Charleroi Historical Tour

1666

A guided tour to discover the fortress and the thrilling history of Charleroi...

Which a military fortress was transformed into a metropolis.

Back in 1666, the Marquis de Castel Rodrigo, the Governor of the Netherlands, serving the young King of Spain, Charles II, created a fortress in the village of Charnoy.
The fortified site was called Charleroy in honour of the King and, on 3 September of the same year, the Latin chronogram 'FVNDATVR CAROLOREGIVM' was included in the baptismal register.

Charleroi remained under military control for two centuries. After the 1830 revolution, economic activity thrived, driven by industrial development and the proliferating channels of communication.

As space in the city was becoming limited, a decision was taken in 1867 to demolish the city wall to allow the city to expand. Boulevards were then created on the former city wall.

Heads of industry chose these new sites on the new tree-lined boulevards to set up home in private townhouses created in the modern architectural style. This signalled the coming of Art Nouveau.

During the First World War Charleroi was the scene of bitter fighting to take possession of bridges over the river Sambre.

Economic decline set in after the Second World War owing to the disappearance of heavy industry but the city gradually started to move into state-of-the-art technologies to become the leading Walloon metropolis we know today.

This urban tour takes visitors from stopping point to stopping point to discover the metropolis' past and must-see locations. This may take several forms: a major tour starting from South Station, linking the lower and upper parts of the city, or two shorter routes. The 2.4 km Ville-Basse circuit, starting from the station and the 3.3. km Ville-Haute circuit starting from the Tourist Office, place Charles II.

In the late 19th century, Charleroi made its mark as one of the key links in the north-west European industrial axis, between the United Kingdom and the Ruhr, and became one of the world's wealthiest cities.

Until the First World War it was the economic backbone of Belgium and Europe, on the same footing as London. Business operators came from all over the world to build dozens of industrial empires.

1. POINT OF DEPARTURE - 1666
Charleroi-Sud Station

The tour begins at the Neoclassical-style Charleroi-Sud Station, which was built during a period of great industrial success. Taking its cue from the Paris-Est Station, Charleroi-Sud was built using glass and steel.

Located on the square aux Martyrs, in front of the station, the steel drum standing there pays tribute to the French armies which, from the French Revolution until the Second World War, crossed the river Sambre eight times to win freedom for the local population.

2. CONSTANTIN MEUNIER
King Baudouin Bridge

The King Baudouin Bridge featuring two sculptures made by Constantin Meunier, as a tribute to members of the mining and factory-working communities, spans the Sambre, the first Belgian river to be channelled.

Standing on this bridge you suddenly become aware of the extent of Charleroi's role as an industrial power.

The silhouettes of factories, blast furnaces, chimneys and the tops of slagheaps can still be seen against the horizon.
Still very much present in the Charleroi landscape, the traces of the industrial legacy never fail to impress foreign visitors.

« It was quite by coincidence that I ended up in the Black Country, the industrial region. I am struck by that tragically fierce beauty. I can feel a life work ready to be created revealing itself to my inner being. »
Constantin Meunier

THE LOWER CITY

The Spanish wanted to turn Charleroi into a purely military site. Louis XIV made it into a city. He offered many concessions in order to encourage people to live there. The lower part of the city succeeded in attracting people engaged in commercial and craftwork activities and working class communities.

La place Verte

After the extensive remodelling project, the square in the downtown area was assigned its historical name in 2016: place Verte, dating back to the Louis XIV fortress when it was nothing more than a meadow surrounded by a lime tree-lined avenue.

Post office

As in the case of the railway sector, Charleroi was a very forward-looking administrative city in terms of postal activities.
A central post office was built in the upper part of the city in 1905 but this no longer exists. Two years later the general post office was established in the lower part of the city. The building now accommodates the Librairie Molière book shop, one of the biggest in Belgium.

3. PASSAGE DE LA BOURSE

In the late 19th century, the city authorities were anxious for Charleroi to acquire the status of a major city, with its parks, avenues, boulevards and monuments.

Schools, a commodity exchange and a covered passageway leading up to it were built. It was only natural that the gallery should be called the Passage de la Bourse (Exchange Passageway).

It is one of the few, perhaps the only gallery with a twist. Based on the Neoclassical style, the gallery was built in 1890 on the site of a Capuchin monastery, emulating the Parisian fashion for large covered passageways.

4. ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA

rue de Marchienne, 11

In common with Madeleine Church in Paris, Charleroi is home to a Neoclassical church dating back to 1828 that is quite unique.

Charleroi was a Dutch fortified site at the time.

The architect Kuypers therefore decided to invest it with a secular appearance, based on a certain austerity much favoured by Dutch Protestants.

The left nave wall is adorned with a work by François-Joseph Navez, a Neoclassical painter hailing from Charleroi and a disciple of Jacques-Louis David, a famous painter from the French Revolution period, who was also the official painter of Emperor Napoleon. ①

worth seeing

Boulevard Tirou

Several urban projects were developed between the 1930s and the 1960s with a view to transforming the city into a modern metropolis.

The most spectacular initiative was undoubtedly the filling in of the bed of the Sambre to turn it into a splendid boulevard.

Ever since the 1920s the size of the population has continued to grow and rising water levels have continued to cause problems. In 1928, under the leadership of Mayor Joseph Tirou, a decision was taken to fill in the Sambre's natural river bed and retain solely the channelled section. 1948 was the year in which the new boulevard was inaugurated along the route of the river. It is hard nowadays to imagine that this location was ever frequented by boats and fishermen.

ENTRE-DEUX-VILLES

The tour arrives here in the *Entre-deux-villes* district, located at the site of the former village of Charnoy, on the left bank of the Sambre. This district was soon covered with private dwellings, while also attracting craftsmen and traders.

5. FIACRE CHAPEL
Place Saint-Fiacre

The 17th century military hospital that used to stand on the edge of the Sambre had a tiny chapel dedicated to the worship of St. Fiacre.

St. Fiacre was used as a place of worship in the lower city, prior to the construction of a larger church dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua.

6. ESCALIER DES RAMES
Rue de Dampremy

In the late 18th century, a textile industry began to emerge in Charleroi, attracted by the advantages offered by the Sambre.

Another reminder of the fortress, the *escalier des rames* (the stairway of tenters), connects rue de Dampremy to a path leading to the foot of the fortress, where the weavers would place wool on wooden frames to dry. The city wall can still be seen from the terrace of a neighbouring establishment.

worth seeing

Rue de la Montagne
The route continues towards rue de la Montagne (Mountain Street). This aptly named street provides a direct link between the lower and upper city.

Jules Destrée
Before branching off towards the boulevard de l'Yser, the tour passes by the statue of Jules Destrée, the man behind the cultural and social development of Charleroi, the Science and Art Minister, a great admirer of all things artistic. He discovered Pierre Paulus, revealing his talent during the 1911 International Exhibition. In 1893, he welcomed Paul Verlaine to his home in Marcinelle, when the poet visited Charleroi to give a conference and to attend a concert at the Eden Theatre, where we are now heading.

THE UPPER CITY

This part of the city played a mainly military role, as it was the site of many military and civilian buildings.

7. EDEN

Boulevard Jacques Bertrand, 1

After 1870 theatrical activities became increasingly important in the life of Charleroi in parallel with the major works undertaken and the industrial expansion process.

Numerous theatre venues were opened, presenting plays from Brussels and Paris.

In the midst of this atmosphere, the architect Cador proceeded in 1885 to build the first regional theatre using sustainable materials, the Eden Theatre, where Sarah Bernhardt came to perform *La Dame aux Camélias*.

After being used for several different functions, including a school in the 1980s, the Eden returned to its original purpose. It is now a leading entertainment and cultural venue.

worth seeing

Maison du Bailli

Rue de France, 3

Dating back to the late 18th century, during Charleroi›s Austrian period, this establishment was built in the Neoclassical Louis XVI style. Its façade in rue Turenne still features the date 1780, written in gold letters. The Maison du Bailli (Bailiff's House) owes its name to the official representing the legal system. This listed and renovated building now houses the Espace Wallonie, a centre providing information about the Walloon Region and hosting several exhibitions.

Maison de la Laïcité

Rue de France, 31

The building's façade features a plate commemorating its founder, Jules Bufquin des Essarts, manager of the Journal de Charleroi. We will be returning to this illustrious individual in the context of the Press Centre (see stopping point 11).

worth seeing

Historical centre

Place Charles II

The tour now leads to the historical centre of the city, place Charles II.

The plan for place Charles II draws its inspiration from the ideal model of the Renaissance.

The concentric plan is designed to allow troops to be deployed towards the bastions as effectively as possible.

Under the square is a remnant of the French fortress: a 43-metre deep well.

Streets reminiscent of the French fortress bastions start from the hexagonal-shaped square, as referred to by the tour stopping points: rue Turenne, rue Orléans, rue Dauphin, rue Montal, rue des Gardes and rue Vauban.

Relief map

An opportunity to take a break from the tour to enter the City Hall and admire the model relief map of the fortress.

It is a reproduction to a scale of 1:600 of the map produced in 1696 for Louis XIV. The original is part of a series of one hundred relief maps of cities and fortresses. The maps are now kept in the Lille Fine Arts Museum.

The map featured the name "The three cities of Charleroi", referring to the upper and lower city and the Entre-deux-villes. The model is part of a brand-new scenographic presentation. ① ③

« My first thought was always to begin the campaign via Charleroi, because, owing to the important of this place, I was looking forward to taking hold of it while the fortifications, which were still new, were easier to destroy. »

Louis XIV

8. CITY HALL

Place Charles II

In the1930s, in a region enjoying a rapid economic expansion, Charleroi was the focal point of a powerful industry.

The size of the population was continuing to increase and in order to cater for the needs of citizens, a new city hall was built on the square.

Architect Jules Cézar designed the project but Joseph André was responsible for its successful conclusion. It is an Art Deco structure that is exceptional from every point of view: from the use of high-quality materials to the impressive belfry, via the monumental shape of the complex and the masterpieces embellishing the rooms and corridors. It is one of the few city halls in Wallonia to enjoy exceptional heritage status owing to its interior design. ① ②

9. BELFRY

Belfries have been part of the landscape in Belgium and Northern France ever since the 11th century. Built in Charleroi in 1936, this belfry is the only one in the Art Deco style and the most recently built in Belgium.

It is now included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, together with 32 Belgian and 23 French belfries.

Ever since the 12th century the belfry has been historically acknowledged as being a municipal tower, built in contrast to the keep, the tower of the local lord, and in contrast to the church tower, the tower of the clergy.

A belfry is a perfect symbol of the power of the cities. ① ③

10. ST. CHRISTOPHER'S BASILICA

Place Charles II

In 1667 Louis XIV ordered a chapel to be built for the garrison and dedicated to the worship of St. Louis, a direct ancestor of the King.

The foundation stone of St. Louis Chapel is embedded in the wall, featuring the date 1667. The fleur-de-lys is a reminder that the church was founded by the French.

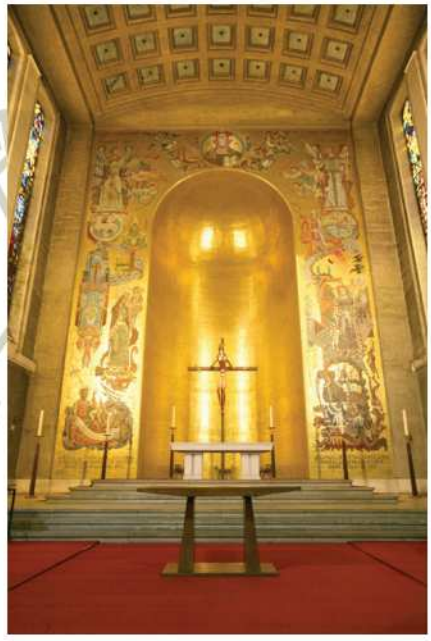
The building was extended in the 18th century and dedicated to the worship of St. Christopher, previously worshipped in the Charnoy hamlet chapel, which was demolished when the fortified site was built.

The original church has undergone numerous construction phases down the ages but it was not until 1957 that Joseph André gave it a majestic appearance.

« A basilica has to be built so it never happens again ».

These are the words Joseph Tirou used to pay tribute to the hostages executed by the Rexists a few days before the Liberation in 1944. The victims included the Canon of Charleroi, Pierre Harmignie.

Although the name has never been officially assigned, all the people of Charleroi speak of the basilica when a reference is made to the church topped with a 48-metre-high copper dome. The new choir is complemented by an amazing 200 m² glass and gilt mosaic representing the Apocalypse according to St. John. It was created by Venetian masters on the basis of drawings by Jean Ransy, a Belgian artist famous for his symbolic and surrealist works. ① ②



11. GOLDEN HOUSE

Rue Tumelaire, 15

An Art Nouveau masterpiece exemplifying the prosperity of the bourgeoisie emerging in the late 19th century. This was the home of a major industrial glassmaker. The façade attracts attention thanks to its huge golden sgraffito, reflecting the wealth of the family who lived there.

The Golden House, a former showcase of social success, is now the home of the Press Centre. ①

The press

Charleroi's success in becoming a regional capital went hand in hand with the intense development of the press media, particularly after 1870.

Four daily newspapers reported local and international news: the Journal de Charleroi, the oldest, L'Union de Charleroi, Le Progrès and, lastly, Le Pays Wallon.

The oldest publication, the Journal de Charleroi, was created in 1845 by Louis-Xavier Bufquin des Essarts, the son of a French aristocrat, who was a political refugee. His son turned it into a progressive newspaper.

This link with the press brings us to an anecdote about Rimbaud. The reason for his second visit to Charleroi was his hope of being taken on by the Journal de Charleroi as a journalist. In Charleville, his native city, he was a fellow student of Jules Bufquin des Essarts, the son of the newspaper manager. He was invited to dine with the family but his anti-conformist pronouncements and his irreverent attitude struck them as shocking. It is easy to understand why there was no question of him working for the publication.

« I have spent eight days ripping my boots on the cobblestones. I entered the city of Charleroi. »

Arthur Rimbaud

Two unlikely witnesses still to be found in Charleroi recall the legacy of the city's press and more specifically that of the Bufquin des Essarts family. Our tour leads us to a pair of famous lions: Totor and Tutur.

Tourist Office
Museums
Churches
Subway
28 Ouest
N5
N90
30 Ouest
terril des Piges
chaussée de Bruxelles
rue de l'Ancre
rue de la Garenne
place de la Broucheterre
rue du Fort
rue du Mambourg
Palais des Beaux-Arts
18
rue la Poterne
rue Chavanne
place du Manege
Charleroi Expo
avenue de l'Europe
square Octave Pinkers
rue de Castel Rodrigo
rue de l'Aigle
rue Montal
rue des 3 Rois
Basilique St-Christophe
9
rue du Beffroi
rue du Dauphin
bd. J. Bertrand
place Charles II
8
rue de Mons
rue Turenne
avenue des Alliés
rue de la Digue
7
rue de France
bd. de l'Yser
rue Basslé
rue de la Montagne
boulevard A
rue de la Justice
rue du Palais
rue A. Blaren
Station Ouest
place de la Digue
6
rue de Dampremy
place St. Flacre
5
rue du Grand Central
rue des Rivages
rue Dagnelies
place des Tramways
rue du Pont de Sambre
rue du Bief-du-Moulin
rue Fenderie
rue du Compte
Petite Rue
place Verte
Galerie Bernard
boulevard J. Tirou
rue de Marcinelle
4
place Rucloux
rue J. Monnet
rue du Collège
Passage du Bastion
rue de la Bourse
Rue Grande
rue Puissant d'Agimont
3
rue Ch. Dupret
rue Navez
rue Arthur Regniers
rue de Charleville
rue des Trois Poids
rue Olof Palme
pont Olof Palme
Quai Paul Verlaine
pont de la Villette
pont Baudouin
place Bulsset
21
Quai Arthur Rimbaud
rue de Brabant
rue des Ateliers
rue des Peines
rue Perrier
2
Quai de la Gare Sud
placerelle
LaMU
la Sambre
1
av. Paul Pastur
gare Charleroi-Sud
rue de la Villette
rue de la Résistance

R9
Université du Travail
rue A. Langlois
Square Jules Hiernaux
Grand'Rue
Ville 2
28 Est
N90
parc Hiernaux
rue de la Neuville
bd. G Roullier
bd. Solvay
rue du Mambourg
rue Clément Lyon
rue Lebeau
av. J. Henin
rue d'Angleterre
bd. F. Dewandre
rue Isaac
rue Zenobe Gramme
avenue de Waterloo
rue Chapel Huart
rue Léon Berrus
bd. Joseph II
bd. Paul Janson
Stade du Pays de Charleroi
bd. Zoe Drion
rue des Sports
rue Chavannes
rue Neuve
rue de la Regence
rue du Laboratoire
rue de la Science
rue du Spinois
Palais du verre
parc J. Depelsennaire
Bd. A. Defontaine
Hôtel de police
rue Charnoy
rue du Gouvernement
rue Emile Tumelaire
Palais de justice
av. Général Michel
bd. Pierre Mayence
rue d'Orléans
rue du Parc
Caserne Trésignies
rue de la Paix
parc Reine Astrid
rue Willy Ernst
rue Emile Tumelaire
rue du Parc
Patinoire
rue Neuve
rue Brigade Piron
Stade de la Neuville
rue de Montigny
l'Athénée
bd. Pierre Mayence
bd. E. Devreux
rue du Pont Neuf
rue Pruniau
rue d'Assaut
rue Saint-Charles
rue de la Croix Rouge
rue de Montigny
boulevard J. Tirou
29 Est
rue de l'Ecluse
chaussée de Charleroi
Pont de Philippe
30 Est
15
16
17
14
10
11
12
13
19
20

12. TOTOR AND TUTUR

Boulevard Defontaine

Works by a sculptor famed for his many lions, Antoine-Félix Bouré, the two wild animals keep watch over the legal system. The nicknames are probably a reflection of the names of the sons of the then caretaker of the Court House, Nestor and Arthur. They owe their claim to fame to the journalist Louis Bufquin des Essarts, who allowed them to exchange views in the Journal de Charleroi.

The Court House is the work of architect Jacques Depelsenaire, winner of the 1948 Prix de Rome in architecture and famous in Charleroi for his very many achievements.

The Court House has now been extensively renovated and expanded, thanks to the refurbishment of the *Palais du Verre*, to cater for the needs of the legal system.

Meanwhile, the lions are still there, caring and invincible spectators of the judiciary.

Legal question

From the French Revolution until the Battle of Waterloo, Charleroi had the same domestic system as France,: administration, justice, taxes, raising troops, ...

In 1800 Napoleon decided Charleroi should be the district capital and the headquarters of a court of first instance.

worth seeing

Located on the same esplanade as the Court House and the *Palais du Verre*, the park was redeveloped in 2011 and renamed Depelsenaire park, as a tribute to its creator.

13. TRÉSIGNIES BARRACKS

Avenue Général Michel, 1

The fortifications demolished in the late 19th century were replaced by a barracks. Several regiments were quartered here, including the 1st and 2nd Light Infantry regiments.

The bravery of the 1st Light Infantry regiment throughout the First World War made it one of the most highly-decorated in the entire Belgian army.

A Neo-Medieval style was adopted in a bid to reflect the army's power.

It uses architectural components calculated to evoke the defence capabilities.

One of the wings in the barracks houses the Light Infantry Museum. ①

worth seeing

The large boulevards

Thanks to the fortress demolition programme rolled out from 1869 to 1872, the city was finally able to develop, loosen up and expand. The demolished city walls that used to surround the city centre were replaced by large boulevards.

The 1867 Charleroi urban development plan is clearly marked by the influence of Baron Haussmann, to whom Paris owes its major urban development achievements and the creation of its grand tree-lined boulevards.

In common with Paris, these urban development activities enabled Charleroi to ensure a smoother flow of people and goods, which was not only good for the economy but also for air and water quality, and for the hitherto overlooked question of hygiene.

The period of urban development in the second half of the 19th century profoundly altered the city's appearance.

140 years later, the city is once again experiencing a radical change to its urban environment. Major projects are underway, others have already been completed, such that Charleroi is the scene of the one of largest urban projects in Europe.

worth seeing

Police headquarters...
Au Boulevard Mayence, 67

The construction of a police headquarters and the extension of the Charleroi Danses studios on the site of the former gendarmerie is one of the key city transformation projects, assigned to world-famous architect, Jean Nouvel. A 75–metre-high police headquarters tower now dominates the Charleroi skyline. It is covered with blue enamelled bricks, a key component that is very typical of the region.

...and Charleroi Danses

Extended by over 2000 m², the Charleroi Danses studios are located right in front of the tower. They comprise dance studios and artists' residences. The Charleroi Danses Biennial is a key event involving international and Belgian performances.

14. DOCTORS' HOUSE
rue Léon Bernus, 40

Located in the midst of a district created in the early 20th century, this Art Nouveau building is highly representative of the commitment to assert the social status of the newly installed bourgeoisie.

The façade of this house is a harmonious combination of bricks, timber, metal, stained-glass windows and bas-relief carvings, involving all the different trades right down to the finest details.

Built at the dawn of the 20th century, a row of 30 or so houses in rue Léon Bernus, is listed as an architectural whole.

worth seeing

1911 International Exhibition.

Before the dark years of the First World War, Charleroi experienced a euphoric epoch, a happy period when it was the focus of international interest. Thanks to the 1911 International Exhibition its status, was enhanced quite considerably.

An impressive exhibition covering 27 hectares, it occupied most of the space left after the fortifications were demolished, and in particular the Waterloo Gate, covering the brand-new Labour University.

The only visible sign of this major event nowadays is the tiny pavilion used as an electrical room and located on boulevard Joseph II, near to the statue of Boule and Bill.

Underground passages.

In the parking area under this pavilion is a door providing access to underground passages. Running under the city, these are the remnants of the Dutch fortress. On 3 September 1816, exactly 150 years after the creation of the first fortress, the Dutch regime laid the first stone of the new city wall. ①

15. ALFRED LANGLOIS LIBRARY

boulevard Rouilier, 1

The phenomenal prosperity of the Black Country in the second half of the 19th century led to the rapid development of a technical education system.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Paul Pastur, Alfred Langlois and Jules Hiernaux, three iconic figures in the region, devised a completely new educational programme and created the Labour University.

This was the very first time that manual workers, the creators of the economic boom, had the opportunity to improve their skills. A library was added on. At the time the shelves were heaving with technical works. It is now one of the most extensive libraries in the province.

Paul Pastur

Both hailing from Marcinelle, Jules Destrée and Paul Pastur were childhood friends. Their families were very close and would always remain so. From the very start of his career as a lawyer, Paul Pastur was anxious to be a spokesperson for the workers. He bore witness to the material and moral misery, became a socialist militant and devoted himself to the expansion of technical education in Hainaut province. The Labour University was inaugurated in 1911, one month after the Charleroi International Exhibition opened. The building still houses the office of its creator.

« Allowing young generations of workers to gain access to the training they need to achieve social advancement through education, culture and work. »

Paul Pastur

16. GRAMME BUILDING
Boulevard Solvay, 31

The Gramme Building was inaugurated to coincide with the 1911 International Exhibition.

This impressively designed building pays tribute to the trades driving the region's prosperity.

Its structure, its decoration, its technology, its size - all reflect Charleroi's rich industrial legacy and the expertise of its craftsmen.

worth seeing

BPS22
Boulevard Solvay, 22

Housed in the industrial glass building constructed during the 1911 International Exhibition. The venue has retained its distinctiveness and its industrial splendour.

The outcome of the revamped exhibition design is impressive. A large hall covered with an industrial glass structure lends itself to monumental installations.
The Province's vast collection is strikingly highlighted with special emphasis on international artists. The museum also hosts other events, bringing together different artistic disciplines: music, theatre, dance, techno culture... ① ②

17. LAFLEUR HOUSE

Boulevard Solvay, 7

A typical example of the Viennese Secession movement, built in 1908, the Maison Lafleur was the first Art Nouveau listed building in Charleroi.

The late 19th century saw the disappearance of the fortifications, the expansion of the city and the creation of new boulevards.

The city grew prosperous, driven by its industries, and the new bourgeoisie that emerged from this industrial success went to live in the new residential districts. Art Nouveau came into being at the same time as this bourgeoisie, on the cusp of two centuries, while the architectural achievements were in tune with the times. The dwellings at that time were lavishly furnished to demonstrate the social status of their owners and featured new industrial materials in the walls. ①

The tour continues via rue Neuve towards rue de la Chapelle.

worth seeing

St. Anne's Chapel

In May 1682 a statue of the Madonna and Child was discovered in a niche formed by the branches of a tree on the city wall. This discovery gave rise to the worship of the *Notre-Dame-au-Rempart* (Our Lady of the City Wall). In order to provide appropriate shelter for the Virgin Mary, a first chapel was built on the city wall, in the same spot that the statue was found..

The chapel was demolished and subsequently rebuilt. Two engraved stones from the original chapel have been replaced on each side of the entrance, representing one of the oldest remnants that can still be seen of the city.

These stones pay tribute to the donations made by two Spaniards of noble birth. Each of their coats of arms was engraved there until being effaced by French revolutionaries. However, their names are still very visible.

In the 1950s the city was the scene of several projects completed under the supervision of architect Joseph André: the Exhibition Centre, the Centre for Fine Arts and a splendid extension to St. Christopher's Basilica.

18. CENTRE FOR FINE ARTS
Place du Manège, 1

When Charleroi was at the peak of its development Joseph André built a daring Centre for Fine Arts, an establishment that is both Art Deco and Modernist, the conference room ardorned with a fresco by Magritte. The 1,800-seat Centre for Fine Arts boasts one of the largest auditoriums in Wallonia. ①

worth seeing

Fine Arts Museum
Housed in the Centre for Fine Arts, the museum looks after a fine, wide-ranging collection, comprising mainly paintings but also sculptures, engravings, drawings, ceramics, videos and installations. The entire collection covers 19th and 20th art in Wallonia and turns a spotlight on 21st century artists that have close links with the region and social concerns. ① ②

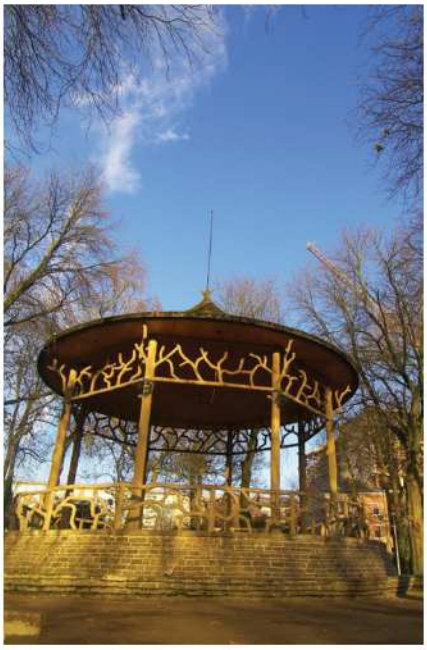
René Magritte
This key surrealist artist lived in the Charleroi Region from the age of three to 18, returning in later years to produce a fresco for the Centre for Fine Arts called *"La Fée ignorante"* (The Ignorant Fairy). The centre has nine paintings by the master.

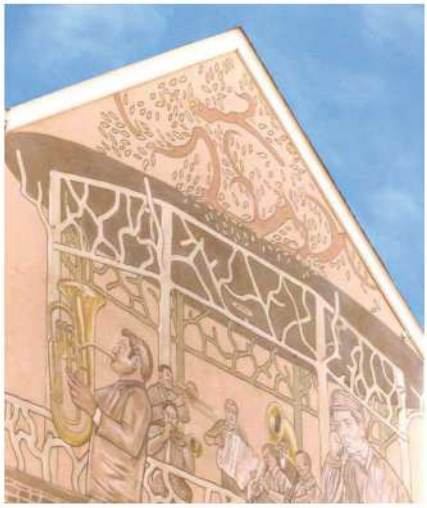
worth seeing

Tourist Office
The tour returns to the city centre, the site of the Tourist Office, housed in a 19th century building whose façades have kept the stained-glass windows. An original fresco by Silvio Gigli at the top of the gable represents Jacques Bertrand, the Charleroi Region bard, and the bandstand in Queen Astrid park.
Place Charle II, 20

19. QUEEN ASTRID PARK
Boulevard Audent

This is one of the few late19th century parks to have been preserved. A pleasant crossing point between the upper and lower city, the park was inaugurated on the day when some of Charleroi's streets were illuminated by electricity for the first time. During the Belle Epoque local residents would gather around the bandstand to enjoy a pleasant time together. Even today, people can come here on certain Sundays to listen to the music. ②





The park has many ornamental objects, including the city's only equestrian statue, Lucky Luke astride his faithful
Jolly Jumper. The park also features some splendid trees, along with the age-old tree named Ginkgo Biloba, which was rediscovered towards the 18th century. A plate at the bottom of a copper beech reminds us that this is a Tree of Freedom that was planted on 4 October 1930 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Belgium's independence.

20. MAISON LEMAÎTRE
Boulevard Devreux, 6

The Maison Lemaître is an impressive private townhouse built in 1882 by architect Auguste Cador. The house is dedicated to Georges Lemaître, a scientist born in Charleroi, who is internationally famous for advancing the Big Bang theory as a cosmological model.

Charleroi was the birthplace of several scientists and leading industrialists.

Apart from Georges Lemaître, there is Julien Dulait, an engineer and inventor of electrical machinery, Ernest Solvay, a well-known chemist, and Emile Gobbe, the inventor of a mechanical glass manufacturing process with Emile Fourcault.

worth seeing

Fortress-style house

Boulevard Tirou, 88
This is one of the city's oldest buildings, dating back to 1738, during the fortification period.

A plate on the façade refers to General Letort, an officer in Napoleon's army, who died in this building from an injury sustained during the fighting in Gilly, two days before the Battle of Waterloo.

Further on, the *Vecteur*, in rue de Marcinelle 30, is a place dedicated to the emerging culture and alternative arts. The centre has an exhibition area, the *Galerie V2*, facing the main building.

21. DARVILLE BAS-RELIEF CARVING / NAPOLEON PLATE

Quai Arthur Rimbaud, 10

Underneath the Quai 10 arcade is the site of a bas-relief carving, representing Charleroi fortress, made by Alphonse Darville in 1966 to commemorate the city's 300th anniversary. Winner of the 1935 Grand Prix de Rome, the artist produced several works for his native city and founded the Charleroi Fine Arts Academy.

A commemorative plate recalls Napoleon's stay and his decision to set up his general headquarters in Puissant Castle, which no longer exists, two days before Waterloo.

Quai 10

This is a centre dedicated to the visual arts, comprising film theatres, rooms for video games and exhibition rooms.

On the other side is the Placerelle (bridge), a stainless steel pedestrian area spanning the river Sambre, reminiscent of the Pont des Arts in Paris.

Sambre quays

The Sambre, long imprisoned within its concrete walls, as a reflection of urban development subjugated to industry, has now been returned to the city's inhabitants. The lowered quays have become pleasant areas for taking walks.

① Guided visits available.
② Folder / tour available from the Tourist Office
③ Access to the relief map of the fortress and belfry

INFORMATIONS

Charleroi Tourist Office
Maison du Tourisme
Place Charles II, 20 - 6000 CHARLEROI (Belgium)
Tel : +32 (0)71 86 14 14
www.charleroi.be
www.cm-tourisme.be
maison.tourisme@charleroi.be

Photographs : Jean-Pierre Coqlet, Maxime Delvaux, Luc Denruyter, Jean-François Laurent, PBA, Gina Santin, Mireille Simon.

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