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• Pères Trappistes •



A touch of **BELGIUM**

Beer Sommelier, **Luc De Raedemaeker**

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When you ask people around the world what they associate 'Belgium' with, some of them say 'Belgium?'. Those who have heard of the country typically associate it with chocolates, Belgian waffles, Brussels or Bruges and with, "Belgian Beers."





Indeed, with the bounty of classic beers and excellent newcomers available in every corner of Belgium, never before there has there been a better time or place for a beer lover. Whether you love fruity Tripels, thirst-quenching Witbieren, dark and soulful Dubbels or sour and tart Oude Geuzes, Belgian brewers have you covered. Welcome to the exiting world of Belgian beer and culture.

To really understand Belgian beer and culture, you have to understand the country's geography, history, politics, religions and legal regulations.

Belgium is part of the beer belt that stretches across northern Europe, where it is too chilly to grow grapes that can be turned into half-decent wine. But the climate and the land are excellent for growing barley and hops, the basic ingredients of beer. Belgium is also known for its high-quality water, vital for turning out good beer. The town of Spa, whose name has become generic (Spa known for its healing waters) is located in eastern Belgium.

The seemingly endless variety of beer styles can be credited to the habit of big European powers invading and occupying our land. Belgium was occupied by France, Austria, Spain, Germany – and even by the Dutch. On one hand, the invaders have left behind influences and flavours. On the other hand, we held strongly to our tried and tested local traditions and we created a distrust of central government and foreign fashion. So our brewers found a balance between external influences and remaining faithful to local tradition.

As a result of the political compartmentalization, most villages had at least two breweries: a Catholic one and a socialist or liberal one. In most cases the owner was also the mayor of the village. Free beer was a great tool to convince the voters.

During the centuries Belgium was also a hiding place for Catholic monks chased from France, Germany and the Netherlands, so it's not a coincidence that six of the world's eight Trappist breweries are located on Belgium soil.

Belgium never had a "Rheinheitsgebot" (purity law) like Germany or ridiculous high taxes on beer like, for instance, England, so Belgian brewers' hands were free to experiment. In 1919 a government regulation, "Wet Vandervelde" banned the sale of gin in pubs and taverns. The captains of industry paid the salary of the blue-collar workers in the local pub, owned by those same business leaders, of course. As a result of this ingenious system, the working class heroes spent their salary on gin, leaving their wives and children in poverty. The regulation missed its goal. As a side effect, this opened up a market for stronger beers aimed to please the drinkers used to their gin. The strong Belgian ales were born.

All these factors ensured the great variety of Belgian beers.

Beside the great beer varieties, the ceremony with which Belgian beer is poured and drunk betokens a love of beer that no other country can match. Almost each beer has his own glassware – quite unique in the world.

Belgian food and beer are also great companions. The huge variety of flavors beer can bring to a meal – anything from zesty citrus notes, caramel, nuts and tropical fruit, to deep rich chocolate and coffee – is a great asset at the gastronomic table. An increasing number of chefs, from those working in pubs and bars to those running high-end restaurants, are bringing great pairings; especially Belgian cheeses and beer is a good match.

Do you already smell the beer? In Belgium you can taste talent, atmosphere and the tales behind the excellent Belgian beers. Let's have a look at the beer scene in Belgium's two biggest cities.

ANTWERP

Antwerp, a busy pocket-sized metropolis, has something for everyone. The city is an inspiring source of culture thanks to its impressive architecture and magnificent museums and churches. Fashionistas can explore the stores of Antwerp's designers, whose stylish creations are revered all over the world. And foodies and people with a passion for life in general will enjoy the warm welcome of Antwerp's cafés and restaurants. But for the past 10 years the city also offers a great beer scene, with a microbrewery, new beer pubs and two beer festivals. Antwerp is also home to the De Koninck brewery and its beer is found on draught in most pubs. Unlike the rest of Belgium, where lager is king, the standard beer here is a "Bolleke Koninck".



Bakkerij Goossens

"Bakkerij Goossens" is a well know artisanal bakery located in the city center. You won't have much trouble finding the place, because there's always a long line of people waiting outside this authentic bakery. After tasting the delicious bread, you understand why. Go for the sucre bread or raisin bread. The dough is mouthwateringly tender and soft, even a couple of days old it's great for toasting or "pain perdu." But the masterpiece for beer lovers is of course a "Keuninckske" produced with the local beer, De Koninck. As soon as you put this bread to your lips, you notice its incredible aroma; it smells like all the warm, yeasty matiness you get hit with when you walk into a brewery. When you take a bite, your mouth fills with the perfect combination of dense chewy, crusty and moist textures. As you would expect from bread made with beer, this loaf delivers the wonderful flavors you love in a great beer: caramel, malt and yeast, except this is like a beer you can chew.

Korte Gasthuisstraat 31 – 2000 Antwerp

't Oud Arsenaal

This bar, near the theater and the main shopping drag, Meir, makes you feel welcome. Little has changed since the place opened in 1924 at this congenially old-fashioned "bruin" café. The interior is marked by a lovely leaded glass screen and an impressive array of beer memorabilia. Elderly locals, beer lovers and lost tourists are attracted by the unorthodox beer selection and by the exceptionally reasonable prices. The highlight is a selection traditional Lambic beers: Oude Geuze and Oude Kriek. The main problem is likely to find a free seat, especially on Saturdays and Sundays when it's market day. Don't miss this place.

Maria Pijpelinxstraat 4-2000 Antwerp

Kulminator

According to the beer geeks from Ratebeer.com, the "Kulminator" is the best beer-pub in the World. This year's designation wasn't the first time the pub won the prize as "Best Beer-Pub in the World"; it did so back in 2007 and again in 2009. The owners, Leen and Dirk, founded the Kulminator in 1974. This Antwerp beer pub is well-known among locals and beer enthusiasts from all over the world. It's one of the reasons why many people specifically come to visit Antwerp. The pub has a variety of more than 800 different beers, mostly Belgian, but also a nice international selection. What makes this place so special is the range of aged beers – vintage beers that Dirk and his wife have in stock. The ages of these vintage beers can go as far back as the 1970s! Young and not-so-young beer lovers can drink a beer brewed in their year of birth.

A must visit.

Vleminkveld 32-2000, Antwerp



Luc De Raedemaeker



The Grand Place, Brussels

BRUSSELS

Brussels makes no secret of its passion for the good life, good food and good beer. Despite all the different languages spoken on the corner of every street and the European dimension, Brussels is still inspired by a very “village-like” spirit. Of course, it’s also well known for its Grand-Place, its Atomium, its Manneken-Pis, its waffles and its chocolates (don’t miss them!). Brussels is the beer capital, known for its Gueuze and its Kriek but also for its old pubs and trendy bars. The city has two breweries within its city limits: Cantillon and Brasserie de la Senne.

Brasserie Bahnoue

Located in a former train way station just outside the city, the pub has quickly become one of the top attractions for local beer lovers. With four Belgian classics on tap, two rotating seasonals on tap and a great selection of Belgian ales in bottle, each visitor will find his choice. The owner, Bernd Zwinnen, is also looking for new beers to surprise his regular guests. Once in a while, beer tastings are organized in this extraordinary place.

Kapelstraat 117 1, 2540 Hove

’t Antwaerps Bierhuiske.

Located in the tourist area the bar looks unremarkable, easily dismissed as just another ordinary cafe/bar, but the beer list is amazing. Many beers from small Belgian craft brewers are offered to a mixed public of locals and tourists. ’t Antwaerps Bierhuiske is a destination for beer lovers as they are one of the few bars in the world to offer a big selection, both on draft and bottled, of beers from de Struise. The beer service is perfect as Paul Meeusen, the owner, is a certified Zytoloog.

Hoogstraat 14-2000 Antwerp

Other great beer places in Antwerp:

’t Pakhuis: Vlaamse Kaai 76-2000 Antwerp (Microbrewery).

Pater’s Vaetje: Blauwmoeselstraat 1-2000 Antwerp

Bier Central: De Keyserlei 25-2018 Antwerp

’t Waagstuk: Stadswaag 20, 2000 Antwerp

Gollem: Suikerrui 28, 2000 Antwerp

Abbey nr 8 “Belgian Beers and Brews”: Handschoenenmarkt 8- 2000 Antwerpen (bottleshop)

De Zeven schaken: Braderijstraat 24- 2000 Antwerp (restaurant)

Grand Cafe De Rooden Hoed: Oude Koormarkt 25 – 2000 Antwerp (restaurant)

Beer festivals:

Modeste Beer Festival: www.modestebierfestival.be

Bierpassie Weekend: www.bierpassieweekend.be



Brasserie de la Senne

The uncompromising brewery Brasserie de la Senne is named after the small river the Senne.

This river dribbles its way through the Pajottenland before flowing through Brussels. The beers of Brasserie de la Senne are produced by two young Brusselois, Yvan De Baets and Bernard Leboucq. Both brewers are driven by their indignation with the sloppy way in which some small breweries try to mimic the efforts of large industrial breweries. A lot of brewers try to produce technically perfect, dreary imitations of fundamentally bland products. The beers of De Baets and Leboucq are the opposite: they are not filtered nor pasteurized and they are free from any additive, while they use only noble raw materials of the first quality. These are genuine beers of character. The brewery recently opened a small tasting room.

Gentsesteenweg 565-1080 Brussels



Moeder Lambic

The two young entrepreneurs and beer enthusiasts who breathed new life into the 25-year-old beer institution Moeder Lambic in Sint-Gillis/Saint-Gilles, deploy their expertise and their range of beers in the city center too. The owners of this pub pair locally sourced farm cheeses and charcuterie with Belgian and foreign craft beers. Many beers come from "smaller" breweries such as Dupont, De Ranke, 3 Fonteinen, Cantillon, or the Brasserie de la Senne. So this is the ideal spot to try out new ones.

This bar is the mecca of the Brussels beer scene.

Rue de Savoïestraat 68-1060 (Moeder Lambic original)

Place Fontainasplein 8-1000 Brussel (Moeder Lambic Fontainas)

Het Goudblommeke in Papier

One of the ugliest streets of Brussels has harbored one of its most intimate cafés since 1846: Het Goudblommeke van Papier. The three-room pub prides itself both for its unique character and cultural heritage. It's a harbor of peace in a crazy world. Order a Belgian ale and enjoy the peace. Ponder also the aphorism above the door: "Every man has the right to 24 hours of freedom a day."

Rue des Alexiens 55-1000 Brussels

Monk

The name 'Monk', in honor of Thelonious Monk but also is a reference to Trappist Monks. Located in the trendy neighborhood of the Vismarkt and the Rue Dansaert, the bar is a real hotspot. Tradition and new trends go hand in hand. The original interior (the bar even has a backroom that's protected Art Deco) and the cosmopolitan ambiance create a unique atmosphere. The locally sourced cheeses, meats and sandwiches pair well with the Belgian beers on the beer list.

A must visit.

Rue Sainte-Catherine 14-1000 Brussels

Other great beer places in Brussels

Poehenellekelder: Rue du Chêne 5 – 1000 Brussels

Daringman: Rue de Flandre 37 – 1000 Brussels

Le Biercirus: Rue de l'Enseignement 57 – 1000 Brussels

Delirium: Impasse de la Fidélité 4A – 1000 Brussels

Restobières: Rue des Renards 32 – 1000 Brussels (restaurant)

Cantillon brewery: Rue Gheude 56-1070 Brussels

Beerfestival:

Belgian Beer Weekend: www.belgianbrewers.be/en/

Brussels Beer Challenge: www.brusselsbeerchallenge.com



15 beers to try before leaving Belgium:

- 1 ORVAL** (*Brasserie d'Orval*): An amber Trappist ale with a pronounced hoppy aroma and extra dry taste. Try an "old" Orval.
- 2 WESTMALLE TRIPEL** (*Brouwerij der Trappisten van Westmalle*): The mother of all Tripels. A world-class beer with a perfect balance.
- 3 EMBRASSE** (*De Dochter van de Korenaar*): Between a strong dark abbey ale and a stout.
- 4 TARAS BULBA** (*Brasserie de la Senne*): Session beer with a great hop aroma and high bitterness; my kind of beer.
- 5 ROCHEFORT 8** (*Brasserie Rochefort*): Less famous as his big brother Rochefort 10, but what a taste.
- 6 DUVEL** (*Duvel Moortgat*): This beer doesn't need any introduction.
- 7 SAISON DUPONT** (*Brasserie Dupont*). **The** classic Saison beer.
- 8 TROUBADOUR MAGMA** (*Brouwerij the Musketeers*): Perfect mix of Belgian traditions and US hops.
- 9 LA RULLES BRUNE** (*Brasserie Artisanale de Rulles*): A Belgian Brown ale with personality.
- 10 OUDE GUEUZE TILOUIN À L'ANCIENNE** (*Gueuzerie Tilquin*): The only *Wallon* Gueuze. Great stuff.
- 11 OUD BEERSEL OUDE KRIEK** (*Brouwerij Oud Beersel*): The perfect fruit beer. Delicious.
- 12 BLANCHE DES HONNELLES** (*Brasserie de l'Abbaye des Rocs*): A *Witbier* with a serious twist.
- 13 RODENBACH** (*Brouwerij Rodenbach*): An old Flemish red, perfect sour-sweet balance.
- 14 DE RYCK SPECIAL** (*Brouwerij De Ryck*): A "Special Belge", fruity, malty and hoppy.
- 15 ST. BERNARDUS ABT 12** (*St. Bernardus Brouwerij*): This is absolute top quality. Closely related to the Westvleteren12.