

Excursion Saturday 23 March 2024

After 2 full days in Brussels, it is time to go and discover the diversity of Belgium. The excursion will bring us to the Abbaye of Villers-en-Brabant in Wallonia and to the majestic city of Antwerp in Flanders.

Departure: +/- 9.00 am – location: near Central Station

Morning : The Abbaye de Villers-en-Brabant



The Abbaye de Villers-en-Brabant (Villers Abbey), situated in the commune of Villers-la-Ville (Belgium) in grounds of more than 36 hectares, is a destination imbued with history and emotion. Listed since 1972 and declared “exceptional heritage of Wallonia” since 2013, the Abbey was founded in the 12th

century, under the aegis of Saint Bernard, in the valley of the Thyle river. It is one of the “daughter”-abbeys of Clairvaux and protected by the dukes of Brabant.

The 13th century marked its apogee. Between the 14th and 17th centuries, the abbey experienced a succession of calm and troubled periods, during which the monks left the site on nine occasions for reasons of insecurity. In the 18th century, the abbey experienced its second golden age, marked by a great architectural boom. After the French Revolution, the monastic community dispersed and the abbey was sold as national property.

In the 19th century, the former Abbey of Villers was transformed into a romantic and picturesque place to visit. The Belgian government expropriated the property in 1892 and began a major restoration programme, which was interrupted by the First World War and then resumed from time to time. Listed in 1972, the site underwent a new campaign to consolidate the ruins between 1984 and 2000, and new tourist facilities were installed between 2010 and 2017.

A guided tour will enlighten us on the particularly ingenious monks of the Cistercian Order who built this majestic Abbey and brought this architectural masterpiece to life.



More information : <https://villers.be/en>



A light **lunch** will be provided in the “Bistro de l’Abbaye”.

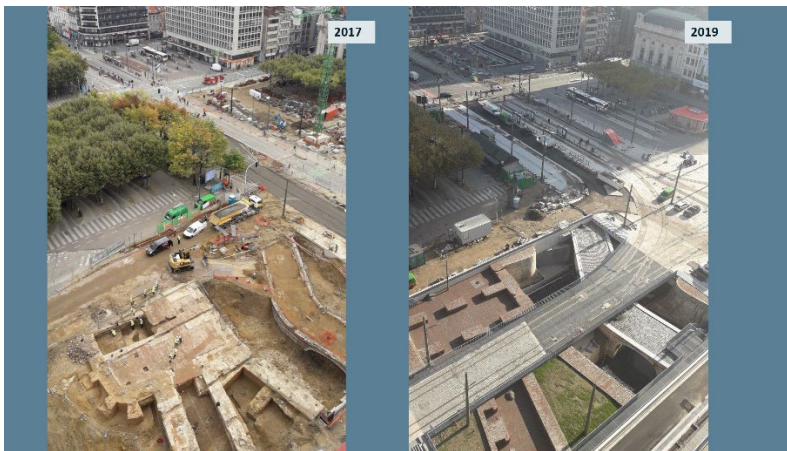
Afternoon: Guided tour of Antwerp’s Archaeology

After lunch we leave for the city of Antwerp.

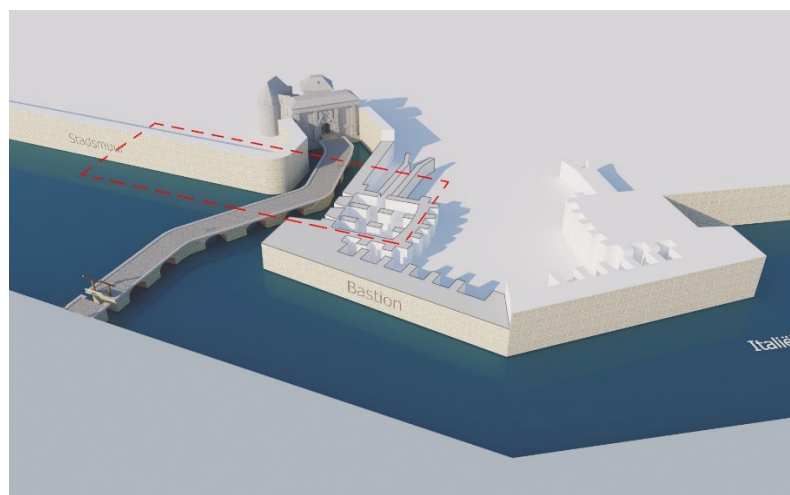
Antwerp is the archetypal bourgeois merchant town since the late Middle Ages and played a major role in the globalisation of European economic activities. Still today it is Europe's second-largest commercial port in terms of activity and tonnage, after the neighbouring port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

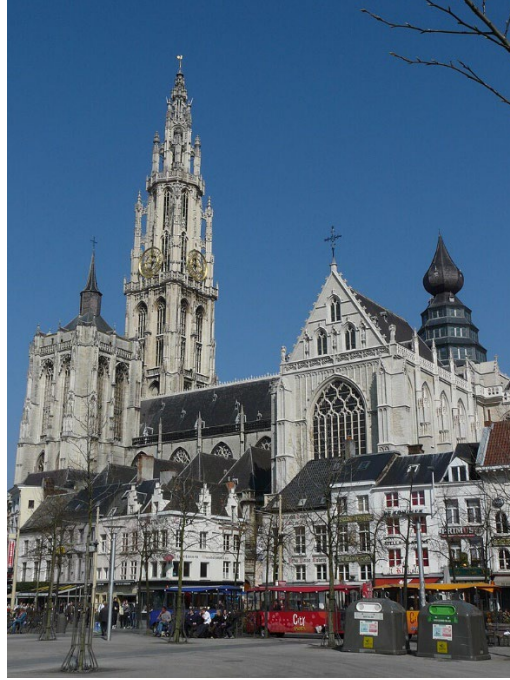
The Antwerp Archaeological Service will guide us through the city : we will discover how the results of their archaeological excavations of the city wall are fully integrated in the actual city planning. We will start at the Kipdorp-site and walk through the ancient heart of the city alongside the cathedral and the Plantin Moretus museum to the Saint-Michael’s bastion where we will be able to enjoy a beautiful view on the river Scheldt, vital to the development of the city since its origin.

We will leave Antwerp around 4pm and aim to be back in Brussels by 5pm.



Kipdorp-site





The cathedral



Saint-Michael's bastion





« Aspect méridional de la ville et citadelle d'Anvers au XVII^e siècle » – Engraving by Jean Boisseau



Antwerp in 1740