

IN THE
FOOTSTEPS OF

Margareta

A city tour of
Burgundian and contemporary
features in Mechelen

WELCOME TO THE CITY OF

Mechelen

02

Welcome to the city of Mechelen. Historical monuments, parks, charming places near the water? Everything is within walking distance. This guide offers you the best of Mechelen in a nutshell. This includes background information on ancient monuments, useful tips and surprising facts.

The focus is on one of Mechelen's most important periods: the Burgundian ages. The times of Margaret of Austria and Margaret of York. Two fascinating women who left their mark on this city at the banks of the Dyle. During this tour you will tread in the footsteps of these powerful women.

Imagine ... 500 years ago - Mechelen is the capital city of the Low Countries. It was where the court and the Great Council were located. Many Burgundian nobles came to live in this city. Mechelen was an important place. This thriving time left many traces in the city. You can still see the many city palaces, historic churches, wooden facades and richly decorated guild houses.

If that isn't enough? Your route will take you along the banks of the Dyle and the Beguinage, to the brewery known as Het Anker. Thirsty? Release the Burgundian inside you and enjoy a Gouden Carolus, the beer that still puts Mechelen on the map to this very day!



HIGHLIGHT

you just have to see this



DID YOU KNOW?

this makes your tour educational



TIP

for the real fans



SCULPTURAL MECHELEN

sculpture gems

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OPENING HOURS

For the opening hours of churches, museums, attractions and parks please check visitmechelen.be

INFORMATION WITH CHILDREN IN MIND

Many monuments in Mechelen have a **brown sign**. This is tailored for adults. But at **Mechelen Kinderstad** we also keep children in mind. Families can take a short tour (45 minutes) along 11 informational signs for children.



HISTORY

C. 600 AD

A saint of the British Isles in Mechelen

A missionary left the British Isles to preach the message of salvation and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. His final destination was the settlement at Mechelen. His name: Rumbold. He died between 580 and 655 CE and was venerated as a saint.

Pilgrims visited his grave, monks founded a St. Rumbold's Abbey. Over time, a population centre prospered on the right bank of the River Dyle, near the present-day cathedral. Come face to face with St. Rumbold in the cathedral that is named after him, where 25 paintings, which date from c. 1500, narrate his life, like a comic strip.



800-1000 AD

Mechelen as a port city

There was a portus, or port, on the left bank of the River Dyle. We know this from the archaeological research that was conducted on the Lamot site, which is situated between Korenmarkt and Vismarkt. Did this port belong to a local ruler or to St. Rumbold's Abbey? The trading port is no longer mentioned from the end of the twelfth century onwards.

1288

A stone town hall

1288 marks the first mention of the Aldermen's House. It was one of the oldest stone buildings in Flanders. Mechelen's town council of Mechelen convened here until the second half of the fifteenth century. Many years later, the Great Council of Mechelen, the highest court in the Burgundian Netherlands, used the building for its sessions. Since 2018, the building is home to the tourist information office of Visit Mechelen. The age of Mechelen's Aldermen's House is testimony to the economic boost the city experienced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This also led to more administration and jurisdiction.



1301

A Golden Age!

Duke John II of Brabant and Jan Berthout granted Mechelen a charter. The city was given the right to appoint a court of 12 aldermen. The charter determined the organisation of the city's government until 1795.

Also in 1301

Mechelen was granted the exclusive staple right for grain, salt and fish. The local economy benefited! Boats unloaded their goods in the city, displaying them for sale. They could only depart three days later to sell their goods elsewhere. Other cities were not very happy about the situation. They felt that they were severely disadvantaged by Mechelen's staple right.

1452

A half-completed tower

The founding stone of the present-day St. Rumbold's Tower was laid. The plan was to build a 167-metre high tower. But the builders never made it past the 97-metre mark. The work on the tower stopped in the mid-sixteenth century for various reasons. The funds were diverted to other projects, such as the private city palace of Hieronymus van Busleyden, a residence for Margaret of Austria and the new palace of the Great Council. People also had their doubts about the project's technical feasibility in light of the many Gothic towers and churches that fell down in Europe around this time. An incomplete building that stood 100 metres tall was deemed preferable over a megastructure that might quite possibly crumble.



1473

The Parliament of Mechelen

The Burgundian duke Charles the Bold centralised the power, founding the Parliament of Mechelen. This court took precedence over all the other courts in the Burgundian territories. It later became the Great Council. Charles chose Mechelen and it is easy to see why: the city was centrally located and enjoyed a special status. Together with the surrounding region, Mechelen formed a fief that was independent from the adjoining larger principalities, i.e., the Duchy of Brabant and the Prince-Bishopric of Liège. The duke avoided a conflict by choosing Mechelen. The city would remain autonomous until the end of the eighteenth century. It became one of the Seventeen Provinces under Emperor Charles V.

1506

Mechelen as the capital

Margaret of Austria, Charles the Bold's granddaughter, was the first governess of the Netherlands. Mechelen was the territory's legal and administrative centre. Margaret's palace, which is now home to the city's law courts, was located in Keizerstraat.

Margaret's court was a veritable hive of activity. Pioneering artists introduced the Renaissance and humanism to the Netherlands here. Wealthy families moved to the city, displaying their power and wealth in impressive residences. Just look at the magnificent Hof van Busleyden. This was recently transformed into a museum on the Burgundian past of Mechelen and the Netherlands and its influence on today's society.

1530

Mechelen no longer the capital

Mary of Hungary succeeded Margaret of Austria as governess of the Netherlands. She moved the court to Brussels. Consequently, Mechelen no longer was the political centre of the Netherlands.



1554

A revolutionary herb book

Rembert Dodoens, who hailed from Mechelen, published his revolutionary *Cruydeboeck* ("Herbal" in English). He chose to move away from the traditional alphabetic list of herbs, introducing a new system instead, which was based on the plants' external characteristics. Dodoens's book was translated from Dutch into most European languages. A Japanese version was even published. In addition to being the city's surgeon, Dodoens was also appointed as Emperor Maximilian II's personal physician. You can find his statue in the Botanic Garden.

1559

Mechelen a 'capital' again

King Philip II of Spain ordained that Mechelen should become the seat of the new archdiocese. The city thus became the ecclesiastical capital of the Southern Netherlands. The first archbishop was Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle. In 1961, it was renamed the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels. The current archbishop, Jozef De Kesel, was invested in St. Rumbold's Cathedral in late 2015.



TIP

A delicious Maneblusser

The city of Mechelen's own specialty beer is called *Maneblusser*. The origin of this name is briefly explained on the bottle – a fun souvenir. Looking for more tasty treats? You can also buy *Maneblussertjes*, which are biscuits and chocolates in the shape of a crescent moon. You can taste all this and more thanks to the Sense-sations voucher booklet. Every voucher invites you to try a specific local speciality. Add an unexpectedly flavoursome dimension to your visit with an amazing array of typical Mechelen flavours.

1687

Extinguishing the moon

On the evening of 27 January 1687, St. Rumbold's Tower was shrouded in wintery fog. A man stumbled out of an inn in Grote Markt into the cold, dark night, after more than his fair share of beer. Suddenly he noticed that the tower was on fire. Alarm! The entire city was in an uproar. The town council, led by the mayor, rushed to the scene, and organised a fire extinguishing effort. Buckets of water changed hands as they made their way up the stairs to the top of the tower. But before they even reached the top, a moonbeam suddenly pierced through the fog. The glow disappeared... The courageous people of Mechelen had tried to put out the moon! The news travelled fast. And that is why the people of Mechelen are still called "Maneblussers" or moon extinguishers to this day.

5 May 1835

A first: the train

The first (steam-powered) train on the European continent operated on the line between Brussels and Mechelen. Under the law of 1 May 1834, Mechelen was designated as the hub or central point of Belgium's future rail network. You can still see this centre point in the station. The train transformed the city. A neighbourhood developed around the station, and employment increased following the construction of the central railway marshalling yard – also known as the "Arsenaal". Mechelen prospered and grew.

1914

War-time bombs

Mechelen was heavily damaged during the bombardments in the early days of World War I. The giant clock of St. Rumbold's Tower was destroyed as well as many historic buildings along IJzerenleen.

1940-1945

Sad times

World War II was a dark chapter in Mechelen's history. The Nazis deported over 25,000 Jews and gypsies to Auschwitz from the Dossin barracks. In April 1944, the Allies carried out heavy bombardments on the Arsenaal, the station and the railways. The number of casualties was high, the material damage huge. The British liberated Mechelen on 4 September 1944.



09

1960-1970

New labour

Belgium went in search of labourers, mainly for the national coal mines. Berbers, people from the north of Morocco, moved to Belgium. This "temporary" labour force was required longer than initially estimated and they stayed on. The population's composition gradually changed, also in Mechelen.

Mechelen also welcomed many Assyrian Turks. They came from the destroyed Christian village of Hassana in the extreme south-eastern tip of Turkey. The new residents were recognised as political refugees in Belgium and soon integrated.

11 May 1988

Go Mechelen!

KV Mechelen won the European Cup, making its European debut in the process. It beat the Dutch star team of Ajax by 1-0 in Strasbourg. Football-loving Europe was just stunned. Since then, no other Belgian team has won a European football cup.



2000

Towards a new Mechelen

Mechelen started to rediscover its heritage. The city's public space was gradually modernised and monuments were restored with respect for their history. Eyecatchers include the opening up of the vlietjes (old canals), the skywalk on St. Rumbold's Tower and the discovery of unique medieval murals in the Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, which you can visit with a guide. The Dyle towpath and the many city parks only accentuate the trend towards more greenery and nature in the city.



2016

138 nationalities, 80 languages

Bart Somers was awarded the World Mayor Prize 2016. The prize rewarded his efforts to transform Mechelen since his appointment in 2001. He succeeded in turning it into one of Belgium's most attractive cities and a role model for integration. Mechelen is home to 138 nationalities, with 80 languages spoken in the city. Mechelen demonstrated how all these nationalities can work together on 24 September of that year: 89 nationalities enjoyed a breakfast together on the occasion of the Bread Festival. A European record.

11

DID YOU KNOW?

Children's mayor

Mechelen has a second mayor, the children's mayor. He or she presides over the Children's Council, together with the municipal secretary. Mechelen is a very child-friendly city, which also caters to its youngest residents and visitors.



2018

Burgundian Mechelen

A new museum opened its doors in Mechelen. Following the opening of Museum Hof van Busleyden, Mechelen revisited its Burgundian roots. Find out more about Burgundian culture in an early sixteenth-century city palace and discover how it lives on in the contemporary city. A unique experience, which the people of Mechelen and visitors to the city should definitely check out.



THE DUKES OF BURGUNDY

Philip the Bold
(1342-1404)



Margaret of Male
(1350-1405)

John the Fearless
(1371-1419)



Margaret of Bavaria
(1363-1423)

Isabella of Portugal
(1397-1472)



Philip the Good
(1396 -1467)



Charles the Bold
(1433-1477)



Margaret of York
(1446-1503)



Isabella of Bourbon
(1436-1465)



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



Mary of Burgundy
(1457-1482)



Philip the Handsome
(1478-1506)



**Joanna of Castile/
the Mad**
(1479-1555)



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



Charles V
(1500-1558)



Philip II
(1527-1598)

On Burgundians and Habsburgers

In Mechelen, the Burgundian era commenced in 1369. That year Philip the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy, married Margaret van Male. She was the daughter of the Count of Flanders, who was also the Lord of Mechelen. By the end of the fifteenth century, many Netherlandish territories were integrated into the Burgundian empire. The dukes were called John the Fearless, Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. This was the Golden Age of the Flemish Primitives.

1477. Mary of Burgundy, who came to power at the age of twenty, married Maximilian of Austria. He was a Habsburger, a scion of a prominent European royal house. Mary died in 1482. Maximilian succeeded her as regent of the Burgundian Netherlands, which became Habsburg territory.

Their children were Philip the Bold and Margaret of Austria. She became governess of the Netherlands and established her court at Mechelen. Her nephew was the future Emperor Charles, a Habsburger. In 1515, he became governor of the Netherlands and subsequently was crowned emperor of “an empire on which the sun never set”. The Renaissance was about to invade the Netherlands.

Margaret of Austria

(1480-1530)



Charles VIII of France

(1470-1498)

John of Castile

(unknown-1499)

Emmanuel Philibert II of Savoy

(1480-1504)



A TOUR OF THE CITY'S

Burgundian highlights

Mechelen is easily explored on foot.

Your walking tour of the city's highlights and hidden gems starts at the Aldermen's House and lasts about 90 minutes (2.5 km).

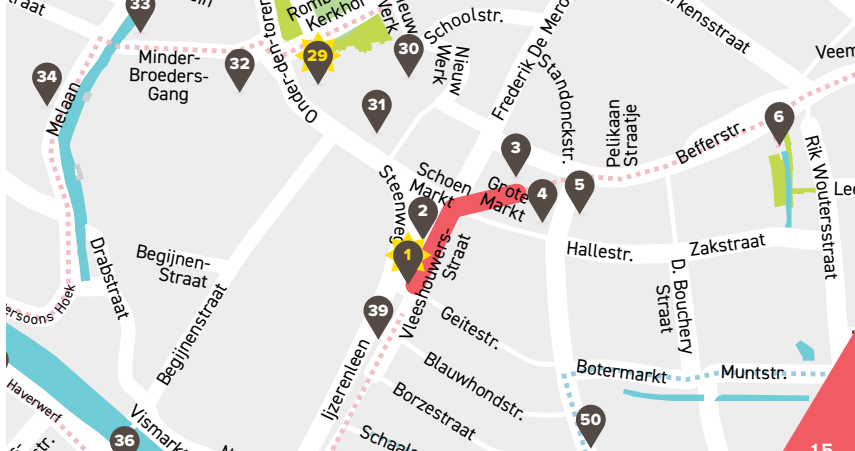
Do you have more time to burn and are you interested to see more?

Then choose one or even both extensions.

Your walk will last around three hours in that case (6,4 km).

90
MIN.

2,5
KM



Aldermen's House/Tourist information office – *The oldest town hall*

The Gothic Aldermen's Hall is one of Flanders' oldest town halls. The aldermen would often meet in open air before this building was erected. A larger wing was added onto the thirteenth-century building in Schoenmarkt in 1375. The aldermen moved to Den Beyaert, the current post office building on the opposite side of the street, in 1475. The Great Council of Mechelen, the highest court of the Netherlands, held its sessions in the Aldermen's House – which the locals called “the old palace” – until 1616. Afterwards the gunners' guild of the “colveniers” held its guild meetings in the hall. It was subsequently used as a theatre, a fencing school, a prison, an archaeological museum and a municipal archive.



Since 2018 the building is home to the tourist information office of Visit Mechelen. If you take a guided Burgundian-themed tour, you can see the former council hall and the two large murals of “The Last Judgement” and “The Calvary”.

2



Sculptural Mechelen

‘Our Margret’ – What a woman she was

You can find “Our Margret” or “Ons Margriet” as the locals call her, in Schoenmarkt, in between St. Rumbold’s Tower and the Aldermen’s House. She is of course Margaret of Austria, the governess of the Netherlands (1506-1530) and what a woman she was. She had a huge impact on the city.

In 1849, Jozef Tuerlinckx received the commission to create a large statue of Margaret of Austria. Many of the cities in the newly-established nation chose to honour their “national heroes” with statues. But Mechelen was the only Belgian city to choose a woman. Initially, Margaret’s statue was installed in

Grote Markt. She was moved to her current location when the weight of her statue proved too much for the underground car park that was built in the square. The governess now has a better view of Grote Markt, from her new location, which now looks larger than ever.



DID YOU KNOW?

Sculptural Mechelen

Mechelen has cherished sculpture for many centuries. The city has hundreds of sculptures by well-known and lesser-known artists, which add an eye-catching feature to the city’s streets and squares. We have chosen to highlight some of these sculptures during this walk. Are you interested to learn more about Mechelen’s long-standing sculpture tradition? Then take a tour of the city with a guide to explore “Sculptural Mechelen”.





3

Grote Markt – A centuries-old square

For centuries, Grote Markt has been the main square in Mechelen's city centre. It is dominated by St. Rumbold's Tower, which you can see from wherever you stand. The town hall stands at the opposite end.

Don't forget to have a look at the houses that line Grote Markt. These historic dwellings date from different eras and were built in different styles, including the sixteenth-century Renaissance and the eighteenth-century Rococo. Huis Keulen ("House Cologne" at no. 26) is an interesting example of early sixteenth-century civilian Brabant Gothic. According to some, Mechelen's city architect Rombout II Keldermans designed this step-gabled house. He was widely regarded as one of the most important architects of the Brabant Gothic and was the city's municipal architect at the time of its construction.

Grote Markt became a car-free square in 2004, with an underground car park. During the building process, archaeologists discovered a cesspool and a thirteenth-century road among others. There used to be market stalls along this road already. Nowadays, there is still a bustling market in the square on Saturday mornings.



Sculptural Mechelen

Opsinjoorke – The story of a doll

The bronze statue in front of the town hall is called Opsinjoorke and represents a doll from 1647, which the people of Mechelen carry with them in processions and parades. The doll is tossed in the air and caught in a large linen cloth.

But what does it all mean? Originally the doll was called *Sotscop* (“Crazy head”) or *Vuilen Bruidegom* (“Dirty groom”), a reference to drunkards who abused their wives. They are publicly and symbolically punished for their bad behaviour, with this doll. But where did the name *Opsinjoorke* come from? For that, we have to travel back in time to 4 July 1775. On that occasion, *Sotscop* landed in the the crowd that lined the streets for the procession for the millennium celebrations of the veneration of St. Rumbold in the city. An Antwerper in the crowd fended off the doll that fell on top of him whereupon the crowd immediately accused him of trying to steal *Sotscop*. Punches flew. The victim subsequently argued his innocence in a letter of protest to the judge in Mechelen and claimed compensation. As the *Sotscop* had fallen on a “Sinjoor” (the nickname of the Antwerpens), he is since called *Opsinjoorke*. His name lives on in the Gouden Carolus Hopsinjoor, a hopped beer, which is produced by Mechelen’s city brewery Het Anker.

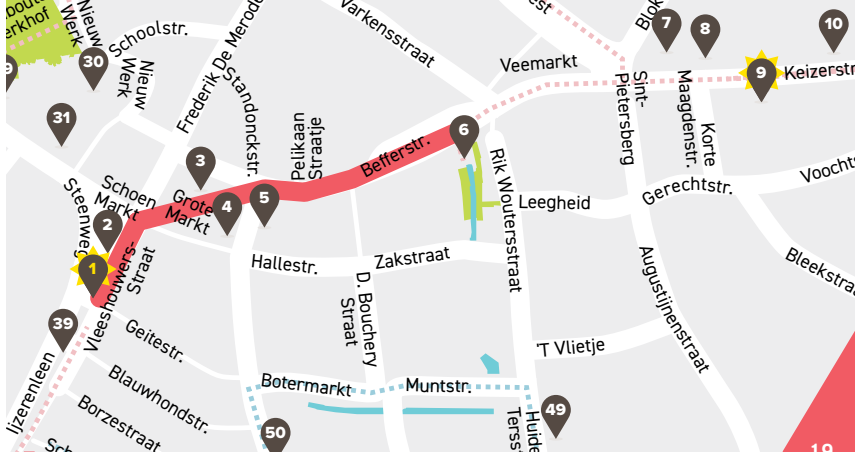


TIP

Play incentives

This is not your only encounter with this funny little lad in Mechelen’s streets. You’ll spot a yellow version of him later during your walk, in Sint-Romboutskerkhof. The colourful giant version of the doll is one of the six play incentives in Mechelen’s city centre. Children can sit and climb on it, and even hang from it.





5

Town hall – A town hall from two eras

The tumultuous history of the current town hall starts with an early fourteenth-century cloth hall (the section to the right). The cloth hall was supposed to have a belfry, which was the symbol of urban power, like the cloth hall in Bruges. This is where the city kept important documents that were relevant to the city and where guards stood watch over the city. But Mechelen's belfry was never completed. In the fourteenth century, the cloth trade soon declined and the city ran out of money for the completion of the tower. St. Rumbold's Tower was used as a belfry instead. The unfinished belfry of the town hall was used as a prison instead.

To the left of the belfry, you can see the Palace of the Great Council. But the council never convened here. This wing was only completed in the early twentieth century, according to the original sixteenth-century plans of the master architect Rombout Keldermans, with some neo-Gothic additions. Have a look at the 36 medallions on the side of the building in Belferstraat, which portray several rulers, from Pepin of Landen (622-639) right up to Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy (1478-1506).



**DID YOU KNOW?****Cavalcade**

Every 25 years, the Hanswijk Cavalcade makes its way through the streets of Mechelen. This historic-religious procession with its many horses is usually followed by the *ommegang* or procession. UNESCO recognised the giants in the procession as world heritage. You can only witness the Cavalcade a few times in your lifetime. After the 2013 iteration, you will have to be patient until 2038!



Rik Wouters Garden – A tribute to a Mechelen artist

The Rik Wouters Garden, a small city garden, pays tribute to this Mechelen artist. Here you can relax as you gaze at the canal that was opened up again. There is a bronze bust of the artist in the park and the street artist Gijs Van Hee created a striking mural, which is inspired by Wouters's well-known, exuberant sculpture of *The Mad Maiden*. The location of the garden, which you can get to from Befferstraat or Rik Woutersstraat, is no coincidence. The artist lived in his parents' home (at no. 41-43) in Rik Woutersstraat for ten years.



Sculptural Mechelen

Nel – Wife and model

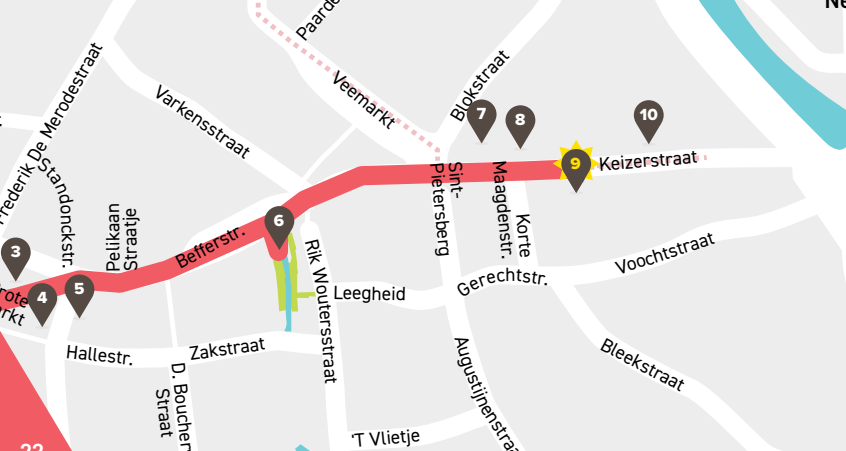
Can't get enough of Rik Wouters? You can find one of his sculptures in Sint-Romboutskerkhof. This is Nel, his model and wife. She is slightly bent over and has crossed her arms. Nel could not have surmised that her pose – listening to her husband's plans – would inspire him to create one of his most beautiful works. The sculpture is called *Domestic Chores*.

Rik Wouters – Light and colour

Rik Wouters (Mechelen, 1882 - Amsterdam, 1916) was born into a family of Mechelen wood carvers. He became famous in 1912 with his paintings and sculptures, in which he combined light, lightness and colour. Wouters's brief artistic career mainly unfolded in Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam but he always had a special relationship with his native Mechelen. Although he died young, at the age of 33, Rik Wouters left us a magnificent body of work. He continues to be one of Belgium's favourite artists.

Labelling his work is not easy: is he an Expressionist, an alternative Impressionist, a luminist...? Perhaps that is why Wouters's work is so powerful.





7

Church of St. Peter and St. Paul – Margaret's church

During the years she lived in Mechelen, Margaret of Austria had a special relationship with the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, which no longer exists. It was located on the opposite side of the street, where the current church stands today. A wooden bridge connected Margaret's palace with her own prayer space in the medieval church. Her intestines were buried here after her death.



When the church was demolished at the end of the eighteenth century, the parish church relocated to the vacant, Baroque Jesuit church on the opposite side of the street. The lead urn with Margaret's intestines moved to the "new" Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, where it was given a new place, near the main altar.

DID YOU KNOW?

Trace of a lost church

You can still see a remnant of the old, demolished Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Korte Maagdenstraat (at no. 3). It will help you better understand how Margaret of Austria's palace could be connected to this medieval church.



Lying and cheating?

City lore has it that the church has so many confessionals (14!) because it was located near Veemarkt where people tended to lie and cheat while selling their livestock, after which they went to confession. The real reason? The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul originally was a pilgrim's church, with plenty of relics. Anyone wishing to touch such a relic and gather strength from it had to be free of sin. Hence the large number of confessionals.



Palace of Margaret of York – *A bishop's palace becomes a theatre*

Initially this was the location of “Hof van Kamerijk”, the palace of Bishop John VI of Burgundy. In 1480, Margaret of York, who was the widow of the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold, transformed the residence into a real palace. Her court attracted many powerful people to Mechelen, which only enhanced the city's reputation. The Jesuits used the remnants of this palace, also called “Imperial Court” because Charles V spent his youth here, as a convent in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, the building was transformed into a city theatre. You can still spot Margaret's diamond-shaped coat of arms on the façade (to the right of the entrance), alongside that of her husband.



Who was Margaret of York?

In 1468, King Edward of England married off his sister Margaret to Charles the Bold, the recently-widowed Duke of Burgundy. The new family ties suited Edward well, as Charles was a reliable and wealthy ally against France.

Charles had a daughter from his previous marriage, Mary of Burgundy. She was only eleven when Margaret became her stepmother. The two got on very well with each other. Charles died on the battlefield (1477) and his daughter Mary succeeded him. She was only nineteen and inexperienced. Mary found herself having to deal with the confident wealthy Flemish cities, which clamoured for more independence. Margaret of York advised her as much as she could. The cities viewed her with mistrust. Margaret was forced to leave the court, moving to her widow's estate in Mechelen.



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Palace of Margaret of Austria – *A hub of art and science*

In 1507, Margaret of Austria moved to Mechelen, after becoming governess of the territory. Under Margaret, Mechelen became the capital of the Low Countries. Her newly-built city palace, Court of Savoy, was one of the first buildings with Renaissance elements in the Low Countries. It was designed by the prominent Mechelen architects Antoon and Rombout Keldermans.

The court was a meeting place for humanists, scientists and artists. In 1616, the Great Council moved into the building. Until then, it had held its sessions in the Aldermen's House. Since the nineteenth century, the building is occupied by the court of first instance. Margaret's coat of arms is still displayed on the façade, alongside her cousin's, Emperor Charles V, and a sculpture of Lady Justice.

Tip: take a look around in the beautiful courtyard.



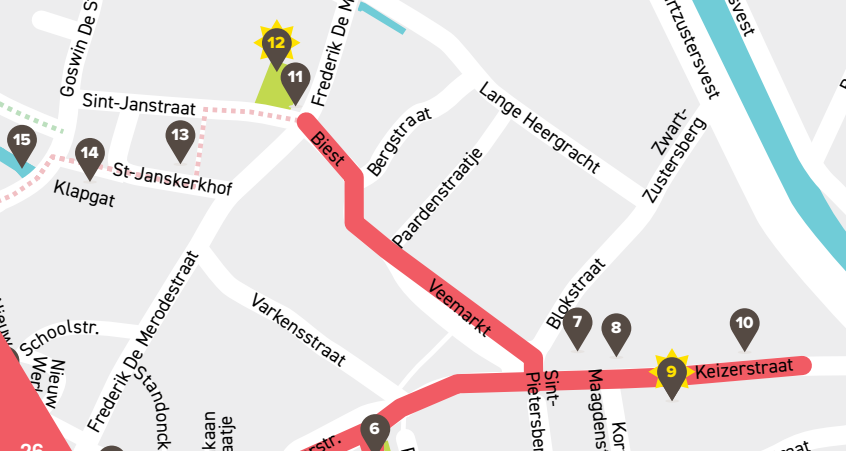


Who was Margaret of Austria?

Margaret had a turbulent start to life. She was married no fewer than three times. The French crown prince jilted her at the age of eleven because he found a more interesting match and the Spanish successor to the throne died shortly after they were married. The love of her life, Duke Philibert of Savoy, died after a happy marriage, which lasted only three years. Margaret, who was just 24 at the time, donned widow's black and refused to be married again. She became the governess of the Low Countries, moving to Mechelen in 1507.

She was also in charge of the education of (Emperor) Charles and his sisters. According to her contemporaries, she governed her territory with tact and a good understanding of politics. One of her greatest successes was the "Paix des Dames" ("The Ladies Peace"), or the Treaty of Cambrai in 1529. She was able to enforce this after tough negotiations with Louise de Savoye, the French king's mother, who also happened to be the sister of her dead husband Philibert. The arts and sciences flourished at Margaret's court, where prominent artists and philosophers resided in a time of sweeping change. Polyphonic music was one of her greatest passions. You can see her original choir book in Museum Hof van Busleyden. It is listed as one of the Flemish Masterpieces.





10

Margaret's Square -

The largest collection of retable cabinets

There used to be a hospital around Margaret's Square. The Augustinian nuns in Mechelen ran the hospital for almost 500 years, taking care of the largest collection of retable cabinets in Europe, probably the largest in the world. The seven retable cabinets, which are now on display at the Hof van Busleyden Museum, are top-notch Mechelen products! The themes depicted are fully aligned with the world of female religious followers in the Early Modern Period. Margaret of Austria herself also had various retable cabinets in her collection. She did not have them made in Mechelen but in Ghent. Walk back towards the Veemarkt and continue your route.



Sculptural Mechelen

Golden rocking horse



You can spot a striking gold statue of a young boy on his rocking horse opposite Hof van Savoye, in Margaretplein. This image refers to the childhood of Emperor Charles V in Mechelen, where he grew up at the court of his aunt, Margaret of Austria. The contemporary artwork *Powerless Structures* is by the Scandinavian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset. The original bronze version is four metres high. It was temporarily located at Trafalgar Square in London and is now part of the permanent collection of the Arken Museum of Modern Art in Ishøj, Denmark.



TIP

Toy Museum – Relive your childhood!

Walk 5 minutes (about 400 metres) up the road and you'll find yourself on the doorstep of the Toy Museum, which has one of the largest toy collections in Europe. It includes toys from around the world, from the past and present.

This is not your typical museum visit as you can also play your way through the museum. Try your hand at some traditional games or re-experience historic events like the Battle of Waterloo as if you were there yourself. Which toys did you play with as a child? And do you think children would still play with them today?

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11

't Schipke - World-famous

Het Schipke actually consists of two houses: a corner house and the adjacent house in Frederik de Merodestraat.

They were only combined during their renovation in 1772 in the run-up to the grandiose festivities to mark the 1000th anniversary of the death of St. Rumbold. This also explains their current Rococo appearance.

This striking corner house became world-famous as it was occupied by Jef Denyn's internationally acclaimed carillon school from 1947 until 2013.

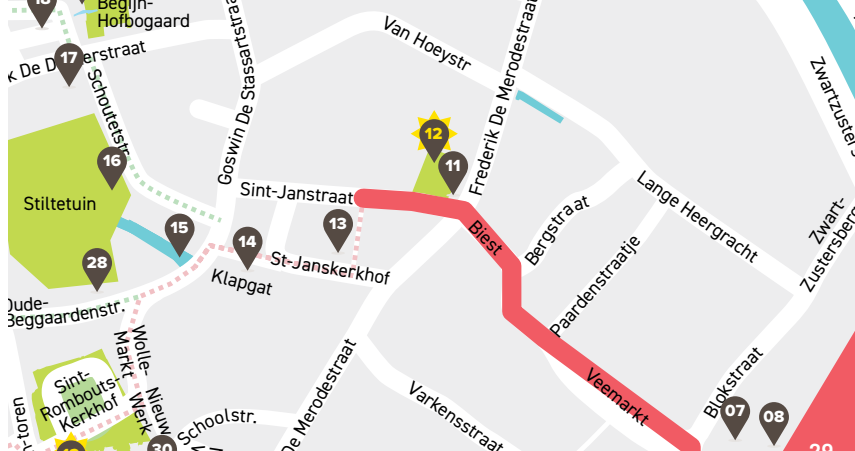
The school has since moved to a new building in Bruul. The part of the Hof van Busleyden Museum known as 't Schipke is undergoing extensive renovation. The museum will boast a bar with terrace and a brand-new educational space in the corner house.



**TIP****School of the Ursuline Nuns – A colourful winter garden**

You can find more women with a penchant for pioneering architecture just a 15-minute drive outside of Mechelen. The Ursuline nuns founded a boarding school for girls from good families in Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Waver at the end of the nineteenth century. Their school soon became internationally famous. But the various architectural styles of the buildings are just as international: they include neo-Classicism and the Art Nouveau of the beautifully-preserved winter garden from 1900, an impressive reception room for prominent visitors. This was the school's calling card. Enjoy the magical setting and the colour and light of the impressive dome. We still don't know the name of the architect who designed this stunning winter garden.

The Winter Garden is closed for renovation until the end of 2023. You'll find the latest information about its reopening at visitwintertuin.be.



Hof van Busleyden – *Burgundians, the Renaissance and our time*

Shortly after 1500, Hieronymus van Busleyden was an important humanist in the Netherlands. He built a magnificent palatial residence for himself in Mechelen, as a member of the Great Council of Mechelen, for his vast collection of books and art. Here he received prominent intellectuals, such as Erasmus and Thomas More. While the house's Gothic style is rather traditional, several elements also reveal the mindset of a man who was inspired by the new ideas of the Renaissance on his European travels. The new Museum Hof van Busleyden introduces its visitors to Mechelen's Burgundian past and how it still impacts the modern-day city today.





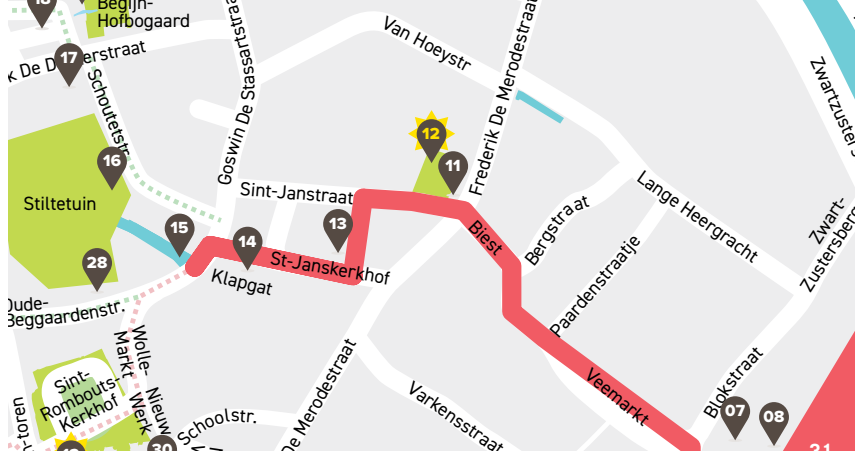
TIP

Enclosed Gardens and other masterpieces

You can see various authentic masterpieces by Flemish and other masters in the museum. Find out more about the heyday of Mechelen and the Burgundian Netherlands. And don't forget to take some time to admire the many delicate of the Enclosed Gardens: these lavish, moving and unique sixteenth-century masterpieces were created by anonymous women artists. Another masterpiece you can't afford to miss is the magnificent Mechelen choir book from Margaret of Austria's private collection. Like so many other beautifully illuminated music manuscripts, it was produced in the workshop of Petrus Alamire, whose name even sounds like music...

While renovation work is under way at the museum, the permanent collection is closed to visitors. For updates, go to hofvanbusleyden.be.





13

Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist – A treasury and a church

The Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist – a Gothic building with a Baroque interior – was built from the end of the fourteenth century until the mid-fifteenth century. Two larger than life patron saints stand guard at the foot of the western tower: the murals represent St. Christopher who protected the faithful from an unexpected death and St. George who fought evil in the form of a dragon. They can only be visited with a guide.

St. John's Parish was one of the wealthiest parishes in Mechelen. After the Great Council moved to Court of Savoy, Margaret of Austria's former palace, many counsellors relocated to the parish. They invested both in the parish and the church. Rubens's Baroque triptych *The Adoration of the Magi*, on the main altar, is perhaps the most resplendent of the church's many treasures.

DID YOU KNOW?

A second choir?

While this church looks as if it has two choirs, the structure to the left of the "actual" choir is a chapel that was literally added onto the church in 1548. The building was commissioned by the president of the Great Council, Lambert de Briaerde. This Chapel of the Sacraments is just as large as the choir. The tombs of the couple who paid for the church, de Briaerde and his wife Marguerite Micault, are still in the chapel.





TIP Virtual Mechelen

Using the platform 'Virtual Mechelen' you can visit locations you can't usually enter. The murals in the St. John the Baptist Church and the St. John the Evangelist Church are just one example. Climb the tower without needing to climb any stairs? Peek inside Margaret's Palace? The online portal provides a virtual walk through the city and allows you to discover the most important tourist highlights from within. **Visit virtueelmechelen.be now.**

14

Klapgat – Catching up under Christ's watchful eye

Het Klapgat is a tiny alleyway opposite the tower of the Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. Church-goers used to gather in this alley after Mass to catch up ("klappen" or chat). But they did this so often and so loudly that the alley was soon called Klapgat.

The *Hofje van Olijven* or Mount of Olives, an ensemble which dates from before 1578, stands at the entrance to Klapgat. The masonry was renovated in 1874. These sixteenth-century wooden sculptures portray Christ and his three favourite apostles on the eve of Christ's Passion. In the past, the faithful would convene here to pray in difficult times. They would drop a 'susse' (1 centime) or a 'cent' (2 centimes) in the collection box.





TIP

Kazerne Dossin – Never forget

Just five minutes from here (400 metres), you can visit Kazerne Dossin, Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights.

Kazerne Dossin is a unique place of remembrance in Belgium. During World War II, the ‘SS Sammellager Mecheln’ was death’s waiting room for over 25,000 Belgian and Northern French Jews and gypsies. The transports left for the concentration camp from this barracks, which was transformed into a museum to explain the historic relevance of this site and such themes as racism, exclusion and human rights.

The combination of the historic narrative of the Holocaust in Belgium with the theme of human rights has helped transform Kazerne Dossin into a project of European relevance. The leading architect and former Flemish Master Architect bOb Van Reeth created the unique design for the new museum opposite the former barracks.



Groen Waterke – An urban idyll

Het Groen Waterke is one of the many idyllic beauty spots around Mechelen. The canal owes its name to the water surface which is covered with duckweed. In effect, this is a part of the Melaan canal, which was not covered or filled in. Here you can really sense how quiet it must have been in the city in the old days. You are also quite near the Refuges of the Abbeys of Sint-Truiden and Tongerlo.

DID YOU KNOW?

The “heimelikheden”

Small platforms, which were used as toilets, were often built on the side façades of buildings near the water. They were called “heimelikheden” or secret places, which is quite funny considering everyone could see you.

One day, the prioress of the nearby nun’s convent sent an angry letter to the town council. She complained about the young men, who would sail under these toilets with little boats and shoot tiny arrows at the nuns’ buttocks with their blowpipes. Her complaint was deemed justified and soon after the number of boats on the canal dwindled.



TIP

Mechelen sends you on your way

The anecdote about the toilets is taken from a walking guide titled *Mechelen sends you on your way*. Children can learn more about the child-friendly city of Mechelen thanks to several fun facts and stories.

Further information from Visit Mechelen.





TIP
**Farther abreast –
A walk through the
Beguinage**

Are you up for more Mechelen? From here, you can take a walk through Mechelen's two beguinages, which takes about 40 minutes (1,5 km). **See page 48.**

28

Archbishop's Palace – Italy in Mechelen

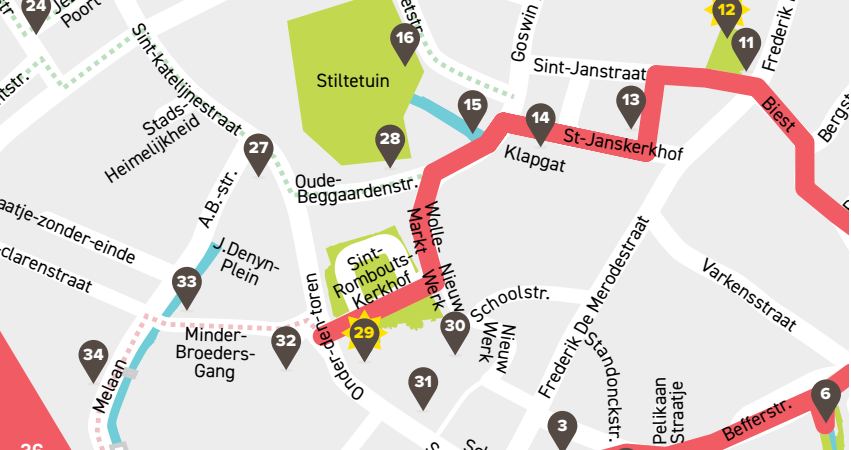
You can find this classic eighteenth-century palace, which was commissioned by Cardinal Thomas Philippe d'Alsace, in Wollemarkt. It owes its Italianate influences to an unknown Italian architect. Typical classicist features include the simple façade structure, a lot of horizontalism and the U-shaped floor plan. Originally there were two patrician houses here, which were used as the Refuge of the Abbey of Affligem.

DID YOU KNOW?

Silent garden

The sizeable verdant oasis in the shadow of St. Rumbold's Tower is actually the historic garden of the Archbishop's Palace in Wollemarkt. Take a stroll through the garden and admire the storage buildings, the grotto, the garden pavilion, and the garden wall, which have all been restored to their former glory. The garden is open on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons. You can access the garden from Schoutetstraat.





29

St. Rumbold's Tower and skywalk – *Towering high above the city*

St. Rumbold's Tower is the quintessential symbol of Mechelen. The founding stone of this imposing monument was laid in 1452. Originally, the tower was supposed to stand 167 metres tall, but construction stopped in the early sixteenth century at 97 metres. The tower was also used as a belfry, as the belfry of the present-day town hall was never completed. The city's most important documents were preserved here and the bells sounded the alarm in case of imminent danger. The panoramic view from the top of the tower made it easy to spot any threat. The tower underwent a thorough restoration in 1981, when a new carillon was also installed. Do you want to experience this breath-taking view? You can! At least, if you overcome the 538 steps that separate you from the skywalk. Don't be deterred. You can catch your breath in one of the six tower rooms. Or in all six: in the Crane Room, where you can see the two carillons, or in the Ash Cellar. A cellar at the top of the tower? The visitor's guide contains plenty of fascinating facts about the amazing history of this tower, which is listed as UNESCO World Heritage. The view from the top and the journey up to it are a unique experience.

DID YOU KNOW?

Malinovy Zvon

Did you know that the Russian word for carillon translates as "Sounds of Mechelen" or "Malinovy Zvon"?



**DID YOU KNOW?**

The carillon

Legend has it that the people of Mechelen are always late. They arrive at “Mechelen time”. In all fairness, they always apologise too. That is why they decided to install the world’s largest clock on all four sides of the tower in the eighteenth century. The gigantic dials were even larger than Big Ben’s in London. They only indicated the hour.

The people of Mechelen used to listen to the carillon to know the exact time and they still do so today. While the clock is no longer there, the carillon plays a chime every 15 minutes.

The strike in between the quarters of the hour, every 7.5 minutes, is called the “Mechelen halfke” (“Little Mechelen half”). The oldest bell, called Yhesus, dates from 1480, Margaret of Austria’s birth year. Every week in summer, the city organises carillon concerts. The carillon school holds the Queen Fabiola international carillon competition every five years.





Carillon school

Mechelen is home to a world-famous carillon school. It was founded in 1922 by the carillonneur Jef Denyn and was the first of its kind around the world. The school received financial support from Herbert Hoover, John D. Rockefeller Jr. and William Gorham Rice among others and is still very popular. Students from all over the world travel to Mechelen to learn all about the art of carillon playing.

For many years, the carillon school was based in 't Schipke. In 2013, it moved to Bruul.



30

St. Rumbold's Cathedral – *A cathedral jam-packed with art*

Work started on the present-day cathedral as early as the thirteenth century. It was consecrated in 1312 and construction on St. Rumbold's

Tower commenced around 1450. By the early sixteenth century, the funds dried up and construction ground to a halt. In 1559, the church became a cathedral, a church where the archbishop has his "seat".

The cathedral has many stunning artworks, starting with the Gothic choir and the tombs of the archbishops. The coats of arms of the knights who participated in the Fifteenth Chapter meeting of the prestigious Order of the Golden Fleece, in 1491, presided by the thirteen-year old duke, Philip the Good, also hang here. And you can also see the 25-part series of paintings about the life of St. Rumbold here.

Perhaps Margaret of York commissioned these. They give you a very good idea of what Mechelen used to look like around 1500.





Sculptural Mechelen

Den Uil statue – *The place to be*

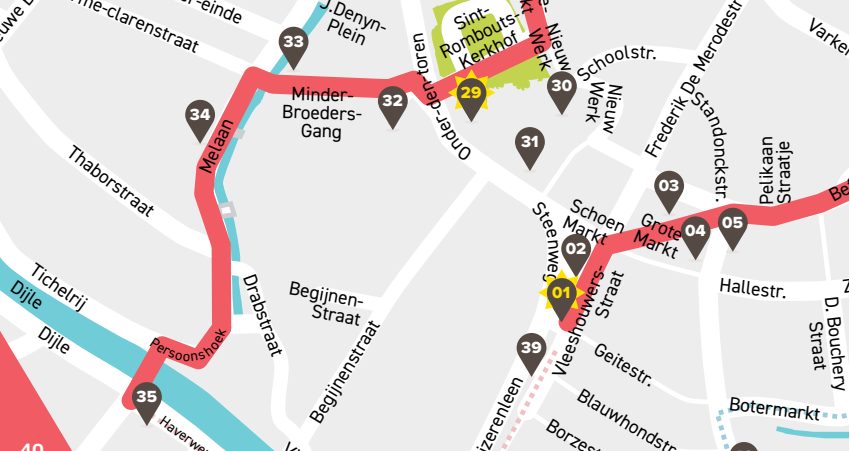
“Let’s meet at Den Uil?” Recently a lot of locals have taken to saying this. The owl – the work’s official name is *The Great Vivisector* – stands in the square between the Post Office and St. Rumbold’s Cathedral and is a meeting place for people of all ages. The imposing 3.25-metre tall bronze sculpture weighs over a ton. The artist Johan Creten (b. 1963) is the first Belgian artist to exhibit his work in the Louvre during his lifetime. Take a seat on the work and pose for a picture.

Cultuurplein – *From poor relief to a cultural centre*

The cultural centre, the academy, the city’s conservatory and De Garage, a contemporary art space, are all located around Cultuurplein. You can still recognise the nave of the church of the former convent of the Friars Minor, which once stood here and which has since been incorporated in the cultural centre. The church was used as a hayloft for a long time. You can see the medieval Chapel of the Holy Spirit to the left of this building, where the poor begged for assistance. Every parish had so-called Tables of the Holy Spirit. Once a week, usually on Sunday, the benefactors, who were in charge of overseeing the parish’s poor relief effort, would provide food and other aid to the poor, in return for a token, which proved that they had gone to Mass first.

These institutions mainly earned an income from land, which they acquired through inheritances and donations. This system had a weakness however. The income was lower in difficult times, meaning less funds were available to provide for a growing number of needy and poor people. The chapel is now part of the Beeldsmederij De Maan (“Image Forgery The Moon”).





33

De Cellekens – From almshouse to artist's residence

You can visit a unique monument near St. Rumbold's Tower. From 1854 onwards, De Cellekens was an almshouse for poor, single women. The three wings come together in a U-shape around the lovely courtyard garden. The Convent House is the central building, with two rows of typical almshouses with arched doorways to the left and right of it. Each door originally gave access to two small rooms, with a bed, wardrobe, chair and table. The institution's name refers to these "cells". The building remained vacant for many decades, after which the new owners, the artist Mariette Teugels and her husband, the photographer Herman Smet, restored it. They received the prestigious Europa Nostra award for their efforts in 2002. You can see works by Teugels in the new garden.

Gothic chapel

The Scheppersinstituut school along Melaan was founded in the nineteenth century. Before this, it was the site of the convent of the Poor Clares. Their Gothic chapel, which dates from 1513, from the era of Margaret of Austria, was preserved and incorporated in the school. You can see it at No. 12, Melaan.



34

Melaan – A place by the water

Every local loves to take a stroll along the banks of Melaan. This tributary of the River Dyle was one of the last visible canals in the city and was only covered in 1913. Until 2007, when it was uncovered thanks to a European project to restore “Water in Historic City Centres”. Sit down on one of the many benches and gaze at the water.

41

35

Haverwerf – Three attractions

Originally oats were unloaded and traded here. Oats were synonymous with cereals and Mechelen had the exclusive staple right for this. This meant that cereal barges had to moor in Mechelen and offer their goods for sale here for three days. The skippers then loaded the grain that had not been sold back onto their barge and moved on.





TIP

A boat trip on the Inner Dyle

Hop on a boat in Haverwerf for a trip through the marina and Keerdok. It's the perfect way to experience Mechelen's city centre from a different perspective as you sail past Vismarkt, Grootbrug, the Botanic Garden and Volmolen. See how the locals live in historic and modern buildings on the water. Living in a house on the river must be simply amazing. The boat trips are organised from April until the end of October.

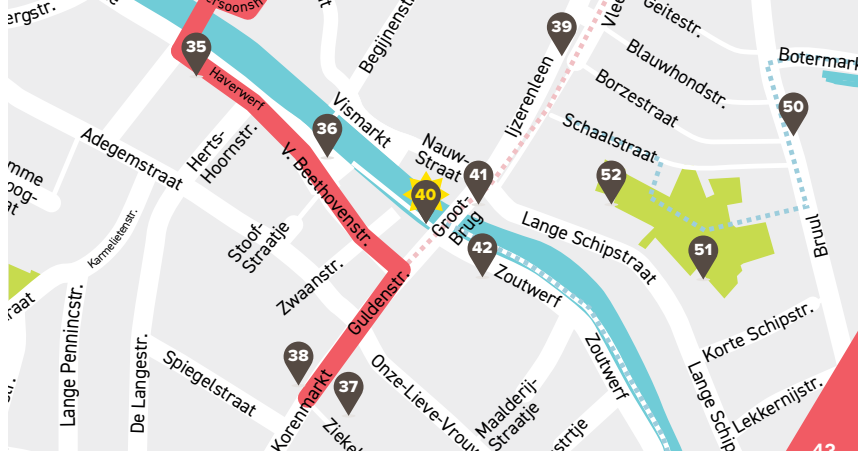


The houses near the bridge will immediately catch your eye. They date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and are the main attraction in Haverwerf. The corner house is called *Het Paradijske* or "The Little Paradise" and the reliefs above the windows reveal why. They represent "The Garden of Eden" and "The Tree of the knowledge of good and evil". The middle house is called *De Duiveltjes* and has one of the most beautiful wooden façades in Belgium. It used to be called "The Prodigal Son". This parable from the gospel is shown above the front door. Nowadays it is named after the satyr sculptures, which act as supporting columns on the first floor. The Baroque house of Sint-Jozef stands to the left of it, and features a relief of Saint Joseph and Jesus in the centre of its façade. Continue your walk along the water and enjoy the surroundings!

36

Lamot site + Vismarkt – Hip and trendy

Enjoy the view of the Lamot Congress and Heritage Centre from Haverwerf. The industrial heritage of this former brewery has been preserved in a contemporary manner, transforming it into one of Mechelen's



hotspots. Walk up the steps and peek inside!

Fish was first traded in 1531 in Vismarkt on the opposite side, after the fishmongers had been banned from IJzerenleen, by Margaret of Austria among others. Why, you ask? Because people couldn't stand the fish odour. Until a few decades ago, there was a large concentration of fish shops here. Nowadays it is one of Mechelen's nicest squares, with fish and other shops and plenty of pubs and restaurants.

At night, Vismarkt and adjoining Nauwstraat are always busy. Head to the laidback traditional pubs, the stylish modern lounge bars and the trendy restaurants to meet the young and the young at heart of Mechelen.





TIP Mechelen Muurt

Mechelen Muurt is a project by former city artist Gijs Vanhee. He invited ten (inter)national artists to do something with ten selected walls within the city. Vanhee painted the work shown here as the closing act of the project. 'The Gift' symbolically represents how the street is given back to the people who live there, by enriching cold bare walls with colour and stories.

More information can be found through [Visit Mechelen](#).



37

Hof van Cortenbach – A hidden gem

Hof van Cortenbach is an early sixteenth-century city palace. This gem is somewhat hidden in the inner area behind Huis Den Drake, also known as Den Breckpot, held by Ywein van Cortenbach. His son Jan IV built a home for himself in the courtyard of his father's house. He may have commissioned it from the famous architect Rombout II Keldermans. In any event, he confirmed his status as a prominent citizen with this imposing house. He was a member of the town council and even served as mayor several times.



Hof van Schoofs – A prestigious building

This monumental city palace was built for the noble Schoofs family. In the fifteenth century, they combined two existing houses, called Het Schaakberd (The Chess Board) and De Leeuw (The Lion). Around 1474, Jean Carondelet, the president of the Parliament of Mechelen, may have also briefly lived here.

Around the 1550s, the building was purchased by the wealthy wine merchant Claude Ritz, who probably added the impressive high tower. Afterwards, the city palace was used as the guild house of the guild of the old crossbow, as a shop, hotel and ironmonger's.



TIP

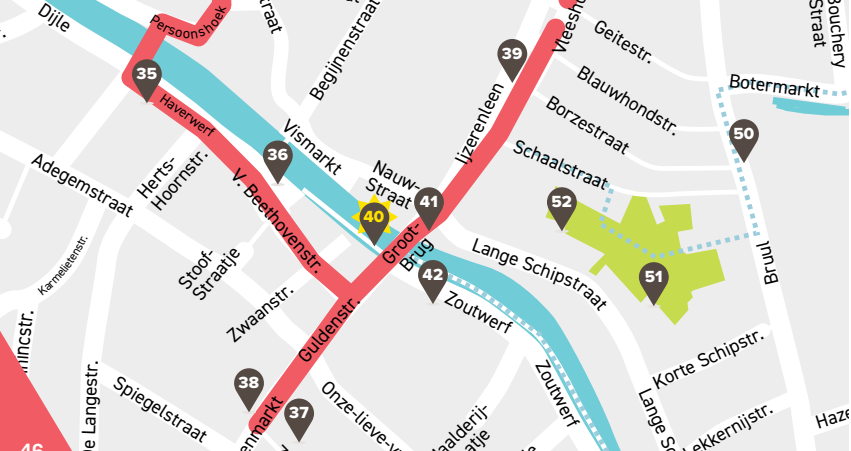
A walk along the water and into nature

Do you want to see Mechelen's greener side? Then turn back and walk up the Dyle path in Zoutwerf. This extension takes 60 minutes (2,4 km).

See page 62.

Are your legs tired? Then head to IJzerenleen and the Aldermen's House and find a table on one of the many terraces. As you walk to IJzerenleen, you pass the lovely houses in Zoutwerf and Grootbrug. **Go to p. 64 if you want to find out more about them.**





39

IJzerenleen – Mechelen’s Champs Elysées

According to the locals, IJzerenleen is really the “Champs Elysées” of their city. Fortunately there is less traffic but the façades are imposing, the window displays of the shops highly appealing and you can also see one of Flanders’ oldest town halls here.

In the past, there used to be a small canal here, which ran from the River Dyle to Koolvliet. This is also where the fish market was held. IJzerenleen was named after the iron railings along the canal, which are still here. The canal itself was covered in the sixteenth century. While the façades may look like they date from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively, they are not original. Many of them were destroyed during World War I. They were rebuilt in a variety of old styles, after many discussions and an architectural competition.



DID YOU KNOW?

Vlietenkelder

The covered canal in the middle of IJzerenleen was used as a bomb shelter during World War II. Check out the map of all the former canals on one of the access hatches in the ground.





TIP Shopping

You can shop till you drop in Mechelen's shopping centre. Bruul, IJzerenleen/Guldenstraat, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat and the surrounding streets are all very pedestrian-friendly, making this area a nice place to shop. Well-known chains and elegant boutiques stand side by side with more "traditional" establishments, like a cheesemonger, a chocolate shop, a tobacconist, a handicraft shop, a hat maker and so on. What's more, vehicles are banned at certain times of the day in some of the streets. The Saturday morning market in and around Grote Markt is also highly recommended.



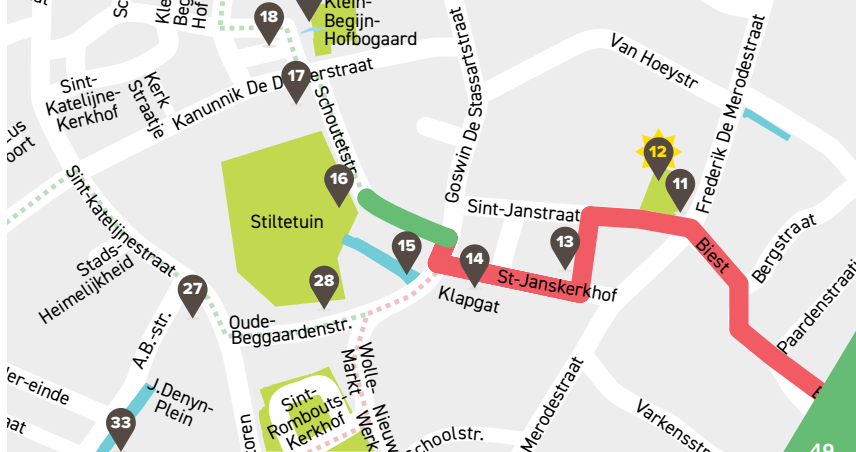
FARTHER ABREAST

Through the Beguinage

40
MIN.

1,5
KM

The extension of this walk starts in Goswin de Stassartstraat and ends in Oude Beggaardenstraat. It takes about 40 minutes (1,5 km).



16

Refuge of the Abbey of Sint-Truiden – A city palace for the abbey

Abbeys and convents built refuges very early on in different cities, from where they oversaw their nearby land. This also provided them with a place to stay when they were travelling or a refuge in case of danger. In the sixteenth century, Canon Willem Sarens transformed a house and tower along Groen Waterke into a real city palace. He intended to use it as his own home and as a refuge for the Benedictine abbey of St. Truiden, of which his brother was the abbot.

The abbey sold the refuge in the early seventeenth century. The main building was used as a residence for magistrates of the Great Council. In 1921, the Province of Antwerp acquired the building and restored it. The archdiocese's archives and administration were moved here over time.



DID YOU KNOW?

Starlings on the menu

Starling pots, in which these birds build their nests, have been incorporated in the elegant tower. Starling was considered a delicacy well into the nineteenth century.



Refuge of Tongerlo Abbey – *Tapestry manufacturers*

There were about a dozen refuges of abbeys and convents in the city in the sixteenth century. The Norbertine abbey of Tongerlo built such a refuge in Schoutetstraat in 1484, near the refuge of the Abbey of Sint-Truiden. Antoon I Keldermans, Philip the Good's architect, is said to have been involved in the construction. The abbey owned the refuge for three centuries.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the building changed function several times. It was used as a police barracks and archiepiscopal museum among others. Since 1986, the restored refuge is occupied by the Royal Tapestry Manufacturers De Wit, which also preserves, restores and exhibits tapestries from the Burgundian era. Take a look around the courtyard!

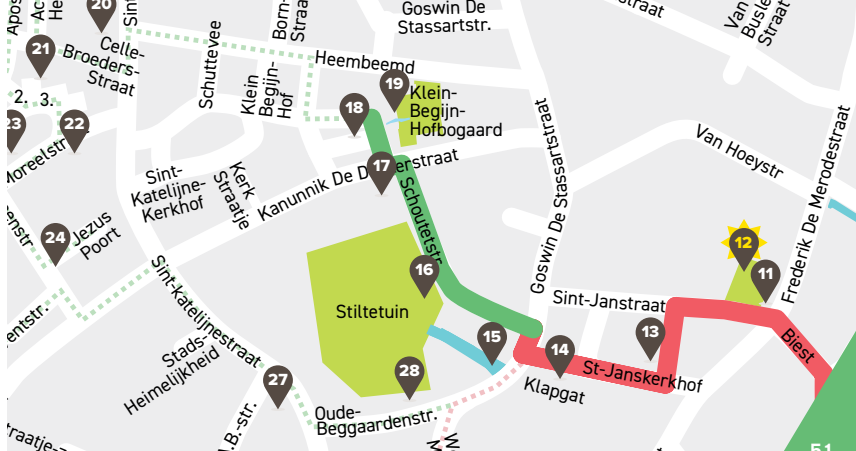


TIP

De Wit Royal Tapestry Manufacturers

This manufacturer is world-famous. Its employees manually restore valuable tapestries. De Wit receives commissions from around the world, among others because of its patented, ingenious cleaning system. Moreover, they also own a prestigious collection of antique and modern tapestries, from the Burgundian era among others. The Manufacture welcomes individual visitors on Saturday mornings.

Further information from Visit Mechelen.



18

Small Beguinage – *A haven of peace*

The Small Beguinage is a charming oasis in the city centre. Mechelen's oldest beguinage dates from the thirteenth century. Another beguinage was subsequently built outside the city walls but the old and sick beguines continued to live here. The courtyard used to have three gates, which no longer exist. The Small Beguinage was beautifully renovated as part of a Flemish effort to renovate city centres.

19

Tuin van Oh! – *Charming neighbourhood park*

There is a small park near the Oh! business centre, which offers start-ups an office space and coaching. The garden was built as additional green space, a small verdant oasis in the city, for the neighbouring residents and visitors. An unknown canal was discovered during construction, which was beautifully integrated into this lovely neighbourhood park.



Gulden Kop – A wooden façade

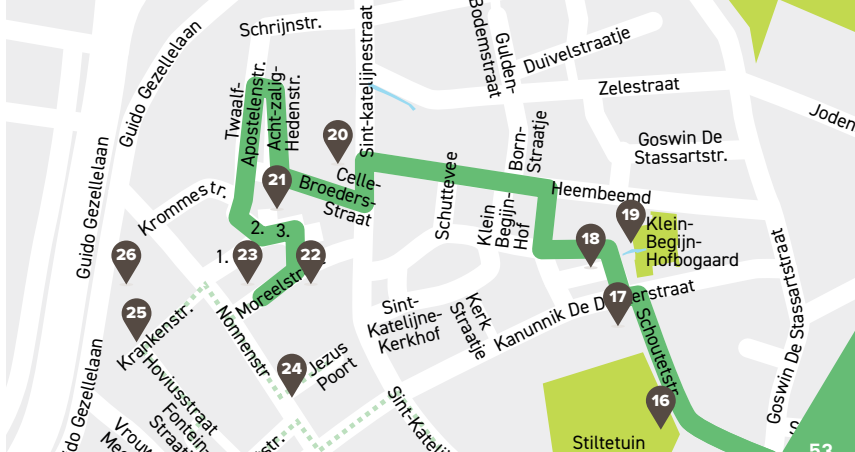
The Gulden Kop house, which was subsequently renamed Prins van Parma (Prince of Parma), is the family house of the Waghevens family. This family of clock founders lived and worked in Mechelen from 1460 until 1568. The large workshop and the high gate to the left which leads to it are evidence of their trade. The sixteenth-century late-Gothic wooden pointed gable façade was restored in the nineteenth century.



Cellenbroedersklooster – From monks to beguines

The monks of the former Alexian monastery in Begijnenkerkhof tended to the (mentally) ill from 1448 onwards. In the early seventeenth century, they moved to Hof van Naussau in Nokerstraat, transferring their convent to the beguines, who moved inside the city walls. The complex consists of two perpendicular wings. The restoration of the main building in 2000 uncovered a unique “treasury”, with sixteenth and seventeenth-century interior decoration.





22

Large Beguinage – A miniature city in the city

In 1578, the beguinage outside the city walls was destroyed, forcing the beguines to move into the city, to the Large Beguinage. They bought several dwellings in an existing city neighbourhood, built new houses and closed the beguinage with gates. As a result of its specific history, the Large Beguinage in Mechelen is even more unique, compared with the beguinages in other cities.

The small, picturesque streets of Mechelen's two beguinages are quiet and peaceful, making them a nice place to live. Many of the houses are listed monuments.

The occupants of the beguinage would appreciate it if you respect their peace and privacy.



Beguines and beguinages

Beguinages were founded around the time of the crusades when many men did not return from the Holy Land, resulting in many widows, orphans and single women. A convent was one solution. Often convents only welcomed rich women or noblewomen however. That is why women decided to live together and become self-sufficient. Beguinages thus became small cities of women in the city, with a bakery, a brewery, a hospice, a church and bleaching fields. Unlike nuns, beguines did not take a vow of poverty. They were not bound to the cloister for life, although this was customary. The number of beguines steadily dropped from the nineteenth century onwards. Mechelen's last beguine died in 1993.



Beguinaige Church – *A prestigious church*

At the end of the sixteenth century, Mechelen's beguines founded a new court within the city walls. They also built a new church in Nonnenstraat, which was the main road into and out of the beguinaige. Archbishop Boonen laid the founding stone in 1629.

Jacques Francart, the court architect of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, designed the plans for the Baroque church with Italianate influences, together with the Jesuit Pieter Huyssens. The young Mechelen sculptor Lucas Faydherbe helped decorate it. The beguines must have been quite rich to afford such prestigious architects and artists. By this time, it is estimated there were about a thousand beguines, and many brought dowries with them. The devotion of the beguines was heavily oriented towards female saints, as is evidenced from the decoration in the Beguinaige Church in Mechelen.



UNESCO World Heritage

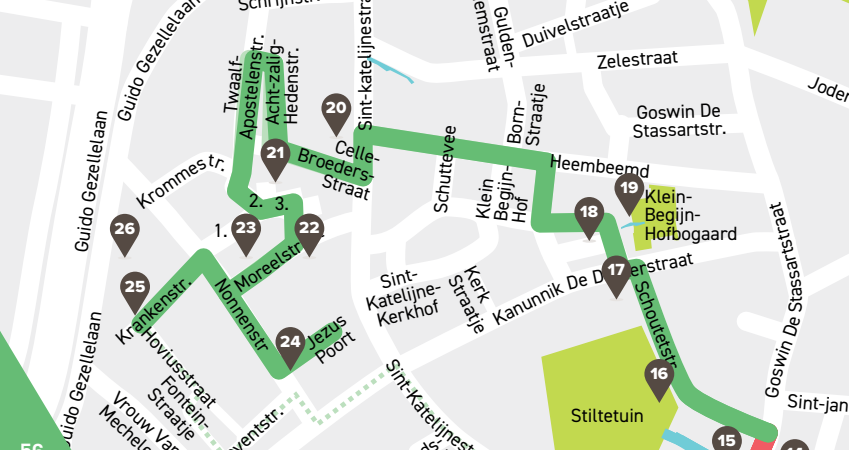
Mechelen's Large Beguinaige was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, along with twelve other Flemish beguinaiges, because of its age, its typical Flemish appearance and unique architecture and structure.

"The beguinaiges bear witness to the cultural tradition of independent religious women in north-western Europe in the Middle Ages", according to the UNESCO website. These are the other Mechelen sites on the list: St. Rumbold's Tower, the town hall's belfry.

Certain customs are also considered intangible cultural heritage, as an expression of cultural identity or diversity:

Mechelen's giants, Mechelen's carillon culture, Belgian beer, including Mechelen's.





24

Hof van Fontes/Jesus' Gate – A noble court for the beguines

Nonnenstraat is one of the main streets in the Large Beguinage as this is where the first buildings were located, which the beguines bought when they moved their beguinage within the city walls at the end of the sixteenth century. You can also find Hof van Fontes here. It is named after its former owner, Philip of Burgundy, Lord of Fontes and advisor and chamberlain to Philip the Good.

The sixteenth-century Jesus' Gate, which was also part of the beguinage, is a partly integrated passage, which gives out onto a small courtyard lined with houses of beguines.



Rich, less rich and poor

The beguinage was under the guidance of a Grand Mistress or prioress, who was assisted by mistresses. Rich beguines, who often came from noble families, built or bought a house in the beguinage. Beguines who were not that well off rented a room from them or did their housekeeping. The poor beguines lived in convents, or small cloisters. These were usually founded by benefactors, in exchange for prayers for the salvation of their dead family members or for themselves.

The beguines in convents worked to earn a livelihood. Lacemaking became their main occupation from the seventeenth century onwards. Mechelen lace is produced without needles and is widely renowned as the most difficult and the most expensive lace to make, because of its outstanding quality. Mechelen lace is sometimes also called royal lace because the English and French courts ordered so much of it.



25

Brouwerij Het Anker – *More than five centuries of tradition*

You will end up at the rear façade of the Het Anker brewery in Krankensstraat. It was founded in 1471, making it one of Belgium's oldest breweries. Emperor Charles was a great fan of the Mechelen beer that was brewed here. He even placed several orders for beer after he moved to Spain. In 1872, the Van Breedam family bought the brewery. And that is why you can still taste this renowned beer more than five centuries later, thanks to their passion for the beer brewing profession and their keen interest in Mechelen's Golden Age under the dukes of Burgundy. Charles Leclef, the fifth generation of this family, took over at the brewery's helm in 1990, restoring the old buildings and modernising the installations. In 2010, he opened a whisky distillery in the seventeenth-century family farm in Blaasveld. Gouden Carolus Single Malt has since gone on to win several international awards and is well loved by customers worldwide, just like the beers of Het Anker. Step through the entrance gate into the courtyard of the Brewery.





TIP Gouden Carolus

Gouden Carolus comes in many different versions. The best known version is probably Gouden Carolus Classic. In 2012, this specialty beer was elected the world's best dark ale. The beers and whisky of Het Anker have won several awards.

TIP White gold and other regional products

Mechelen is proud of its regional products. Mechelen's horticultural industry is internationally acclaimed and chefs know that Mechelen's vegetable auction has some of the best produce. Tender baby vegetables, Belgian endive and asparagus, Belgium's white gold, all titillate the taste buds of gourmets. And what's more, they're also healthy.

Foodies also enjoy Mechelse Koekoek: the flesh of this chicken, which is a cross between indigenous chickens with cuckoo plumage and an Asian chicken, is quite firm. It tastes delicious and works well in several dishes. And of course, you should wash it down with a good Gouden Carolus!



Infirmiry of the Large Beguinage – *From hospital ward to brewery*

By 1250, Mechelen's beguines had their own infirmiry, a hospital for beguines who fell ill and the city's poor. After they moved into the city, the former refuge of St. Bernard's Abbey in Hemiksem was turned into an infirmiry in the early seventeenth century. After the beguinage was closed, the refuge briefly became a nursing home for poor elderly citizens.

The beguinage's former brewery was transformed into the Het Anker brewery in the early twentieth century. Here they still brew Gouden Carolus or "the Emperor's beer". Every year, on 24 February, Charles V's birthday, Het Anker brews its Gouden Carolus Cuvée of the Keizer Imperial Dark.

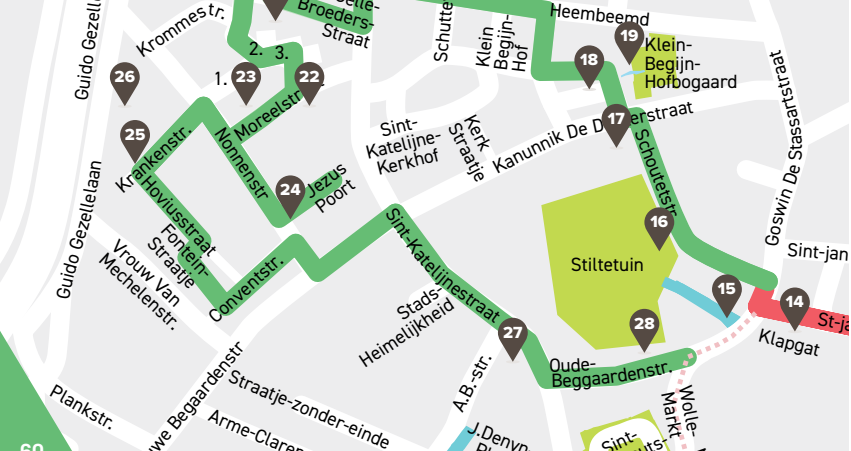


DID YOU KNOW?

Not that pious...

In 1467, Charles the Bold visited Mechelen. He decided that the beguines did not have to pay taxes and excise on the beer that they brewed for their own consumption. But the beguines did not always stick to the rules, selling their beer illegally to outsiders. Many centuries later, an ordinance was issued, threatening to fine the beguines 25 guilders, if they continued to sell beer to customers who did not live in the beguinage.





27

In den Vijgenboom – *Oldest wooden façade*

Mechelen still has about five houses with a centuries-old wooden façade. The oldest is in In Den Vijgenboom, on the corner of Sint-Katelijnestraat and A.B.-straat. This house, with its wooden pointed façade, dates from the early sixteenth century. The sculptures around the upper windows represent a hammer, pliers and an anvil. The house probably belonged to a member of the smiths' guild at one time.



55 Preachers Monastery - 'literary wellness centre'

Cities are never complete. Mechelen is no exception. This brochure is a snapshot. Numerous urban renewal projects have either been started or are underway at the time of going to press.

This includes the Tinel site near the Dossin barracks. This district will become a particularly interesting location. Housing, green spaces, fine dining, culture and leisure have always had and will have a place here. The Dominican convent has already been transformed into a city library. This 'literary wellness centre', which opened in September, is a wonderful place to catch your breath. Do walk up to the attic, where the imposing roof structure with heavy wooden beams has been retained.



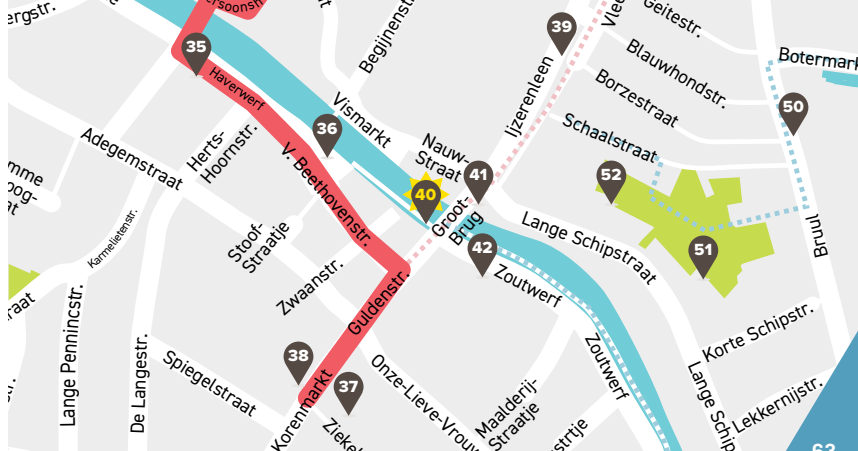
FURTHER ABREAST ALONG

the Dyle tow-path

The extension of this walk starts in Zoutwerf and ends in IJzerenleen. It takes 60 minutes (2,4 km).

60
MIN.

2,4
KM



Dyle towpath – A stroll along the river

The locals enjoy their city and it is easy to see why! To be fair, a walk along the water in the city centre is quite unique and very relaxing. And walking along the floating Dyle towpath is highly recommended. It winds its way along (and over) the River Dyle, and extends from Haverwerf to the Botanic Garden.

Discover Mechelen from a different perspective, as you walk past the rear of luxurious lofts and quaint old houses. The many waterbirds make this walk even more picturesque and entertaining, including for children.





41

Grootbrug – Flanders’ oldest bridge?

Hoogbrug or Grootbrug, which dates from the thirteenth century, is the oldest (sand)stone bridge in Mechelen, and perhaps even in all of Flanders. It connects IJzerenleen with Korenmarkt, and was part of the city’s fortifications at one time, and was also a toll bridge. The last arch, on the corner of IJzerenleen, indicates where the canal or vliet, which ran between the iron railings, once flowed into the Dyle. Hoogbrug also leads to Brusselpoort, Mechelen’s only remaining city gate, which is situated along Mechelen’s small city ring road.

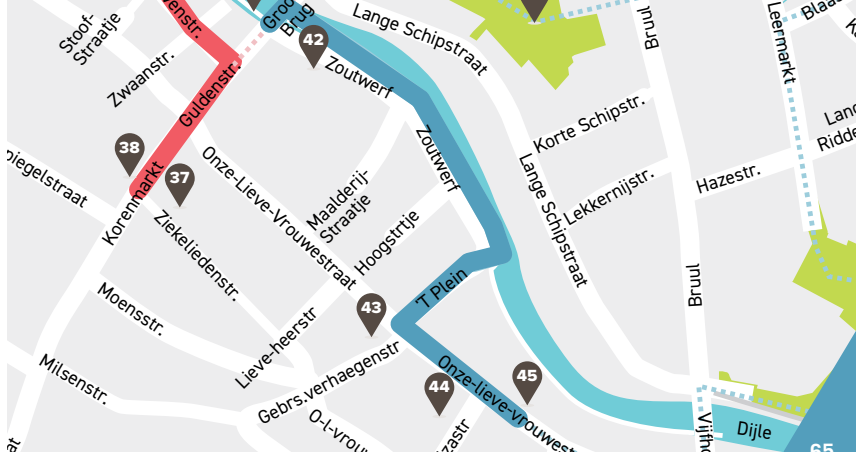
42

Zoutwerf – Port activities

1301. Mechelen is granted the staple right for salt. This meant that all salt that passed through the city had to be unloaded here and offered for sale. The historic quay on Grootbrug was renamed “Zoutwerf” or salt wharf.

The two authentic wooden pointed gable façades of *De Waag* and *De Steur* (no. 7 and 8) will immediately catch your eye. With a imagination, you can visualise how boats were unloaded here. The goods were stored in *De Steur* and weighed in *De Waag*. The current façades date from the sixteenth century.

The former guild house of the fishmongers, called *In den Grooten Zalm* (no. 5), also stands out. The name has been carved out in relief above the door. A scroll bearing the name of the house is wound around the gilded salmon. The trade displayed its wealth with this lavish Renaissance façade – the first of its kind in Belgium – around 1530. The other guilds still stuck to the Gothic style, using wood for their buildings.



43

Hemelrijck – *A unique Garden of Eden*

You can see at a glance why this house is called *Hemelrijck* (Kingdom of Heaven): Adam and Eve are portrayed above the door, in the Garden of Eden. Other parts of the façade have also been richly decorated. Mechelen's coat of arms crowns the façade, and is surrounded by two mermaids. Hemelrijck is a unique house: it is one of the oldest examples in Mechelen of the transition of the late Gothic into the Renaissance, with its typical decoration. The house was built in the early sixteenth century for the artistic Snellinck family. It was part of a set of four houses, called the Four Evangelists.



44

Church of Our Lady across the River Dyle – *Light, space and Rubens*

The Gothic church of Our Lady across the River Dyle is very spacious and light. It was built from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century, where Mechelen's first parish church once probably stood. It contains a few highlights, including Rubens's *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*. He painted this masterpiece for the wealthy fishmongers' trade. The other artworks were commissioned by the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Seven Contractions, which received the support of Philip the Good and Margaret of Austria. The abstract stained glass windows which were placed in the large Gothic window openings after World War II are quite impressive, transforming this building into a real "church of light".

45

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat – *Tradition and innovation*

In recent years, several original and hip shops have opened in Onze-Lieve-Vrouwestraat. They mesh perfectly with shops that have a long-standing tradition.

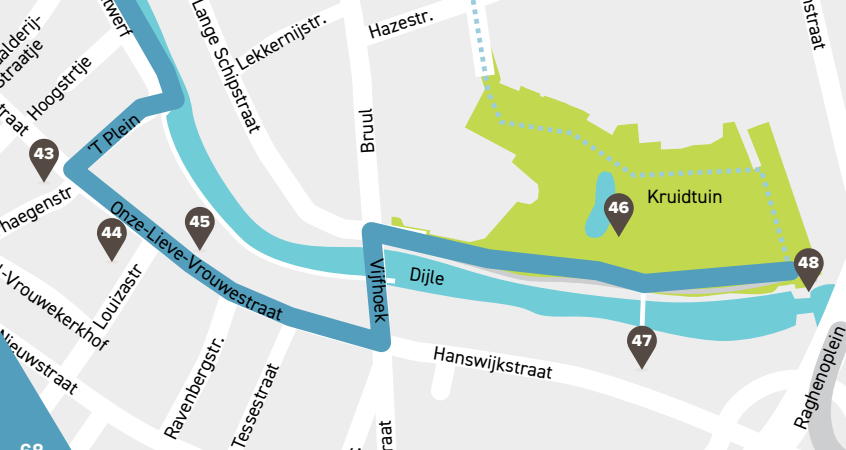


DID YOU KNOW?

A church visit, in 1570

1570. We enter the church on a weekday. It is quite busy inside. A priest is saying Mass at one of the many altars. Another Mass is being said in a chapel where members of a brotherhood or trade have gathered. A baptism or marriage takes place at another altar. People come to confession and a grave digger breaks open the stone floor. A beggar stands near a pillar. Groups of citizens discuss the latest news. Craftsmen and one artist are painting or hammering away. The sound of barking dogs echoes in the space and children whine as their mother drags them through the church, which is the shortest way to get home.





46

Botanic Garden – A city park with a past

Mechelen's Botanic Garden has an amazing history. In the Middle Ages, this verdant urban oasis was the garden of the Commanderie of Pitzemburg, an order of knights which was abolished under French rule. In the nineteenth century, an English landscape garden was built here for the members of the elitist *Société Royale d'Horticulture*. The Botanic Garden became a public park after World War II. You can enjoy nature in this quiet, lovely park, while your children have fun in the playground.



Sculptural Mechelen

Garden sculptures

There are several sculptures in the stunning green setting of the Botanic Garden, including *Adolescence, ma fille*. Urban lore has it that a girl once fell into the River Dyle and was saved by a dog. Her parents commissioned this sculpture as a mark of gratitude. But the story is incorrect. The sculptor Rik Van Perck (1869-1951) created this sculpture of his daughter, without any connotations.

Continue your walk and you will run into the statue of the famous scientist Rembert Dodoens, who was born in Mechelen. In the sixteenth century, he published his *Cruydeboeck* ("Herbal" in English), a revolutionary work on medicinal plants and herbs, which you can see in Museum Hof van Busleyden.

**DID YOU KNOW?****Green fringe**

Walk across the bridges over the Dyle and into Mechels Broek. You can see plenty of waterbirds in this vast nature area. The green fringe around Mechelen starts just outside the small ring road in many locations. Tranquil Vrijbroek Park and its magnificent rose garden is located to the south. The Rivierengebied and Zennegat can be found in the north and west. Follow the hike and cycle junction networks to escape the historic city centre and get out into nature.

Want to go walkabout? Visit Mechelen will gladly make suggestions and provide information.



Basilica of Our Lady of Hanswijk

The Mechelen-born architect and sculptor Lucas Faydherbe designed this seventeenth-century Baroque basilica. It is one of the first domed churches in the Low Countries. Its dome was supposed to be much higher but the substructure was not deemed sufficiently solid. The additional fortifications gave rise to a terrible dispute between the architect and the clergy. Inside there are four gigantic reliefs under the dome. Two were made by Faydherbe. Until World War II, everyone assumed that they were carved out of sandstone. As stone would have been too heavy, the ingenious Faydherbe used (cheaper) plaster and human bones instead. The “fraud” was discovered when the reliefs, which had been damaged by wartime bombs, were restored after the war. The historic statue of the Virgin near the altar, to which miraculous events have been attributed, is carried through the city’s streets every year in the ceremonial Hanswijk procession. In 1985, Pope John Paul II stopped to pray in this church during his visit to Mechelen. Two years later, it became a basilica.



Molenhuis and Spuihuis –

The remnants of a once-magnificent complex

In the fifteenth century, an imposing complex of seven water mills was built in Zandpoortvest, where the Dyle entered the city. The only remnants of this are the mill house and the wooden sluice house.

The mill in the mill house was of vital importance for Mechelen’s cloth industry. The sluice controlled the water levels for the mills. The mill house was transformed into a private residence around 1915. It now is occupied by the Via Via Joker Reiscafé. From 2018, you can visit the sluice house during guided group tours.

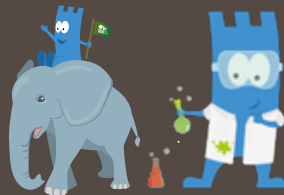


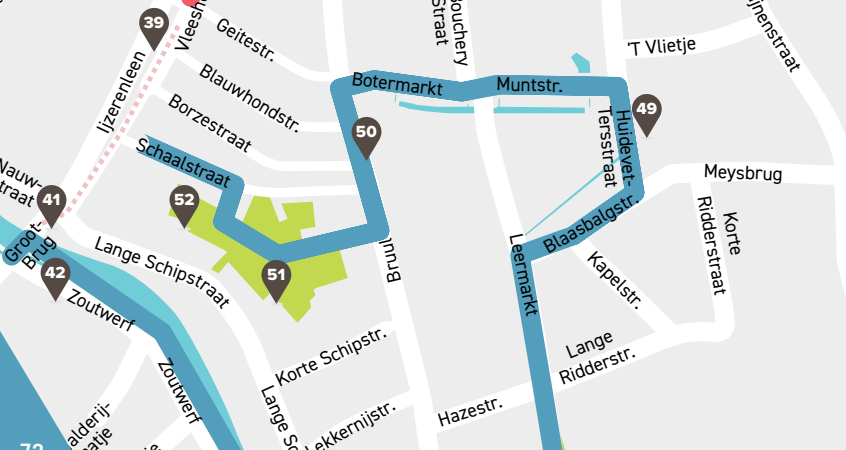


TIP

Planckendael en Technopolis

Looking for family-friendly tips for a trip outside the city? **Planckendael** is a 40-hectare animal park, with several exotic animals, where you can take an adventurous walk over hanging bridges or climb into the tree tops. There is plenty of space for everyone: playing children, animals that enjoy a nap in the grass or hop around their enclosure and visitors who enjoy a stroll. Another Mechelen attraction is **Technopolis**. Want to land a plane? Sleep on a bed of nails? Cycle along a cable that is suspended five metres above the ground? You can do all of this and much more in this hands-on, family-friendly Flemish science and technology centre!





49

De Vleeshalle – Historic market hall

At the end of the nineteenth century, a new covered meat hall was built in Mechelen, significantly improving the situation for traders and buyers as the meat was stored and displayed in better conditions.

The city centre's trading function was also strengthened as a result. The light, spacious hall had 115 butcher's benches, which were rented out to butchers. It closed in 1965 as more butchers started to open their own shops. The cow's heads above the two entrance gates refer to the building's former function. In 2018, a market hall reopened in this listed building, selling local speciality products.

You can enjoy a drink and a snack here in a historic setting.



50

Bruul – Shopping and walking

Walk through Botermarkt with its fun fountains and you will end up in Bruul, Mechelen's bustling shopping street. It is also one of the streets in the Belgian version of Monopoly. Shoppers will love the mix of large chains and trendy boutiques. It is also a great place for a stroll as this neighbourhood is largely car-free. In addition to shops, you can also explore the Church of Our Lady of Leliëndaal, and the adjoining Bruulpleintje.



51

Sinte Mettetuin – A romantic green garden

You can get from Bruul to IJzerenleen by walking through this new, romantic city garden. Take a stroll through this hidden beauty spot and enjoy the lovely garden. And if you are lucky, your ears are also in for a treat as you are in the grounds of the Carillon School! In early 2018, a glass Carillon Pavilion was built in the garden. As a result, visitors of Sinte Mettetuin can now really take a closer look at the chamber carillon. And if you're lucky, a student may be practicing or a park concert is scheduled.

52

Gazebo Our Lady of Leliëndaal – Relaxing in the city

The hidden gazebo of the former convent of Our Lady of Leliëndaal can be found at the back of Sint-Mettetuin, the former convent garden, which is a lovely place to relax in Mechelen's city centre. The nuns probably used this sixteenth-century gazebo as a place to meditate or rest. The late-Gothic building has an open structure, with one column at the front, allowing you to get a better look at the striking vaulted wooden ceiling and the remnants of the murals.

Walk up this narrow, quaint street to IJzerenleen where your walk ends. You have now returned to where you started. We hope you enjoyed your walk! You can quench your thirst in one of the many cafés in IJzerenleen and Grote Markt. Perhaps you'll even order a delicious Gouden Carolus?

COLOPHON

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**VISIT
MECHELEN**

CITY MAP



Visit Mechelen

- A tour of the city's Burgundian highlights
- Further abreast: through the Beguinage
- Further abreast: along the water and into nature

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29 St. Rumbold's Tower



12 Hof van Busleyden

Does Burgundy make you think of eating and drinking? Do you want to add a real experience to your visit?

If you're a fan of good food, then you'll love our Sense-ations vouchers!



Try out a handful of local specialities using the vouchers in the booklet. Tickle your taste buds with a wide range of very different Mechelen flavours, including beer cheese and artisan sweets. For a really fun day, why not combine your tastings with an excursion? Several of Mechelen's attractions and monuments offer nice discounts in exchange for a voucher.