

ANTWERP

Average temp (Sep) 14.5°C

Belgian
city
focus
#1

Called 'The Metropolis' by locals, Antwerp is all a city should be: cultured and fashionable, with a patchwork of lively neighbourhoods awaiting discovery. **Kimberley Lovato** is our city guide

'T EILANDJE

The former docklands district has been transformed into one of the city's biggest draws, with great restaurants and a stunning new museum building.

EAT 't Zilte (1 Hanzestedenplaats, tel. (0)3 283 4040) is a two-Michelin star restaurant that's at the top of its game since moving from a small town near Antwerp to the ninth floor of the newly opened MAS (see below).

CULTURE **Museum aan de Stroom**, or MAS (1 Hanzestedenplaats, tel. (0)3 338 4400), is a glass and red sandstone structure that looks more like a giant Jenga puzzle than a museum. Inside you'll be treated to an architecturally wondrous setting, as well as permanent and temporary exhibits that focus on the city and its relation to the world.

TIP An old railway yard near MAS has been transformed into an urban park called **Spoor Noord** with a skate park, summer terrace and fountains.

MEIR

Antwerp's popular pedestrian-only shopping street stretches from the Central Station to the Town Hall. Explore the side streets for tucked-away treasures.

SLEEP **Hotel De Witte Lelie** (16-18 Keizerstraat, tel. (0)3 226 1966,



Mighty MAS: Antwerp's newest museum is a design icon in the docklands district

INFO

Brussels International Airport is about 50km south of the city centre.

Train: There are trains every 15 minutes from the airport; change at Brussels North for trains to Antwerp. The whole journey should take just over an hour, costing €9.50 (b-rail.com).

Bus: An hourly Airport Express bus goes to Antwerp's Central Station and the Crowne Plaza Hotel, costing €10 and taking around 45 minutes (airportexpress.be).

Tourist office There is an office at 13 Grote Markt (tel. (0)3 232 0103, antwerpen.be).

dewittellelie.be, doubles from €265) is set in three renovated 17th-century gabled mansions, perfectly situated between Meir and Eilandje. A glamorous boutique hotel, it has just 10 rooms, each blending contemporary and antique style.

CULTURE **Rubenshuis** (9-11 Wapper, tel. (0)3 201 1555, rubenshuis.be) is the former home of baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens, currently hosting an exhibit highlighting the architectural prowess of the artist (10 September–11 December). Also on show are valuable books on architecture from Rubens' library.

SHOP **Cocodrillo** (8-9 Schuttershofstraat, cocodrillo.be) is where the well-dressed of Antwerp go to round off their outfits in style – they know this shoe shrine carries the best of Belgian and international designers. Belgium's first **Jimmy Choo** boutique (17 Schuttershofstraat), which opened this summer, is just a handbag's throw away.

LATER **Caffènation** (64 Hopland) is where die-hard coffee lovers line up, as much to watch the expert baristas prepare their masterpieces as to enjoy the resulting beverages.

'T ZUID (THE SOUTH)

The lively Zuid neighbourhood is home to the Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Photography and the Museum of Fine Arts.

SLEEP **Patine** (1 Leopold de Waelplaats, tel. (0)3 257 0919, wijnbistropatine.be, studio for two €100 per night or €550 per week, including breakfast) is a cosy wine bar-restaurant that harks back to days when pubs doubled as guesthouses for weary travellers. Good, affordable fare is served seven days a week, and the studio and three-bedroom apartment are ideal for families or extended stays.

EAT **Salon de Thé Claude** (79 Scheldestraat, tel. (0)3 237 0501) is a delightful tearoom and café. Come for breakfast or afternoon tea, and be sure to sample that quintessential Parisian sweet treat – macarons.

LATER **Velvet Lounge** (6 Luikstraat, tel. (0)3 237 3978) is a fusion restaurant that transforms into a music lounge with a sophisticated atmosphere from about 11pm.

CHRISTOPHE'S ANTWERP TIP

"For the sharpest shopping, go to concept store **RA** (13 Kloosterstraat); you can have a fresh juice in the bar after exhausting your credit card."

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