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## The Best of Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg

Although they're such small places, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg contain a diversity of culture, language, and tradition that defies easy definition. This is true even within each individual country.

Belgium, for example, is fractured along the age-old European great divide between the Germanic north and the Latin south, a division expressed in the constant regional bickering between Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia that threatens to split the country entirely.

Holland (the Netherlands) also has its great divide, along the "three great rivers"—the Maas, the Waal, and the Rhine. The northerners are straitlaced and Calvinist and only know what to do with a glass of beer because they've been shown by the exuberant, Catholic southerners. Then there's the matter of nations within the nation. Friesland, Zeeland, and Limburg have their notions of separateness and their own languages to back them up.

As for Luxembourg, you'd think a country so small that even on a big map its name can't fit within its borders would be simpler. Not a bit of it. Luxembourgers are such a mixed bag that they're still trying to sort out the mess left behind when the Germanic tribes overran the Roman Empire's Rhine defenses in A.D. 406.

The Benelux Union came into existence in 1944 as much as anything because these small countries were tired of being trampled by bigger neighbors with sharp elbows and puffed-out chests. It was the seed from which the subsequent European Union emerged. Diversity is their greatest asset, and their willingness to adapt diversity to the needs of a new era is perhaps their best gift to the new Europe. The visitor from afar may well be more impressed by their shared characteristics, which include a determined grasp on the good life, than by the differences that separate them.

### 1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Traveling Through Time in Bruges** (Belgium): Without a doubt, Bruges is one of Europe's most handsome cities. Its almost perfectly preserved center sometimes seems more like a film set or museum exhibit than a living city, because it throws your sense of time so out of joint. Its historic buildings run the gamut of architectural styles from medieval times to the 19th century. The city's picturesque canals are the icing on Bruges's cake. See chapter 5.
- **Riding the Kusttram (Coast Tram)** (Belgium): Riding the modern and comfortable Kusttram still seems like an old-fashioned adventure. The 2-hour journey takes you all along the 70km (44-mile) Belgian coast, from De Panne on the French

## The Benelux Countries



border to ritzy Knokke-Heist near the Dutch border. Along the way, you can stop at a number of inviting resorts or even smaller places, such as a stretch of beach or a horse-riding trail—whatever takes

your coastal fancy, the Coast Tram can get you there. See chapter 7.

- **Touring the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): The Ardennes, which covers the eastern third of Belgium, beyond the River Meuse

and on into Luxembourg, is unlike any other landscape in the Benelux countries. Its steep river valleys and thickly forested slopes make it a place apart. This is a historic land of castles, stone-built villages, and farmhouses, but that's not all. The region also has famous resort towns like Spa and Bouillon, unequaled cuisine based on its fresh produce and game, excellent winter skiing, nature and fresh air in abundance, and towns like Bastogne and Ettelbruck which recall the sacrifice American soldiers made for victory in the Battle of the Bulge. See chapter 9 and chapter 18.

- **Skating on the Canals** (Holland): When the thermometer drops low enough for long enough, the Dutch canals freeze over, creating picturesque highways of ice through the cities and countryside. At such times, the Dutch take to their skates. Joining them could be the highlight of your trip. See p. 284.
- **Following the Tulip Trail** (Holland): The place to see the famous Dutch tulips in their full glory is the Keukenhof Gardens at Lisse, where vast numbers of tulips and other flowers create dazzling patches of color in the spring. Combine your visit with a trip through the bulb fields between Leiden and Haarlem. See chapter 12.
- **Checking Out the Windmills on the Zaanse Schans** (Holland): In flat Holland, wind is ever-present, so it's not surprising that the Dutch have used windmills to assist with their hard labor, from

draining polders to sawing wood. At one time the industrious people around the Zaan, northwest of Amsterdam, had almost 500 windmills working for them. Today, of the 12 that survive, four have been reconstructed in the Zaanse Schans, together with other historical buildings reminiscent of the Zaan region's bustling past. See chapter 12.

- **Celebrating Carnival in Maastricht** (Holland): The country never seems so divided by the great rivers as it does during carnival season. Southerners declare that their celebrations are superior, and if you ever run into a southern carnival parade, you'll have to admit that they know how to party. In Maastricht the festivities are especially boisterous. On the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, the mayor officially hands over the keys of the city to Prince Carnival, who will reign for the next 3 days. During this time, people parade through the streets of Maastricht in an endless procession of outrageous outfits and boundless energy. The atmosphere is always high spirited, but it never gets out of hand. See p. 430.
- **Driving the Wine Trail** (Luxembourg): Follow the Route du Vin along the peaceful banks of the Moselle River from Echternach to Mondorf-les-Bains. Here, the low hills of Luxembourg are covered with vineyards. Several wineries open their doors to visitors, offer guided tours, explain how their wine is produced, and treat you to a little of what they have stored in their vats. See chapter 18.

## 2 The Best Castles & Stately Homes

- **Beersel** (near Brussels, Belgium): This 13th-century castle just 8km (5 miles) south of Brussels looks

to be the ideal place for pulling up the drawbridge and settling in for a siege—and if the owners have

had the foresight to amply stock the rustic Auberge Kasteel Beersel restaurant inside, the proceedings need not be too burdensome. This is a castle just like Disney makes them, with turrets, three towers, a drawbridge, a moat, and the spirits of all those who have, willingly or unwillingly, resided within its walls. See p. 103.

- **Gravensteen** (Ghent, Belgium): Even more than 900 years after it was built, the castle of the Counts in Ghent can still summon up a chilly feeling of dread as you look at its gray stone walls. It's a grim reminder that castles were not all for chivalrous knights and beautiful princesses; this one was intended as much to cow the independent-minded citizens of Ghent as to protect the city from foreign marauders. Inside are the tools of the autocrat's profession: torture instruments that show that what the Middle Ages lacked in humanity they made up for in invention. See p. 130.
- **Bouillon** (near Dinant in the Ardennes, Belgium): This was once the home of a genuine hero, although a hard-handed and ruthless one: Godfrey of Bouillon, who led the First Crusade in 1096, and in 1099 took Jerusalem by storm (massacring its Muslim inhabitants in the process). Meanwhile, back in Bouillon, his castle was being taken over by the prince bishop of Liège. It still stands today, 61km (38 miles) southeast of Dinant on the River Meuse, atop a steep bluff overlooking the town, the bridge over the River Semois, and the road to Paris. You can tour its walls, chambers, and dungeons. See p. 202.
- **Menkemaborg** (Uithuizen, in Groningen province, Holland): A borg is the Groningen version of a stately home, developed from an earlier, defensive structure. Once home to Groningen landed gentry, the Menkemaborg is a beautiful example of the style. Rebuilt in the 1700s, it was owned by the same family until the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays it is a museum, with period furnishings re-creating a vivid picture of the life and times of a wealthy provincial squire. See p. 374.
- **Het Loo Palace** (near Apeldoorn, Holland): William III, who became king of England, had a royal hunting lodge built here, in the forests surrounding Apeldoorn. Subsequent members of the House of Orange made alterations to the palace, especially in the 19th century, but recent renovations have revealed much of the original decoration, and what couldn't be saved has been redesigned according to the original plans. Don't miss the gardens, which have once again been returned to their 17th-century splendor. See p. 391.
- **Amersoyen Castle** (near 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland): This is a magnificent example of a moated fortress with sturdy towers at its corners, an architectural type that was introduced into Holland in the second half of the 13th century. The Amersoyen's history was turbulent—it burned down in 1590 and was left in ruins for half a century before being rebuilt. See p. 422.

### 3 The Best Museums

- **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts** (Brussels, Belgium): Paintings by

many of the finest Belgian artists are assembled in the exceptional

setting of this twin museum's neo-classical Museum of Historic Art. You'll find an entire section devoted to Brueghel, as well as works by Rubens, van Dyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and many others. Go underground to the Modern Art Museum for works by Magritte, Delvaux, Ensor, Rops, Alechinsky, and others. See p. 87.

- **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen** (Royal Fine Arts Museum; Antwerp, Belgium): Brussels's art museum may be the more conveniently placed for most visitors, but if you want to see the Flemish Masters in all their glory, you should head north to Antwerp, where the Fine Arts Museum has the best collection of their works in the world, including the largest group of Rubens masterpieces in existence. See p. 138.
- **Musée de la Vie Wallonne** (Museum of Walloon Life; Liège, Belgium): Set in a 17th-century convent, this museum rambles through the history and culture of the French-speaking (and Walloon dialect-speaking) region of Belgium called Wallonia. Its exhibits also ramble through the building that houses them, covering everything from popular arts and crafts to industry and agriculture; there's even an interesting section on theater marionettes. See p. 175.
- **Rijksmuseum** (State Museum; Amsterdam, Holland): The Rijksmuseum houses some of the Netherlands's most important works of art: Rembrandt's world-famous *The Night Watch*, four of Vermeer's beautiful miniatures, and numerous works by Frans Hals. All in all, this is one of the most impressive collections of Old Masters in the world. Unfortunately,

until mid-2008 you'll be able to view a lot fewer than previously, since most of the museum is closed for refurbishment. But in the sole wing that remains open, the Philips Wing, the Rijksmuseum has assembled *The Masterpieces*, highlights from its collection of 17th-century Dutch Golden Age, ah, masterpieces. See p. 269.

- **Van Gogh Museum** (Amsterdam, Holland): This museum has an extensive collection of its namesake's work: a total of 200 paintings and 500 drawings, ranging from the famous *Sunflowers* to earless self-portraits. The permanent collection also includes important works by van Gogh's 19th-century contemporaries, and there are often temporary or visiting exhibitions concentrating on the same period. A new partly underground elliptical wing, by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, opened on Museumplein in 1999 to house temporary exhibitions of work by van Gogh and other artists. See p. 272.
- **Mauritshuis** (The Hague, Holland): This wonderfully intimate museum is set in the 17th-century palace of a Dutch count. Its collection of Golden Age art treasures is small but unrivaled. See p. 322.
- **Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen** (Rotterdam, Holland): This museum features a range of art forms, from visual to applied arts, covering a period of over 7 centuries. Here you see paintings by everyone from Brueghel and van Eyck to surrealists like Magritte and Dalí. See p. 322.
- **Museum Het Catharijneconvent** (St. Catherine's Convent; Utrecht, Holland): This museum, appropriately housed in a former convent, will give you a clear picture of Holland's Christian heritage.

The collection of medieval art and illuminated manuscripts is particularly impressive. See p. 384.

- **National Museum of Military History** (Museum of the Battle of the Bulge; Diekirch, Luxembourg): Luxembourg has many museums devoted to the peaceful aspects of life, but there's something special about this tribute to the heroes of the Battle of the Bulge (1944–45)—something

gritty, immediate, and real that sets it apart from other war museums. Its centerpiece is a series of dioramas that give you an eerie sense of being there in the battle, in the snow, with danger all around. The display is bound to inspire both sympathy and admiration for the men who fought and died for freedom all over the beautiful Ardennes region that is now so peaceful. See p. 461.

#### 4 The Best Cathedrals & Churches

- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk** (Church of Our Lady; Bruges, Belgium): The soaring 122m (396-ft.) spire of this church can be seen from a wide area around Bruges. As a magnificent bonus, the church also holds a beautiful marble *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo (one of his few works outside Italy); a painting by Anthony van Dyck; and the 15th-century bronze tomb sculptures of Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy. See p. 118.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Antwerp, Belgium): You can't miss this towering example of the Flemish Gothic style if you visit Antwerp, or even pass close to the city. Its 123m (400-ft.) spire dominates the area. This is in fact the biggest church in the Benelux countries, with seven naves and 125 pillars. But oversize statistics are not Our Lady's only attraction—there are no fewer than three Rubens masterpieces inside, as well as paintings by other prominent artists. See p. 139.
- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** (Cathedral of Our Lady; Tournai, Belgium): This cathedral is a harmonious blending of the Romanesque and Gothic styles. It has five towers and a magnificent

suite of stained-glass windows, as well as paintings by Rubens and Jordaens. Equally interesting are the opulent pieces in the Treasury, especially the gold-and-silver reliquary, The Shrine of Our Lady, dating from 1205. See p. 196.

- **Westerkerk** (West Church; Amsterdam, Holland): The Westerkerk's 85m (277-ft.) tower, the Westertoren, is the tallest in Amsterdam, providing a spectacular view of the city. Anne Frank could hear every note of the carillon's dulcet tones while in hiding from the Nazis in her nearby house. See p. 278.
- **Sint-Bavokerk** (St. Bavo's Church; Haarlem, Holland): Walking to the town center from Haarlem station, you catch only glimpses of the church, but the moment you reach the market square it is revealed in all its splendor. This church, which was completed after a relatively short building period, has a rare unity of structure and proportion. Regular concerts are given here on the famous organ built by Christian Müller in 1738. The young Mozart once played on this instrument. See p. 296.
- **Sint-Janskerk** (St. John's Church; Gouda, Holland): At 122m (400 ft.), this is the longest church in

Holland. It also has some of the most magnificent stained-glass windows in Europe. See p. 347.

- **Domkerk** (Utrecht, Holland): This magnificent cathedral was begun in the 13th century. Its 111m (365-ft.) tower, which dominates old Utrecht's skyline, offers a great view of the city. See p. 384.
- **Sint-Servaasbasiliek** (Basilica of St. Servatius; Maastricht, Holland): One of the oldest churches in Holland, this basilica was built over the grave of St. Servatius, the first bishop of Holland. Parts of it date back to the 10th century, and it was enlarged in the 14th and 15th centuries, when the south portal and the entrance to the cloister at Keizer Karelplein were added. These are adorned with beautiful statues and intricate stone carvings. The church interior is largely Romanesque, and

recent restorations have given it a cool and restrained atmosphere, emphasizing the simple arches and vaults. Over the centuries people have honored St. Servatius with gifts, so the Treasury holds a collection of incredible richness and beauty. Most impressive are the reliquaries of Saint Thomas and of Saint Servatius, made by Maastricht goldsmiths in the 12th century. See p. 428.

- **Notre-Dame Cathedral** (Luxembourg City): The cathedral of Luxembourg City was built late for the Gothic style—in the early 17th century—but is nevertheless a great Gothic monument, albeit clearly influenced by Renaissance ideals. The Octave of Our Lady of Luxembourg takes place here every year before the statue of the Virgin, which is said to have miraculous powers. See p. 451.

## 5 The Best Offbeat Trips

- **Walking on the Wadden Sea** (Holland): At low tide, the Wadden Sea, between the northern coast and the Wadden Islands, virtually disappears, and if you're up for a walk in the mud, you can join a Wadden Walking (*Wadlopen*) trip and plow your way over land to one of the islands. Several companies, both in Groningen and Friesland, organize guided trips from May to early October. If you're lucky you might encounter some seals gallivanting in pools left by the retreating tide or sunbathing on the flats. See p. 368.
- **Riding White Bikes in Hoge Veluwe National Park** (Holland): It was tried once in Amsterdam—providing free white bikes for everyone to use—but the bikes mysteriously disappeared and turned up in private hands with fresh coats of paint. The scheme has worked much better in this beautiful national park (which apparently doesn't shelter as many bike thieves). Just head to Hoge Veluwe's parking lot, pick up a bike, and explore the traffic-free scenery to your heart's content. See p. 393.

## 6 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **Hiking Across the Hautes Fagnes** (Belgium): Wooden walkways stretch like the Yellow Brick Road across the high and bleak moorland plateau of Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve in eastern Belgium, between Eupen and Malmédy. It's forbidden to leave

these walkways except in the company of an official guide accredited to the Walloon region. On the walkways you can explore the remnants of an ancient morasslike landscape that has claimed lives in bad weather through the centuries, into recent times. It is a beautiful, wild place and satisfying to cross at any time of year. A fine summer's day may be best, but venturing onto the moor, adequately clothed, in the middle of a snowbound winter night also has its attractions. See chapter 9.

- **Sand Yachting at De Panne** (Belgium): Conditions on the beach at De Panne are ideal for this exciting, unusual sport. See chapter 7.
- **Skiing the Ardennes** (Belgium and Luxembourg): Quite a few ski and winter sports shops in the Belgian and Luxembourg Ardennes have bet the farm and lost their shirts by banking on snowfall each winter. Some years it snows and some years it doesn't, and some years it does but by the time skiing enthusiasts arrive from Brussels the covering has melted and the ski slopes are as green as a golf course. Still, when it does snow enough, the Ardennes is a pleasant place to ski. There are a dozen or so downhill centers but most skiing in the Ardennes is cross-country. A particularly good location is Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve between Eupen and Malmédy, but you can ski only on the designated trails, as this is a

protected landscape. See chapter 9 and chapter 18.

- **Biking in Holland:** In this nation with a population of 15 million people, there are some 11 million bikes, so you can believe that the Dutch are all but born in the saddle. To fully engage in the Dutch experience, you positively have to board a bicycle and head out into the wide green yonder. The tourism authorities have marked out many cycling tour routes and have published descriptive booklets and maps to go along with them, available from VVV offices. A few suggestions for longer tours: cycling around the IJsselmeer, the big lake north of Amsterdam, which you can do in anything from 2 days to a week; biking along the coast from Zeeland to Zandvoort; touring the beautiful countryside of the "green province," Drenthe; and following the course of the River Maas down into hilly Limburg. Many rail stations around the country have bikes for rent.
- **Canoeing in the Biesbosch** (Holland): This unique natural park of marshland, meadows, and willow woods was formed during the St. Elizabeth floods of 1421, when 16 villages were submerged and the former polders became an inland sea. There are several possibilities for exploring the Biesbosch, including tour boat, but paddling your own canoe is the best way to get close to nature. See chapter 16.

## 7 The Best Romantic Getaways

- **Château Vacations** (Wallonia, Belgium): The French-speaking region of Belgium is noted for its beautiful châteaux, dating from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, set in the countryside amidst ornamental gardens and often surrounded by

moats. Nowadays, some of these venerable, stately homes have been transformed into hotels or restaurants, offering guests luxurious living and fine dining. There are châteaux in the suburbs of Brussels, along the steep valley of the River

Meuse, among the rolling hills of the Ardennes, and set amidst the wide-open green spaces of Hainaut on the French border. A weekend in one of these châteaux is surely among the most romantic getaways imaginable. For further information, contact the **Wallonia-Brussels Tourist Office** (☎ 02/504-0200; fax 02/513-6950). See chapter 8.

- **Kasteel Wittem** (Wittem, Holland; ☎ 043/450-1208): This romantically idyllic 12th-century castle is also a hotel. It's the perfect place to stay after exploring the south of Holland's Limburg province. In summer you can dine or have breakfast on a magnificent terrace overlooking the garden and moat. See p. 433.

## 8 The Best Deluxe Hotels

- **Métropole** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/217-23-00): This century-old hotel in the heart of Brussels maintains the Belle Epoque splendor of its first days and combines it with modern furnishings and service. Its **L'Alban Chambon** restaurant is one of Brussels's best. See p. 67.
- **Hotel des Indes** (The Hague, Holland; ☎ 070/361-2345): Within this opulent hotel, you can lean over the balustrade on the first-floor landing to watch the cream of The Hague's society having tea in the lounge, the lights of chandeliers reflecting in the polished marble pillars. The rooms are equally grand and comfortable. See p. 324.
- **Hotel Lauswolt** (Beetsterzwaag, near Leeuwarden, Holland; ☎ 051/238-12-45): This 19th-century country house has been converted into a luxury hotel equipped with the latest amenities and leisure facilities. Some 2,700 acres of woods and heather offer ample opportunity for walking or horseback riding. You can also play golf or tennis, and there are even two swimming pools. All this

activity will surely stir your appetite—luckily, the cuisine is of the same high standard as the other comforts in the hotel, and dinner in the elegant 19th-century dining room will be an unforgettable experience. See p. 357.

- **De Campveerse Toren** (Veere, Holland; ☎ 0118/501-291): This ancient inn guards the harbor of Veere. With the Veerse Meer (Lake Veere) lapping at the walls below your room, you can look over the entire length of the lake and to the harbor where pleasure boats are moored. Little is as calming to the spirit as a walk through the old streets of Veere at dusk, when most of the tourists have gone for the day. Later, back in your room at the inn for the night, you'll be gently lulled to sleep by the murmuring waters of the lake. See p. 416.
- **Grand Hôtel Cravat** (Luxembourg City; ☎ 22-19-75): The Grand Hôtel Cravat has been a Luxembourg institution for nearly a century. And for fine dining nearby, you won't need to look much further than its own Le Normandy. See p. 455.

## 9 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Comfort Art Hotel Siru** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/203-35-80):

This is one of the most surprising—even shocking—hotels you'll

find anywhere. Its art-aficionado owner had the innovative idea of inviting Belgium's top artists to decorate a room with a painting, sculpture, or installation on the theme of travel. Many of them took up the challenge, with the result that each room is a miniature single-exhibit art gallery. The art is, obviously, contemporary, so the response from guests can vary. Some regulars ask for a different room each time so that after a hundred visits they'll have toured the full "gallery"; some always ask for the same room; others, shaken by an unsettling image, ask for a room change in the middle of the night. One thing is certain: The Siru is unforgettable. See p. 73.

- **Welcome** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/219-95-46): This is the best little hotel in Brussels. With only 17 rooms, it's small, but the welcome's a big one, and the standard of the rooms is high. As a bonus, you have only to trip down the stairs to find yourself in one of the best seafood restaurants in the city, La Truite d'Argent. Try to get Michel to tell you about the hotel and restaurant's history, preferably over a glass or two of Kwak beer—but be careful: it's a long story and Kwak is strong beer. See p. 70.
- **Egmond** (Bruges, Belgium; ☎ 050/34-14-45): You can think of the Egmond as your own country mansion, for not much more than a hundred bucks a room. There's just one problem with this image: The Egmond is not actually in the country. In compensation, it has its own grounds and gardens, and is next to the Minnewater (Lover's Lake) and the Begijnhof. See p. 111.
- **Ambassade** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/555-0222): This hotel occupies 10 neighboring

canal houses on the "Golden Bend"—for centuries the city's most fashionable address. Here, you really feel that you're in the home of a rich 17th-century merchant. Most of the individually styled and spacious rooms have large windows overlooking the canal, as does the split-level chandelied breakfast room. If you need some modern—in fact, New Age—relaxation, you can take to the flotation tanks or relax into a deep massage at the hotel's Koan Float center. See p. 246.

- **Seven Bridges** (Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/623-1329): There are some hotels where you realize that the owners aren't just running a business, but doing what they love. The Seven Bridges is that kind of place—Pierre Keulers and Günter Glaner have found both their hobby and their profession in this fine hotel in Amsterdam. It's no exaggeration to say that all the furniture, fixtures, and fittings have been selected with loving care, and guests receive the same conscientious attention. See p. 248.
- **Best Western Hotel du Casque** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/321-4343): Maastricht, in the south of Holland, is where the cold-blooded northern Dutch come to get lessons in how to have fun. Though Maastrichters do their best, you can generally see them shaking their heads sadly, as though their less-talented brethren never will learn the lesson. The Hotel du Casque overlooks the Vrijthof, which basks in its reputation as the liveliest square in the liveliest city in the country. Despite its prestigious address, this hotel is as moderately priced as you'll find in Maastricht. See p. 430.

- **Grand Hôtel du Parc** (Clervaux, Luxembourg; ☎ 92-06-50): The northern Luxembourg town of Clervaux is one of the most dramatic in the Ardennes; it's situated in a plunging valley, watched over by a castle on the mountain

heights. The Grand Hôtel du Parc offers old-fashioned charm with all the benefits of modern facilities, including a sauna and solarium, at a downright affordable price. See p. 463.

## 10 The Best Restaurants

- **Comme Chez Soi** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/512-29-21): If Michelin were to introduce a four-star category, Comme Chez Soi would undoubtedly be one of the first to collect the extra star. The irony about this culinary holy-of-holies is its name: "Just Like Home." I definitely don't eat gourmet fare in my home, but perhaps this is standard stuff at owner and master chef Pierre Wynants's place. A hallowed silence descends on diners as they sample their first mouthful of his French specialties with added Belgian zest. This being Belgium, the silence doesn't last long, but the taste and the memory linger. See p. 74.

- **In 't Spinnekopke** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 02/511-86-95): For a different kind of Brussels eating experience, try this down-home restaurant dating from 1762. Here, traditional Belgian dishes are given the care and attention expected of more refined—though not necessarily more tasty—cuisine. See p. 79.

- **Hostellerie le Sanglier des Ardennes** (Durbuy, Belgium; ☎ 086/21-32-62): This restaurant, in a hotel in one of the prettiest of Ardennes villages, has the rustic looks and ideal location to go along with its fine country food. Walking in the surrounding wooded hills is the perfect preparation for lunch or dinner here. See p. 207.

- **La Rive** (in the Amstel Intercontinental Hotel, Amsterdam, Holland; ☎ 020/520-3264): If two prestigious Michelin stars don't make your mouth water, then what will? La Rive even has a special table where you can watch how the chefs actually do it. While dining, you can enjoy the view through tall French windows to the broad Amstel River. The service and wine cellar are in the finest modern French traditions. See p. 266.

- **Le Restaurant** (in the Hotel des Indes, The Hague, Holland; ☎ 070/361-2345): The Hague's nickname "Dowager of the Dutch East Indies" could well apply to the elegant Hotel Des Indes. The food it serves is refined and delicious, combining European and colonial flavors. See p. 324.

- **Restaurant de Echoput** (Apeldoorn, Holland; ☎ 055/519-14-63): Game features prominently on the menu at this restaurant, set amidst the forests near Apeldoorn, on the edge of the Royal Wood. During the hunting season you can have wild boar, venison, and any kind of fowl, always succulent and prepared with flair. In spring and summer the menu is just as delectable, and in fair weather you can dine on the terrace in the fresh forest air. See p. 392.

- **Château Neercanne** (Maastricht, Holland; ☎ 043/325-1359): "To

live like a god in France” goes the Dutch proverb expressing the pinnacle of earthly pleasure. You might imagine yourself to be both a god and in France if you dine at this château, which was designed following French models. What’s more, in true French culinary style, the food here is seductively elegant and the wine cellar is unique and impressive—the wines

are kept under perfect conditions in the marlstone caves behind the château. See p. 431.

- **Salon Saint-Michel** (Luxembourg City; ☎ 352/22-32-15): The Saint-Michel occupies a little side street in the Old Town, but lights up the entire city with classic French cuisine that makes no concessions where quality is concerned. See p. 456.

## 11 The Best Cafes & Bars

- **Falstaff Gourmand** (Brussels, Belgium; ☎ 26-20-06-20): Le Falstaff deserves the highest accolades for its eclectic, accomplished mix of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and its extensive drink list. This is self-satisfied, bourgeois Brussels at its best. See p. 76.
- **De Engel** (Antwerp, Belgium): There are cafes in Antwerp with a lot more action, but for a real Antwerpenaar brown cafe-style pub, it’s hard to beat De Engel. Its location at a corner of the Grote Markt adds to the attraction, but to experience De Engel’s crowning glory, order a glass of Antwerp’s own, lovingly poured De Koninck beer—a golden-brown liquid in a glass called a *bolleke* (little ball) that glows like amber in the sunlight streaming through De Engel’s windows. See p. 147.
- **’t Dreupelkot** (Ghent, Belgium): Ghent has no shortage of fine cafes, and you can just about guarantee that any one you enter will provide pleasant memories. ’t Dreupelkot adds a particularly warm glow of appreciation, however; its stock-in-trade is *jenever*, one of the most potent alcoholic liquids known to

humankind. Actually, some of ’t Dreupelkot’s 100 varieties are fairly mild, while others have been flavored with herbs and spices. The atmosphere in the cafe is great—it’s filled with cultured *jenever* buffs rather than with drunks. See p. 135.

- **Cafe ’t Smalle** (Amsterdam, Holland): This cozy, crowded brown cafe on Amsterdam’s Egelantiersgracht is usually thick with cigar smoke, *jenever* vapor, and lively conversation. You can escape the crush on the splendid waterside terrace, a perfect place to watch cyclists and cars rushing past while you rest your legs on the terrace railing. See p. 290.
- **In den Ouden Vogelstruys** (Maastricht, Holland): This friendly, popular Maastricht watering hole was already well-trodden territory when it came under artillery fire in some war or another in 1653, and took a hit from a cannonball that remains lodged in one of its walls. The place attracts a broad—in some cases very broad—cross-section of Maastricht society. See p. 434.

## 12 The Best Shopping

- **Diamonds** (Antwerp, Belgium): One thing is for sure, you’ll be spoiled for choice in Antwerp’s

Diamond Quarter, which does six times as much diamond business as Amsterdam. Much of the trade

here is carried on by the city's Orthodox Jewish community, whose conservative ways and traditional black clothing make a striking contrast to the glitter of their stock-in-trade. See chapter 6.

- **Lace** (Belgium): There are two kinds of Belgian lace: exquisitely handmade pieces, and machine-made stuff. Machine-made lace is not necessarily bad—indeed some of it is very good—but this is the form used to mass-produce pieces of indifferent quality to meet the demand for souvenirs. The highest-quality lace is handmade. Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent are the main, but far from the only, points of sale. See chapters 4, 5, and 6.
- **Chocolates** (Belgium): The Swiss might argue the point, but the truth is that Belgian handmade chocolates, filled with various fresh-cream flavors, are the best in the universe. You can't go wrong if you buy chocolates made by Wit-tamer, Nihoul, Leonidas, and Neuhaus, available in specialist shops all over Belgium (and in Holland and Luxembourg, too). See chapter 4.
- **Delftware** (Holland): Originally, the pottery made in the factories at Delft was white, imitating tin-glazed products from Italy and Spain. But during the 16th century, blue Chinese porcelain was imported to Holland, and this was soon recognized to be of superior quality. So the Delftware factories started using a white tin glaze to cover the red clay and decorating the pottery in blue. This Delft Blue became famous the world over, along with Makkumware, which is pottery produced in the Dutch town of Makkum. Delftware and Makkumware are for sale in specialized shops all over the country, but it's far more interesting to go to one of the workshops in the towns themselves and see how it's made. Little has changed over the centuries, and all the decorating is still done by hand. See chapters 13 and 14.
- **Flower Bulbs** (Holland): Nowadays many growers offer bulbs with a health certificate clearing them for entry into foreign countries, so you'll have no problem buying bulbs for home. You might not know what kind to buy, though, as it is difficult to choose from the incredible variety of shapes and colors offered in Holland. Some bulbs flower early in January, others wait until the warmer months of May or June. Knowing this, you can choose bulbs with different flowering times, so you can enjoy their blooming over a long period in spring. Check before buying, however, as not all bulbs are certified for entry into the U.S. Packages must have a numbered phytosanitary certificate attached to the label, allowing you to import the bulbs. In Amsterdam, you can't do better than buying them from the Floating Flower market on the Singel canal. See chapter 11.
- **Wine** (Luxembourg): Holland's tiny output notwithstanding, Luxembourg is the only real wine producer in the Benelux countries. The vintage in question is the highly regarded Moselle wine, perhaps not as well known outside the Grand Duchy and its immediate neighbors as German and French wines, but fine stock nonetheless. See chapter 18.