

Antwerp: a surprising visit

Antwerp is different from other cities. That's because the city and its people keep reinventing themselves – everything can always be 'newer' and 'better'. That's something from which you, as a visitor, only stand to gain.

CITY BY THE RIVER

The river Scheldt splits Antwerp into two, but thanks to St Anna's Tunnel, both city halves remain connected. The walk through this pedestrian and cyclist's tunnel is an experience in itself – you go down a wooden escalator, Europe's oldest we'll have you know – and on arrival on the Left Bank, you're treated to the best view of the city.

Beside a river, Antwerp also has a sea port ... 80 km inland. Interested to learn more about this port area? There are bus, boat and cycling tours that will take you through the logistical network. And even in the *Eilandje* district, you can still soak up the port atmosphere of yesterday. While the distinctive neighbourhood was recently given a trendy make-over, the MAS| Museum aan de Stroom (Museum at the River) and Red Star Line museum prove that it hasn't forgotten its past.

INNOVATIVE KNOWLEDGE CITY

Antwerp is characterised by its innovativeness. Just think of printing or international diamond hallmarks, such as 'Cut in Antwerp' which first originated here. Even today, as you stroll from one innovative pop-up to another, you will come across some striking urban renewal projects, including Park Spoor Noord, along the way.

Meanwhile, you can have lunch in a shoe store or catapult a little cocoa up your nose when you try a chocolate shooter. Even quality businesses like to think outside the box. That's how The Jane set up shop in a former chapel. And even traditional establishments, such as city brewery De Koninck, which was founded in 1833, continue to innovate, with a brand-new brewery and a contemporary beer city.

You can seamlessly move from one hotspot to the next on a city bike which is ready waiting for you at one of the Velo stations. You can plot your route with your smartphone: all tourist information is available online or in an app, and thanks to the free Wi-Fi network in the city centre, you are hooked up in seconds.

CREATIVE CITY

Antwerp exudes creativity ... even architecturally. During a tour of the city, you will come across late Classical masterpieces, contemporary delights and anything in between. Antwerp has so many architectural treasures, it can simply recycle them as stores – just check out The (shopping) Stadsfeestzaal or the Palace in Meir when you get the chance.

There are, of course, also museums if you fancy a bit of culture, like Plantin-Moretus, the world's first museum to feature on the World Heritage List, or the M HKA and the MoMu, in which contemporary art and trend-setting fashion claim their place. And then there is The Rubens House full of works by the famous artist. His paintings, however, can also be admired at the Cathedral of Our Lady. This is, again, a world heritage site. A fine achievement if you consider that only one of its spires was completed.

METROPOLIS ON A HUMAN SCALE

Even though Antwerp boasts no fewer than 174 nationalities, thanks to its modest dimensions, it is a metropolis on a human scale: everything is easily accessible and within easy reach. That way, visitors can get to know Antwerp very quickly, with all its flavours, styles and idiosyncrasies. In fact, you get one extra day to discover everything, because every first Sunday of the month, all the shops are open.

You're more than welcome to start your adventure. The jovial locals will receive you with open arms, and the city is happy to lay itself bare – layer by layer. Bet you won't want to leave?