



Flanders
State of the Art

Micro-adventures in the Antwerp Kempen region

DISCOVER NATURE IN FLANDERS

Dear Friends of Flanders,

Little moments of happiness are what make your holiday or your day out complete

and in the Antwerp Kempen, they await you around every corner! Go for a walk past heathlands in bloom and idyllic fens. Cross the path of a shepherd with his flock of sheep. Walk, bike or boat your way along the Grote Nete and Kleine Nete rivers. Or go completely Zen in Landscape De Liereman, a recognised silence area.

You'll certainly also be left speechless by the 19th-century Colonies of Benevolence in Merksplas and Wortel – the latter is even a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The jewel of the Antwerp Kempen, however, is surely Grenspark Kalmthoutse Heide. With no less than 6,000 hectares of forest and heathland, pasture and polder, you'd have to look hard to find such another landscape in Flanders as open and vast as this. Hiking, pedalling, mountain biking, horseback riding ... the possibilities are endless.

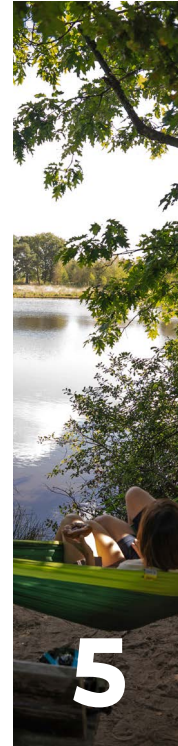
The Antwerp Kempen have a character of their own. Stubborn and sometimes a bit closed off, but also honest, down-to-earth and straightforward. Get to know the region on a day trip, or book a longer stay at one of the numerous B&Bs, holiday rentals, hotels or campsites. Or are you brave enough to spend a night in a treehouse?

Read on, get inspired and go on a **micro-adventure of your own in the Antwerp Kempen!**



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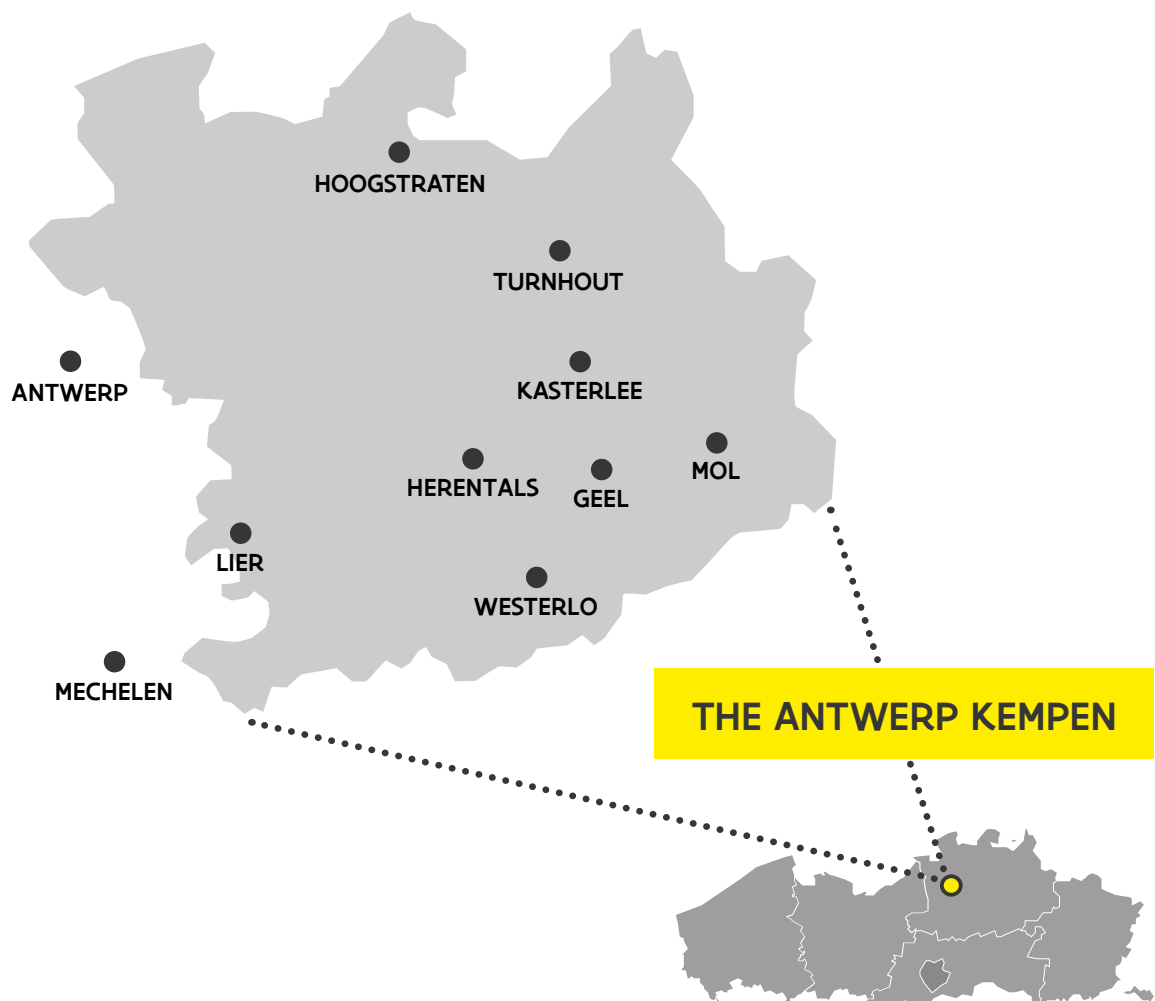




LOCATION AND HOW TO GET THERE

The Antwerp Kempen extend from the Kalmthoutse Heide in the north-west to the border with the province of Limburg in the east. The area is intersected by the valleys of the Grote Nete and Kleine Nete rivers.

In the Kempen, nature is sometimes fickle, and sometimes downright wild – the perfect place for adventures, in other words. For you too?



Nature

—The Turnhout Fens

Just ten minutes from Turnhout and you'll find yourself amongst forests, meadows, fields and fens. The Turnhout Fens area is one of the most important stretches of heathland in Flanders – a biotope in which people and nature are in perfect balance. You can also spot plenty of meadow birds there, such as the black-tailed godwit and the curlew, which have become rare elsewhere. So bring your binoculars!



—The Grote Nete Forest

The Grote Nete river is one of the lifelines of the Antwerp Kempen region. It literally flows through the visitor centre (which, not coincidentally, is housed in a historic water mill), from where you can explore the Grote Nete Forest. Walk past flowery grasslands, mysterious marshes and surprising land dunes, or simply lose your way amidst the vast wood – sorry: forest!



Grenspark **— Kalmthoutse Heide**

The jewel of the Antwerp Kempen is surely Grenspark Kalmthoutse Heide. It spans 6,000 acres, but it feels much bigger. That's logical when you consider that you'd need to look hard to find another landscape in Flanders as open and vast as this. Not that the Grenspark cares much about borders: it simply continues on into the Netherlands.

Now don't for a moment be thinking that the Kalmthoutse Heide is boring and monotonous – on the contrary, nature there is very varied. You will find heathlands and forests, meadows and polders there. In fact, Grenspark Kalmthoutse Heide is part of the Natura 2000 network, which permanently protects Europe's most valuable natural areas.

And the recreational opportunities on offer are also very diverse as well: you can hike, bike, mountain bike, go horseback riding...

— The Kempense Heuvelrug

The Kempense Heuvelrug – a remnant of prehistoric land dunes – is a narrow, mile-long hump in the landscape. Viewed from a distance, it looks rather like a sleeping giant. It even inspired the artist duo Gijs Van Vaerenbergh to create 'A Giant Sculpture': an intriguing representation of a giant whose head alone rises up above the sand. The work is situated in the heart of a varied landscape of pine forests and heathlands that include large natural landscapes that enjoy European protection.

There's also lots of things to do for the **kids**!

— Landscape De Liereman

Landscape De Liereman, between Arendonk and Oud-Turnhout, is a recognised silence area. Wondering what that means? Then try one of the two silence walks available. Or one of the many other marked routes, because the whole area is beautiful there. With luck, you'll spot a herd of Shetland ponies or Konik horses.

Landscape De Liereman is also a great place for children. In the Bos van Bo (Bo's Forest), they can romp around or go on a scavenger hunt. The play forest is right next to the visitors' centre, where you can look back on your visit over a cup of coffee and a cake or a refreshing Gageleer beer.

The Stoeber Trail in De Liereman is a challenging nature experience trail for children. It is 1.2 kilometres long and winds its way through the beautiful nature of Landscape De Liereman in Oud-Turnhout. Along the path you will encounter nine play elements, where children will learn about and be given a chance to mimic the activities of certain animals.





Immerse yourself in history at the Colonies of — Benevolence in Wortel and Merksplas

Colony 5-7 visitors' centre
Colony Walk
Caught between Border and Green' route
Weldadigheid in Merksplas-Kolonie route
Colonie 7 'De landloper'

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, is walking towards the camera on a wide, cobblestone path. She is carrying a grey jacket over her shoulder. The path is flanked by green grass and trees on the left, and a brick building with a gabled roof on the right. A tall black lamppost stands on the left side of the path. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

Going on a micro-adventure for a day in the Antwerp Kempen region



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— Climbing Park De Mosten

For daredevils only: the Treetop Trail in Climbing Park De Mosten in Meer (Hoogstraten). You clamber up to 9 metres high – in complete safety, of course! For budding adventurers, there's also the Monkey Trail, a climbing course where children ages 5 to 10 can swing amongst the trees.



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— Rough-and-tumble in De Averegten

118 acres of inspiration: that is what the provincial domain De Averegten on the outskirts of Heist-op-den-Berg has to offer. There, you'll find a nature playground, a playground and a play forest. Tired of romping around? In that case, it's time for a picnic in the log cabin!

Don't forget to visit the Hobbeldonk nature playground. Should we explicitly name the Hobbeldonk playground in De Averegten here?

There, you will find sand, water, willow cabins and horizontal tree trunks to stimulate children's imagination and creativity and challenge them to move and romp around. Combined with water, these elements offer endless possibilities, from brewing witches' soup to sculpting mud figures.

Please note: The water is not suitable for swimming, but you can go into the water up to your knees in order to play.

— Border hopping

Feel like pushing out your boundaries for a while? That's no problem if you go on one of the **six walks** that hop across the border from Flanders into the Netherlands and back again. Blow your mind by visiting the twin village of Baarle, where the national border sometimes runs right through the middle of houses (this is not a joke – it really does!). Set off in search of rare reed birds and meadow birds in the De Maatjes nature reserve, or flirt with the border in the photogenic Merkske Valley.



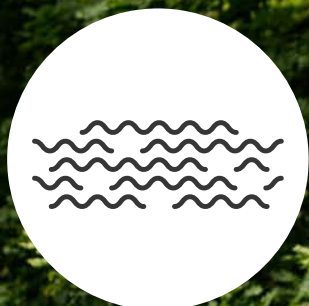
Totterpad — (adventure trail)

Looking for a brilliant place to go with your kids? If so, take them to the Grote Nete Forest in Meerhout and follow the **Totterpad** adventure trail. When Bernard the Beaver wakes up one morning, he sees mysterious paw prints around his lodge. To find the culprit, he must walk across a log bridge, creep into a bird's nest and much more. Will you come and help him? Just be careful you don't take a tumble! Part of the area has been set aside as a nature play area. Afterwards, don't forget to drop in at the visitors' centre.



Go on a boat journey — with De Waterral

The Kleine Nete is one of the purest waterways in all of Flanders and you can experience that in a very special way with **a canoe or kayaking trip** at De Waterral. While you can't expect swirling rapids and other adrenaline kicks, you can expect a beautiful trip through an idyllic piece of nature from the water mill in Retie to the water mill of Grobbendonk. Inspiring and relaxing at the same time!



STAYING OVERNIGHT IN THE ANTWERP KEMPEN

B&B

Hullebrug

A family-run B&B in a historic farmhouse on the Grote Nete river that is inspired by the stories of Felix Timmermans.

CABINS

De Swaenhoeve Zoersel

Will you choose a lodge or just a cosy room in the farm combined with a carriage ride through the Brecht heathland or Zoersel forest?

A Wolf

A luxuriously furnished residence in the Herentals woods. Designed with respect for nature, but equipped with every comfort.

Stefteling Treehouse

This holiday home has a sunny terrace, but the eye-catcher is in the garden – a gingerbread house on stilts, by a pond full of water lilies.

Sterrenhuisje

A fully equipped micro cottage with a roof that can be opened to enjoy the stars. This property has been awarded the European quality label Slow Heritage.

Treelodge

Staying in a treehouse at Treelodge is all about getting your breath back and feeling like you've gone back to what really counts. The three stylish treehouses each have their own hot tub on the terrace, overlooking the greenery.

ForRest

A charming hideaway for 4 with an infrared sauna and a hot tub. From the compact, cosy cottage, you can step straight into the forest for a walk in the woods, a bike ride or other activities.

Ferme NeElke

At Ferme NeElke, you sleep in a gypsy wagon, prepare your food in the

cooking wagon (with bathroom) and enjoy the cosiness in the living room wagon (with wood stove). So you actually get three wagons for the price of one! This accommodation is part of the Hospitality+ care network and is ideal for visitors who need a bit of extra care and support.

HOLIDAY HOMES

De Geitenstal

A place to slow down that's full of history. The place also has a purpose – to preserve an authentic breed of Kempen goats.

ZenCabin Hulshout

Enjoy: that's the motto of this holiday home in the Kempen woods, which comes with a sauna, a hot and cold tub and offers every luxury and privacy.

Domain De Zwaluw

Blissful relaxation in the Kempen, where forest and field come together. Spacious, comfortable holiday homes on a large estate, each with a very individual interior – right down to a retro caravan in the living room!

Chalet Venepoel

A wooden chalet in the woods, near a pond with a beach. An ideal place to spend a family holiday (play apparatus and a trampoline are available) or a weekend with friends (there is a hot tub)!

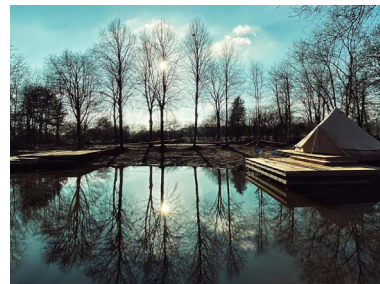
Boskot

Looking for peace, nature and true relaxation? Boskot is an idyllically located, beautifully renovated holiday home an ideal place to recharge with friends, colleagues or family.

Kabouterboshuisje

In this round holiday cottage for 8, you truly feel like you're in a fairy tale. Enjoy a barbecue on the terrace while the kids have fun in the securely fenced play forest. Or rent a cargo bike and head out together.

GLAMPING



De Ark van Noë

In the heart of the Kempen, next to a pond and amongst the animals. After all the rough-and-tumble in the playground or a bike ride, it's time to enjoy yourself on Ark Beach.

Glamping Josephine

Located between Geel and Kasterlee is Glamping Josephine. Located amidst fields and forests and with water nearby, it offers something for everyone.

't Bezig Bieke

Stay in a spacious glamping tent equipped with all modern comforts. You even have your own private spa, with a hot tub and Finnish barrel sauna.

CAMPSITES

Camping Houtum

The perfect base from which to explore the forests of Kasterlee, with hiking and biking routes passing right in front of the door. And there's plenty to do at the campsite, too – you can play beach volleyball and pétanque, go to the indoor and outdoor playgrounds, or just hang out on a terrace.

Domein De Schuur

Experience the true outdoor feeling and unwind at this small-scale family-run campsite. Fun fact: the tavern of the same name was the birthplace of Flemish cabaret – the place where big names such as Miel Cools and Zjef Vanuytsel once started small.

CAMPINGS (CONTINUED)

Camping Zilvermeer

Pitch your tent or caravan at the beautiful Zilvermeer (Silver Lake), or spoil yourself by sleeping in a log cabin or even on a raft on the water. Or how about spending 'shore nights' in a cabin on the beach?

Camping Baalse Hei

Camping Baalse Hei is located in Turnhout, at the edge of a vast nature reserve. Here you have a choice: you can spend your holiday in your own tent, camper or caravan, or opt for a hiker's hut, a mobile home or a chalet.

Mini-shelters De Brink

Looking for a place to stay as a small (youth) group or as a family? At De Brink, you'll find mini-shelters. Holidaying with a larger group? That's no problem in the larger shelters.

Sleep protected from the wind and the rain, looking out over the campfire for which you gathered your own wood....

HOTELS

Hotel Colonie 7

Located on the historical heritage site of the Colony of Merksplas, Colonie 7 offers a unique experience where Belgian gastronomy, history and hospitality come together.

A welcoming place for those who love nature, heritage and special experiences!

Corsendonck hotels

Located in the heart of the Antwerp Kempen region, Corsendonck Hotels offers a unique experience where comfort, nature and hospitality come together.

A warm and inviting home for those who want to enjoy peace and quiet, green environments and a relaxing stay!

Vandervalk hotel Dennenhof

Here, you will sleep comfortably and soundly amidst the greenery and there's a wide choice of rooms and suites, and a fine restaurant on site. Check out the special packages on offer.

HOLIDAY PARKS

Europarcs Zilverstrand

What do you get when you combine a white sandy beach with green surroundings? Europarcs Zilverstrand of course. This holiday park has a whole lot to offer: a wide range of holiday accommodation, a swimming pond and indoor pool, an indoor and outdoor playground, a restaurant, child-friendly entertainment and activities – and beautiful nature!

Sunparks

Kempense Meren

A swimming paradise with a slide, whitewater course and a wave pool? Check! A beach club on a lake? Included. A wide range of holiday homes and hotel rooms? You bet. Hiking and cycling trails through nature? You guessed it.



Taste the Antwerp Kempen

PICNIC

Settling down in an orchard, at a beautifully set picnic table with juice from apples in that very orchard, home-made dishes, local beers AND wines... A dream? Discover the [Picnic Trail](#) in the Nete Valley.

BREWERIES

HET NEST

Het Nest in Turnhout is a young, experimental brewery giving the traditional Belgian beer style a contemporary, international twist. Its trump card: its labels are a nod to the nearby Playing Card Museum.

WESTMALLE

Westmalle is one of only five Belgian beers allowed to call themselves Trappist. In fact, it is still brewed within the walls of the Trappist abbey of the same name, under the supervision of the monks. On one weekend a year, you can visit the

abbey. But at Café Trappisten – which is owned by the abbey and situated in the nearby area – you can sample the beers and cheeses every day.

DE DOCHTER VAN DE KORENAAR

Baarle-Hertog is a unique place: a little piece of Belgium completely enclosed by Dutch territory. Since 2007, there has also been another good reason to go there: De Dochter van de Korenaar, the craft brewery where Ronald Mengerink creates surprising, complex beers.



A day on micro-adventure in the Kalmthoutse

Explore the heathland — with a guide

Would you enjoy learning about the natural wonders and the surprising past of the Kalmthoutse Heide? If so, you can book an excursion with an experienced guide. Like the Early Bird Walk, for example – catch glimpses of nature as it awakens...

Climb the — fire tower

The fire and lookout tower is graceful, elegant and irresistible to anyone who loves expansive views. It has two viewing platforms, one at 12 metres and another at 24 metres above ground. Do you dare to go up?

Purple — splendour

In late summer, the Grenspark is even more beautiful than usual: at that time of year, the heather blooms and a purple blanket covers the landscape. Enjoy it while on a walk, or climb the fire tower and enjoy a bird's-eye view of the landscape.

Accessible heathland

A visual or physical disability need not stop you from enjoying the heathland. From De Vroente, one of the gateways to the Grenspark, you can choose from two accessible walking trails.

THE BUTTERFLY FOOTPATH

for walkers with impaired vision

This 2.7-kilometre trail is fully tailored to people with a visual disability. Natural elements mark out the path and the special Butterfly app indicates the route and provides explanations. Don't have a visual disability but curious about how blind or visually impaired people experience nature? If so, you can borrow a pair of simulation glasses and trekking poles.

THE CATERPILLAR FOOTPATH

with an all-terrain wheelchair

Even if you have difficulty walking, you can enjoy the heathland. The Caterpillar footpath is accessible with a cadWeazle, a special, electric all-terrain wheelchair that you can book at De Vroente (a normal electric wheelchair won't get you through the loose sand). The path is 4.7 km long and leads through the Putse Moer – a quiet little area of fenland – and passes through heathland, woods and open dunes.



Heide

Taste the Kalmthoutse Heide

PIKNIKFABRIK

The piknikfabrik supplies picnics for groups of 8 or more. To enjoy a carefree picnic in nature, you definitely need to pay them a visit.

BOSBAR

Bosbar is a pop-up bar that is open in the summer. Once there, you can laze around and enjoy snacks and drinks while the kids have fun in the play jungle and mud kitchen. Above the bar is B&B De Purperij.



Staying overnight in the Kalmthoutse Heide

— Hotel Jerom

Trendy, convenient and welcoming: Hotel Jerom is the place for a weekend getaway. Feast on an eco-breakfast in the morning, cross the street for a walk in the Kalmthoutse Heide or hop on the train for a day in Breda.

— De Purperij

A wonderfully quiet B&B, with a garden from which you can literally walk into the Kalmthoutse Heide: that is De Purperij. In summer, you can enjoy a snack or drink in the Bosbar.

— Cocoon

The Kalmthout arboretum is one of the finest botanical gardens in the country, with more than 11,000 plants and trees. But did you know you can also spend the night there in the summer? In The Cocoon, a spherical tent suspended amongst the trees that gently lulls you to sleep.

3 bucket-list **EXPERIENCES**

1



Packrafting on the Grote Nete

Packrafting is a unique combination of boating and hiking. You follow a course with a collapsible, ultra-lightweight dinghy in your backpack and when you get to the water, you inflate your boat and paddle on. Experience your own mini-expedition in the valley of the Grote Nete!

2



Expeditie Buitengewoon

On a journey of discovery through the Kempen? That's no problem with Expeditie Buitengewoon, a three-day hike from Balen to Olmen, along forest trails, (cart tracks) and rest spots. In the evening, you settle down cosily together in a comfortable sleeping place. Ideal for families who enjoy a sporting challenge.

No appetite for all that hiking? Take a weekend trip to Keiheuvel Nature Park in Balen, with its outdoor swimming pools, petting farm, miniature golf, trampoline, go-carts and playground. You can 'glamp' there in style in a safari tent.

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3

Rail biking

Looking for an original getaway? How about a spot of rail-biking? On a family bike (for 5) or a group bike (for 12), follow an old railway line from Kapellen to Brasschaat, where you can get your breath back at bistro Perron Noord. And then afterwards, you pedal your way back again – an overall distance of 10 km, or two hours of pedalling. Along the way, you'll pick up a bit of history: the railway was built by the military, and you'll see many traces of its military past. But the most special thing of all is that this is a unique way to explore nature with friends or family. So don't be alarmed if a deer suddenly appears on the rails!



FOR CYCLISTS AND WALKERS: OUT AND ABOUT IN THE ANTWERP KEMPEN REGION



Hiking

Flanders' Finest Wandelroute

The most iconic trails in Flanders are awarded the prestigious Flanders' Finest label. One of those is the **Herentals Discovery Walk** (8.4 km). Your route begins in cosy Herentals, with its medieval beguinage. You then walk through the countryside along the Kleine Nete. Along the way, you'll pass the oldest Stations of the Cross in the country, climb the 112 steps of the Tourist Tower and explore the Kempense Heuvelrug. You'll then return to Herentals for a well-earned drink on a café terrace. Herentals is also easy to reach by public transport.

The most beautiful walks in the Kempen

Looking for the most beautiful walks in the Kempen? You're in luck!



RECHARGING YOUR BATTERIES ALONG THE NETE

(9.5 KM, SHORTENED LOOP 1.9 KM)

Go completely Zen while hiking your way through an officially recognised silence area along the Grote Nete river. Halfway, take a rest on the beautiful village square of Gestel, with its historic farmhouses and authentic pillory. Then follow a winding forest trail to Kruiskensberg, a pilgrimage site with a charming chapel and a play forest. And afterwards, slide your legs under the table at 't Schipke on the Nete, a cosy folk pub in an old ferry house.

The best way to explore the Antwerp Kempen region? By bike or on foot. Fill your lungs with the fresh air and enjoy the most beautiful spots and most spectacular views along the way. To get you started, we have some great cycle and walking routes ready for you.



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BRUGGESKES WALK NEAR RAVELS (10 KM)

Here, your whole hike will be off-road and will take you through one of the largest forests in the province of Antwerp. Along the way, you'll cross streams, canals and ditches – but will keep your feet dry thanks to twenty wooden 'bruggeskes' (little bridges) and a ferry across the canal.



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THE ENCHANTING (AND ENCHANTED) LANDDUINEN WALK (9,2 KM)

Gelegen in het hart van de Antwerpse Kempen neemt de Betoverende Landduinenwandeling je mee door een uniek en eeuwenoud landschap van zandduinen en beekvalleien. Hier wisselen droge, golvende duinen en natte valleien elkaar af, gevormd door de natuur sinds de laatste ijstijd.

Een betoverende tocht voor wie wil genieten van rust, uitgestrekte bossen en verrassende natuurpracht!



Cycling

Flanders' Finest Cycling Route

Only the most beautiful cycling routes in Flanders deserve the honorary title of Flanders' Finest and one of those is the **Around the Abbey of Postel route** (56 km). From Mol, cycle along the Zilvermeer to the Sas4 Tower, which was built where three canals meet and is unique in Europe! Quiet roads will lead you to the Ronde Put nature reserve, where hikers and bird watchers can indulge. After a minor detour through the Netherlands, you'll arrive at the 900-year-old abbey of Postel. While there, be sure to pick up some artisan cheese, bread, beer or speculoos to take home!

An iconic cycling route

The **Kempen Route** is a long-distance cycling route between Antwerp and Maasmechelen, a distance of 213 km. It passes iconic spots such as the Kempense Heuvelrug. It's a tough challenge for athletic cyclists, but even if you only do only a small part of it, this route through forests, heath and dunes is highly recommended.

There is also a barrier-free Kempen route for less mobile cyclists. That one covers a distance of 96 km from Antwerp to Mol and is almost entirely flat. The paths are also wide enough for unusually sized bikes, cargo bikes or bike trailers.



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