercely protecting and preserving the heritage that is uniquely their own.

Fun Fact Walloons, Anyone?

Time magazine included “Walloonophobia”—fear of French-speaking Belgian Walloons—in a list of 200 common phobias.

The vast majority of Belgians are Catholic, though there’s more than a smattering of Protestants and a small Jewish community. Throughout the centuries, Belgians—nobles and peasants alike—have proclaimed their faith by way of impressive cathedrals, churches, paintings, and holy processions. The tradition continues today. For example, the lay sisterhoods known as *beguines*, which date back to about 1189, are still flourishing. Within these communities, widows and disadvantaged women enjoy a pious community life that’s both a refuge and a source of companionship. Beguines usually consist of quiet streets, small houses, a church, and a community hall. You’ll find these oases of peace right in the center of such cities as Bruges and Ghent.

Folklore still plays a large part in Belgium’s national daily life, with local myths giving rise to some of the country’s most colorful pageants and festivals, such as Ypres’s Festival of the Cats, Bruges’s pageants of the Golden Tree, and the stately Ommegang in Brussels. Antwerp owes its very name to the myth of a gallant Roman centurion who slew a despotic giant and cut off his hand, giving the city its “Red Hand of Antwerp” symbol (*Hand-werpen* is Dutch for “to throw a hand”). In Belgium’s renowned puppet theaters, marionettes based on folkloric characters identify their native cities—Woltje (Little Walloon) belongs to Brussels, Schele to Antwerp, Pierke to Ghent, and Tchantchès to Liège.

Courtesy based on mutual acceptance of differences is the prevailing rule among Belgians, and it’s the thing you notice most on your first encounters, whether with salespeople in the shops, restaurant personnel, taxi drivers, or railway station porters. This courtesy, however, is dispensed with a healthy dollop of reserve. Now, that sort of cautious courtesy could appear to be a cool aloofness that is rather off-putting. But don’t be misled. If there is one characteristic all Belgians have in common, it’s the passion with which they pursue any special interest—be it art, music, sports, or that greatest of all Belgian passions, food. Show your own interest in the subject at hand, and coolness evaporates as you’re welcomed into an affectionate fraternity.

Undoubtedly, the Belgian’s appreciation for the good things in life springs from this passionate nature. Indeed, appreciation is at the bottom of a national insistence on only the best. Standards are high in every area of daily life, and woe betide the chef who tries to hoodwink patrons with less-than-fresh ingredients, the shopkeeper who stocks shoddy merchandise, or any service person who is rude—their days are surely numbered. Belgians—Flemish or Walloon—are eminently practical, and none will spend hard-earned money for anything that doesn’t measure up.

Ah, but when standards are met, watch Belgian eyes light up with intense enthusiasm. Appreciation then moves very close to reverence, whether inspired by a great artistic masterpiece, or a homemade mayonnaise of just the right lightness, or one of Belgium’s more than 450 native beers. If you have shared that experience with a Belgian companion, chances are you find your own sense of appreciation taking on a finer edge.

2 History 101

EARLY HISTORY

Julius Caesar first marched his Roman legions against the ancient Belgae tribes in 58 B.C. For nearly 5 centuries thereafter, Belgium was a tranquil backwater of the empire, shielded from the barbarians by the great Roman defense line on the Rhine, but subject to periodic incursions.

From the beginning of the 5th century, Roman rule gave way to the Franks, who held sway for nearly 200 years. In 800, the great Charlemagne was named emperor of the West; he instituted an era of agricultural reform, setting up underling local rulers known as counts. In 814, after Charlemagne's death, these counts rose up to seize more power. By 843 Charlemagne's son had acceded to the Treaty of Verdun, which split French-allied (but Dutch-speaking) Flanders in the north from the southern (French-speaking) Walloon provinces.

Then came the Viking invaders, who attacked the northern provinces. A Flemish defender known as Baldwin Iron-Arm became the first count of Flanders in 862; his royal house eventually ruled over a domain that included the Netherlands and lands as far south as the Scheldt in France. Meanwhile, to the south, powerful prince-bishops controlled most of Wallonia from their seat in Liège.

As Flanders grew larger and stronger, its cities thrived, and its citizens wrested more and more self-governing powers. Bruges (Brugge) emerged as a leading center of European trade; its monopoly on English cloth attracted bankers and financiers from Germany and Lombardy. No one could have foreseen that Bruges's fine link to the sea, the Zwin inlet, would eventually choke with silt and leave the city high and dry, landlocked. Ghent (Gent) and Ypres (Ieper) prospered in the wool trade. Powerful trade and manufacturing

Dateline

- **58 B.C.** Julius Caesar leads Roman legions against Belgae tribes.
- **4th century A.D.** Franks settle the former Roman territory, with their first capital at Tournai.
- **814** Charlemagne, the Frankish emperor of the West, dies and his empire is divided. The Low Countries become part of Lotharingia, squeezed between the German lands and France.
- **843** Treaty of Verdun splits Flanders from the Walloon provinces.
- **966** The first documented reference to Brussels calls it Bruocsella, meaning Settlement in the Marsh.
- **1096** Two Belgian knights, Duke Godfrey of Bouillon and Count Robert II of Flanders, are among the key military leaders of the first Crusade. In 1099, their army storms Jerusalem and Godfrey rules the captured city as "Defender of the Holy Sepulcher."
- **1302** At the "Battle of the Golden Spurs," near Kortrijk, an army of Flemish peasants defeats the French and kills many noble-born knights. But 3 years later France regains control.
- **1384** Duke Philip the Bold gains control of Flanders, beginning the acquisition of the Low Countries by the Burgundians.
- **15th century** Era of "Flemish Primitives"—artists Jan van Eyck, Hieronymus Bosch, Rogier van der Weyden, and Hans Memling.
- **1477** Beginning of the rule of the Austrian Habsburgs.
- **1500** The future Habsburg Emperor and King of Spain Charles V is born in Ghent. He inherits the Low Countries in 1506 (ruling through a regent at first).
- **1531** Brussels is the capital of the Spanish Low Countries.
- **1555** Philip II of Spain introduces Catholic Inquisition persecution against Protestants.
- **1566** Protestant rioters sack Catholic churches in what is known as the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury).

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guilds emerged and erected splendid edifices as their headquarters. In Liège, great fortunes were made from iron foundries and the manufacture of arms.

THE 12TH TO THE 15TH CENTURY

This era was one of immense wealth, much of which was poured into fine public buildings and soaring Gothic cathedrals that survive to this day. During the 15th century, wealthy patrons made possible the brilliant works of such Flemish artists as van Eyck, Bosch, van der Weyden, and Memling.

As cities took on city-state status, the mighty count of Flanders, with close ties to France, grew less and less mighty; in 1297, France's Philip the Fair made a bold attempt to annex Flanders. However, he had not reckoned on the stubborn resistance of Flemish common folk. Led by the likes of Jan Breydel, a lowly weaver, and Pieter de Coninck, a butcher, they rallied to face a heavily armored French military. The battle took place on July 11, 1302, in the fields surrounding Kortrijk. When it was over, victorious artisans and craftsmen scoured the bloody battlefield, triumphantly gathering hundreds of golden spurs from slain French knights. Their victory at the "Battle of the Golden Spurs" is celebrated to this day by the Flemish.

But this valiant resistance was crushed by 1328, and Flanders suffered under both the French and the English during the course of the ensuing Hundred Years' War. When Philip the Good—duke of Burgundy in the mid-1400s and ally of England's King Henry V—gained control of virtually all the Low Countries, he was able to quell political troubles in Ghent and Bruges but unable to prevent extensive looting in Dinant or the almost total destruction of Liège. His progeny,

- **1567** Philip II of Spain sends the Duke of Alba to the Low Countries to confront the Protestant Reformation.
- **1568** Counts Egmont and Hoorn are beheaded on the Grand-Place in Brussels for protesting the excesses of the Inquisition.
- **1576** Spanish troops capture and sack Antwerp, an event recalled as the "Spanish Fury." The Pacification of Ghent, a treaty that establishes freedom of worship in the Low Countries, is signed, but is soon proved to be worthless.
- **1695** Bombardment and destruction of Brussels's Grand-Place by the French.
- **1713** Belgium comes under rule of Hapsburgs of Austria.
- **1795** French rule of Belgium begins.
- **1815** Napoléon defeated at Waterloo. Belgium becomes part of the Netherlands.
- **1830** Belgian War of Independence breaks out.
- **1831** Belgium becomes a constitutional monarchy headed by King Leopold I.
- **1835** The Continent's first railway, between Brussels and Mechelen, opens.
- **1914–18** German forces invade Belgium and occupy most of the country during World War I.
- **1940** World War II: Nazi Germany invades, May 10. King Leopold III surrenders himself and Belgium 3 weeks later.
- **1944** Brussels liberated September 3 by the British Guards Armored Division. Battle of the Bulge, in the Ardennes, begins December 16.
- **1945** World War II ends.
- **1948** Benelux customs union with the Netherlands and Luxembourg takes effect.
- **1949** Belgium joins NATO.
- **1950** King Leopold III returns from exile in Switzerland and reclaims his throne.
- **1951** Leopold III abdicates in favor of his eldest son, Baudouin.
- **1958** Belgium joins the European Economic Community, the forerunner of today's European Union (EU).

through a series of advantageous marriages, managed to consolidate their holdings into a single Burgundian “Netherlands.” Brussels, Antwerp, Mechelen, and Louvain attained new prominence as centers of trade, commerce, and the arts.

By the end of the 1400s, however, Charles the Bold, last of the dukes of Burgundy, had lost the Duchy of Burgundy to the French king on the field of battle, and once more French royalty turned a covetous eye on the Netherlands. Marriage to Mary of Burgundy, the duke’s heir, appeared a sure route to bringing the Netherlands under French rule, and a proposal (in reality an ultimatum) was issued to Mary to accept the hand of the French king’s eldest son. To the French prince’s consternation, Mary promptly wrote a proposal of marriage to Maximilian of Austria. The Austrian’s acceptance meant that the provinces became part of the extensive Austrian Hapsburg Empire.

THE 16TH & 17TH CENTURIES

A grandson of that union, Charles V—born in Ghent and reared in Mechelen—presided for 40 years over most of Europe, including Spain and its New World possessions. However, he was beset by the Protestant Reformation, which created dissension among the once solidly Catholic populace. It all proved too much for the great monarch, and so he decided to abdicate in favor of his son, Philip II of Spain.

Philip ascended to power in an impressive ceremony at the Palace of the Coudenberg in Brussels in 1555. An ardent Catholic who spoke neither Dutch nor French, he brought the infamous instruments of the Inquisition to bear on an increasingly Protestant—and increasingly rebellious—Netherlands population. The response from his Protestant subjects was violent: For a month in 1566 they went

- **1971** Moderate constitutional reforms are introduced, granting some regional autonomy.
- **1992** The legislature ratifies the Treaty on European Union.
- **1993** King Baudouin dies; he is succeeded by his brother, Albert II (b. 1934). Constitution is amended to create a federal state composed of the autonomous regions of Flanders and Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital, with the German-speaking communities a largely self-governing part of Wallonia.
- **1996** The nation reacts with horror to the deaths of four girls (two children and two teens), kidnapped by a pedophile ring. Two other children are rescued by police following their kidnapping and sexual assault, and the names of other missing children are linked to the ring. Mass street demonstrations take place, amid allegations of police and official incompetence and cover-ups.
- **1999** Belgium’s reputation for quality food takes a beating, in a scandal over dioxins mixed with animal feed. In the June election, Guy Verhofstadt, Flemish Liberal Democrat, is elected prime minister. An 18-year-old Flemish schoolboy, Mario Danneels, in his book *Paola: Van la Dolce Vita tot Koningin* (*Paola: From La Dolce Vita to Queen*), reveals that King Albert II has an out-of-wedlock daughter, Delphine Boël, then 31, an artist living in London. December 4: Prince Philippe, son of King Albert II and heir to the throne, marries Mathilde d’Udekem d’Acoz.
- **2000** Brussels is European Capital of Culture.
- **2001** October 21: Princess Elisabeth, a daughter to Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde, is born. Should she succeed to the throne, she will be the first queen of the Belgians since the dynasty was founded in 1830. Demise of the country’s flag carrier Sabena; the new SN Brussels Airlines takes over many of its European routes.
- **2002** Euro banknotes and coins replace the Belgian franc. Sotheby’s sells a newly discovered and authenticated painting by Rubens, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (ca. 1610), for \$75 million.

continues

on a rampage of destruction that saw churches pillaged, religious statues smashed, and other religious works of art burned.

An angry Philip commissioned the zealous duke of Alba, his most able general, to lead some 10,000 Spanish troops in a wave of retaliatory strikes. The atrocities committed by order of the duke of Alba and his “Council of Blood” as he swept through the “Spanish Netherlands” are legendary. The duke was merciless—when the Catholic counts of Egmont and Hornes tried to intercede with Philip, he put them under arrest for 6 months, then had them publicly decapitated in the Grand-Place in Brussels.

Instead of submission, however, this sort of intimidation gave rise to a brutal conflict that lasted from 1568 to 1648. Led by William the Silent and other nobles who raised private armies, the Protestants fought on doggedly until finally independence was achieved for the seven undefeated provinces to the north, which became the fledgling country of the Netherlands. Those in the south remained under the thumb of Spain and gradually returned to the Catholic Church. As an act of revenge, Holland closed the River Scheldt to all shipping, and Antwerp, along with other Flemish cities, withered away to just a shadow of its former prosperity.

THE 18TH & 19TH CENTURIES

At the beginning of the 18th century, the grandson of Louis XIV ascended to the Spanish throne, thereby bringing French domination to Spain’s possessions in the Low Countries. That domination was short lived, however; in 1713, the Spanish Netherlands was returned to the Hapsburgs of Austria. The Oostendse Compagnie (Ostend Company) was founded in 1722 to emulate the trading success of the Dutch and British East India companies, but it survived the hostility of these two powerful rivals only until 1727. A series of revolts against reforms instituted by Joseph II, emperor of Austria, helped to consolidate a sense of nationalism among the Low Country natives, who—for the first time—began to call themselves Belgians. Austrian-Belgian conflicts raged fiercely until 1789, when all of Europe was caught up in the French Revolution.

In 1795, Belgium wound up once more under the rule of France. It was not until Napoléon Bonaparte’s crushing defeat at Waterloo—just miles from

- **2003** The nation’s highest court upholds “universal jurisdiction” and rules that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide can be prosecuted in the country, even if the accused isn’t Belgian, and the alleged offences took place in another country. The first indictee was Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, followed closely by George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Gen. Tommy Franks, and Belgian foreign minister Louis Michel. The law was later amended to prevent politically motivated lawsuits.
- **2004** Belgium’s most notorious criminal, Marc Dutroux, is sentenced to life in prison for the kidnap and rape of six girls, the murder of two of them, and responsibility in the deaths of two more (see 1996, above); several co-defendants also receive long prison terms.

Fun Fact *Vive New York!*

Quel shock! The first European inhabitants of New York spoke French—kind of. In 1624, the Dutch West India Company established a fur-trading post at the tip of Manhattan Island, manning it with a handful of poor Protestant Walloon refugees from what is now Belgium.

Impressions

Say something positive to a Belgian about their country and they say, yes, but have you seen how much better they do it in France? Or the Netherlands?

—Harry Pearson, *A Tall Man in a Low Country* (1999)

Brussels—that Belgians began to think of national independence as a real possibility. Its time had not yet come, however; under the Congress of Vienna, Belgium was once more united with the provinces of Holland. But the Dutch soon learned that governing the unruly Belgians was more than they had bargained for, and the 1830 rioting in Brussels was the last straw. A provisional Belgian government was formed with an elected National Congress. On July 21, 1831, Belgium officially became a constitutional monarchy when a relative of Queen Victoria, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, became king, swearing allegiance to the constitution.

The new nation soon set about its own version of the industrial revolution: developing its coal and iron natural resources, and rebuilding its textile, manufacturing, and shipbuilding industries. The country was hardly unified by this process, however, for most of the natural resources were to be found in the French-speaking Walloon regions in the south, where prosperity returned much more rapidly than in Flanders.

The Flemish, while happy to be freed from the rule of their Dutch neighbors, resented the greater influence of their French-speaking compatriots. Many viewed the acquisition of a French-speaking Belgian colony in the African Congo region as further evidence of domination by an oppressive enclave, and there were increasing signs of trouble within the boundaries of Belgium itself.

THE 20TH CENTURY

It took yet another invasion to bring a semblance of unity. When German forces swept over the country in 1914, the Belgians mounted a defense that made them heroes of World War I—even though parts of the Flemish population openly collaborated with the enemy, hailing them as “liberators” from Walloon domination. Still, tattered remnants of the Belgian national army—led by their “soldier-king,” Albert I—held a tiny strip of land between De Panne and France for the entire 4 years of the war.

With the coming of peace, Belgium found its southern coal, iron, and manufacturing industries reeling, while the northern Flemish regions were moving steadily ahead by developing light industry, especially around Antwerp. Advanced agricultural methods yielded greater productivity and higher profits for Flemish farmers. By the end of the 1930s the Flemish population outnumbered the Walloons by a large enough majority to install their beloved language as the official voice of education, justice, and civil administration in Flanders.

With the outbreak of World War II, Belgium was once more overrun by German forces. In the face of overwhelming military superiority, King Leopold III decided to surrender to the invaders, remain in Belgium, and try to soften the harsh effects of occupation. The Belgian Resistance was among the most determined and successful of the underground organizations that fought against Nazi occupation in Europe. On the other side, Flemish and Walloon quislings formed separate Waffen-SS formations that fought for the Nazis in Russia. In the brutal fighting on the Eastern Front, the Red Army virtually destroyed both of these

units. By the war's end, the king was imprisoned in Germany and a regent was appointed as head of state. His controversial decision to surrender led to bitter debate when he returned to the throne in 1950, and in 1951 he stepped down in favor of his son, Baudouin.

Some of the nationalist and political tensions of that period have lingered down to the present day. Meetings like those of the extreme right-wing, Flemish-nationalist, anti-immigration Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) party, which garners a third of the electorate in Antwerp, often are guarded by paramilitaries wearing gray shirts, black ties, and Nazi and neo-Nazi regalia, and delivering straight-arm Hitler salutes.

During King Baudouin's 42 years on the throne, much progress was made in achieving harmony among Belgium's linguistically and culturally diverse population. During the 1970s efforts were made to grant increasing autonomy to the Flemish and Walloons in the areas where each was predominant, as well as to apportion power to each group within the national government and the political parties. Finally, in 1993, the constitution was amended to create a federal state, made up of the autonomous regions of Flanders and Wallonia, together with the bilingual city of Brussels and autonomous German-speaking communities.

Baudouin died in 1993, removing one of the pillars of unity. A much-loved monarch, his death was greeted with scenes of genuine national sadness that reflected most Belgians' high regard for him personally, and gave them an opportunity to show publicly their support for his goal of keeping the country together. Baudouin was a hard act to follow, and his successor, his brother King Albert II, while winning respect for conscientious effort in what is a difficult job, has not made the same personal connection with the people.

The downside of all the constitutional tinkering aimed at keeping the country intact was that it also brought the country perilously close to splitting up, as each regional government went its own way, leaving the increasingly marginalized federal government walking a tightrope between them. With so many layers of government—federal, regional, provincial, city, and communal—all of which needed an impressively outfitted administration, taxation and bureaucracy were coming dangerously close to choking the life out of the economy.

As the 1990s progressed, ordinary Belgians became increasingly disenchanted with their governance. Simmering resentment boiled over in anger in 1996 with the deaths of two little girls and two teenage girls, and the abduction of others, at the hands of a pedophile ring. The belated arrest of the prime suspect, a convicted sex offender who had been released early from prison, lifted the lid on a tale of official incompetence that destroyed people's already shaky faith in their institutions, and brought hundreds of thousands into the streets of Brussels in protest.

It was unclear how far the subsequent impulse for reform would carry. Still, much was achieved on other fronts. Most notably, Belgium hit, more or less, the strict financial targets that allowed it to participate in the European Monetary Union. What this will mean for Belgium's economy is anyone's guess, but the achievement was undeniably encouraging.

Impressions

Our country has the unique advantage of lying at the crossroads of the great cultures of Europe.

—The late King Baudouin (1990)

Fun Fact Surfer in Spirit

Betcha didn't know that a Belgian invented the Internet. Well . . . kind of. In 1934, Paul Otlet wrote a paper titled *Traité de Documentation* in which he foresaw a Universal Network for Information and Documentation. Access would be through multimedia workstations. These didn't exist yet—an inconvenient fact that, since he was a lawyer, Otlet was perfectly able to disregard.

3 Belgium's Influence on Art

Despite its small geographic size, Belgium has exerted a significant influence on the Western art world. The works of Hieronymus Bosch, Brueghel, Rubens, van Dyck, the brothers van Eyck, and Magritte represent only a fraction of the treasures you see gracing the walls of Brussels's Musée Communal and Musée d'Art Ancien, the Museum of Fine Arts in Tournai, the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, and Ghent's Museum of Fine Arts.

The Golden Age of Flemish painting occurred in the 1400s, a century dominated by the so-called Primitive artists, whose work was almost always religious in theme, usually commissioned for churches and chapels, and largely lacking in perspective. As the medieval cities of Flanders flourished, more and more princes, wealthy merchants, and prosperous guilds became patrons of the arts.

In the 15th century, the function of art was still to praise God and illustrate religious allegory, but **Jan van Eyck** (ca. 1390–1441), one of the earliest Flemish masters, brought a sharp new perspective to bear on traditional subject matter. His *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, created with his brother Hubert for St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, incorporates a realistic landscape into its biblical theme.

The Primitives sought to mirror reality, to portray both people and nature exactly as they appeared to the human eye, down to the tiniest detail, without classical distortions or embellishments. These artists would work meticulously for months—even years—on a single commission, often painting with a single-haired paintbrush to achieve a painstakingly life-like quality.

The greatest Flemish artist of the 16th century lived and worked for many years in Antwerp. From 1520 to 1580 the city of Antwerp was one of the world's busiest ports and banking centers; as such it eclipsed Bruges as a center for the arts. Many of the artists working here looked to the Italian Renaissance masters for their models of perfection. **Pieter Brueghel the Elder** (ca. 1525–69), who had studied in Italy, integrated Renaissance influences with the traditional style of his native land. He frequently painted rural and peasant life, as in his *Wedding Procession*, on view at the Musée Communal in Brussels.

Brueghel painted fewer than 50 oils (although he finished another 250-plus drawings and etchings), but he is still considered one of the greatest 16th-century artists. His works are filled with allusions and allegorical references to the politics and culture of the period, as well as with many plausible and explicit period details. Much of Brueghel's symbolism is obscure to us today, but it would have been clear to the contemporary Flemish audience full of hatred for their Spanish masters. The artist also had a fabulous, grotesque side, clearly influenced by the artist Hieronymus Bosch; see *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* in the Royal Fine Arts Museum (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts), Brussels.

In 1563, Brueghel moved to Brussels, where he lived at rue Haute 132. Here his two sons, also artists, were born. **Jan Brueghel** specialized in decorative paintings of flowers and fruits; **Pieter Brueghel the Younger** became known for copying his father's paintings.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) was the most influential baroque painter of the early 17th century. The drama in his works, such as *The Raising of the Cross*, housed in the Antwerp cathedral, comes from the dynamic, writhing figures in his canvases. His renditions of the female form gave rise to the term “Rubenesque,” which describes the voluptuous women who appear in his paintings.

Portraitist **Anthony van Dyck** (1599–1641), one of the most important talents to emerge from Rubens's studio, served as court painter to Charles I of England, though some of his best religious work remains in Belgium. Look for the *Lamentation* in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp, and the *Crucifixion* in Mechelen Cathedral.

Belgium's influence on the art world is by no means limited to the Old Masters. **James Ensor** (1860–1949) was a late-19th-century pioneer of modern art. One of his most famous works is the *Entry of Christ into Brussels*. Ensor developed a broadly expressionistic technique, liberating his use of color from the demands of realism. He took as his subject disturbing, fantastic visions and images.

Surrealism flourished in Belgium, perhaps because of the earlier Flemish artists with a penchant for the bizarre and grotesque. **Paul Delvaux** (1897–1989) became famous, but the best known of the Belgian surrealists was unquestionably **René Magritte** (1898–1967). His neatly dressed man in the bowler hat, whose face is always hidden from view, became one of the most famous images of the surrealist movement. Many of these modern works can be seen at two sections of the Royal Fine Arts Museums (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts) in Brussels—the Museum of Historic Art and the Museum of Modern Art—and the Royal Fine Arts Museum (Koninklijke Museum voor Schone Kunsten) in Antwerp. The fine arts museums in Ghent, Tournai, and Liège, and the modern art museums in Antwerp and Ostend are also major sources.

4 A Taste of Belgium

Belgian chefs are often influenced by the French, but they add their own special touches. Native specialties in Wallonia include *jambon d'Ardenne* (ham from the hills and valleys of the Ardennes) and savory *boudin de Liège* (a succulent sausage mixed with herbs). Almost every menu lists *tomates aux crevettes* (tomatoes stuffed with tiny, delicately sweet North Sea shrimp and light, homemade may-

Tips False Friend

Watch out for *steak américain*, which might sound like a nice, big, mouth-wateringly juicy American-style steak, but is in fact raw chopped beef!

onnaise), which is filling enough for a light lunch and delicious as an appetizer. A very special treat awaits visitors in May and June in the form of Belgian asparagus, and from October to March there's endive, which is known in Belgium as *witloof* (white leaf).

Belgian cuisine is based on the country's own regional traditions and produce, such as asparagus, chicory (endive), and the humble Brussels sprout. A tradition in Brussels is to cook with local beers like *gueuze* and *faro*. Also, look for great steaming pots of Zeeland

Fun Fact Belgian Fries

Let's get this straight: "French fries" are really Belgian fries. U.S. and British soldiers serving in Belgium during World War I were served fries by folks who spoke French and, *voilà!*, a popular misconception was born. The modest Belgians didn't think to tell the troops they'd been eating Belgian fries for more than 300 years, ever since a very cold winter around 1600.

mussels, which have a fanatical local following. Most places serve both a *plat du jour/dagschotel* (plate of the day) and a value-for-money, two- or three-course menu.

Flanders has added its own ingredients to the mix of Belgian cuisine. The Flemish share the Dutch fondness for raw herring, generally eaten with equally raw onions, while *sole à l'Ostendaise* (sole in a white wine sauce) and the small, gray North Sea shrimp are also firm favorites. River fish used to be the main ingredient of the Flemish souplike stew called *waterzooi*, but today's rivers being increasingly polluted, chicken is now a more familiar ingredient.

If you're basically a potatoes person, you're in good company, for Belgians dote on their *steak-frites*, available at virtually every restaurant—even when not listed on the menu. Lest you think that *frites* in Belgium are the same as American french fries, let me enlighten you. These are twice-fried potatoes, as light as the proverbial feather. They're sold in paper cones on many street corners and (in my opinion) are best when topped with homemade mayonnaise, though you may prefer curry or even your usual ketchup. Frites will also accompany almost anything you order in a restaurant.

Seafood anywhere in Belgium is fresh and delicious. *Moules* (mussels) are absolutely addictive and are a specialty in Brussels, where you find a concentration of restaurants along the Petite rue des Bouchers that feature them in just about every guise you can imagine. (Ironically, Belgian mussels actually come from Zeeland in Holland and may, in fact, be the only Dutch products Belgians will admit to being any good.) *Homard* (lobster) also comes in a range of dishes. Don't miss the heavenly Belgian creation called *écrevisses à la liègeoise* (crayfish in a rich butter, cream, and white-wine sauce). Eel, often swimming in a grass-green sauce, is popular in both Flanders (where it's called *paling in 't groen*) and Wallonia (*anguilles au vert*).

No matter where you eat, you should know that **service** will be professional but not exactly speedy. Belgians don't just dine; they savor each course—if you're in a hurry, you're better off heading for a street vendor or an imported fast-food establishment.

Finally, a word on **Belgian chocolate**. Whatever the Swiss or anyone else might say to the contrary, Belgian chocolates are the world champs; they're so lethally addictive that they ought to be sold with a government health warning. They can also be wonderful gifts for friends back home. Those made by Wittertamer, Nihoul, Neuhaus, and Leonidas ought to do the trick. Buy them loose, in bags weighing from 100 grams to boxes of 2 kilograms or more. Take a prepared box, or simply point to those you want, or ask the assistant for a mixture. Made with real cream, they do not keep well—but then you weren't planning on keeping them for long anyway, were you?

BEER & GIN

What to drink with all those tasty dishes? Why, beer, of course! Belgium is justly famous for its brewing tradition, and this tiny country has more than 100 breweries producing around 450 different brews. Some are pilsners, like Stella Artois, Jupiler, Maes, Primus, and Eupener. The majority, however, are local beers, specialties of a region, city, town, or village; some are made by monks. Each beer has a distinct, and often beautiful, glass, which is why you can instantly tell what everyone is drinking in a Belgian bar. Needless to say, with so many choices it may take quite a bit of sampling to find a favorite. Among names to look for are Duvel, Chimay, Hoegaarden, De Koninck, and Kwak; and Faro, Krieklambiek, and Lambiek from the area around Brussels.

The most unusual Belgian style is lambic, a light, effervescent brew often infused with fruit flavors, which is made only in a small region near Brussels. Unlike the modern steel-tanks-and-gauges approach to brewing, lambics are left to ferment naturally in shallow open containers.

Then there are the heavenly tasting beers brewed by Trappist monks. There are once again six Trappist breweries in the land, since Sint-Benedictus of Achel, in Limburg province, restarted brewing in 1998, more than 60 years after the Germans confiscated the brewing plant during World War I. It rejoined the abbey beers brewed by the monks of Chimay, Orval, Rochefort, Westmalle, and Westvleteren. The Trappist ales from the Abbaye de Notre Dame de Scourmont at Chimay in the south of Belgium are produced using a special yeast isolated by one of the monks after World War II. An extra helping of this yeast is added to the beer when it's being bottled to enhance its flavor.

For a digestif, you might try a gin, in Flanders known as *jenever* (or, colloquially, as *witteke*), and in Wallonia known as *genièvre* (colloquially as *pèkèt*). This stiff grain-spirit is often served in glasses little bigger than a thimble. Belgium's 70 jenever distilleries produce some 270 varieties, some flavored with juniper, coriander, or other herbs and spices. Among notable brands are Filliers Oude Graanjenever, De Poldenaar Oude Antwerpsche, Heinrich Pèkèt de la Piconette, Sint-Pol, and van Damme. Jenever in a stone bottle makes an ideal gift.

Appendix B:

Getting to Know Holland

Like an Atlantis in reverse, Holland emerged, dripping, from the sea. Look at old maps. The country was once mainly a pattern of islands, precariously separated from the North Sea by dikes and dunes. As the centuries rolled past, these islands were patiently stitched together with characteristic Dutch ingenuity and hard work. The feat of engineering required to reclaim all that land from the sea was simply amazing. The result is a canvas-flat, green-and-silver Mondrian of a country, with nearly half its territory and two-thirds of its 16 million inhabitants below sea level.

Perhaps no other country has had such an intimate relationship with the sea. After 2,000 years of raising walls against its permanent threat, the Dutch have had the sea driven into their national consciousness. Holland without water is as unimaginable as Saudi Arabia without sand.

1 Holland Today

The Netherlands is a tiny country, barely half the size of the state of Maine. A burst of vigorous driving will get you from one corner of the realm to the other in a morning, and you can travel by train from Amsterdam to the farthest point of the rail network in an afternoon. The nation's 41,865 sq. km (16,325 sq. miles) are among the most densely populated in the world, holding 16 million people, or approximately 1,000 per square mile. The crowding is most noticeable in the western *Randstad* (Rim City), the heavily populated area that includes the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Haarlem, Utrecht, and Delft. Elsewhere, the land is much more sparsely populated. For the visitor, Holland today presents much the same face it has over the centuries—a serene landscape and an industrious population who treasure their age-old tradition of tolerance and who welcome people of all political, religious, and ideological persuasions.

The Dutch can be both the most infuriating and the most endearing people in the world. One minute they treat you like a naughty child (surely you've heard the expression about someone talking to you like a Dutch uncle) and the next they're ready for a laugh and a beer. They can be rude or cordial (it may depend on the weather), domineering or ever ready to please (it may depend on you). In a shop, they may get annoyed with you if you don't accept what they have, or get mad at themselves if they don't have what you want.

Dutch people have a passion for detail that would boggle the mind of a statistician—and a sense of order and propriety that sends them into a tailspin if you

Thin Red Line

Prostitution is legal in Holland, and prostitutes work in clean premises, pay taxes, receive regular medical checks, are eligible for welfare, and have their own trade union. The streetwalker "heroin whores" need to be excluded from this ostensibly idyllic picture of the world's oldest profession.

mess things up. They organize everything (people, land, flower beds), and they love to make schedules and stick to them. They may allow you to indulge an occasional whim, though they haven't a clue what it means to "play it by ear." They do love to quote homilies ("While the cat's away, the mice will play"; "Everybody talks about my drinking, but no one knows about my thirst"; "In the concert of life, no one gets a program"), including a number that tend to suffer in translation ("Try to find it out with a wet thumb"; "It fits like a hand shoe").

They aren't particularly emotional or hotheaded, but they aren't shy about speaking their minds, either. They are fiercely independent and yet so tolerant of other people's problems and attitudes that their country nearly equals the United States as a traditional haven for the world's exiles and émigrés. (You find in the telephone book Italian, Spanish, and French names that belong to centuries-old Dutch families as respectable as the van Dijks and van Delfts.)

"The Dutch Disease," a conservative U.S. columnist called Holland's social liberalism. But not many of the hookers in Amsterdam's Red Light District are Dutch, and relatively few denizens of the smoking coffeeshops are Dutch. If Amsterdam's a latter-day Sodom and Gomorrah, it's one mainly for visitors. The Dutch themselves are a moderate, conservative lot, whose stable history in a small, densely populated land has led them to seek social consensus rather than confrontation whenever possible.

The uniquely Dutch combination of tolerance and individualism impacts on areas of personal and social morality that in other countries are still red-button issues. In 2001, the world's first same-sex marriage, with a legal status identical to that of heterosexual matrimony, took place in Amsterdam. The Dutch parliament legalized regulated euthanasia ("mercy killing"); making the Netherlands the first country in the world to do so. And then, there's prostitution and drug use, and even the dubious decision of prominent Dutch cabinet ministers to pose nude in the chambers of Parliament for publication in the Dutch edition of *Playboy* magazine. By 2000, the proportion of Dutch couples who live in what used to be called sin was 32%.

Authorities are not duty-bound to prosecute criminal acts, which leaves a loophole for social experimentation in areas that technically are illegal. It has been wryly said that the Netherlands has one of the lowest crime rates in Europe because whenever something becomes a criminal problem the Dutch make it legal, thereby reducing crime with a stroke.

Impressions

To understand the Dutch, you've got to start out with the word gedogen. It basically means to permit, to live with, to be able to tolerate. A lot of what you see in terms of legislation has been subject to gedogen for years. By the time it's written into law, it almost doesn't make a difference.

—K. Terry Dornbush, former U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands, 2001

In the Netherlands, the law allows children 12 to 16 to make their own decisions about sex, but if Mom and Dad feel a relationship is exploitative, they can ask the authorities to investigate. Most Americans would find such a law abhorrent.

—*Time*, April 29, 2002

Impressions

Behave normally—that's crazy enough.

Dutch saying

Don't laugh—at least not in Holland. Like Soviet-era Russians exercising their “freedom” to demonstrate against the Vietnam War or the deployment of U.S. missiles in western Europe, the Dutch will take aim at anyone, on any issue, outside their borders. Just so long as it's understood that everything *inside* has arrived at that hallowed state of perfection.

Run through any list you care to write of America's international misdemeanors and the Dutch will nod sagely and open-mindedly in agreement. Laugh to your heart's content about the soap-opera antics of Britain's House of Windsor, and they will laugh right along with you. But refer, however obliquely, to negative aspects of the Dutch Way, and watch the air turn cool. Go so far as to openly criticize the country, or to joke about Queen Beatrix, and you will find you have touched the natives where they are tender.

Popular opinion notwithstanding, narcotic drugs are illegal in the Netherlands. But the Dutch treat drug use mainly as a medical problem rather than purely as a crime. The authorities distinguish between soft drugs like cannabis, which are considered unlikely to cause addiction and pose a minor health risk, and hard drugs like heroin and cocaine, which are highly addictive and pose significant risks to users' health. Both types are illegal, but the law is tougher on hard drugs. Dealers who import and export drugs face 4 years in jail for soft drugs and 12 years for hard drugs.

In recent years, the Netherlands has bowed to pressure from surrounding countries regarding its drug policy and has tightened the rules for “coffeeshops”—establishments in which cannabis is sold. You used to be allowed to buy and retain 30 grams of soft drugs for personal use; now you can buy only 5 grams at a time for personal use, though you're still allowed to be in possession of 30 grams of soft drugs for personal use. Coffeeshops are not allowed to sell hard drugs or to advertise, and cannot sell to minors. If they create a public nuisance, the local *burgemeester* (mayor) can shut them down.

Supplying free heroin to addicts, with medical support, has helped combat AIDS in Holland and has slashed the drug's street price so that addicts commit fewer crimes to feed their habit. Both healthcare and law-enforcement costs have gone down. The Netherlands has significantly lower rates of heroin addiction, drug use and addiction in general, and drug-related deaths, than Britain, France, Germany, and other western European countries that criticize Holland so fiercely on this issue.

2 History 101

If your knowledge of Dutch history is confined to Peter Minuit buying Manhattan Island and Peter Stuyvesant as governor of Nieuw Amsterdam, read on. A working knowledge of the history of this fascinating country will add interesting dimensions to your visit.

Dateline

- **1st century B.C.** The area's first inhabitants—Frisians, Batavians, and other tribes—settle the coastal territory along the Rhine River. The Batavians become allies of Rome.

continues

Double Dutch, Anyone?

If foreign languages interest you, Dutch should prove a fascinating study. It's a Germanic tongue that at first sounds like a close cousin to German because of the guttural, rolled "s" and "sch" sounds, and the abundance of the letters *k*, *v*, and *b*; but after a couple of days, English speakers may begin to hear words that sound familiar. In fact, Dutch is a bridge language between German and English; in the northern province of Friesland you can hear a Dutch regional language that's supposedly the closest cousin to Old English.

THE EARLY DAYS

For all that the Bible says otherwise, the Dutch say the Creation took 8 days, not 7—on the eighth day they reclaimed their country from the sea with their own hands. The all-important dikes, which hold back the sea, began to evolve as far back as the 1st century A.D., when the country's earliest inhabitants settled on unprotected marshlands in the northern regions of Friesland and Groningen. These settlers first attempted to defend their land by building huge earthen mounds (*terpen*) on which they constructed their homes during recurring floods. Around the 8th and 9th centuries, they were building proper dikes; and by the end of the 13th century, entire coastal regions were enclosed by dikes that held back unruly rivers as well as the sea.

In view of Holland's preference for peaceful international relations, it's ironic that the Dutch first made their appearance on history's stage amid a welter of violence and blood, defending their homeland against those iron-fisted conquerors, the Romans. The earliest inhabitants of what is now the Netherlands were three tribes that settled the marshy deltas of the "lowlands" sometime in the dawn of recorded history. They were the Belgae of the southern regions; the Batavii, who settled in the area of the Great Rivers; and the fiercely independent Frisii, who had taken up residence along the northern coast. Each tribe posed a challenge to

- **12 B.C.** Roman general Drusus attempts to push the empire's frontier in Holland beyond the Rhine.
- **4th century A.D.** Barbarian invasions. Saxons settle in the east and Franks in the south.
- **814** On the death of Charlemagne, the Frankish emperor of the West and conqueror of the Saxons and Frisians, his empire is divided. The Low Countries become part of Lotharingia, squeezed between the German lands and France.
- **10th century** The counts of Holland and Zeeland and the bishopric of Utrecht begin to gain greater control of their own affairs.
- **1275** Count Floris V of Holland grants "Aemstelledamme" freedom from tolls on travel and trade. The year is regarded as Amsterdam's official foundation date.
- **1384** Duke Philip the Bold begins to gain control of the Low Countries for Burgundy.
- **1421** A storm on St. Elizabeth's Day breaks dikes along the Maas and Waal rivers, causing a flood that drowns 10,000 people.
- **1477** Beginning of the rule of the Austrian Habsburgs.
- **1506** Holland is inherited by the future Habsburg Emperor and King of Spain Charles V.
- **1555** Philip II of Spain sends the duke of Alba to the Low Countries to confront the Protestant Reformation.
- **1568** Dutch rally against Spain in the beginning of the Eighty Years' War.
- **1578** Amsterdam abandons the Spanish, and Catholic, cause; Calvinists take over in what is called the *Alteratie*.

Julius Caesar when he came calling in the mid-1st century B.C., but the Romans managed, after prolonged and effective objections from the locals, to get both the Belgae and the Batavii to knuckle under.

By Caesar's own account the Batavians made a fair job of defending their "fertile wetlands." They were, he wrote, the fiercest fighters his legions had ever encountered. In their swampy, tide-washed homeland, between the Roman devil and the deep gray sea, the Batavians struggled mightily to avoid going under, continuing their resistance until 12 B.C. against the general Nero Claudius Drusus. They later became allies of Rome, and the dashing Batavian cavalry took on a romantic aura not unlike that of Jeb Stuart's. An elite unit of Batavians formed the Emperor Augustus's personal bodyguard. Not all Romans admired their martial virtues. The poet Martial mocked the "slow-witted" Batavians—though presumably not to their faces—saying they were as foolish as they were fierce.

Roman legionary bases, one of which grew into the city of Noviomagus (Nijmegen), were used as jumping-off points for invasions of Friesland to the north and Germany to the east. But Rome never did have its way with the Frisians, those hardy *terpen* dwellers in the north. In A.D. 47, Emperor Claudius gave up the costly attempt to acquire the marshy northlands (to an Italian they must have seemed like worthless real estate anyway), settling for the Rhine as the northern frontier of the Roman Empire.

Having seen off the Romans, the Frisians refused to be conquered, even by religion. In the 5th century, they repelled the next wave of would-be conqueror, hordes of Saxons and Franks, who had overrun the by now enfeebled Romano-Batavians. Although the Franks in the late 5th century embraced Christianity, not

- **1579** The Union of Utrecht unites the seven provinces of the northern Low Countries.
- **1581** The United Provinces declare their independence from Spain.
- **1602** The United East India Company (V.O.C.), destined to become a powerful force in Holland's "Golden Age" of discovery, exploration, and trade, is founded.
- **1609** Beginning of the 12-year truce with Spain. The English navigator Henry Hudson, under contract to the United East India Company, sails from Amsterdam and "discovers" Manhattan Island and the future site of New York.
- **1621** Dutch West India Company chartered.
- **1626** Peter Minuit "purchases" Manhattan Island from the Manhattoes Native Americans for the equivalent of \$24, legalizing the Nieuw Amsterdam settlement founded the previous year at the mouth of the Hudson River, and in 1664 renamed New York by the English.
- **1634** "Tulip mania" begins; the price of tulip bulbs soars to crazy heights.
- **1637** Great Tulip Crash.
- **1642** Rembrandt paints *The Night Watch*.
- **1642–43** Navigator Abel Tasman is the first European to reach Tasmania and New Zealand.
- **1648** End of Eighty Years' War with Spain.
- **1652** Jan van Riebeeck founds Cape Town, South Africa.
- **1689** Stadhouder William III and his wife, Mary, become king and queen of England.
- **1782** Dutch become first to officially recognize nationhood of the United States.
- **1799** The United East India Company is liquidated.
- **1795** Velvet Revolution. French troops occupy Holland with the aid of Dutch revolutionaries and establish the Batavian Republic. William V flees to England.
- **1806–10** Louis Bonaparte, Napoléon's brother, reigns as king of Holland.

continues

until the late 8th century did the Frisians abandon their pagan gods, and then only when the mighty Charlemagne, king of the Franks and emperor of the West, compelled them to. Yet even Charlemagne was obliged to promise that the Frisians would remain free “so long as the wind blows out of the clouds and the world stands.”

After Charlemagne’s death in 814, his vast empire was divided among his sons. Soon Dutch history began to take shape through alliances, marriages, feuds, and outright warfare. By the 13th and 14th centuries, the nobility were busy building most of the castles and fortified manor houses throughout Holland that now attract tourists. Meanwhile, the Catholic hierarchy grew both powerful and wealthy; the bishops of Maastricht and Utrecht played key roles in the politics of the era, and preserved their legacy by erecting splendid cathedrals, abbeys, and monasteries.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, Holland’s position at the mouths of the great European rivers made it a focal point in the many shifts of feudal power. After numerous small-scale struggles for control, the House of Burgundy became the first major feudal power in the Low Countries, consolidating its hold on the region by acquiring fiefdoms one by one through the various means of marriage, inheritance, and military force. Its day soon passed, however, as the Austrian Habsburg emperor Maximilian acquired the Low Countries from the Burgundians by much the same means.

Amsterdam began its rise to commercial prosperity in 1323, when Count Floris VI established the city as one of two toll points for the import of beer. The city’s skillful merchants began to establish strong guilds of craftsmen and to put ships to sea to catch North Sea herring (an industry that took a big leap forward in 1385,

- **1813** The Netherlands regains independence from the French.
- **1814** Holland becomes the kingdom of the Netherlands, a constitutional monarchy headed by Willem I of the House of Oranje-Nassau, and incorporating Belgium.
- **1830** Belgium breaks free from Dutch rule.
- **1853** Birth of Vincent van Gogh.
- **1890** Death by suicide of van Gogh.
- **1917** Despite Dutch neutrality in World War I (1914–18), the Netherlands suffers from severe food shortages, triggering street riots.
- **1920** Dutch airline KLM launches the world’s first scheduled air service, between Amsterdam and London.
- **1928** Amsterdam Olympics.
- **1932** Afsluitdijk (Enclosure Dike) at the head of the Zuiderzee is completed, transforming the sea into the freshwater IJsselmeer Lake.
- **1934** The Great Depression leads to shortages and riots; the government calls out the army to maintain public order.
- **1940:** World War II: Nazi Germany invades, May 10. The Netherlands surrenders 4 days later after the aerial bombardment of Rotterdam. Queen Wilhelmina goes into exile in London.
- **1941** Dockworkers and other workers in Amsterdam launch the “February Strike” against persecution and deportation of the city’s Jewish community.
- **1942** Anne Frank and her family, along with other Jewish friends, go into hiding in Amsterdam. Dutch East Indies occupied by Japan.
- **1944** The Frank family refuge is betrayed and its occupants are transported. Anne dies the following year at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
- **1944–45** Thousands die during the “Hunger Winter,” when Nazi occupation forces blockade western Holland.
- **1945** May 5: German forces in the Netherlands capitulate. KLM inaugurates Amsterdam–New York air service, using a 36-seat Douglas DC-4, cruising speed 320kmph (200 mph); journey time, including stopovers in Scotland and Newfoundland: 25½ hours.
- **1947** *The Diary of Anne Frank* is published.

Fun Fact **Beer Days**

Dutch researchers believe that from 1300 to 1650 average annual beer consumption in the Low Countries was between 400 and 450 liters per person.

when Willem Beukelszoon discovered a way to cure herring at sea). They expanded into trade in salted Baltic herring, Norwegian salted or dried cod and cod-liver oil, German beer and salt, bales of linen and woolen cloth from the Low Countries and England, Russian furs and candle wax, Polish grain and flour, and Swedish timber and iron. They opened up lucrative trade by both doing business with, and competing against, the powerful Baltic-based Hanseatic League.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT, REBELLION & WAR

The anti-Catholic, iconoclastic ideas of Protestantism took root in the Dutch psyche at the same time that the Low Countries came under the rule of Charles V, the Catholic Habsburg emperor and king of Spain. At the same time, Dutch citizens were beginning to embrace the Protestant church. Holland became a pressure point and fulcrum for the shifting political scene that the Reformation occasioned everywhere in Europe. The rigorous doctrines of John Calvin and his firm belief in the separation of church and state began to take root.

When Charles relinquished the Spanish throne to his son Philip II in 1555, things took a nasty turn for the Dutch. An ardent Catholic, Philip was determined to defeat the Reformation and set out to hunt heretics throughout his empire. He dispatched the infamous duke of Alba to the Low Countries to carry out the Inquisition's "death to heretics" edict. The Dutch resented Philip's intrusion into their affairs and began a resistance movement, led by the taciturn but

- **1948** Benelux customs union with Belgium and Luxembourg takes effect.
- **1949** Holland joins NATO. The Dutch East Indies' wins independence, as Indonesia, after a bitterly fought liberation struggle.
- **1953** Devastating North Sea storms produce significant coastal flooding. Dutch embark on long-range Delta Project to seal off river estuaries in the southwest.
- **1958** Holland joins the European Economic Community, the forerunner of today's European Union (EU).
- **1966** Street protests in Amsterdam mark Princess Beatrix's marriage to German Claus von Amsberg, a former soldier in the World War II German army.
- **1975** Amsterdam's 700th anniversary. Cannabis use is decriminalized. Holland grants independence to Surinam.
- **1980** Queen Juliana abdicates, and her eldest daughter Beatrix accedes to the throne.
- **1987** The *Homomonument*, the world's first public memorial to persecuted gays and lesbians, is unveiled in Amsterdam.
- **1992** The Treaty of Maastricht creates a single European market, replacing the European Community (EC) with the European Union (EU) and clearing the way for the creation of a single European currency.
- **1997** The Treaty of Amsterdam confirms European Monetary Union and the euro as the future common European currency.
- **2001** The world's first real same-sex marriage, husband and husband, with a legal status identical to that of heterosexual matrimony, takes place in Amsterdam (by 2004, around 8% of marriages in Holland are same-sex).
- **2002** Euro banknotes and coins replace the guilder. Crown Prince

continues

tactful William of Orange, count of Holland, known also as William the Silent, who loudly declared: “I cannot approve of princes attempting to control the conscience of their subjects and wanting to rob them of the liberty of faith.”

Rallying behind William and the League of Protestant Nobles, the Dutch mounted a fierce resistance, though they had no army, no money to raise one, and little support from the Dutch cities, including Catholic Amsterdam, which was interested mostly in maintaining its prosperous trade. William and his brother John of Nassau managed to wage war on Spain despite all this, their only ally a ragtag “navy” of Protestant pirates called the Sea Beggars. They were helped when Spain levied a new tax on its Dutch “colony,” an action so unpopular as to rally the majority of Dutch people—Protestant and Catholic alike—to the anti-Spanish cause.

Those towns that declined to join the fight against Alba were spared destruction when the Spanish invaded. The Spanish armies marched inexorably through Holland, besting the defenses of each city to which they laid siege, with few exceptions. In an ingenious if desperate move in 1574, William saved Leiden by flooding the province, allowing the Sea Beggars to sail their galleons right up to the city’s walls. The attack surprised the Spaniards in the middle of dinner, and they were routed. A stew pot left behind by the fleeing enemy became a cherished national symbol of the triumph of freedom, and its contents inspired the traditional Dutch dish called *hutsot*.

This victory galvanized the Dutch in fighting for their independence. The Calvinist merchants of Amsterdam turned out their Catholic city council in 1578 in a revolution called the *Alteratie* (Changeover), and the city abandoned the Spanish cause. As the Protestant Reformation took hold, the city’s many Catholics were forbidden to hold public office or to worship openly, a situation that continued for more than a century.

In 1579, the Dutch nobles formed the Union of Utrecht, in which they agreed to fight together in a united front. Although the union was devised solely to prosecute the battle against Spain, consolidation inevitably occurred, and by the turn of the 17th century the seven northern provinces of what had been the

Willem-Alexander marries Argentine Máxima Zorreguieta. Dutch parliament legalizes regulated euthenasia (“mercy killing”), making the Netherlands the first country in the world to do so. Pim Fortuyn, a flamboyant, gay, populist right-wing politician, is shot to death in Holland’s first political assassination of the modern era.

- **2003** The permanent International Criminal Court, for prosecuting large-scale crimes against humanity, is inaugurated in The Hague, despite opposition to the court from countries that include the U.S. In a project to test the medical efficacy of cannabis, the drug is made legal under controlled conditions and when prescribed by a physician for patients suffering from a range of terminal and chronic illnesses, including cancer and Aids.
- **2004** The former Queen Juliana dies. Vermeer’s painting *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (ca. 1670) is sold at auction for more than \$30m by Sotheby’s in London. Controversial film director Theo van Gogh, 47, is stabbed and shot to death on the streets of Amsterdam; he had received death threats after making a film critical of Moslems. Police arrest and charge a suspect holding joint Dutch and Moroccan citizenship. The killing ignites a wave of anti-Islamic violence across Holland, and national soul-searching about the country’s famed tolerance.

What's in a Name?

Let's clear up some matters of nomenclature. *Dutch* is the result of a 15th-century ethnological misunderstanding on the part of the English, who couldn't distinguish too clearly between the people of the northern Low Countries and the various German peoples. So, to describe the former, they simply corrupted the German "Deutsch" to Dutch.

The term *Holland* is a bit of a misnomer since, strictly speaking, it refers only to the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland and not to the whole country. The Dutch themselves call their country *Nederland* (the Netherlands) and themselves *Nederlanders*. But they recognize that *Dutch* and *Holland* are popular internationally and are here to stay so, being a practical people, they make use of them.

Spanish Netherlands became the United Provinces—Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Groningen, Gelderland, and Overijssel.

The struggle with Spain was to continue until 1648, and became known as the Eighty Years' War. By the early 1600s, William's son, the brilliant general and notorious philanderer Prince Maurice, was *Stadhouder* (Head of State) of the United Provinces, initiating a new era. The States-General, a parliament under the chairmanship of a Grand Pensionary, was the governing body. Holland's strength was growing and a new, prosperous era was about to begin.

THE GOLDEN AGE

Over the first 50 to 75 years of the 17th century, the legendary Dutch entrepreneurial gift would come into its own. These years have since become known as the Golden Age. It seemed every business venture the Dutch initiated during this time turned a profit and that each of their many expeditions to the unknown places of the world resulted in a new jewel in the Dutch trading empire. Colonies and brisk trade were established to provide the luxury-hungry merchants at home with new delights, such as fresh ginger from Java, foxtails from America, fine porcelain from China, and flower bulbs from Turkey that produced big, bright, waxy flowers and grew quite readily in Holland's sandy soil—tulips. Holland was growing rich.

Amsterdam grew into one of the world's great cities. In 1602, traders from each of the major cities in the Republic of the Seven Provinces set up the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (V.O.C.), the United East India Company, which was granted a monopoly on trade in the East. The company's purpose was to mount safe, cost-effective, exploratory voyages and trading ventures to the East Indies. It was wildly successful and established the Dutch presence in the Spice Islands (Indonesia), Goa, South Africa, and China. The big Dutch East India Company merchant vessels could hold twice as much cargo as their English rivals.

Dutch explorers were establishing the infant Nieuw Amsterdam (later to be called New York City); Abel Tasman was sailing around the South Pacific, discovering New Zealand, the Fiji Islands, Tonga, and Tasmania; and the Dutch Indonesian colonies were established. At home, the merchants who financed all those voyages grew richer, built gabled houses, dug canal after canal, and applauded as the young William III married into the English royal family and shared the English throne with his wife.

Holland was also becoming a refuge for persecuted groups. The Pilgrims stopped here for a dozen years before embarking for America, Jews fled the oppressive Spanish and welcomed the tolerance of the Dutch, and refugees straggled in from France and Portugal. William the Silent had helped create a climate of tolerance in Holland, which attracted talented newcomers who contributed to the expanding economic, social, artistic, and intellectual climate of the country.

Golden Age Holland can be compared to Renaissance Italy and Classical Greece for the great flowering that transformed society. "There is perhaps no other example of a complete and highly original civilization springing up in so short a time in so small a territory," wrote the historian Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1987).

When the war with Spain finally ended in 1648, Holland had a fleet of 2,700 trading ships. Though the Nieuw Amsterdam colony (present-day New York City) in North America was lost to the English in 1664, the Dutch continued to grow wealthy from their Spice Islands holdings. The descendants of William of Orange had by then established a de facto monarchy, which was further strengthened when William III married into the English royal family. The ascension of William III and his wife, Mary, to the English throne in 1688 may have been the beginning of the end for the Dutch Republic, however. Wars, commercial failures, misguided political decisions, and low morale were the hallmarks of the next century of Dutch history, which ended with the House of Orange in exile.

The Dutch call 1672 the *Rampjaar* (Year of Disaster). France, under Louis XIV, invaded the United Provinces by land and the English attacked by sea. This war (1672–78) and the later War of the Spanish Succession (1701–13) drained the country's wealth and morale. The buccaneering, can-do, go-anywhere spirit of traders, artists, and writers began to ebb, replaced by conservatism and closed horizons.

Still, in the 1680s the Dutch merchant fleet was larger than those of England, Spain, Portugal, and France combined, and in Amsterdam the illumination from more than 2,000 whale oil-burning lamps made the nighttime streets among the safest in the world.

DECLINE & FALL

Conflict arose between Holland and England—in part because of their lively competition on the seas. Needless to say, Dutch support for the new United States of America (Holland was the first to recognize the fledgling country's nationhood and extended three substantial loans to the new government) did little to heal the breach with the British. By the time William V—with his mixed Dutch-Anglo background—ascended the Dutch throne, anti-British sentiment

Impressions

The energetic and practical Hollanders . . . were after trade, not empire or conversion, and were highly adept at avoiding bloodshed. When they realized that the time had come to bow gracefully from the scene, they did so without any death-or-glory nonsense.

Arthur C. Clarke, "A Clear Run to the South Pole," in *Greetings Carbon-Based Biped!* (1999)

Fun Fact Beating the Dutch

The 17th-century Dutch got up the noses of the English by competing against them aggressively and successfully for maritime trade and, in 1667, by sailing boldly up the Medway near London and trashing the English fleet. So the English added verbal abuse to their counterattack arsenal. That's why we have "Dutch courage" (alcohol-induced courage), "Dutch treat" (you pay for yourself), "going Dutch" (everybody pays their share), and "double Dutch" (gibberish). Americans were kinder to their Revolutionary War supporters, speaking of "beating the Dutch" (doing something remarkable).

was so strong that in 1795 he was exiled to England and a new Batavian Republic was set up, aligning itself with France.

In 1799, the United East India Company was liquidated, a key indicator of the nation's steep commercial decline. An equally significant milestone in the downward spiral was passed when the Dutch navy, which had once been all but invincible, was captured by a company of horsemen. That happened in January 1794, when the fleet found itself stuck in the frozen waters between Den Helder and Texel Island. French cavalry simply rode out to the ships and captured them all. The humiliating defeat was quite a fall from the heights of glory the navy had known off the same coast in 1673, when Admirals de Ruyter and Tromp had led Dutch ships to victory over a combined English and French fleet.

Revolutionary France invaded Holland in 1794, capturing Amsterdam and establishing the Batavian Republic in 1795, headed by the pro-French Dutch Patriots. Napoléon brought the short-lived republic to an end in 1806 by setting up his brother, Louis Napoléon, as king of the Netherlands, and installed him in a palace that had been Amsterdam's Town Hall. What Napoléon the emperor wanted, of course, was a fraternal puppet on the Dutch throne to do his bidding. Far from being a puppet, Louis did a such a good job of representing the interests of his new subjects—for instance, permitting them to trade surreptitiously with Britain, which was at war with Napoléon and under French blockade—that in 1810 Napoléon deposed him and brought the Netherlands formally into the empire.

The French reign was short lived, but the taste of royalty proved sweet. When the Dutch recalled the House of Orange in 1814, it was to fill the role of king in a constitutional monarchy. The monarch was yet another William of Orange; however, because his reign was to be a fresh start for the republic, the Dutch started numbering their Williams all over again (which makes for a very confusing history). Then came Waterloo in 1815 and Napoléon's final defeat.

MODERN TIMES

The Netherlands escaped the worst ravages of World War I by maintaining a strict neutrality, but the war still had an impact. While the wealthy exploited the situation by selling the belligerents arms and other supplies, the populace suffered from acute food shortages, and the poor were constantly faced with starvation. In 1917, food riots were suppressed by the army, and the authorities responded with soup kitchens and rationing. In the 1920s, Holland shared in the wealth as Europe's condition improved, but conditions were very bad during the 1930s,

Fun Fact Prohibition? No Thanks

In April 1933, 100 gallons of beer from the Heineken brewery in Rotterdam arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey. This was the first legal shipment of beer to the U.S. in 13 years.

when the widespread unemployment brought on by the Great Depression caused the government to use the army in 1934 to control the unruly masses. During this time many poor Dutch families were forced to move to Germany, where jobs were easier to come by.

In World War II, Nazi troops invaded the country in 1940. An Austrian Nazi, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, was put in charge of the occupied Netherlands. The occupation was complete and devastating: An estimated 104,000 of Holland's 140,000 Jews were murdered, Rotterdam sustained heavy bombings, and the rest of the country also suffered terribly at the hands of its invaders. During the war the Dutch operated one of the most effective underground movements in Europe, which became an important factor in the liberation in 1945.

Among those murdered in the Nazi terror was a teenage girl who has come to symbolize the many other victims of the Holocaust—Anne Frank (1929–45). Anne is famous the world over for her diary, a profoundly moving record of a Jewish teenager's struggle to cope with the horrific realities of war and the Nazi occupation. When the Germans began deporting the Jews, Anne and her family went into hiding in an Amsterdam canal house, now the Anne Frankhuis. Cut off from other outlets for her energies, she began to keep a journal telling of her thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The last entry was on August 1, 1944, shortly before she and her family were discovered and deported to concentration camps. Anne and her sister Margot were sent to Bergen-Belsen, where they died of typhus just a few days before Allied forces liberated the camp. Otto Frank, Anne's father, was the only survivor of the Frank family, and it was he who first had Anne's diary published.

Holland's liberation began with the largest airborne assault in military history, Operation Market Garden, in September 1944. The U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the British 1st Airborne Division, and the Polish 1st Parachute Brigade—a total of 35,000 paratroops and glider-borne infantry—landed at key points along the road from Eindhoven through Nijmegen to Arnhem, to capture the bridges over the rivers Maas, Waal, and Rhine and permit the ground forces to break through into Hitler's Germany. It was, in a phrase that has gone down in history, “a bridge too far.” Amid grim fighting, the operation was a partial success, but the critical bridge over the Rhine River at Arnhem remained in German hands. The unliberated parts of Holland were plunged into the terrible Hunger Winter, as Allied troops fought their way slowly forward through mud and flooded polder. The west and north of the country experienced liberation only after Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945.

During World War II the Dutch colonies in the Far East were captured by the Japanese. At war's end the Indonesian colonists took up a determined fight for their independence, which they finally achieved in 1949. In 1963 Holland relinquished control over the western half of New Guinea, which became part of Indonesia, and in 1975 it granted independence to Surinam.

In 1953, devastating North Sea storms broke through the dikes in many places along Holland's southwest coast, flooding significant areas. There was a

substantial loss of life and property. In order to assure greater protection along its coastal areas, Holland embarked upon a long-range Delta Project to seal off the river estuaries in the southwest of the country.

Holland today is a constitutional monarchy headed by the ever popular Queen Beatrix of the House of Orange (opinion surveys regularly give her an 80% approval rating). The heir-apparent is their oldest son, Willem-Alexander (b. 1967). Parliament consists of two houses—an Upper Chamber and a Lower Chamber. The three major political parties are the Christian Democrats (CDA), the Labor party (PvdA), and the Liberal party (VVD).

3 The (Un)Natural Environment

Holland is the great river delta of northwest Europe, tucked into a corner between Germany and Belgium. It's an embroidery of canals, rivers, lakes, and drainage channels—there are 7,925 sq. km (3,090 sq. miles) of water within Holland's borders in the form of lakes, rivers, and canals—with a dense, sandy, and peatlike soil that tends to settle over time. The country sinks an average of 1m, or 39 inches, every 1,000 years. As a result, approximately 25% of Holland, an area that holds about two-thirds of its people, now lies *below* sea level, protected from flooding only by sand dunes, dikes, and Dutch engineering ingenuity. The fact that the solid, timeless buildings of Amsterdam and the city's 725,000 inhabitants stand where waves should by all rights be lapping is a difficult concept for foreigners to grasp.

Incidentally, if you think a dike is a high wall, you'll be surprised to see that actually many of them are still great mounds of earth and stone that extend for miles—like a huge rope with a flattened top. Indeed, many of the roads you travel on are built along the tops of dikes.

While visiting Holland in 1859, Matthew Arnold was so amazed at what he saw that he wrote home, "The country has no business to be there at all." Maybe so, but the Dutch have a ready answer: "God made the earth," they tell you, "and the Dutch made Holland." That they did, and they did a fine job of it. Around half of the country's land area has been reclaimed, from the sea, lakes, and marshes. Some 2,600 sq. km (1,000 sq. miles) of the country was under water just 100 years ago. The A1/A6 highway out of Amsterdam runs north-east for 20km (13 miles), across a narrow stretch of water to Flevoland, the Netherlands' newest province. There is something convincing about Flevoland as evidence of reclamation: Its main towns, Almere and Lelystad, are so new that the paint on the buildings has scarcely had time to dry. The land itself has an unshaped feel, despite forests that have been planted and the tractors you can see ploughing the fields and harvesting crops.

In recent decades, more land has been reclaimed from the sea. A large part of the new polder (reclaimed land), Flevoland, was pumped dry in 1957, followed by another dammed-in area in 1968. More than 200,000 Dutch now live and work on land that used to be under an arm of the North Sea called the Zuiderzee (now a freshwater lake called the IJsselmeer).

Natural regions are formed by the low hills of the southeast; the forest in the center of the country (the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland); the islands and former islands along the coast of the North Sea (the province of Zeeland in the southwest and a string of sandbar islands off the coast of the province of Friesland in the north); the polders of the former Zuiderzee; and the flat farmland of the rest of the country (some of which is actually old and well-established polder).

Impressions

Here a wretched race is found, inhabiting either the more elevated spots or artificial mounds.

—Roman geographer Pliny the Elder (1st century A.D.)

The “Great Rivers”—the Rhine, the Waal, and the Maas (or Meuse, as it is known in Belgium, and in France where its headwaters lie)—divide the country along geographic and spiritual lines. The Dutch living in the lower land “above,” or north of, the rivers have long been predominantly Calvinist, whereas the population of the higher lands “below,” or south of, the rivers has been traditionally Catholic. (Interestingly, the southerners, whose spiritual capital is Maastricht, lump Amsterdammers together with the other “cold-blooded” northerners as people too straitlaced to know how to enjoy themselves.)

Even far inland, the Dutch are closely tied to water and the sea. Indeed, it is these three rivers that have given Holland its historically strategic position in world shipping and trading. From earliest recorded history, they have brought the products of Europe to this point on the North Sea for shipment to markets around the world.

In flat Holland, wind is ever present, so it is not surprising that the Dutch have made use of windmills to do their hard labor, from pumping water off the land to drain polders, to milling grain and sawing timber. Nowadays, you’re as likely to see the whirling blades of wind-turbines, generating a growing proportion of the nation’s electrical power.

4 Dutch Influence on Art

The 17th century was the undisputed Golden Age of Dutch art. During this busy time, artists were blessed with wealthy patrons whose support allowed them to give free reign to their talents. Art held a cherished place in the hearts of average Dutch citizens, too, as Peter Mundy, who traveled to Amsterdam in 1640, observed: “Many times blacksmiths and cobblers will have some picture or other by their forge and in their stall. Such is the general notion, inclination, and delight that these country natives have to paintings.” The Dutch were particularly fond of pictures that depicted their world: landscapes, seascapes, domestic scenes, portraits, and still lifes. The art of this period remains some of the greatest ever created in Holland.

One of the finest landscape painters of all time was **Jacob van Ruysdael** (1628–82), who depicted cornfields, windmills, and forest scenes, along with his famous views of Haarlem. In some of his works the human figure is very small, and in others it does not appear at all; instead the artist typically devoted two-thirds of the canvas to the vast skies filled with the moody clouds that float over the flat terrain of Holland.

Frans Hals (1581–1666), the undisputed leader of the Haarlem school, specialized in portraiture. The relaxed relationship between the artist and his subject in his paintings was a great departure from the formal masks of Renaissance portraits. With the lightness of his brushstrokes, Hals was able to convey an immediacy and intimacy. He not only produced perceptive psychological portraits, but also had a genius for comic characters—he showed men and women as they are and as a little less than they are in such works as *Malle Babbe* (1650). Hals also excelled in producing group portraits, such as *The Archers of St. Aidan*.

He carefully planned and balanced the directions of pose, gesture, and glance, but his *alla prima* brushwork (direct laying-down of a pigment) makes these public images appear as spontaneous reportage. It's worth visiting the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem to study his techniques.

One of the geniuses of Western art was **Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn** (1606–69). This highly prolific and influential artist had a dramatic life filled with success and personal tragedy. Rembrandt was a master at showing the soul and inner life of humankind, in both his portraits and illustrations of biblical stories. His most famous work, the group portrait known as *The Night Watch* (1642), is on view in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Rembrandt's use of lights and darks was influenced by Caravaggio, like Hals and Van Honthorst before him, but was much more refined. For him, the values of light and dark gradually and softly blended together; although his paintings probably lose some of the drama of chiaroscuro, they achieve a more truthful appearance. The light that falls upon a face in a Rembrandt portrait is mysterious yet revealing of character. His series of religious paintings and prints are highly personal and human in spirit. The overall stillness of his religious work reflects an inner contemplation. He depicted Christ as a humble and gentle Nazarene, with a loving and melancholy expression. Rembrandt's religious prints (etchings) were a major source of income during his lifetime.

A spirituality reigns over his self-portraits as well; Rembrandt did about 60 of these during his lifetime. The *Self-Portrait with Saskia* shows the artist with his wife during prosperous times, when he was often commissioned by wealthy merchants to do portraits. But later self-portraits show his transition from an optimist to an old man worn down by care and anxiety. At the Rembrandt House in Amsterdam—which has been restored to much the way it was when the artist lived and worked there—you can see the above self-portrait along with some 250 etchings.

In his later years, while at the height of his artistic powers, Rembrandt's work was judged too personal and eccentric by his contemporaries. Many considered him to be a tasteless painter obsessed with the ugly and ignorant of color; this was the prevailing opinion until the 19th century, when Rembrandt's genius was reevaluated.

Jan Vermeer (1632–75) of Delft is perhaps the best known of the “Little Dutch Masters.” These painters restricted themselves to one type of painting, such as portraiture. Although the scope of their work was narrow, they rendered their subjects with an exquisite care and faithfulness to actual appearances.

The main subjects of Vermeer's work are the activities and pleasures of simple home life. Vermeer placed the figure(s) at the center of his paintings, and typically used the background space to convey a feeling of stability and serenity. Vermeer excelled at reproducing the lighting of his interior scenes. Art historians know that Vermeer made use of mirrors and the *camera obscura*, an early camera, as compositional aids. His paintings give a wonderful illusion of three-dimensionality: As light—usually afternoon sunshine pouring in through an open window—moves across the picture plane, it caresses and modifies all the colors.

If **Vincent van Gogh** (1853–90) had not failed as a missionary in the mining region of Belgium, he might not have turned to painting and become the greatest Dutch artist of the 19th century. *The Potato Eaters* (1885) was Van Gogh's first masterpiece. This rough, crudely painted work shows a group of peasants gathered around the table for their evening meal after a long day of manual labor. Gone are the traditional beauty and serenity of earlier Dutch genre painting.

After the death of his father, Vincent traveled first to Antwerp and then to Paris to join his favorite brother, Theo. In Paris he discovered and adopted the rich, brilliant color palette of the Impressionists. Through Theo, an art dealer, Vincent met Paul Gauguin, and the two had many conversations on the expressive power of pure color. Van Gogh developed a thick brushwork—with a textilelike texture—that complemented his intense color schemes.

In 1888, Vincent traveled to Arles in Provence, where he was dazzled by the Mediterranean sun. His favorite color, yellow, which signified love to him, dominated landscapes such as *Wheatfield with a Reaper* (1889). For the next 2 years, he remained in the south of France, painting at a frenetic pace in between bouts of madness. In *The Night Café* (1888), the red walls and green ceiling combine with a sickly yellow lamplight to give an oppressive air to this billiard-hall scene. (With red and green, Vincent wrote, he tried to represent “those terrible things, men’s passions.”) We see the halos around the lights swirl as if we, like some of the patrons slumped over at their tables, have had too much to drink. Perhaps his best-known nightscape is *The Starry Night* (1889); with its whirling starlight, Vincent’s turbulent universe is filled with personal anxiety and fear.

The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam has more than 200 of his paintings—including all those named above—presented to Holland by Theo’s wife and son with the provision that they not leave Vincent’s native land. Vincent sold only one painting in his lifetime (Theo sold it), but he did “sell” others, to pay for food, drink, and lodgings—and maybe some went for a song.

Before **Piet Mondrian** (1872–1944) became an originator of De Stijl (or neoplasticism), he painted windmills, cows, and meadows. His Impressionistic masterpieces, *The Red Tree* (1909)—which looks as though it’s bursting into flame against a background of blue—marked a turning point in his career. He had always said that when he discovered his true personality, he would drop one of the two *a*’s in his surname (originally Mondriaan), and this was the first canvas he signed as Mondrian.

With his friend, Theo van Doesburg, Mondrian began a magazine in 1917 entitled *De Stijl* (The Style) in which he expounded the principles of neoplasticism: a simplification of forms or, in other words, a purified abstraction; an art that would be derived “not from exterior vision but from interior life.” In part, this movement was an outgrowth of and reaction against the cubist work of Picasso and Braque, which Mondrian had seen while he lived in Paris from 1912 to 1914.

To Mondrian and the poets, sculptors, and architects associated with De Stijl, abstraction was a moral necessity. They believed that simplifying vision would simplify life, and that a universal plastic language would bring about a better world. The geometric painters of the De Stijl school attempted a “controllable precision.” Their basic form was the rectangle—with horizontal and vertical accents at right angles. Their basic colors were the primaries—red, blue, and yellow—along with black and white. In works like his 1936 *Composition in Blue, Yellow, and Black* (Gemeentemuseum Den Haag), no part of the picture plane is more important than any other; with its design, Mondrian achieves an equilibrium but does not succumb to a mechanical uniformity.

Mondrian suppressed the use of curves and the color green in his later work because, he said, these reminded him of nature. But it’s ironic to note that to support himself Mondrian had to paint flowers on porcelain for much of his life. In 1940, Mondrian moved to New York, which he loved, to escape the war in Europe. In the evenings he would take walks around the Art Deco Rockefeller

Center; the geometry of the lighted windows reminded him of his paintings. Mondrian's last paintings were lively abstract representations of New York, like *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43) (MoMA, New York) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944) (Gemeentemuseum Den Haag).

5 A Taste of Holland

Dutch national dishes tend to be of the ungarnished, hearty, wholesome variety—solid, stick-to-your-ribs stuff. A perfect example is *erwtensoep*, a thick pea soup cooked with ham or sausage that provides inner warmth against cold Dutch winters and is filling enough to be a meal by itself. Similarly, *hutspot*, a potato-based “hotchpotch,” or stew, is no-nonsense nourishment to which *klapstuk* (lean beef) is sometimes added. *Hutspot* also has an interesting intangible ingredient—see “History 101,” above, for the story of its origin.

Seafood, as you might imagine in this traditionally seafaring country, is always fresh and well prepared. Fried sole, oysters, and mussels from Zeeland, and herring (fresh in May and early June—great excitement surrounds the first catch of the season, part of which goes to the queen and the rest to restaurateurs amid spirited competition—pickled other months) are most common. In fact, if you happen to be in Holland for the beginning of the herring season, it's an absolute obligation—at least once—to interrupt your sidewalk strolls to buy a “green” herring from a pushcart; prices run the gamut from dirt cheap to astronomical. The Dutch are also uncommonly fond of oily freshwater eel and Zeeland oysters and mussels (*Zeeuwse oesters* and *Zeeuwse mosselen*), from September to March.

At **lunchtime**, you're likely to find yourself munching on *broodjes*, small buttered rolls usually filled with ham and cheese or beef, although a *broodje gezond* (healthy sandwich) with cheese and vegetables is a good choice for vegetarians. Not to be missed are the delicious, filling pancakes called *pannekoeken*, often eaten as a savory dish with bacon and cheese. *Poffertjes* are a sweet, lighter, penny-size version that are especially good topped with apples, jam, or syrup. **Desserts** at any meal lean toward dairy products, fruit with lots of fresh cream, ice cream, or *appelgebak*, a lovely and light apple pastry. Dutch *gebak* (pastries) are fresh, varied, and inexpensive; and you will notice the Dutch sitting down for a *koffie* and one of these delicious *hapjes* (small snacks, or literally, “bites”) throughout the day—why not join them?

That, briefly, is the Dutch cuisine—which is not to say that it's the only cuisine available in Holland. Far from it! The popular Indonesian *rijsttafel* (**rice table**), a feast of 15 to 30 small portions of different dishes eaten with plain rice, has been a national favorite ever since it arrived in the 17th century. If you've never experienced this minifeast, it should definitely be on your “must-eat” list for Holland—the basic idea behind the *rijsttafel* is to sample a wide variety of complementary flavors, textures, and temperatures: savory and sweet, spicy and mild. You'll also find the cuisines of France, China, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, and several other nations well represented.

THE RESTAURANTS

At the top of the restaurant scale are those posh dining rooms affiliated with the prestigious Alliance Gastronomique Néerlandaise or the Relais du Centre. They're likely to be elegant and sophisticated or atmospherically Old World and quaint. They will certainly be expensive. Many restaurants are not open for

lunch. Although more and more restaurants are staying open later, the Dutch in general dine early; in many cases last orders are taken no later than 10pm.

Unless you eat especially early or late, reservations are generally recommended at top restaurants and at those on the high end of the moderate price range. Restaurants are often small and may be crowded with neighborhood devotees. Outside terraces are always in big demand on pleasant summer evenings. Smokers are everywhere, but nonsmoking rooms in restaurants and cafes are rare. So be warned, and try to sit outside in good weather.

For authentic Dutch dishes, look for the *Neerlands Dis* sign, which identifies restaurants specializing in the native cuisine. Then there are the numerous moderately priced restaurants and the brown cafes, which are cozy social centers with simple but tasty food, sometimes served outside on sidewalk tables in good weather. Sidewalk vendors, with fresh herring and the ubiquitous *broodjes* (sandwiches) or other light specialties, are popular as well.

Though there's no such thing as a free lunch, there is the next best thing—a *dagschotel* (plate of the day). Another way to combat escalating dinner tabs is to take advantage of the tourist menu offered by many restaurants. Dutch menus list appetizers, *not main courses*, under “entree”; and 15% service plus value-added tax (BTW) is almost always included in the prices.

BEER & GIN

What to drink? **Beer**, for one thing. As you make the rounds of the brown cafes (the traditional Dutch watering holes), you can get the regular brands such as Heineken, Grolsch, or Amstel, or you could try something different. I happen to like the *witte* (white) beer, which is sweeter than *pils*, the regular beer. Or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, you can have a Belgian dark beer, like De Koninck or Duvel. (Belgian beers are popular in Holland and are, in general, better made, more artisanal, than the local brews.)

Then there is the potent native gin known as *jenever* (the name comes from the Dutch word for “juniper”), a fiery, colorless spirit distilled from grain or malt, served ice-cold and drunk neat—without any mixer, or even ice. It was once the drink of the masses in Holland, where it originated as a kind of medicine. Juniper oil was added to the distillate for its diuretic properties.

Jonge (young) jenever is less sweet and creamy than the *oude* (old) variety—jenever grows smooth and soft with age—but both are known for their delayed-action effectiveness. There are also very good Dutch liqueurs, such as Curaçao and Triple Sec. Wines from all over the world are available as well.

Appendix C:

Getting to Know Luxembourg

So tiny is the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg—with only 2,600 sq. km (1,000 sq. miles), it's about five-sixths the size of Rhode Island, the smallest state in the U.S.—it hardly seems possible that the country's borders could embrace so many worthy travel delights. Yet within this country are the remnants of a rich history and a landscape whose scenic beauty varies from wild highlands to peaceful river valleys to plains dotted with picturesque villages and farmlands. Outside of the capital, Luxembourg City, the classic Luxembourg settlement is a village or small town of whitewashed houses clustered around a medieval castle and church. Luxembourg's people have emerged from a turbulent past to forge a prosperous present and build the framework for an optimistic future, not only for their own country, but also for the entire European Union.

1 Luxembourg Today

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a constitutional monarchy, has a population of around 440,000. Economically it has a strong iron and steel industry and a large number of light industries. The strength of its banking and financial institutions has attracted more than 200 foreign banks, including the headquarters of the European Investment Bank. Its economic strength attracts European immigrants—some 25% of the total population (65% of the workforce) is foreign. The residents of the Grand Duchy have the highest income per capita of any country in the world.

Agriculture is still important, as are the vineyards of the Moselle Valley. And the enchanting Luxembourg countryside, particularly its northern reaches in the Ardennes, has become a popular holiday destination for Luxembourgers themselves and for people from the neighboring countries of Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, making tourism an important industry.

Having played a key role in establishing the institutions that evolved into the European Union, Luxembourg today plays an important role in European matters. The city of Luxembourg City hosts the secretariat of the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice, and the European Investment Bank.

THE PEOPLE In such a small country, with bigger neighbors on its doorstep, Luxembourgers are a strange combination, one that results in a distinctive individuality that even extends to the national language, which is vaguely related to both French and German, yet quite different from both.

They have a personality that's hard to capture in words. They generally seem content to leave it simply at *Mir welle bleiwe wat mir sin* ("We want to remain what we are") with no need to spell out "what we are" in detail. You'll see that national motto inscribed over old door frames, hear it echoed in songs, and recognize its essence in everyone you meet in the Grand Duchy.

But some of their character traits are easy to pin down. One thing they definitely are is hardworking. Foreign firms that open branches in Luxembourg will tell you that their productivity is far higher in the Grand Duchy than in other

locations. One look at the country's well-tended farms or shops will reveal the industriousness of their owners. Go into a Luxembourg home and the cleanliness and order will speak more loudly than the proud homemaker ever could.

The people of Luxembourg are also quite cosmopolitan. From their cuisine (a combination of the best from surrounding countries) to their culture and dress, they are at home in the world, eager to travel, and secure enough in their uniqueness to appreciate the special qualities of others. But in addition to this openness, they are essentially proud and patriotic. Centuries of domination by foreign rulers could not kill their independent spirit.

They do have a reputation for being smug that's not entirely undeserved. If you are a citizen of one of the world's wealthiest countries per capita, it may be no more than human nature to assume that this pleasing fact is due to your own native industry or superiority, rather than to, for instance, enabling the citizens of less-blessed countries—like Germany and France, to name but two of many—to engage in fiscal fiddling and to stash the proceeds in your banks.

Finally, to say that Luxembourgers are fond of eating is an understatement. If there's an important matter to discuss, decision to be made, or social crisis to resolve, Luxembourgers repair to the nearest cafe or pastry shop. It goes without saying, then, that they are also fond of cooking—don't go away without indulging in their luscious pastries, and forget the calories! Around half of the total land area of the Grand Duchy is farmed, but only 6% of Luxembourgers live and work on farms.

After you spend a little time with these proud and charming people, you may well find yourself silently echoing their motto, adding, "We want you to remain what you are!"

THE LANGUAGE *Lëtzebuergesch*, the national language, has a vaguely German base with overtones of French, yet is completely distinct from both of those languages. Luxembourgers learn and use their native tongue from earliest childhood, and then study German in their first school years and French shortly after. As for anyone who isn't a native who was born learning *Lëtzebuergesch*, forget it—it's a tongue twister. Not to worry, however; while the native language is widely used among Luxembourgers, and although French is most often used in official and cultural activities, and German is heard frequently—virtually everyone speaks English. In other words, you'll encounter few, if any, language difficulties in the Grand Duchy.

THE POLITICAL SCENE Grand Duke Jean of the House of Nassau succeeded his mother, Grand Duchess Charlotte, as head of state in 1964. Luxembourg, a constitutional monarchy, has a one-house legislature, the Chamber of Deputies, which is made up of 64 members who are elected for 5-year terms. The deputies are supervised by an appointed, 21-member Council of State.

RELIGION The vast majority (some 95%) of Luxembourgers are Roman Catholic, although a significant percentage of those hasten to make it clear that they are non-practicing Catholics. It is, however, rare to meet one who does not observe at least some of the customs, traditions, and mores of the church. Despite

Impressions

We are very much a combination of what surrounds us.

—Prince Jean de Luxembourg

Founding Father

Luxembourg was the birthplace of Robert Schumann (1886–1963), often called the “Father of Europe” because of his role in bringing together the original European Coal & Steel Community in 1950, which developed by stages into today’s European Union.

their thorough Catholicism, Luxembourgers also follow a strict policy of religious freedom. Along with Catholic priests, the state supports the chief rabbi and the official Protestant pastor. There are also small clusters of other Christian and non-Christian faiths. While religious instruction is a part of the school curriculum, upper levels can choose instead an ethics-and-morality course.

2 History 101

BEFORE THE 12TH CENTURY

Long before recorded history, the Grand Duchy was home to Magdalenian, Neolithic, and Celtic tribes. The Treviri tribe of the Celts, a fierce people who resisted invaders to the death, finally fell in the first century A.D. to Roman legions intent on bringing all of Europe under Caesar’s rule. For almost 500 years afterward, one Roman emperor after another put down numerous uprisings as the area’s independent-minded inhabitants stubbornly refused to give up their worship of Druidism for the paganism of Rome.

As Rome suffered military defeats and Christianity became more widespread, the Roman hold on the region finally weakened. By the 5th century the only reminders of the Romans left in Luxembourg were the bits and pieces of their urban civilization, a network of bridges that marked their progress across the land, and place names such as Ettelbruck (Attila’s Bridge), named for the Hun general who dealt the coup de grâce to the Western Roman Empire. Luxembourg was by then quite firmly in the Frankish camp.

Along with monasteries that sprang up and flourished with the support of the people came educational and cultural influences that helped form the foundation of today’s Luxembourg.

Dateline

- **963** Sigefroi, count of the Ardennes and founder of the House of Luxembourg, acquires an old Roman fortress called Lucilinburhuc and builds a small castle on a rocky outcrop called the Bock, laying the foundation for the future city of Luxembourg.
- **1244** Countess Ermesinda, who is credited with being the founder of Luxembourg, grants rights and freedoms to the citizens of the town of Luxembourg and autonomy to its administration.
- **1288** Luxembourg suffers a crushing defeat in the Battle of Worringen, putting an end to its acquisition of land in Limburg and Brabant.
- **1308** Henry VII, count of Luxembourg, is elected king of Germany, and in 1312 is crowned Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV.
- **1354** Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, the grandson of Henry IV, raises Luxembourg’s status from a county to a duchy.
- **1388** Charles IV’s son, Holy Roman Emperor Wenceslas II, grants the duchy to his nephew, Jost von Mahren, as a fiefdom, with disastrous results for Luxembourg.
- **1418** First documented reference to the Town Hall of Luxembourg City, on the site where now stands the Palace of the Grand Dukes.
- **1443** Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy captures the fortress of Luxembourg and establishes Burgundian rule.

continues

The great Frankish leader Charlemagne brought in Saxons to settle the Ardennes, thus adding another ethnic imprint to the face of the region.

In the 10th century, Sigefroi, the youngest of the counts of Ardennes, obtained a large land grant from the Abbey of Saint Maximin (the deed, dated Apr 12, 963, is still kept in the Pescatore Museum in Luxembourg). He built his castle on the ruins of Castellum Lucilinburhuc, an ancient Roman fort that had guarded the crossroads of two important Roman routes, from Paris to Trier and from Metz to Aix-la-Chapelle road. On that strategic spot grew a town and eventually a country by the name of Luxembourg.

THE 12TH & 13TH CENTURIES

By the 12th century, the counts of Luxembourg were at the country's helm. They enlarged their territory by wars with other noblemen, fortunate marriages, and various diplomatic shenanigans. But soon they began to absent themselves for long periods; some of the nobility joined the forces of Godfrey of Bouillon to travel to the Holy City during the Crusades. Some never returned (having fallen in battle), and those who did found that much of their land had been confiscated by other overlords during their absence.

When Henry the Blind's daughter, the Countess Ermesinda, reached adulthood in the early 1200s, things were in disarray. But Ermesinda was able to restore some of Luxembourg's lost territory through a few marriages, as she inherited lands previously held by her ailing spouses. When her last husband died in 1225, she boldly took charge of the affairs of state. By bringing noblemen who had always been at each other's throats together in a central governing body, she achieved such revolutionary reforms as the establishment of a court of justice and limited judicial

- **1506** Luxembourg is inherited by the future Habsburg Emperor and King of Spain Charles V.
- **1573** Following the 1554 destruction of the Town Hall by a gunpowder explosion, construction is completed on the original wing of the ducal palace.
- **1684** France captures the fortress, ends the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs, and brings the country under French rule.
- **1697** A second period of Spanish rule begins, when France returns the duchy to Spain under the Treaty of Ryswick.
- **1713** Beginning of Luxembourg's Golden Age, when it comes under rule of Hapsburgs of Austria.
- **1794–95** The Revolutionary French besiege Luxembourg City. Starvation forces the fortress's Austrian garrison to surrender.
- **1814** The French garrison leaves the fortress.
- **1815** Treaty of Vienna partitions Luxembourg; lands east of the Moselle, Sûre, and Our are ceded to Prussia, and the remainder go to Holland's King William of Orange as the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.
- **1839** Under the Treaty of London, Luxembourg's Walloon districts are returned to Belgium.
- **1867** The Treaty of London guarantees Luxembourg's neutrality under the protection of the great powers. Luxembourg City fortifications are razed.
- **1890** Luxembourg cuts its ties to Holland's House of Orange. Adolf of Nassau serves as the first "indigenous" grand duke.
- **1912** Marie Adelaide of Nassau becomes the first grand duchess.
- **1914–18** German troops invade and occupy the country during World War I.
- **1922** Agreement on economic union with Belgium.
- **1940** World War II: Nazi Germany invades, May 10. The country is quickly occupied and the royal family and government go into exile.
- **1944** September: U.S. troops begin liberation of Luxembourg.
- **1944–45** Battle of the Bulge. Hitler's last great offensive brings destruction

rights for ordinary citizens. The tight rein of feudal lords was somewhat loosened. Countess Ermesinda also began to establish convents and monasteries to provide education and culture for her people. Her legacy to her people was a united nation with enlightened social standards.

THE 14TH TO THE 18TH CENTURY

In 1308, Henry VII of the House of Luxembourg became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He spent the rest of his life trying to unite all of Europe under his rule. His son, John the Blind, was a valiant warrior who perished at Crécy fighting the forces of Edward III of England, after ordering his men to lead him into the thickest part of battle. Today he is revered as Luxembourg's national hero. John's son, Charles IV, favored extending his domain through treaty and marriage; by the time his son, Wenceslas, gained the throne, the House of Luxembourg ruled a territory some 500 times the size of today's Luxembourg.

The glory days did not last long, however. King Wenceslas's son, Sigismund, proved to be far less capable than his ancestors. By the mid-1400s Luxembourg itself was a province ruled by the dukes of Burgundy. During the next 400 years that rule shifted among Spain, France, Austria, and Burgundy.

THE 19TH CENTURY

To quell the locals' growing unrest, each successive ruler found it necessary to further strengthen a capital city that was already one of Europe's best defended. Luxembourg, then, became a problem for the rest of Europe: Its position was too strategic and its fortifications too strong to allow it to be self-governing—or even to be controlled by any one nation. The answer seemed to be to divide Luxembourg among several nations; therefore, the Congress of Vienna handed over most of the country to Holland's William of Orange-Nassau, and the remainder to Prussia. Then, with the Treaty of London in 1839, more than half of Holland's piece of Luxembourg was given to Belgium (the resulting Belgian province still bears the name Luxembourg).

Since its boundaries were becoming smaller and smaller, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg posed no real threat to anyone. Still, its many fortifications made it all but impregnable, so in 1867 the European powers convened in London and decided that freedom would be granted the Grand Duchy on condition that its fortifications be dismantled. Luxembourgers were overjoyed. In October

to much of the Grand Duchy. The German army is thrown back again by American troops and Luxembourg is re-liberated.

- **1948** Benelux customs union with Belgium and the Netherlands takes effect.
- **1949** Luxembourg joins NATO.
- **1952** As a founding member of the European Coal and Steel Community, Luxembourg is chosen as the seat of important European institutions.
- **1958** Luxembourg joins the European Economic Community, the forerunner of today's European Union (EU).
- **1964** Grand Duchess Charlotte abdicates in favor of her son, Grand Duke Jean.
- **1966** Opening of the European Center on the Kirchberg.
- **1992** The legislature ratifies the Treaty on European Union.
- **1993** Luxembourg opposes efforts of other EU members to impose withholding tax on savings and investments in the Grand Duchy.
- **2002** Euro banknotes and coins replace the Luxembourg franc.
- **2003** Luxembourg joins Germany, Belgium, and France in opposing the invasion of Iraq, prompting sour comment from pro-war countries about the Grand Duchy tossing its "weight" around on the international stage.

1868 they affirmed a constitution that boldly proclaimed “The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg forms a free state, independent and indivisible.” Today there are green parks throughout the capital city to mark the sites of mighty fortifications, now vanished, and tiny Luxembourg has led the way toward the peaceful economic unification of Europe’s separate nations.

THE 20TH CENTURY

Since that momentous announcement of independence, Luxembourg has seen periods of prosperity (largely due to its important steel industry) and periods of decline that have prompted thousands to emigrate in search of work. Twice—in World War I and World War II—the country suffered the agonies of military occupation. The heroism of the Luxembourg underground resistance movement during World War II is legendary. Many of the younger men made their way to Allied countries to fight in their ranks, while those at home actually went out on strike when the Nazis imposed compulsory service in the Wehrmacht—a move that brought swift retribution from the Nazis.

In the winter of 1944 and 1945, part of the Battle of the Bulge was fought in the Ardennes region of northern Luxembourg. General George S. Patton’s Third Army turned the tide of that battle, with an assault from Martelange in Luxembourg that relieved the besieged 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne in Belgium. Thousands of Americans killed in the heavy fighting of Hitler’s last great offensive are buried in a U.S. military cemetery just outside Luxembourg City.

The little country didn’t just work to rebuild itself in those postwar years. In 1945, Luxembourg joined the United Nations. In 1948, it formed a customs

The Mysterious Maiden Mélusine

Luxembourg has a rich folklore tradition, and the tale of Mélusine the mermaid is perhaps the nation’s most famous myth. Legend says that imprisoned within the rock that helped form Luxembourg City’s tremendous defenses is a beautiful maiden named Mélusine. She passes the time by knitting, but she manages only one stitch each year—and it’s a very good thing she’s so slow. You see, should she finish her knitting before she’s released, all of Luxembourg and its people will vanish into the rock with her!

Mélusine was imprisoned after Sigeftroi married her without knowing that she was really a mermaid. At first, she kept her secret by reverting to her natural state only on Saturday, a day she told her husband that was reserved for her personal privacy. But when his curiosity got the better of him and he peeked, she vanished into the rock.

Once every 7 years, Mélusine returns, either as a serpent with a golden key in its mouth or as a beautiful woman. All it will take to win her freedom is for some brave soul to kiss the womanly vision or take the key from the serpent’s mouth. That brave soul has yet to appear, and in the meantime all of Luxembourg (or at least that part of Luxembourg that believes in the legend) prays for her to drop a stitch or two so that whatever she’s knitting will take a very long time to complete!

Luxembourg's Windtalkers

During World War II, when French was banned by the Nazis, *Lëtzebuergesch*, which was not understood by the Germans, served as a kind of secret code for the Resistance.

union called Benelux with Belgium and the Netherlands that later became an economic union, and in 1949 was a founding member of NATO.

3 A Taste of Luxembourg

Among the national favorites are some of the best pastries you're ever likely to eat; Luxembourg cheese (delicious); trout, crayfish, and pike from local rivers; Ardennes ham smoked in saltpeter; hare, wild boar, and other game (during the hunting season); and lovely small plum tarts called *quetsch* (in Sept). Other tasty treats include the national dish of smoked neck of pork with broad beans (*judd mat gaardebounen*); a *friture* of fried small river fish such as bream, chub, gudgeon, roach, and rudd; calves' liver dumplings (*quenelles*) with sauerkraut and boiled potatoes; black pudding (*treipen*) and sausages with mashed potatoes and horseradish; and a green-bean soup (*bouneschlupp*). French cuisine also features prominently on restaurant menus, and German and Belgian influences are felt as well.

Luxembourg City, because of its large number of international diplomatic and business visitors, has many fine restaurants offering international cuisine. It also has just as many small cafes and bistros featuring traditional dishes. In smaller towns and villages, hotel restaurants are often quite good, as are the small local cafes.

Although many of the fine beers of Belgium and Holland are available here, Luxembourg has its own that take a backseat to none—look for such brand names as unfiltered Mousel (pronounced “*mooz-ell*”), Bofferding, and Henri Funck.

Winemaking along the Moselle has a history that dates back to the Romans. And, of course, the Moselle wines (mostly white) will top any list. Look for Riesling, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, Rivaner, Elbling, Gewürztraminer, and Crémant de Luxembourg, and for the National Mark, which certifies that they are true Luxembourg wines.

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Frommer's China: The 50 Most Memorable Trips
Frommer's Exploring America by RV
Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe
Frommer's NYC Free & Dirt Cheap

Frommer's Road Atlas Europe
Frommer's Road Atlas France
Frommer's Road Atlas Ireland
Frommer's Wonderful Weekends from
New York City
The New York Times' Guide to Unforgettable
Weekends
Retirement Places Rated
Rome Past & Present

Travel Tip: He who finds the best hotel deal
has more to spend on facials involving
knobbly vegetables.

Hello, the Roaming Gnome here. I've been nabbed from the garden and taken round the world. The people who took me are so terribly clever. They find the best offerings on Travelocity. For very little cha-ching. And that means I get to be pampered and exfoliated till I'm pink as a bunny's doodah.



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Travel Tip: Make sure there's customer service for any change of plans - involving friendly natives, for example.

One can plan and plan, but if you don't book with the right people you can't seize le moment and canoodle with the poodle named Pansy. I, for one, am all for fraternizing with the locals. Better yet, if I need to extend my stay and my gnome nappers are willing, it can all be arranged through the 800 number at, oh look, how convenient, the lovely company coat of arms.



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