



STREETWISE IN MECHELEN



WHERE DO YOU BEGIN TO EXPLORE MECHELEN?

In 800 or in 2014? On the Grote Markt or in St Rumbold's Tower? The answer is, whenever and wherever you like! With this little book of walks you step straight into the story of Mechelen, Margaret of Austria's city.

The booklet will be your companion on a walk through historical Mechelen, a companion that will feed you information about what you see as you go.

It will lead you to monuments steeped in history, through verdant parks and alongside tranquil watercourses. You will have a chance to admire art treasures in our historic churches and to enjoy the beauty of enclosed gardens.

When you need to recharge the batteries, head for a sun-drenched street café for a traditionally brewed glass of Gouden Carolus, the beer that has put Mechelen back on the world map.



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KEY



FULLY ACCESSIBLE



ACCESS LIMITED



REGRETTABLY, NOT ACCESSIBLE



A 'MUST SEE'

St Rumbold's Tower

Kazerne Dossin

Aldermen's House

Palace of Margaret of Austria

Dyle Path

HISTORY



600

An Irish missionary called Rumbold (Rumoldus) left his country to spread Christianity. His destination was the settlement of Mechelen. You will meet him in St Rumbold's Cathedral, where 25 paintings tell the life of Rumbold in an early comic strip. He died between 580 and 655 and was venerated as St Rumbold. Pilgrims visited his tomb. And monks founded St Rumbold's Abbey. A flourishing community grew up on the right bank of the River Dyle, near the site of what is today St Rumbold's Cathedral.

800-1000

We know from archaeological research on the Lamot site that there was a trading port on the left bank of the River Dyle, possibly belonging to a local ruler or to St Rumbold's Abbey. By the end of the twelfth century there are no more references to it.

1452

The first stone of the present-day St Rumbold's Tower was laid. The plan was to build a tower some 167 meters high but in the mid-sixteenth century when it had reached a height of just 97 meters, building work came to a standstill for various reasons.

1473

The Burgundian duke Charles the Bold centralized power and founded the Parliament of Mechelen: a court of law which represented all the other courts of law in the Burgundian territories. Mechelen was a logical choice because of its central location and special status. Mechelen, along with the region, formed a seignior, which enjoyed autonomy from the large principalities nearby like the Duchy of Brabant and the Prince-bishopric of Liège. By choosing Mechelen the duke avoided conflict. Mechelen retained its autonomous status until the end of the eighteenth century. Under Charles V it became one of the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands.





1288

There are already references to the Schepenhuis or Aldermen's Building House, which means it is one of the oldest stone town halls in Flanders. Until the second half of the fifteenth century it was the town hall and meeting place of the city tribunal; later the seat of the Great Council. It is now a municipal museum housing a sizeable collection of work by the artist Rik Wouters.

1301

Duke Jan II of Brabant and Jan Berthout granted Mechelen a charter, prescribing the structure and organization of the city. For example, a twelve-man bench of Burgomaster and Aldermen was set up. The charter determined the way the city was administered until 1795. But more happened in 1301: Mechelen was given the exclusive staple rights for grain, salt and fish, which was very good for the economy! Boats tied up here and offered their goods for sale. Only after three days could merchants offer their unsold wares elsewhere. Other towns felt considerably disadvantaged by Mechelen's staple rights and were not happy about the situation.

1506

Margaret of Austria, Charles the Bold's granddaughter, was appointed regent of the Netherlands. Mechelen was the juridical and administrative centre. Margaret of Austria's palace in Keizerstraat was a hive of activity: the most progressive artists of her day visited the court and the renaissance and humanism flourished. The city became a magnet for rich families who settled in the city and demonstrated their power by building impressive residences. The Hof van Busleyden is a beautifully preserved example. Five centuries later Margaret of Austria's palace served as a court of law.

1530

Mary of Hungary succeeded Margaret of Austria as regent of the Netherlands. Under her rule the court moved definitively to Brussels, which meant that Mechelen was no longer the political centre of the Netherlands.

1554

Rembert Dodoens, who was from Mechelen, published his 'Cruydeboeck', a herbal that was revolutionary because of the way it classified the plant kingdom. The book was translated into most European languages. There is even a Japanese version. Did you know that Rembert Dodoens was the city surgeon, but also Emperor Maximilian II's personal physician?

1559

King Philip II of Spain made Mechelen the seat of an archbishopric and thus the ecclesiastical capital of the Southern Netherlands. This was a politically shrewd move: by having state and church borders converge, he increased his control. The first archbishop of Mechelen was Antonius Perrenot de Granvelle. Later well-known archbishops included Matthias Hovius, Thomas-Philippus d'Alsace et du Boussu, Désiré-Joseph Mercier and Jozef Ernest Van Roey. Since 1961 it has been the archbishopric of Mechelen-Brussels. The current archbishop – who succeeded Godfried Danneels in 2010 – is André-Joseph Léonard.



1835

On May 5th the first train on the European mainland chugged its way along the Brussels-Mechelen line. A law dated May 1st 1834 made Mechelen the midpoint of Belgium's future railway network. A milestone in front of the station commemorates this. The arrival of the train changed the city and a new district grew up around the station. In 1839 the Central Railway Engineering Works – known locally as 'het Arsenaal' – brought employment and a significant increase in the population.

1687



Late in the evening, on January 27th and 28th 1687, St Rumbold's Tower was shrouded in a wintry mist. A none too sober tippler stumbled out of an inn on the Grote Markt into the cold night. He suddenly noticed that the tower was ablaze and immediately raised the alarm. The whole city was thrown into a state of confusion. The city council led by the burgomaster lost no time in organizing the fire-fighting campaign. Buckets of water were passed from hand to hand up the tower stairway, but even before they reached the top, the moon slipped through the haze and the glow disappeared ...

The courageous citizens realized that the reddish misty glow they were trying to extinguish was the moon! "Don't tell a soul," they said. But the news soon spread abroad, earning the people of Mechelen the nickname 'Maneblussers' or 'Moon Extinguishers' – a nickname they bear to this day.



Maneblusser is the name of Mechelen's city beer, this blonde beer is brewed at Het Anker brewery. It also inspired the 'Maneblussertjes' biscuits and pralines in the shape of a half-moon.

1914



The bombing raids at the beginning of the First World War certainly did not leave Mechelen unscathed. St Rumbold's gigantic clock was badly damaged and many of the historic buildings along the IJzerenleen were destroyed.

1940-1945

The Second World War was a sad chapter in the history of Mechelen. More than 25,000 Jews and gypsies were deported to Auschwitz from the Dossin barracks by the Nazis. In April 1944 the Allies carried out bombing raids on the Arsenaal, the station and the railway. Many people died and there was considerable material damage. Fortunately, on September 4th 1944 Mechelen was liberated by the British.

1960-1970

Belgium recruited workers for its coal mines. Many Berbers from the north of Morocco came to Mechelen. These 'temporary' workers were needed for longer than anticipated and stayed on. Three generations have now lived in Mechelen.

Assyrian Turks from the Christian village of Hassana in the far south-east of Turkey also came to Mechelen. When their village was set on fire and destroyed, Belgium recognized its inhabitants as political refugees and they soon integrated.



1988



As the European newcomer, KV Mechelen won the European Cup Winners' Cup by beating the Dutch champions Ajax 1-0 in Strasbourg on May 11th. Football-mad Europe was stunned. Not a single Belgian team has since won a European football trophy.

post-2000



Mechelen has re-discovered its heritage. The public space is being carefully modernized, guided by respect for history and heritage. Monuments have been sympathetically restored. Highlights include uncovering former brooks, installing the Skywalk on St Rumbold's Tower and the newly-discovered medieval wall paintings in St John's Church.



THE BURGUNDIAN DUKES



Philip the Good
(1396 -1467)



**Margaret
of York**
(1446-1503)



Philip the Fair
(1478-1506)



**Joanna
the Mad**
(1479-1555)



Charles V
(1500-1558)



**Isabella
of Portugal**
(1503-1539)

Philip II
(1527-1598)



Isabella of Portugal
(1397-1472)

**Charles
the Bold**
(1433-1477)



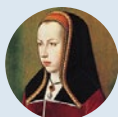
Isabella of Bourbon
(1436-1465)



**Mary of
Burgundy**
(1457-1482)



**Maximilian I
of Austria**
(1459-1519)



**Margaret
of Austria**
(1480-1530)



**Charles VIII
of France**
(1470-1498)



John of Castile
(n.n.-1499)



**Emanuel
Philibert II
of Savoy**
(1480-1504)



WALK ALONG MECHELEN'S HIGHLIGHTS

Mechelen is best explored on foot. The walk, which takes in the main sights, begins on the Grote Markt and lasts approximately 60 minutes (2,4 km).

If you have more time and are feeling energetic, why not also follow one or both extensions? This will take you a total of about two and a half hours (5 km).

6 Grote Markt

The Grote Markt, the central square in the historic centre, is dominated by St Rumbold's Tower. You can see it wherever you are. On the other side of the square is the Town Hall, about which we will hear more later. Look at the houses round the Grote Markt. They are from different times and in different styles, including sixteenth-century renaissance and eighteenth-century rococo. In 2004 the Grote Markt was made a traffic-free zone and an underground car park was built. While work was being carried out, archaeological finds were discovered, including an old well and a thirteenth-century street which would have been lined with market stalls. These days a very lively market is held here every Saturday morning.





1 minute

Opsinjoorke

The bronze statue in front of the Town Hall shows Opsinjoorke in full flight. The original doll was made in 1647. It is carried in ceremonial and religious processions and thrown into the air by means of a large linen cloth. It was originally called Sotscop or Foul Bridegroom, a reference to inebriated husbands who maltreated their wives. Divorce was absolutely forbidden in those days, and so the doll was symbolically punished (thrown into the air) for the sins of these men. The doll acquired its current name on July 4th 1775 when, during a religious procession, the doll went beyond the reach of the cloth and landed among the crowd. An onlooker from Antwerp put out his arms to ward off the doll, but was accused of trying to steal the Sotscop. After receiving a sound thrashing from the patriotic people of Mechelen, he sent a letter of protest to the Mechelen magistrate pleading his innocence. From then on Sotscop became known as Opsinjoorke, 'sinjoor' being the nickname of the people of Antwerp!

In Mechelen dialect

In Mechelen dialect we say "*Oepsinjoorreke*". How do you recognize a true born Mechelaar? He can say "*droa-roa-j-oare*" in inimitable fashion: "three raw eggs".



Cavalcade

Every 25 years the Hanswijk Cavalcade makes its way through the streets of Mechelen. This historical and religious procession is followed by the Mechelen Ommegang which features the family of giants recognized as UNESCO intangible world heritage. Nobody can witness this event more than a few times in their life. If you missed the 2013 edition, you'll have to wait till 2038!

7 Town Hall

Mechelen actually has three town halls: the old Schepenhuis, the Huis De Beyaert and the present-day town hall. Behind the latter you also have the brand-new administrative centre called the 'Huis van de Mechelaar'. But to return to the present-day town hall on the Grote Markt, it consists of two parts: the cloth hall with unfinished belfry and the Palace of the Great Council.

Why wasn't the belfry ever finished? The cloth trade went into decline in the fourteenth century and there wasn't the money to complete the building. For two hundred years the belfry was no more than a shell, until it was eventually provided with a temporary roof in the sixteenth century.

Temporary? That roof is still there. The belfry is now a UNESCO world heritage site. On the right of the belfry you can see the oldest part of the town hall, the remains of the earlier cloth hall. On the left is the Palace of the Great Council.

The Great Council? It never actually met here, because this wing was only completed in the twentieth century in accordance with the original sixteenth-century plans of the then leading architect Rombout Keldermans.





Visit the Town Hall

The interior of the Town Hall is well worth seeing. You can visit it in the company of a guide on the Historical City Walk. Further details are available from Tourism Mechelen.

8 Church of St Peter and Paul

This beautiful, harmonious baroque church was originally dedicated by the Jesuits to St Ignatius and St Francis Xavier. After the abolition of the Jesuit Order, the parish of St Peter and Paul asked if they might make the Jesuit church their parish church because their own church had fallen into a state of disrepair. The transfer took place and officially the name of the church has since been 'St Peter and St Paul on a visitation upon St Ignatius and St Francis Xavier'. It is abbreviated to the Church of St Peter and St Paul, or in Dutch Sint-Pieter-en-Paulkerk. The interior is richly decorated. The pulpit recalls missionary work carried out by St Francis Xavier in the four corners of the world. At the time (end sixteenth century) there was still no awareness of Oceania, "the fifth continent". Note how Europe is represented, with the horn of plenty and wisdom in the form of a book. The fourteen confessional boxes built into the wall are another fine example of Mechelen woodcarving.



Lying and cheating



Legend has it that the church had so many confessional boxes because it is located near the Veemarkt (Cattle Market) where lying and cheating were rife. However, the real reason was that the Church of St Peter and Paul was originally a pilgrimage church containing numerous relics. You were not allowed to touch them unless you were free from sin. Hence the large number of confessional boxes.





9 Palace of Margaret of York

Opposite Margaret of Austria's palace you can see all that remains of Margaret of York's palace. Originally the Bishop of Kamerrijk (Cambrai) resided in the building when he was in Mechelen. Margaret chose the vast Court of Kamerrijk as part of her settlement when she became a widow. It is also known as the imperial court because Charles V resided here from 1500 to 1515. Just above the little door in the tower is her diamond-shaped escutcheon, alongside that of her spouse, Charles the Bold. The former reception hall of the palace is now the City Theatre (Stadsschouwburg).

Margaret of York

King Edward IV of England offered his sister Margaret in marriage to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, who had just been widowed. This arrangement suited Edward since it gave him a rich ally against France. Charles had a daughter from his previous marriage. Mary of Burgundy was just eleven years old when Margaret became her stepmother. The two got on very well together.

Charles was killed on the battlefield and his daughter Mary succeeded him. She was nineteen, young and inexperienced and found herself up against the rich and assertive Flemish cities which were striving for greater independence. Margaret advised and assisted her but was a thorn in the eye of the cities. Margaret was banished from the court and moved to the estate she had inherited from her husband in Mechelen.



Ursuline Institute

Evidence that other women, too, had a preference for progressive architecture is to be found 15 minutes by car from here. At the end of the nineteenth century the Ursuline nuns founded a 'Pensionnat de demoiselles' – a boarding school for the education of young ladies – in Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Waver. That institute soon won international acclaim. The diverse architectural styles were also international, ranging from neoclassicism to art nouveau. The winter garden was built in the latter style in 1900 to provide a reception area designed to impress the notable visitors to the school. The winter garden of the Ursuline Institute has survived intact. Visitors are invariably mesmerized by the magical play of light and colours on the impressive dome. We still do not know the name of the architect.



32 Toy Museum

Continue 5 minutes (some 400 meters) in the same direction and you will come to the Toy Museum, which boasts one of the largest collections of toys in Europe. You'll find toys from all over the world, from early toys to modern. There's much more to a museum visit than just looking: you can play traditional games and relive historical events such as the Battle of Waterloo (precisely 200 years ago in 2015) as if you had been there in person. Which of these toys did you play with yourself? And would young children still do so today? The museum brings memories of childhood flooding back for young and old.



10 't Schipke – The Little Boat

Mechelen is home to a world-famous carillon school. It was the first of its kind in the world when it was founded by the carillonneur Jef Denyn in 1922. Herbert Hoover, John D. Rockefeller Jr. and William Gorham Rice gave financial support to this school. It attracts students from all over the world looking to perfect the art of carillon playing.

The carillon school used to be housed in 't Schipke, a charming corner building in rococo style. Note the Belgian bluestone doorway and the slanting door. Owing to building work on the adjacent Hof van Busleyden, in 2013 the carillon school moved to a different address.

11 van Busleyden Court

Numerous large town houses – 'paleizen' – were built in Mechelen in the sixteenth century. Hiëronymus van Busleyden, member of the Great Council, humanist and good friend of Erasmus, had architect Keldermans design a palatial home for him. From 1619 to the First World War the building was occupied by an organization known as the Berg van Barmhartigheid – or Mountain of Charity -, which loaned money to the poor on an interest-free basis. During the First World War the building was badly damaged, leaving only the walls standing. It was later rebuilt and became the municipal museum. The Hof van Busleyden Museum is currently closed for building work.






1 minute 


12 St John's Church

The parish where St John's Church is located was one of the richest parishes in Mechelen because the members of the Great Council lived round about. The Great Council was the highest court of law in the Low Countries from the fifteenth century (first under the name Parliament of Mechelen) and it remained in existence until the French Revolution. Those elected to the Council had studied law at university and were appointed by the sovereign. So the parish was not short of money. This is reflected in the wealth of treasures housed in St John's Church.

Built in above the altar is Peter Paul Rubens' famous baroque triptych. The beautifully executed panel in the middle depicts 'The adoration of the three wise men'. Behind the side panels is a mechanism for turning the paintings at regular intervals so that all the scenes can be admired. The churchwardens' benches are particularly noteworthy because of the exquisite woodcarving. This is where the wealthy sponsors of the parish sat.

The richest members of the Great Council were also responsible for building on the Sacrament Chapel in 1548. The chapel is as big as the original chancel and houses the tomb of the man who commissioned it (Lambert de Briaerde, the then Chairman of the Great Council) and his wife. 

Wall paintings

In 2008 the Flemish Heritage Institute chanced upon some fourteenth-century wall paintings behind the organ-case, on the first floor of the tower of St John's Church. These are not fragments, but two large artworks depicting St Christopher and St George. 

13 Klapgat – Gossip Alley

The Klapgat is an alleyway opposite the tower of St John's Church. People tended to congregate here for a chat ('klappen') after Mass. They did this so regularly that the alleyway was dubbed Klapgat, or Gossip Alley. A statue of Christ kept a watchful eye on the prattlers from the Mount of Olives. In the little chapel next to the statue you can see a group sculpture behind railings. The faithful used to come here to pray in times of difficulty. They would offer up a coin, placing it in the built-in collection-box.

Human Rights Walk

The Human Rights Walk visits lesser-known parts of Mechelen and reveals some unusual historical facts. Further details are available from Tourism Mechelen.





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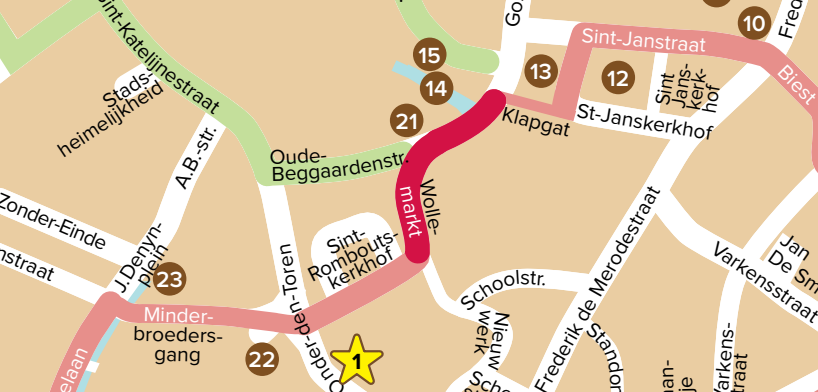
Kazerne Dossin

Barely 5 minutes (400 meters) from here is Kazerne Dossin. Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights.

Kazerne Dossin is a very special place of remembrance for Belgium. As 'SS Sammellager Mecheln', the Dossin barracks was a waiting-room for death for more than 25,000 Jews and gypsies from Belgium and Northern France during the Second World War. A brand-new museum has been built to record the historical significance of this place for present and future generations and to illustrate themes like racism, exclusion and human rights.

The combination of the human rights theme and the historical story of the Holocaust in Belgium makes Kazerne Dossin a project of European interest. The new museum was designed by leading architect and former Flemish Government Architect bOb Van Reeth.





1 minute

A few steps further through the Beguinage

If you want to see as much of Mechelen as possible, why not go for a stroll through Mechelen's beguinages? Allow 30 minutes (1,5 km). See page 34.

14 Groen Waterke – Green Water

There are many idyllic spots in Mechelen and Groen Waterke is one of them. The brook owes its name to the duckweed which covers the surface of the water. It is in fact the remains of the Melaan brook which was not covered over or filled in here. Enjoy the peace and quiet of this idyllic spot, close to the houses of refuge of St Trond and Tongerlo abbeys.

The Secrecies

In the old days platforms were often built into the side wall of buildings next to the water. They were toilets known as 'secrecies' – rather a strange name when you think how the user was on view there!

One day the mother superior of the convent sent an angry letter to the city council, complaining about the boys who sailed in boats under her secrecies firing at the bottoms of the nuns with blowpipes! She was lucky: her complaint was heard and soon there was far less traffic on 't Groen Waterke!

21 Archbishop's Palace

On the Wollemarkt is a classical palace built for Cardinal Thomas Philippe d'Alsace in the eighteenth century. The building owes its Italian influences to an unknown, Italian architect. Characteristics of classicism are the sober structure of the façade, horizontalism and a U-shaped floor plan.

Originally there were two patrician houses here which served as the House of Refuge of Affligem Abbey. When the abbey was made part of the archbishopric, these buildings became the residence of the Mechelen archbishops.

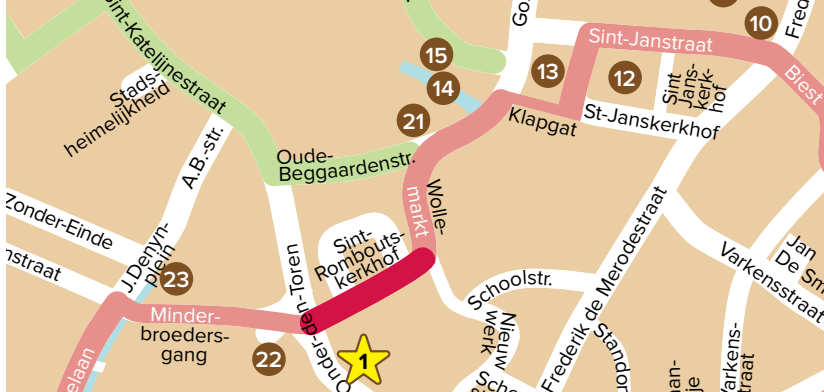




St Rumbold's Tower

Building work by the Keldermans family of architects on this imposing Mechelen monument began in 1452. Times and circumstances changed and as a result the tower was never completed. But this did not prevent the 97-metre tower becoming the symbol of Mechelen and a UNESCO world heritage site. The city's most important documents used to be kept in this fortified tower, which was also the belfry. The bells in the tower served to tell the townspeople the time and to sound the alarm in the event of danger. The tower also made a good vantage point: from here you could see the enemy arriving from a long way off.





1 minute

The Carillon

Legend has it that the people of Mechelen were always late, arriving at what was called “Mechelen time”. Sorry! Consequently in the eighteenth century they hung the largest timepiece in the world on the four sides of St Rumbold’s Tower. The gigantic clock-faces were larger than those of Big Ben in London. They only indicated the hour. For the minutes in-between, people had to listen to the carillon. And we still do that. The timepiece is no longer there but the carillon plays tunes every quarter of an hour. Unique to Mechelen is the strike between each quarter, every seven-and-a-half-minutes. That is the ‘Mechels halfke’ – the ‘Mechelen half’. The oldest extant bells date from the seventeenth century. In 1981 the tower was restored and a new carillon fitted. Every week several carillon concerts are held and every five years the carillon school organizes the Queen Fabiola international carillon competition.

Skywalk here we come!

You can visit the tower. You will find that it has six rooms, each of which serves a different purpose. In the tower you can admire a working timepiece and two carillons from close to. Unique in Europe, the Skywalk affords a panoramic view of the Grote Markt, the city and surrounding area and is a well-deserved reward for your exertions.





1 minute



St Rumbold's Cathedral

St Rumbold's Cathedral was built in the thirteenth century. From the outset it was larger and more impressive than all the other parish churches and later on it became 'the church of the archbishops'. Originally there was a triple-nave cruciform church on the site of the vast cathedral. Only after a series of building campaigns did the church become our city's star attraction.

In the religious wars in the sixteenth century the church took some hard knocks. Much of the old interior was lost to iconoclasms and plundering. Calvinist rule at the end of that century removed all references to Catholic worship. But the church had even more storms to weather. In the Second World War Mechelen was bombed and in 1972 a huge fire broke out. St Rumbold's Cathedral withstood them all.

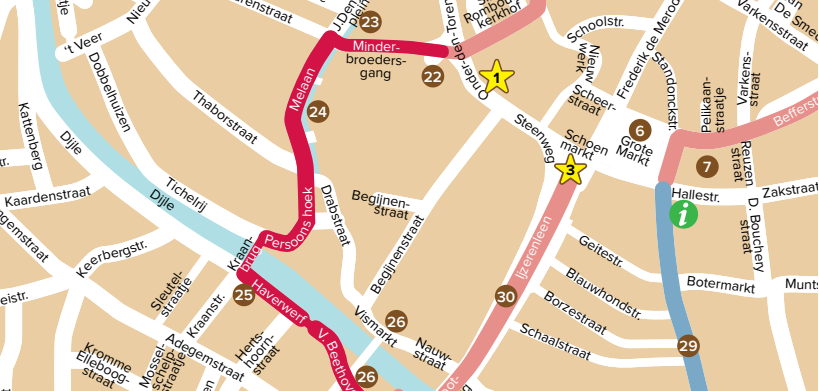
The inside of the cathedral is breathtaking. You can admire Anthony van Dyck's painting 'Christ on the Cross', along with works by (among others) Michiel Coxie, Gaspard de Crayer and Abraham Janssens. The real showpiece, however, has to be the high altar by Lucas Faydherbe which dates from 1665.



22 Cultural square

Around the square are the Cultural Centre, the Academy, the Municipal Conservatory and de Garage, space for contemporary art. You will recognize the former monastery of the Friar Minors by the nave on the right, which is now part of the Cultural Centre.

On the left you see the Chapel of the Holy Ghost where the poorest of the poor came for help. Each parish had its so-called Holy Ghost Tables. Usually once a week, on Sundays, the poor-relief workers would give the people food and other help in kind, though they did have to hand over a token to prove they had been to mass. The institutions derived most of their income from the landed property received through gifts and legacies. This system had a weakness: when times were hard, the income was low and despite the growing number of needy, less help could be provided. Nowadays the chapel is part of DE MAAN puppet theatre.



1 minute

23 The Cells

In the shadow of St Rumbold's Tower is a unique historical monument. 'De Cellekens' was originally a charitable institution which took in needy women without a family to care for them.

The three wings form a U-shape around the magnificent enclosed garden. The convent building is in the middle and left and right are little houses with round arched doors built in 1854. Originally each door provided access to two small rooms with bed, cupboard, chair and table. The institution derives its name from these little 'cells'.

'De Cellekens' was empty for a long time but then the new owners, artist Mariette Teugels and her photographer husband Herman Smet, restored the building. They were rewarded for their efforts with the Europa Nostra Prize. You can see some of Mariette Teugels' work in the new garden. The artist specializes in busts and sculptures of animals and the human figure.

24 Melaan

Every Mechelaar enjoys a stroll alongside the Melaan. De Melaan was one of the city's last brooks and was only filled in in 1913. As part of the European project 'Water in Historic City Centers', in 2007 this part of the Melaan was opened up again. Why not take a moment to sit on one of the many benches and enjoy the pleasing quiescence of the water.

25 Oats Wharf

Originally oats were unloaded and traded here. Oats used to be synonymous with grain and Mechelen had the exclusive staple rights to grain. Boats carrying grain had to tie up in Mechelen and offer the whole cargo for sale for three whole days. Only what the merchants did not sell in Mechelen could be loaded back onto the boats and taken elsewhere.

You can't fail to notice the three houses near the bridge. They date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and are what draws people to the Haverwerf. The corner house is called Het Paradijske, Little Paradise. The reliefs above the windows depict the scenes 'Earthly paradise' and 'The tree of knowledge of good and evil'. In the middle is De Duiveltjes, The Little Devils, one of the most beautiful wooden façades in the country. We know that it used to be called De Verloren Zoon, The Prodigal Son, because the story is depicted above the front door. Now it is named after the little devils which act as pillars. On the left is the house known as Sint-Jozef; in the middle is a relief of St Joseph with the Child Jesus. Enjoy the waterside!

26 Lamot site + Vismarkt (Fish Market)

From the Haverwerf you have a good view of the former Lamot brewery, which was cleverly converted into a modern conference and heritage centre. It has given the area a real buzz and made it a hip and happening place.

Fish was first traded on the Vismarkt on the other side in 1531, after the fish merchants were expelled from the IJzerenleen because of complaints about the smell of fish. There are still a few fish shops on the square today.

The Vismarkt and the adjoining Nauwstraat are a hive of activity into the small hours. In the relaxed 'brown cafés', the stylish modern lounge bars and the trendy restaurants you will meet young and young-at-heart Mechelaars.





Boat trip along the Inner Dyle

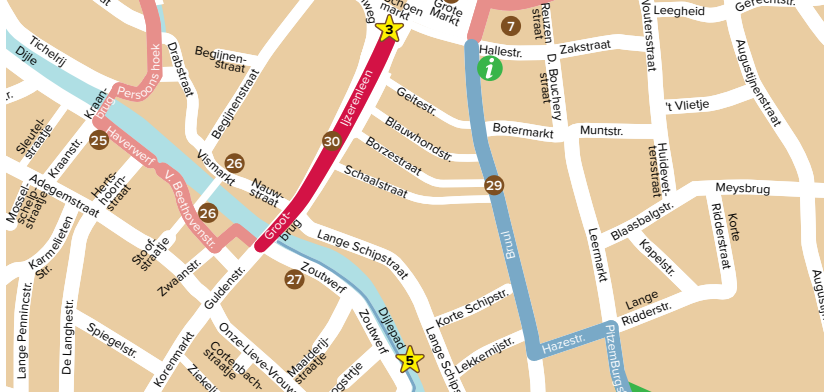
Leave by boat from Haverwerf, sail through the marina and the 'turning dock' and on through the historic centre, experiencing Mechelen from a different perspective! Along the way, you'll pass (among other things) the Fish Market, the Large Bridge, the Botanical Garden and Fullers' Mill and you'll see how the people of Mechelen live in historic and modern waterside buildings. What heaven it must be to have a house on the Dyle! The boat trips take place from April to September.



Dyle Footpath

The people of Mechelen like to enjoy their city and why not! A walk alongside the water in the heart of the city is a unique and relaxing experience, particularly if you walk over the floating part of the Dyle Path! The path leads past (and over) the Dyle, between Haverwerf and the Botanical Garden. See a different side of Mechelen - the backs of the old houses! The many water birds make it atmospheric and fun for children too.





1 minute

A few steps further along the Dyle Path

If you want to see as much of Mechelen as possible, why not walk along the Dyle Path? Allow 45 minutes for this extension (1,8 km). See page 40.

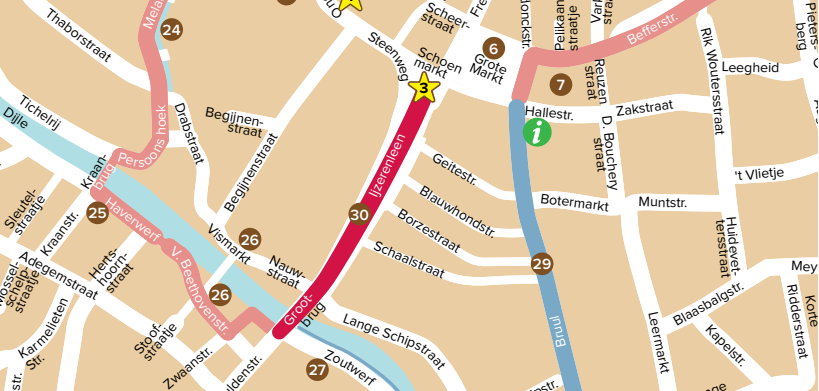


30 IJzerenleen

Many Mechelaars regard the IJzerenleen as Mechelen's Champs Elysées. Fortunately there are fewer cars. The street boasts imposing façades, lovely shops and one of the oldest town halls in Flanders. The IJzerenleen was once a brook linking the Dyle with the Koolvliet; it was also the site of the fish market. The name IJzerenleen derives from the iron railings erected alongside the brook, which are still there today, though the brook was covered over back in the sixteenth century. The fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth-century façades are not original. Having suffered damage in the First World War, they were rebuilt following an architectural competition.

Inlet Cellar

The vaulted-over inlet, located in the middle of the IJzerenleen, served as an air-raid shelter in the Second World War. On one of the entrances underground is a map of all the former inlets.



1 minute

Shopping

If you're longing to hit the shops, the convivial Bruul, IJzerenleen/Guldenstraat and Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat triangle is perfect (1,45 km). Some of the streets here are closed to traffic which makes for a pleasant shopping experience. High-street chains and chic boutiques stand shoulder to shoulder with traditional specialist shops: a cheese merchant, chocolatier, cigarette shop, handicrafts shop, milliner, etc. Don't miss the weekly market on Saturday mornings on and around the Grote Markt!



Aldermen's House

The Schepenhuis, or Aldermen's House, is one of the most eye-catching buildings in Mechelen. The earliest reference to it dates from 1288. The Schepenhuis has a fascinating history and this is reflected in the building. First it was the town hall, later on the seat of the Great Council and then the home of the municipal collection and the city archive. The Schepenhuis has been a municipal museum since 2000.



ERRATA

WEGWIJS IN MECHELEN

Rik Wouters. Hoogtepunten (p. 33)

De tentoonstelling van Rik Wouters in het Schepenhuis is vroegtijdig afgelopen.

MALINES EN POCHE

Rik Wouters. Pièce majeures (p. 33)

L'exposition de Rik wouters à la Maison échevinale s'est terminée avant la date prévue

UNTERWEGS IN MECHELEN

Rik Wouters. Spitzenwerke (p. 33)

Die Ausstellung Rik Wouters. Spitzenwerke im Museum Schepenhuis ist leider frühzeitig beendet.

STREETWISE IN MECHELEN

Rik Wouters. Highlights (p. 33)

The Rik Wouters exhibition in the Schepenhuis Museum has ended earlier than foreseen.

GUÍA DE MALINAS

Rik Wouters (p. 33)


La exposicion de Rik Wouters en la Casa de la Villa (Schepenhuis) se ha clausurado de lo previsto.



Rik Wouters. Highlights

Rik Wouters is one of the Belgian public's favourite artists. He is seen by some as a direct precursor of Expressionism. Even during his lifetime he was regarded as an exceptionally modernistic talent. Most of his artistic career was played out in Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam, but there was always a special place in his heart for Mechelen where he was born.

Though he died at the age of just 33, Rik Wouters left behind a fantastic body of work. Many of those works belong in the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA). Comprising 19 sculptures, 26 paintings and 55 works on paper, that collection is now on display in the Schepenhuis together with the Rik Wouters collection belonging to the Municipal Museums Mechelen.

The KMSKA collection will remain in Mechelen until building work in Antwerp is completed at the end of 2017. Regular changes will be made to the presentation at the Schepenhuis Museum. 

A FEW STEPS FURTHER THROUGH THE BEGUINAGE

The extension of the walk starts at Goswin de Stassartstraat and ends at Oude Beggaardenstraat. Allow 30 minutes (1,5 km).

15 House of Refuge of St Trond's Abbey

Very early on the abbots of abbeys and monasteries had refuges built in the walled towns where they could stay during a visit to that town or on their way to their often extensive landed estates. In times of war, these refuges also offered protection.

The House of Refuge of St Trond's Abbey was established by the Benedictine Abbey in the sixteenth century to improve contact between the abbey and the archbishop. These days this beautiful building is part of the archbishop's palace to which it is linked by means of a covered bridge.

Starling on the menu

Nesting boxes for starlings are built into the ornamental tower. The starling was a real delicacy until the nineteenth century.





1 minute

Royal Manufacturers De Wit

The Royal Manufacturers De Wit is world famous for restoring valuable tapestries by hand. Thanks partly to its ingenious, patented cleaning system, De Wit has clients in every corner of the globe. De Wit also has a prestigious collection of antique and modern tapestries. It is possible to visit the Royal Manufacturers at fixed times. Further details are available from Tourism Mechelen.

16 House of Refuge of Tongerlo Abbey

The House of Refuge of Tongerlo Abbey dates from the fifteenth century. These days the building houses the Royal Manufacturers De Wit, a world-famous tapestry-weaving and restoration workshop. If the gate is open, step into the beautiful garden. You will see a number of plants growing which are depicted on historical tapestries.

17 Small Beguinage

The Small Beguinage is a charming oasis of peace and tranquillity in the heart of Mechelen. This, Mechelen's first beguinage, dates from the thirteenth century. Later on there was a beguinage outside the city walls, but old and ailing beguines continued to live here. Three entrance gates closed off the little square but they are no longer here. The Small Beguinage was the first in Flanders to benefit from a regeneration scheme and has been beautifully restored.

Play with me!

On the square behind the Church of St Catherine (Sint-Katelijnekerk) you will see a curious silver half-sphere. It is one of numerous 'toys' that make up 'Mechelen, Kids' City'.

18 Large Beguinage

Around 1560 the beguinage outside the city walls was destroyed. The beguines re-established themselves inside the city walls, where the Large Beguinage grew up. They bought up existing buildings and built new dwellings, which explains why the Large Beguinage is rather different in character from beguinages in other cities.

Because of its typical Flemish character and unique architecture, the Large Beguinage was declared a UNESCO world heritage site. The little houses are listed.

Kindly respect the privacy of the residents as you stroll along the quiet, picturesque streets of the beguinages.

Beguines and beguinages



Beguinages were small towns within a town. They had their own bakery, brewery, nursing home, church and bleaching fields. Beguinages were founded in the time of the crusades. Many of the men who left on a crusade never returned, which resulted in a surplus of women: widows, orphans and women who failed to find a suitable husband. Going and living in a convent was one solution, but many convents only took aristocratic or well-to-do women.

Women who didn't enter a convent for whatever reason, went to live together and together were able to sustain themselves. The main difference with convents was that the beguines did not take the life-long vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. So they were not tied to the beguinage for life, though most did live out their life there. Initially the church treated them as heretics, but gradually they were accepted on condition that they led a devout life. This was how beguinages in Flanders originated. A beguinage was headed up by a Grand Mistress, who was assisted in the organization and coordination of daily life by mistresses.

Rich, usually aristocratic beguines would build their own house or buy one in the beguinage. Less well-off beguines rented a room from these homeowners and took charge of the housekeeping. Beguines with no possessions were taken into small convents, usually founded by benefactors, to guarantee that prayers were said for the occupants or their deceased family member. Beguines in the convents had to work for their living, which is one reason lace-making became one of the most important activities in the seventeenth century. So the beguinage played a crucial role in Mechelen's lace industry.



1 minute

19 Beguinage Church

The seventeenth-century Beguinage Church has a magnificent baroque façade, after the Italian example. At the time Mechelen's beguines had capital and so were able to commission well-known architects. The plans were drawn up by the Jesuit Pieter Huyssens, but the actual work was overseen by Jacques Francart, who was from Brussels and was court architect to archdukes Albrecht and Isabella. The young Lucas Faydherbe from Mechelen can claim partial responsibility for the interior decoration.





1 minute 

20 Het Anker brewery

Krankenstraat leads to the back of het Anker brewery, which enjoys world fame for its 'Gouden Carolus' or Golden Charles beer. Founded in 1369, Het Anker is one of Belgium's oldest breweries. The three copper brew-kettles in the brew-room date from after the Second World War.

Jan uit den Anker started the brewery in 1369. Later on his son Matthijs bought up the municipal brewery and started brewing the amber-coloured 'Mechelschen Bruynen', which was popular with both the bourgeoisie and the nobility. The beer was also to Charles V's taste and now, six centuries on, 'den Bruynen' is still brewed. These days it is called 'Gouden Carolus Ambrio' and is slightly stronger than its predecessor.

In the 1990s the premises were given a makeover. Charles Leclef, the fifth generation of the family, restored the old buildings and modernized the refrigeration, fermentation and lagering facilities.

Gouden Carolus – Golden Charles

There are several versions of Gouden Carolus. The most famous is undoubtedly the Gouden Carolus Classic. This special beer won the gold medal at the World Beer Awards in 2010.

Some cafés, and of course Het Anker brasserie, serve the various beers in 'tasting glasses'.

Prefer something a little stronger? At the end of 2013 Het Anker brewery launched its first ever, 3-year-old bottles of whisky. So sit back and relax with a Gouden Carolus Single Malt. Cheers!



Sense-sational Mechelen

Explore Mechelen by means of a journey through the senses of the city. 'Sense-sational Mechelen' is a guide that titillates all the senses. Inhale the smell of freshly-brewed Gouden Carolus beer and savour the sounds of the carillon. Set off with the city map, follow the various contradictions in the guide or simple... follow your nose!



A FEW STEPS FURTHER ALONG THE DYLE PATH

The extension of the walk leaves from the Zoutwerf and ends on the Grote Markt. Allow 40 minutes (1,8 km).

Large Bridge

The Grootbrug or Large Bridge, also known as the Hoogbrug - High Bridge, connects the IJzerenleen on the other side with the Korenmarkt. This sandstone structure dating from the thirteenth century is the oldest stone bridge in Flanders. The Grootbrug used to be a toll bridge; payment was exacted both on the water and on the street. The bases of two small defence towers are still visible.

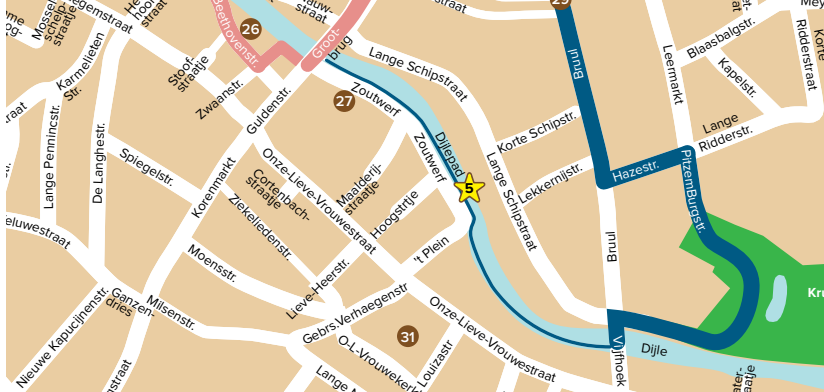
The Guldenstraat, Korenmarkt and Hoogstraat lead in a direct line from the Grootbrug to the Brusselpoort, the only surviving city gate.

27 Salt Wharf

When the city acquired the staple for salt in 1301, the historic quay on the Grootbrug or Large Bridge was renamed the 'Zoutwerf' or Salt Wharf. You will immediately notice the two authentic façades of 'De Waag' and 'De Steur'. It is not hard to picture the boats being unloaded here and the cargoes brought in. De Steur served as a warehouse, while the goods were weighed in De Waag ('Weighhouse').

Another striking building is the former guildhall of the fishmongers, 'In den Grooten Zalm' – In the Large Salmon. You'll see the name of the building in relief above the door. A banderol bearing the words 'In den Grooten Zalm' is wound round the gilded salmon. The sumptuous Renaissance façade gives





1 minute

some indication of the wealth of this guild. Other guilds were still building in Gothic style and in wood.

The 'Innehuysken' to the right of 'De Waag' is where the 'innegeld' – 'monies received' – was paid, an early form of taxation. The building was destroyed by fire in the seventeenth century, but the fishmongers pulled together, rebuilt it and renamed it 'De Kleine Zalm', 'The Small Salmon'.

31 Church of Our Lady-across-the-Dyle

At the end of the steep street called 't Plein is the Church of Our Lady-across-the-Dyle. It was built in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on the site where Mechelen's first parish church probably stood. The tower contains a complete carillon with no fewer than 49 bells.

The Dyle church houses some wonderful art treasures. Rubens painted a work for this church just as he had done for St John's. The fishmongers commissioned him to illustrate the wealth of their guild as they had done by building 'De Grooten Zalm' on the Zoutwerf. The large triptych entitled 'The miraculous draught of fishes' tells the story of the same name from the Bible.

The fourteenth-century sculpture 'Our Lady with the Crooked Hip' is one of the glories of the church. It is the only free-standing sculpture in Mechelen from that period and it takes its name from Mary's characteristic stance.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat

In recent years edgy retail outlets have mushroomed in Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat, integrating harmoniously with businesses which can look back on a long tradition.



1 minute

28 Botanical Garden

The Botanical Garden or 'Botanique' is steeped in history. From the Middle Ages this green oasis was the garden of the former 'commanderij van Pitzemburg', order of knights. After its abolition, in the nineteenth century the garden was turned into an English landscape garden for members of the elitist Société Royale d'Horticulture. After the First World War it opened to the public as a municipal park.

In the middle of the Botanical Garden is a statue of the celebrated scientist Rembert Dodoens. In the sixteenth century he wrote a highly acclaimed herbal called the 'Cruydenboek'.

These days the Botanical Garden is a quiet and very pleasant park where you can enjoy the plant life while the children let off steam in the playground.

33 Church of Our Lady of Hanswijk

This baroque pilgrimage church designed by Lucas Faydherbe was one of the first domed churches in the Low Countries. The dome was to have been even higher, but the substructure proved not to be sufficiently robust. Architect and church engaged in a bitter battle about additional reinforcements.

Inside under the dome are two huge reliefs, also by Faydherbe, believed by everyone to be sandstone until the bombing raids in the Second World War. But sandstone would have been too heavy, so the resourceful Faydherbe had used gypsum. Only when the damaged reliefs were repaired did the deception come to light.

At the front of the church is a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary which is carried in the annual Hanswijk procession. In 1985 the late Pope John Paul II prayed in this church, whose status was elevated to that of a basilica two years later.

29 Bruul

The Bruul is Mechelen's busiest shopping street. You may know it from the game of Monopoly. You can shop here to your heart's content in large high-street chains and charming boutiques. Or you can of course just enjoy browsing in this semi-traffic-free area. As well as shops you'll find the Church of Our Lady of Leliëndaal, with the convivial Bruul square next to it. At the far end of the Bruul you come to the Botermarkt with its modern fountain.



Verdant outskirts



Just beyond the bridges over the Dyle is the Mechels Broek, a wildlife area where many water birds are found. The verdant outskirts of Mechelen extend from different points just behind the small ring road (kleine ring). In the south you find the peaceful Vrijbroek provincial park with its magnificent rose garden. In the north and west is the river area with the Zennegat. Follow the footpaths or cycling network from the historic city centre and you'll be in the countryside in no time. Feel like a breath of fresh air? Tourism Mechelen will be happy to provide suggestions.

Planckendael and Technopolis



If you're planning an outing outside the city, Planckendael makes an ideal destination. Though there are plenty of fascinating animals to admire in its 40 hectares, Planckendael is much more than 'just' an animal park. For example, you can follow an adventure trail which leads across suspension bridges and into the canopies of trees. There is more than enough space for animals to frolic, for children to play and for more sedate visitors to stroll. Another must is Technopolis. Land an aeroplane, take a nap on a bed of nails or ride a bicycle along a wire 5 metres above the ground. You can do all that at Technopolis, the Flemish hands-on centre for science and technology!



CITY MAP

★ 1 St Rumbold's Tower  and Cathedral 

★ 2 Kazerne Dossin 


★ 3 Aldermen's House 

★ 4 Palace of Margaret of Austria

★ 5 Dyle Path 

6 Grote Markt


7 Town Hall 

8 Church of St Peter and Paul 

9 Palace of Margaret of York

10 't Schipke – The Little Boat

11 Van Busleyden Court

12 St John's Church 

13 Klappgat – Gossip Alley

14 Groen Waterke – Green Water

15 House of Refuge of St Trond's Abbey

16 House of Refuge of Tongerlo Abbey

17 Small Beguinage

18 Large Beguinage

19 Beguinage Church

20 Het Anker brewery

21 Archbishop's Palace

22 Cultural square

23 De Cellekens - The Cells

24 Melaan

25 Haverwerf – Oats Wharf

26 Lamot site + Vismarkt (Fish Market)

27 Salt Wharf

28 Botanical Garden


29 Bruul


30 IJzerenleen


31 Church of Our Lady-across-the-Dyle


32 Toy Museum 

33 Church of Our Lady of Hanswijk


Walk along
Mechelen's
highlights


A few steps further
through the
Beguinage


A few steps further
along the Dyle Path

 Tourism Mechelen

 station

5 minutes






MECHELEN-NEKKERSPOEL

5 minutes

MECHELEN

COLOPHON

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