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Leuven Tourist Information

By Meredith Booney

General summary of the city:

Leuven (Louvain in French) is a university town and the capital city of the Belgian province of Flemish Brabant. The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Catholic University of Leuven) is the oldest catholic university in the world. It is also one of the world's oldest universities. With respect to the adage "old is gold", the university which is the hallmark of Leuven, is one of the most beautiful sights in the whole of Europe.

An ancient town Leuven, grew industrially from 11th century onwards. The town soon became famous for linen production (known as lewyn, then) by the late 15th century. Historians argue that linen is actually a corruption of the word "leuven". By the 18th century, the Beer brewing industry came into existence. The local "Stella Artois" brand of beer became a household name. Things turned out even better for Stella Artois when it merged with the Walloon based brewer Piedboeuf to manufacture Interbrew. The brand Interbrew grew exponentially as one of the most famous brewing companies in the world offering some of the most popular beer brands in Europe. Couple of years ago, Interbrew merged with a Brazilian brewer AmBew to merge InBev which is now the largest and the most popular brewer company in the world with a sizeable marketshare.

The city of Leuven suffered setbacks during the World Wars and the library of the university was destroyed and rebuilt twice. Ten percent of the students attending the university in Leuven are international students. All in all, Leuven is an historically gifted intellectual place for learning and spreading of knowledge.

Places of interest:

St.Peter's Church on Grotte Markt (Great Market Square) founded in the later part of the tenth century is a Gothic building. The Church bore the brunt of warfare during the world wars and had to be renovated. The best part about the church is the treasury of St.Peter which houses the 15th century paintings like the "The Last Supper" and the "Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus".

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The Grotte Markt and the Oude Markt (Old Market) reflect the ethos and splendor of the 15th and 16th century BC. No visitor worth his salt should miss the Stadhuis, the townhall of Grott Markt. The Stadhuis is the most beautiful building in Leuven and one of the most popular structures of Belgium. You can take a guided tour of the Stadhuis everyday from 3pm. During the months of April through September, the Stadhuis is open for guided tours from 11 am on weekdays.

The Beguinages built during the period between the 13th and 16th century are the collection of small buiding used by Beguines. They were more than 300 women during those times who lived religious lives, without taking monastic vows. A visit to the Beguinage reminds people of how these sisters dedicated their lives to God without isolating themselves from the world. Quite recently the Beguinages have been able to hold public interest because of their inclusion to the World Heritage List by UNESCO.

Things to do:

Leuven is one place which can make you feel young. There is a continous feeling of learning and education. No prizes for guessing why; Leuven is a "student city" with most of the citizens being students. The Old Market is famous for bars and cafés. Onder den Toog is well known for being Belgium's smallest bar and a haven visitors who want to absorb the folklore and ambience of the Louven culture.

A visitor cannot afford to miss the Rock Werchter festival held for three days in July. Though the city radiates a Catholic sentiment, the festivals in Leuven do not have any religious or historic appeal. They are purely indulged in for fun, merriment and get-togethers. The Rock Werchter features rock bands from parts of Europe and the USA. The other music festival known as Beleuvenissen play more jazz and blue, folk and classical concerts. Come August, and you can see the rise of pop fever in this city with interntional pop and rock bands coming together for the rock festival Marktrock. If you are into sports especially football, then you can pay a visit to the Oud-Heverlee Leuven, a Belgian football club, from the municipality of Leuven. You can also head to listening to some pleasing orchestra like the famous Arenberg Orchestra in Leuven.

Food and Drink:

The Belle Epoque and the Orange par Roland Debuyst restaurants are famous for gourmand delights. Also famous is the French restaurant offering the best in French cuisine called Ramberg Hof. Oesterbar is another beautiful eatery offering the choices of seafood and oysters for people who love seafood.

Since the place is famous for its cosmopolitian outlook, Leuven brims with the choicest international and ethic cuisinE ranigng from Italian, Mexican, Spanish to Chinese, Moghlai and Indian. There are around 1765 cafes and more than 215 restaurants in Leuven. The quality standards for food and drink are quite high as they are strictly monitored under the watchful eyes of the Leuven Catering Inspectorate.

The popular starters consists of soupe à la bière (beer soup) made with chicken stock and onions; a

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cold pate made of veal, pork and rabbit; flamiche, a tasty cheese pie with leeks or onions; and tomatoes filled with mayonnaise and shrimps. The main course include chicken stew or fish stew, lean beef cooked in a casserole with onion and beer among other favorites. A popular sweet dish is the Gaufres which are waffles served with chocolate syrup or icing sugar. Frijtes is a popular snack here.

Like the rest of Belgium, beer reigns high among the list of favorite drinks in Leuven, the most popular brand being the good ol' Stella Artois. There is also a good demand for French and Luxembourg variety of wines. Other popular drinks are gin and coffee. Leuven Peckhke gin with peach juice and Leuven Nootje, gin with hazel nut are quite popular among gins. Popular brands of Coffee are Margogyp and Mysore.

Hotel and Accomodation:

Het Klooster Hotel Hotel Ibis Leuven Centrum Hotel New Damshire Begijnhof Congreshotel Hotel Binnenhof Theater Hotel Leuven Centrum Entertainment:

You can take your kids or friends to a beautiful recreational park known as Kessel-Lo Provincial Recreation Park. Children can have a gala time playing, riding electric boats, driving mini-cars etc. You can indulge in row-boating, pedal boating, go-karts and playing to your heart's content in a splash pool.

For sports aficionados, there are football pitches, basketball and volleybal courts, a tennis court, two skate ramps and a roller skating rink. The eco-house along with a permanent water exhibition attract a lot of visitor attention. Those who love nature can also find peace and solace watching the greenery, the tree orchard and the blooming flower garden in the recreation park.

Those who prefer night entertainment, can visit some of the zaniest bars which are found around the Oude Markt and the Grott Mart. For people who love shopping, there is the Fochplein, which is famous for popular shops selling everything from food to outfits. There are also some smaller shops in the market area which sell interesting as well as commonplace items. Be it the park, the bars, the museums or the univeristy; the sheer magnetism and the chemistry of Leuven is quite entertaining. The friendly hospitality of the students of Leuven, the humor and the camaraderie shown by them to visitors is really commendable.

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Have you ever been a tourist in the city that you call home? If you are wondering what to do this weekend, why not become a tourist in your own city? It is amazing what you will learn about its history and what it has to offer. So many of us go about our daily routine and never take the time to explore or enjoy our surroundings. It is not that we take our cities for granted it is just that we all get busy with our jobs and our families that we just don't find the time. We don't make it a priority.

So, how about we all spare some time and start exploring!

If you were a tourist coming to your city for the first time, what would you want to do? Where would you go? Do you know what is so special about your city? To begin with, you may want to go to your local Tourist Information Office or Visitors Bureau to get some ideas. Is there a special exhibit at one of the museums? Is there a bus or boat tour that you can participate in? Is there an event or a festival that is taking place that you would like to attend? Is there a celebration coming up that sounds like fun?

As you research the endless possibilities you will notice that a lot of activities don't even require a lot of money. Some museums are free on certain days of the week. Some other attractions offer discounts during the weekdays and when it is not the typical tourist season.

We have been making a point of visiting the local attractions and participating in events in our city for years. We have toured around our city by boat and by double decker bus. Both tours offered something different but both were highly enjoyable. We have also visited the local museums when special exhibits are on display. Not only did we learn about our country's history but we also learned a lot more about the world. We regularly attend the festivals that are taking place here. Some of the festivals have us trying out new wines, some have us viewing millions of tulips and others have us up on our feet dancing to the music of a live band. And do you know what? We are having an absolute blast.

With all this touring around, we have also grown to love our city even more. We have always been proud to call it our home and we love telling people all about it. But now that we have spent some serious time exploring it firsthand, we have seen what it has to offer. We have found new activities that we didn't even know existed here and we have become well informed of the history of our city. As a result of this we even decided to create a website giving tourists and residents information about this great city that we call

home.

So, we ask you again. What are you doing this weekend? Why not take some time to

explore your surroundings? Have a great time and enjoy!

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