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CheeseWeb Escapes to Antwerp

You wouldn't think a city, a mere 30 minute train trip from Brussels, would be much different than the capital, but visiting Antwerp feels almost like entering a new country. Besides the obvious language differences, you will also find variation in the food, architecture, fashion and general atmosphere of the city.

Antwerp has much to offer the visitor; be it for a day-trip, a weekend getaway or a longer stay - a lively nightlife, great restaurants, world class museums, stunning architecture, excellent haut-couture shopping and a wonderful zoo for the children (and kids at heart). Listed below are our favourite spots in Antwerp, so you can have your own great CheeseWeb Escape!



THE GROTE MARKT - If you've spent any time in Belgium, you know the heart of a city is its Market Square, or Grote Markt in Flemish (Grand Place in French). Antwerp's Grote Markt is a beautiful example, with its Medieval Guild houses and stunning City Hall building.

Here you will also find the rather gruesome statue of the hero Brabo slaying the giant, Antigoon. Legend has it, Antigoon forced everyone who passed on the river Scheldt to pay a toll. If they refused, he cut off their hand and threw it in the river. Silvius Brabo, a Roman soldier, killed the giant and threw his hand into the Scheldt. The name Antwerp is said to have come from hand werpen (hand to throw). Although it is argued an 't werf (on the wharf) is a more likely

root of the city's name.

THE PORT OF ANTWERP - Despite its location in the middle of the northern half of the country, Antwerp is a port city – one of the largest in Europe, and as such, has almost a coastal vibe. The **Scheldt riverside**, just beyond the city's Grote Markt, is a popular spot for locals to stroll or sit and watch the busy barge traffic.

Here you will also find Antwerp's oldest building, the medieval castle, **Het Steen** (the stone), now the home of the city's shipping museum.

Although much of Antwerp's port area is rough and industrial, some of the riverside neighbourhoods are going through a revival and many trendy restaurants are opening their doors here.



paintings by Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens. Take a moment to say a prayer, or just enjoy the quiet splendour of this magnificent place of worship.



One of our recent finds, and sure to become a favourite, is **HET POMPHUIS**. As the Flemish name suggests, [Het Pomphuis](#) was originally a huge pumping station for the dry dock. In 2002, it reopened as a modern bar and restaurant. Het Pomphuis maintains its original high ceilings and industrial feel, while serving a high standard of delicious food in a warm atmosphere.

THE ONZE-LIEVE-VROUWEKATHEDRAAL - Walking past the Grote Markt, away from the river, you'll find yourself at the base of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal (The Cathedral of Our Lady), a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its Gothic spire stands over 400 feet tall and can be seen peaking above the city's rooftops. The cathedral's interior is breath-taking and includes

After you leave the cathedral, head around the corner, for something a bit more irreverent. **THE KATHEDRAAL CAFE**, otherwise known as Het Elfde Gebod (The Eleventh Commandment) is a fun, if quirky spot to savour a Trappist beer or enjoy a traditional Flemish dish. While you dine, you'll be watched over by more than 400 religious icons.

PLANTIN MORETUS PRINTING MUSEUM –While it may sound a bit dry and boring, this under-rated museum is such a gem, it was recognised by UNESCO as part of the Memory of the World Programme in 2005. The collection of rare books and manuscripts, as well as the world's oldest



printing presses, not to mention the beautiful house and garden, are but a few reasons not to overlook it. For a much more detailed description, read about my [visit to the Plantin Moretus Printing Museum](#).

When you've had your fill of the museum, head across the square to the 'T **KOEKEBAKSKE CAFE**. If it's sunny, grab a table on the

square and people watch, while you enjoy a bagel. (I highly recommend the tapas bagel if you're up for something different.)

RUBENSHUIS - One of Antwerp's most famous residents was Baroque painter, Peter Paul Rubens. His beautiful Italian style villa is now a museum, where you can visit his former home, studio and beautiful Baroque garden, all of which he designed himself. [Rubenshuis](#) contains many paintings by Rubens and his contemporaries and also hosts temporary exhibitions.





ZURENBORG NEIGHBOURHOOD – Brussels may be synonymous with Art Nouveau, but Antwerp has its fair share of beautiful buildings too. In fact, for the busy visitor, a trip to the Zurenborg neighbourhood offers more stunning architecture per square metre, than traipsing around to the buildings spread all over Brussels.

Besides beautiful examples of Art-Nouveau, you will also see many different ‘revival’ architectural styles like Gothic Revival, Neo-Renaissance, Greek Revival, Neoclassical and British Tudorbethan. An hour will give you plenty of time to wander through these lovely streets, but don’t be surprised if you meet up with a tour group or two, especially on sunny weekends.

If you are accessing the city by train, get off at Antwerp – Berchem station. Cross the street and you will find yourself at the start of Zurenborg. The main streets of interest are **COGELS-OSYLEI**, **TRANSVAALSTRAAT**, **WATERLOOSTRAAT** and the surrounding side streets.

FOMU - ANTWERP PHOTOGRAPHY MUSEUM – Photo-lovers shouldn’t miss a visit to [Antwerp’s photography museum, FoMu](#). The permanent collection includes cameras and photographs from their

beginnings to present day. There are photographs from legends like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Man Ray

and Lynne Cohen to name a few. In addition to the impressive collection of 183 daguerreotypes, there are ever changing temporary exhibitions of contemporary photography as well.

ANTWERP FASHION – Antwerp is famous for cutting edge fashion. **THE ANTWERP SIX** (Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee) all graduated from the city’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1980-1981 and are renowned in the world of avant-gard fashion.





domed ceiling. On weekends there are often impromptu events in the main hall. The last time I visited a tango competition was in progress. A draw for some (and a deterrent for others), is one of the few **STARBUCK'S** in Belgium located in the station, if you just can't live without your half-fat grande mocha.

THE ANTWERP ZOO – As you leave the station, you will find yourself steps from one of Antwerp's most popular attractions, the [Antwerp Zoo](#). Although it is located in the city centre, it is surprisingly spacious and contains 900 different species. This is the oldest animal park in the country, but the zoo is constantly upgrading to meet high standards for their animal enclosures. My favourite areas included Nocturama, containing nocturnal animals, the monkey house and the elephant enclosure, where baby Kai Mook is a visitor favourite.

If you have money to burn on the latest styles, head to **KAMMENSTRAAT** and the surrounding side streets. You will find Dries van Noten's flagship store here. If you don't have the budget to shop for clothes you can still admire them at **ANTWERP'S FASHION MUSEUM**, located nearby.

All of that shopping can be exhausting, so reward yourself with a coffee and dessert, in beautiful surroundings. The **BOURLA THEATRE'S CAFE, DE FOYER**, is in a stunning high-ceilinged cupola. The Sunday brunch is also a popular event, so be sure to book ahead.

ANTWERP CENTRAL STATION – If you arrive in Antwerp via train, you'll be entering one of the most beautiful, and recently restored, train stations in Belgium. Even if you visit the city by some other means, take a moment to admire the huge





billowing steam in the background.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of what Antwerp has to offer, simply a few of our favourites. If you know of more places in Antwerp, or elsewhere in Belgium, we should review, please don't hesitate to [contact us](#) and share your own best finds.

If you've enjoyed CheeseWeb Escapes, please don't hesitate to pass it along to your friends. If you've received this mail and have not yet signed up, visit our [newsletter signup page](#) to do so.



Alison Cornford-Matheson is a freelance writer and [travel photographer](#) and the founder of [Cheeseweb.eu](#) She landed in Belgium in 2005 and, over the years, has become passionate about this quirky little country. She loves to discover Belgium's hidden gems - be they museums, shops, restaurants, castles, gardens or landscapes, and share them through her words and photos. She loves to travel the world with her husband, Andrew, and spend quiet nights reading with her cats and a glass of red wine.