

SPA

AVERAGE TEMP (AUG) 15°C

Belgian city focus



*PER COUNTRY PER CAPITA

Nestled in a picturesque valley in Wallonia, Spa has been a celebrated site of healing hot springs since Roman times. Come 27 August, however, this attractive town in the Ardennes is powered by high-adrenaline action, when the Belgian Grand Prix rolls on to the Spa-Francorchamps circuit (belgium-grand-prix.com). Kimberley Lovato explores the birthplace of Agatha Christie's famous detective Hercule Poirot

» THERMES DE SPA

This light-filled contemporary centre offers 800m² of heated baths around two spectacular indoor and outdoor pools perched above the town. Hamams, saunas and treatment rooms should keep any spa enthusiast happy.

» **Sleep soundly** The Radisson Blu Palace Hotel (39 Place Royale, tel. (0)87 279700, radissonblu.com/palacehotel-spa, doubles from €135) offers guests direct access via a private funicular to Les Thermes de Spa, with entry tickets available at the front desk. The hotel will also arrange travel to the Francorchamps race circuit, 14km away.

» **Must eat** In a half-timbered house surrounded by greenery, La Tonnellerie (Parc de Sept Heures, tel. (0)87 772284) serves Mediterranean cuisine in its newly decorated dining room and on a terrace overlooking the park. The four-course vigneron (winegrower) menu offers wonderfully seasonal flavours.

» **Shop 'til you drop** Lola Coquelicot (15 Place Royale) sells unique women's fashion, accessories, bags and shoes that are as cute as the name itself.

» **Dance the night away** The Casino de Spa (4 Rue Royale, open from 11am



The recently restored Abbey of Stavelot was founded around 650

» INFO

Brussels Airport is 135km from Spa and there are regular connections to Brussels' three main train stations (Midi, Central and Nord).

Train Hourly departures to Spa, with transfer in Verviers, take about 2.5 hours and cost from €36 return. Weekend travel is half price. Spa's railway station is in the centre of town.

Car All major rental car agencies service Brussels airport, and it takes 1.5 hours to drive to Spa. This is the best way to access the town, racetrack and surrounding countryside.

Tourist office The main office can be found at 41 Place Royale (tel. (0)87 795353, spa-info.be).

to sunrise) is the oldest in the world, built in 1763 by the prince-bishop of Liège. You can place your bet on an unforgettable night here.

» GALERIE LÉOPOLD II

Named for the Belgian King who reigned for 44 years, this 19th-century open-air arcade with scrolling ironwork columns has been a Spa landmark since 1878, and is the setting for many of the town's cultural events.

» **Culture vultures** Every Sunday afternoon during August, brass bands entertain the strolling crowds at the 18th-century park that holds the Galerie Léopold II, Parc de Sept Heures. Spa is also the birthplace of Agatha Christie's fastidious detective, Hercule Poirot, and it's easy to imagine him walking briskly with umbrella and hat in these elegant surroundings.

» **Must eat** For artfully prepared and presented French cuisine head to L'Art de Vivre (53 Avenue Reine Astrid, tel. (0)87 770444), arguably Spa's best restaurant and favoured by locals. Tucked away in a red-brick building, the food and service will spoil you rotten.

» **Shop 'til you drop** Don't miss the **Marché aux Puces**, or flea market (between Avenue Reine Astride and Parc de Sept Heures). Held at the Galerie Léopold II each Sunday morning from 8am to 1pm, it attracts hordes of treasure seekers.

» SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS RACING CIRCUIT

For more than five decades, the Belgian Grand Prix has wooed Formula One fans to this spectacular race track. The event is held here each August and the Spa-Francorchamps circuit is rated by drivers as one of the most beautiful in the world.

» **Culture vultures** The town of Stavelot is part of the original course of the Spa-Francorchamps and, with its **Abbey of Stavelot** (abbayedestavelot.be), makes a worthy detour. Destroyed after the French Revolution, the abbey was only restored between 1999 and 2002. Remains of the original were recently excavated, and are open to the public. Within the complex, the **Museum of the Principality of Stavelot-Malmédy** will tell you about the abbey's history, while the **Spa-Francorchamps Racetrack Museum**, whose displays of F1 vehicles span the history of the track, is a must for petrolheads.

» **Sleep soundly** Known as the Ardennes' 'Little Versailles', the regal **Manoir de Lébioles** (1/5 Domaine de Lébioles, Creppe, tel. (0)87 791900, manoirdelebioles.com, rooms from €179) lives up to its name with grand, individually appointed rooms and stately common areas that scream royal treatment. The spa and meeting rooms are perfect for special events, and the restaurant attracts gourmands eager to savour the creations of chef Olivier Tucki.

FROM JUST
€99*
RETURN ALL-IN



Fly to **Brussels** from 50 premium European destinations with fares from just **€99*** return all-in. brusselsairlines.com

*PRICES QUOTED ARE FOR A RETURN TICKET IN LIGHT ECONOMY FROM OR TO BRUSSELS. ALL TAXES AND FEES INCLUDED. IF BOOKED ON BRUSSELSAIRLINES.COM. TICKETS ARE NOT CHANGEABLE. NOT REFUNDABLE. PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.