

The Best of Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

Although they're small, each of these three countries contains a diversity of culture, language, and tradition that defies easy definition. Belgium is fractured along the age-old European divide between the Germanic north and the Latin south. This division is expressed in the constant regional bickering between Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia that threatens to split the country entirely.

Holland (the Netherlands) has its great divide, too, along the "three great rivers"—the Maas, the Waal, and the Rhine. The northerners are straitlaced and Calvinist and (to hear the southerners say it) 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. Luxembourgers are such a mixed bag 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.

Diversity is the greatest asset of the Benelux countries. The visitor from afar may be equally 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

- **Seeing the Grand-Place for the First Time** (Belgium): There's nothing quite like strolling onto the 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). See chapter 6.
- **Admiring Art Nouveau** (Belgium): Brussels considers itself the world capital of Art Nouveau, and local architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) was its foremost exponent. View the master's colorful, sinuous style at his former home, now the Horta Museum, and in buildings around town. See chapter 6.
- **Time-Traveling in Bruges** (Belgium): Without a doubt, Bruges is one of Europe's most handsome small cities. Its almost perfectly preserved center sometimes seems like a film set or museum, with buildings that run the gamut of architectural styles from medieval times to the 19th century. The picturesque canals are the icing on Bruges's cake. See chapter 7.
- **Riding the Kusttram (Coast Tram; Belgium)**: Onboard the Kusttram, the 2-hour ride along the Belgian coast, from De Panne on the French border to Knokke-Heist near the Dutch border, still seems like an old-fashioned adventure. Along the way, stop off at inviting

resorts, beaches, horseback-riding trails—whatever takes your fancy. See chapter 9.

- **Touring the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): The Ardennes, which covers the eastern third of Belgium, beyond the Meuse River and on into Luxembourg, is unlike any other Benelux landscape. Steep river valleys and thickly forested slopes set it apart. This region of castles, stone-built villages, and farms has resort towns like Spa and Bouillon; unequaled cuisine created from fresh produce and game; winter skiing; nature and fresh air in abundance; and towns like Bastogne and Ettelbruck that recall the sacrifice American soldiers made for victory in the Battle of the Bulge. See chapters 11 and 20.
- **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. 313.
- **Relaxing in a Brown Cafe** (Holland): Spend a leisurely evening in a brown cafe, the traditional Amsterdam watering hole. These time-honored Dutch bars are unpretentious, unpolished institutions filled with camaraderie, like a British pub or an American neighborhood bar. See chapter 13.
- **Following the Tulip Trail** (Holland): The place to see the celebrated Dutch tulips in their full glory is 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 14.
- **Checking Out the Windmills at 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 Zaan district, northwest of Amsterdam, had more than 1,000 windmills. Of the 13 that survive, five have been reconstructed at Zaanse Schans, together with other historical buildings reminiscent of the area's past. See chapter 14.
- **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 they know how to party. In Maastricht, the festivities are especially boisterous—people parade through the streets in an endless procession of outrageous outfits and boundless energy. See p. 253.
- **Driving the Wine Trail** (Luxembourg): Follow the Route du Vin along the 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 barrels. See chapter 20.

2 THE BEST CASTLES & STATELY HOMES

- **Beersel** (near Brussels, Belgium): This 13th-century castle, 8km (5 miles) south of Brussels, is a castle just like Disney makes them, with turrets, towers, a
- drawbridge, a moat, and the spirits of all those who have, willingly or unwillingly, resided within its walls. It looks like the ideal place for pulling up the drawbridge

and settling in for a siege—so long as the owners have the foresight to amply stock the rustic Auberge Kasteel Beersel restaurant inside. See p. 132.

- **Gravensteen** (Ghent, Belgium): Even 900 years after it was constructed, the castle of the Counts of Flanders in Ghent can still summon up a feeling of dread as you peruse 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 subdue 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. 161.
- **Bouillon** (near Dinant in the Ardennes, Belgium): This was the seat of the valiant but hard-handed and ruthless Godfrey of Bouillon, who led the First Crusade in 1096. His castle still stands today, atop a steep bluff overlooking the town, the bridge over the Semois River, and the road to Paris. Tour its walls, chambers, and dungeons. See p. 233.
- **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, Menkemaborg is a fine example of the style. Rebuilt in the 1700s, it was owned by the same family until the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays it's a museum, with period furnishings re-creating a vivid picture of the life and times of a wealthy provincial squire. See p. 412.
- **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 during the 19th century. Restoration has revealed much of the original decoration, and what couldn't be saved has been redesigned according to the original plans. The gardens have been restored to their original 17th-century splendor. See p. 430.
- **Ammersoyen Castle** (near 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland): This magnificent example of a moated fortress, with sturdy towers at each corner, dates from the second half of the 13th century. Ammersoyen's history was turbulent—it burned down in 1590 and was left in ruins for half a century before being rebuilt. See p. 462.

3 THE BEST MUSEUMS

- **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts** (Brussels, Belgium): Paintings by many of the finest Belgian artists are assembled in this twin museum's neoclassical Museum of Historical Art. An entire section is devoted to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and there are works by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and many others. Go underground to the Modern Art Museum for works by René Magritte, Paul Delvaux, James Ensor, Félicien Rops, Pierre Alechinsky, and others. See p. 115.
- **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen** (Royal Fine Arts Museum; Antwerp, Belgium): If you want to see the Flemish Masters in all their glory, head to Antwerp, where the Fine Arts Museum has the world's best collection of their works, including the largest group of Rubens masterpieces in existence. See p. 171.
- **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 Belgium's French-speaking region of Wallonia. The exhibits wander through the building that houses them, covering everything from popular arts and crafts to industry and agriculture. There's an interesting section on theater marionettes. See p. 208.

- **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 Jan Vermeer's 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 2013 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 Rijksmuseum has assembled *The Masterpieces*, highlights from its collection of 17th-century Dutch Golden Age collections. See p. 298.
- **Van Gogh Museum** (Amsterdam, Holland): An extensive collection of van Gogh's work is here: 200 paintings and 500 drawings, ranging from the famous *Sunflowers* to earless self-portraits. The permanent collection includes important works by van Gogh's 19th-century contemporaries, and frequent temporary or visiting exhibits concentrate on the same period. See p. 299.
- **Mauritshuis** (The Hague, Holland): An intimate museum set in the 17th-century palace of a Dutch count, it contains a small but impressive collection of Golden Age art treasures. See p. 356.
- **Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen** (Rotterdam, Holland): This eclectic museum features a range of art forms, from visual to applied arts, covering a period of over 7 centuries. Here you see paintings by the likes of Pieter Bruegel and Jan van Eyck, and surrealists like René Magritte and Salvador Dalí. See p. 370.
- **Museum Het Catharijneconvent** (St. Catherine's Convent; Utrecht, Holland): Housed in a former convent, the museum provides a picture of Holland's Christian heritage. The collections of medieval art and illuminated manuscripts are impressive. See p. 423.
- **National Museum of Military History** (Museum of the Battle of the Bulge; Diekirch, Luxembourg): There's something special about this tribute to the heroes of the Battle of the Bulge (1944–45), something gritty and immediate 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. See p. 500.

4 THE BEST CATHEDRALS & CHURCHES

- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Bruges, Belgium): The spire of this church soars 122m (400 ft.) high and can be seen from a wide area around Bruges. The church holds a marble *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo, a painting by Anthony van Dyck, and the 15th-century bronze tomb sculptures of Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy. See p. 149.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Antwerp, Belgium): It's hard to miss this towering example of the Flemish Gothic style if you visit Antwerp or even pass close to the city—its spire is 123m (404 ft.) high and dominates the area. This is the biggest church in the Benelux countries, with seven naves and 125 pillars. But over-size statistics are not Our Lady's only

attraction—no fewer than four Rubens masterpieces are inside, along with paintings by other prominent artists. See p. 174.

- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Tournai, Belgium): With a harmonious blending of the Romanesque and Gothic styles, this cathedral has five towers, magnificent stained-glass windows, and paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and Jacob Jordaens. Equally interesting are the opulent objects in the Treasury, especially a gold-and-silver reliquary, The Shrine of Our Lady, dating from 1205. See p. 228.
- **Westerkerk** (West Church; Amsterdam, Holland): The Westerkerk's tower, the Westertoren, is at 85m (277 ft.) high 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 house nearby. See p. 307.
- **Sint-Bavokerk** (St. Bavo's Church; Haarlem, Holland): The moment you enter Haarlem's main square, this church is revealed in all its splendor. Completed after an unusually short construction period, it 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. 328.
- **Sint-Janskerk** (St. John's Church; Gouda, Holland): At 122m (400 ft.), this is the longest church in Holland, and it has magnificent stained-glass windows. See p. 384.
- **Domkerk** (Utrecht, Holland): This magnificent cathedral was begun in the 13th century. Its tower, which is 111m (365 ft.) high and dominates old Utrecht's skyline, affords great views of the city. See p. 422.
- **Sint-Servaasbasiliek** (Basilica of St. Servatius; Maastricht, Holland): One of Holland's oldest churches, this basilica was built over the grave of St. Servatius, the first bishop of Holland. Over the centuries, people have honored St. Servatius with gifts, and now the Treasury holds a collection of incredible richness and beauty. Most impressive are the reliquaries of St. Thomas and of St. Servatius, created by Maastricht master goldsmiths in the 12th century. See p. 470.
- **Notre-Dame Cathedral** (Luxembourg City): The cathedral was built late for the Gothic style—in the early 17th century—but is nevertheless a great Gothic monument, albeit one 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. 491.

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, join a Wadden Walking (*Wadlopen*) trip and plow your way over land to one of the islands. If you're lucky, you might encounter seals gallivanting in pools left by the retreating tide or sunbathing on the flats. See p. 406.
- **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. See p. 431.

6 THE BEST OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- **Hiking Across the Hautes Fagnes** (Belgium): Wooden walkways stretch like the Yellow Brick Road across the high, bleak moorland plateau of Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve in eastern Belgium, between Eupen and Malmédy. On these walkways, you explore the remnants of an ancient morasslike landscape that has claimed lives in bad weather through the centuries and 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 p. 246.
- **Sand-Yachting at De Panne** (Belgium): Conditions on the beach at De Panne are ideal for this exciting, unusual sport. See p. 198.
- **Skiing the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): Some years it snows and some years it doesn't. But when it does snow enough, the Ardennes is a very pleasant place to ski. You'll find 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 skiing is permitted only on the designated trails because this is a protected landscape. See chapters 11 and 20.

- **Biking in Holland:** 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 tourist offices. 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 polderland became an inland sea. There are several possibilities for exploring the Biesbosch, including a tour boat, but paddling your own canoe is the best way to get close to nature. See p. 460.

7 THE BEST ROMANTIC GETAWAYS

- **Château Vacations** (Wallonia, Belgium): Belgium's French-speaking region is noted for its beautiful châteaux, dating from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, set in the countryside amid 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. A weekend in one of these châteaux is surely among the most romantic getaways imaginable. For more information, contact the **Wallonia-Brussels Tourist Office** (☎ 070/22-10-21). See chapters 10 and 11.

- **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 the summer, dine or have breakfast on a magnificent terrace overlooking the garden and moat. See p. 474.

8 THE BEST DELUXE HOTELS

- **Métropole** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/217-23-00): This century-old hotel in the heart of Brussels maintains the Belle Époque 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. 93.
- **Le Méridien Hotel des Indes** (The Hague, Holland; ☎ 070/361-2345): Within this opulent hotel, simply lean over the balustrade on the first-floor landing to watch the cream of The Hague's society having tea in the lounge, and the lights of chandeliers reflecting in the polished marble pillars. The rooms are equally grand and comfortable. See p. 359.
- **Bilderberg Landgoed Lauswolt** (Beetsterzwaag, near Leeuwarden, Holland; ☎ 0512/381-245): 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 forest and heather offer ample opportunity for walking or

horseback riding. Play golf or tennis, or swim in the heated indoor pool. All this activity will surely stir your appetite—luckily, the cuisine is of the same high standard as the other comforts in the hotel. See p. 395.

- **Auberge 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 overlook the length of the lake 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. 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. 455.
- **Grand Hotel 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 farther than its own Le Normandy. See p. 494.

9 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

- **Comfort Art Hotel Siru** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/203-35-80): An art-afficionado 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 took up the challenge, and now 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. See p. 99.

- **Welcome** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/219-95-46): This is the best little hotel in Brussels, a small place with a big

welcome, and the standard of the rooms is high. Try to get proprietor Michel Smeesters to tell you about his hotel'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. 97.

- **Egmond** (Bruges, Belgium; ☎ 050/34-14-45): 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 stands next to the Minnewater (Lover's Lake). See p. 140.
- **Firean** (Antwerp, Belgium; ☎ 03/237-02-60): Some hotels would be notable enough if they only shared the Firean's Art Deco style and Tiffany glass decor. So, having an inventively fitted out interior, a fine restaurant, and proprietors who care about service makes this one stand out from the crowd. See p. 179.
- **Ambassade** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/555-0222): This hotel occupies 10 neighboring canal houses on the city's most fashionable canal. You really

feel that you're in the home of a well-to-do 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. See p. 276.

- **Seven Bridges** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/623-1329): At some hotels, the owners aren't just running a business—they're 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. 277.
- **Amrâth Hotel DuCasque** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/321-4343): 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 about as moderately priced as you're likely to find in Maastricht. See p. 472.

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"—maybe this is standard fare 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. 100.
- **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. 105.
- **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. 240.

- **La Rive** (in the Amstel InterContinental Hotel, Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/520-3264): La Rive has a special table where you watch how the chefs actually do the business. While dining, 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. 296.
- **De Echoput** (Apeldoorn, Holland; ☎ 055/519-1463): Game features prominently on the menu at this restaurant, set amid the forests near Apeldoorn, on the edge of the Royal Wood. During the hunting season, try wild boar, venison, and any kind of fowl—always succulent and prepared with flair. In spring and summer, the menu's just as delectable, and in fair weather dine on the terrace in the fresh forest air. See p. 431.

- **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. 473.
- **Le Bouquet Garni/Salon Saint-Michel** (Luxembourg City; ☎ 26-20-06-20): 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. 495.

11 THE BEST CAFES & BARS

- **Le Falstaff** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/511-87-89): 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. 130.
- **'t Dreupelkot** (Ghent, Belgium; ☎ 09/224-21-20): 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, but you should know that 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 *jenever* buffs, not drunks. See p. 169.

- **Den Engel** (Antwerp, Belgium; ☎ 03/233-12-52): There are cafes in Antwerp with a lot more action, but for a genuine Antwerp bar it's hard to beat this one. A location on a corner of the Grote Markt adds to the attraction. To experience Den 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 sunlight streaming through Den Engel's windows. See p. 183.
- **Cafe 't Smalle** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/623-9617): This cozy, crowded brown cafe on Amsterdam's Egelantiersgracht is usually thick with *jenever* vapor and lively conversation. Escape

the crush on the splendid canal-side terrace, a perfect place to watch cyclists and cars rushing past while you rest your legs on the terrace railing. See p. 322.

- **In den Ouden Vogelstruys** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/321-4888): 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 individual cases very broad—cross section of Maastricht society. See p. 475.

12 THE BEST SHOPPING

- **Antiques** (Brussels, Belgium): You'll need luck to score a bargain at the weekend antiques market on place du Grand Sablon—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. See chapter 6.
- **Chocolates** (Belgium): The Swiss might want to argue the point, but the truth is that Belgian handmade chocolates, filled with various fresh-cream flavors, are the best in the universe. You won't go wrong if you buy chocolates made by Wittamer, Nihoul, Leonidas, and Neuhaus, available in specialist stores all over Belgium (and in Holland and Luxembourg, too). 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, 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, though not the only, points of sale. See chapters 6, 7, and 8.
- **Diamonds** (Antwerp, Belgium): One thing is for sure, you'll be spoiled for choice in Antwerp's Diamond Quarter.

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 8.

- **Flower Bulbs** (Holland): It's difficult to choose from the incredible variety of bulb shapes and colors offered in Holland. Some bulbs flower early in January; others wait until the warmer months of May or June. Knowing this, choose bulbs with different flowering times, so you'll enjoy their blooming over a long period in spring. Check before buying, however, as not all bulbs are certified for entry into the United States. Packages must have a numbered phytosanitary certificate attached to the label, allowing you to import the bulbs. In Amsterdam, buy them from the Floating Flower market on the Singel canal. See chapter 13.
- **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 stores 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 15 and 16.

- **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 20.