



Flanders
State of the Art

Micro-adventures in and around Hoge Kempen National Park

EXPERIENCE NATURE IN FLANDERS

© Peter Baas

VISITFLANDERS

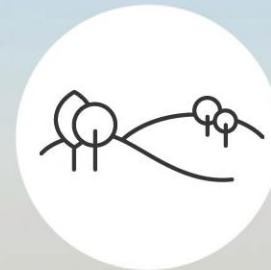
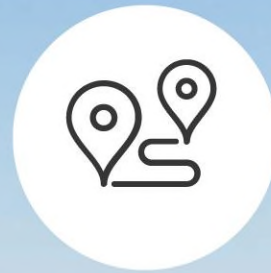
Dear friends of Flanders,

Small adventures await you in and around the **Hoge Kempen National Park**. Embrace the vastness of more than 12,000 hectares of pristine nature, spread across 10 municipalities in the heart of Limburg.

Through one of the **entrance gates**, you step into this unique area where dense deciduous and pine forests are interspersed with purple heathlands, shifting dunes and large ponds. The National Park is also home to many rare animals. You might spot a smooth snake or a saddle-backed bush cricket.

Let your curiosity run wild on the diverse **cycle** and **walking routes** that wind through the park. Follow the traces of the (mining) past, let the **stone men** guide you to the top of the slag heap or travel among the stars and planets in the **Cosmodrome**.

In short, there is so much to discover in this unique part of Flanders. Read on, be inspired and experience the most wonderful micro-adventures there yourself.



Contents

**ACCESSIBILITY AND
ENTRANCE GATES** 4

**A WHOLE DAY OF ADVENTURE IN
HOGE KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK** 7

- Climb Flanders’ highest land dune
- Wake up with the sunrise
- On safari with a Ranger
- Trekking on horseback
- Barefoot trail

SPEND THE NIGHT IN NATURE 10

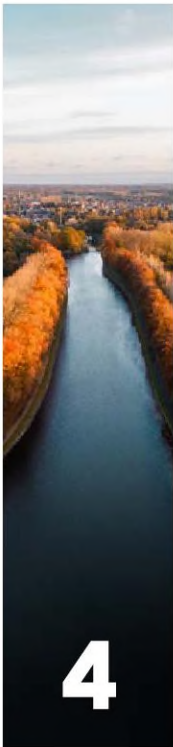
**THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES
FOR YOU TO TICK OFF** 11

- Follow the stone men to the top
- Stargazing in the Cosmodrome
- National Park Trail

TASTE THE NATURE 12

**FOR CYCLISTS AND WALKERS:
OUT AND ABOUT IN HOGE
KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK** 14

- Cycle routes
- Walking routes





ACCESSIBILITY AND ENTRANCE GATES

The **Hoge Kempen National Park** is one of the four National Parks in Flanders and is located in the province of **Limburg**. The vast nature reserve stretches across the municipalities of **As**, **Bilzen**, **Bree**, **Dilsen-Stokkem**, **Genk**, **Lanaken**, **Maaseik**, **Maasmechelen**, **Oudsbergen** and **Zutendaal**. With multiple entrance gates, the park offers good accessibility from all sides.

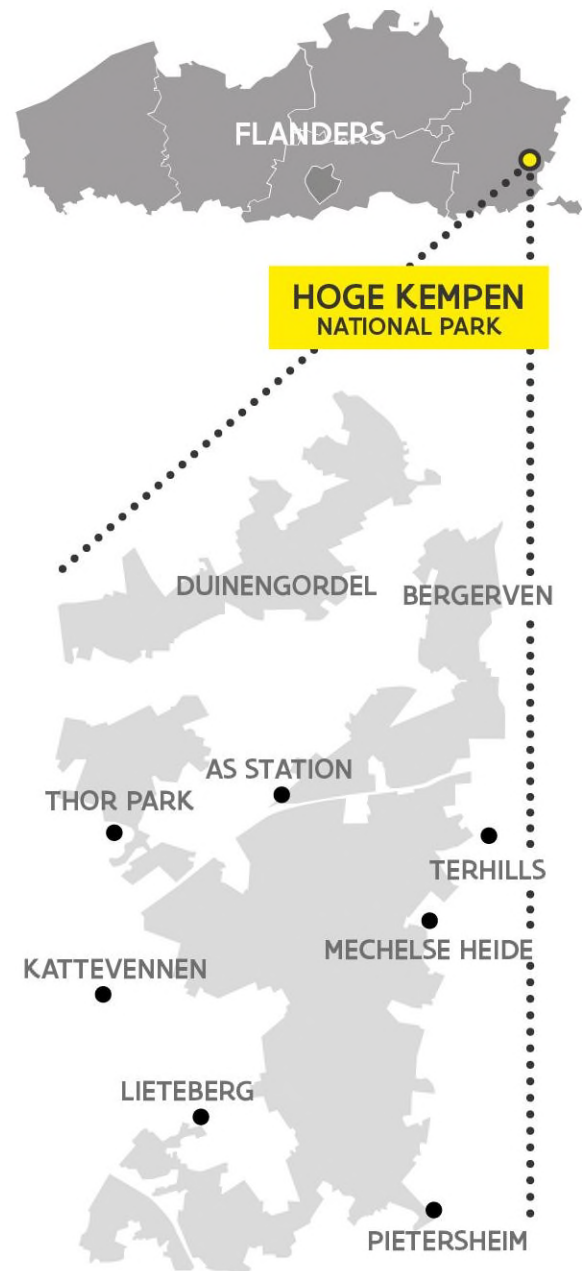
— Accessibility



- The park is easy to reach from Genk railway station. From there, you need to walk a little further to the **Kattevennen Entrance Gate**. At the station, you can also hire a **bicycle** or take a bus to the National Park.



- The Hoge Kempen National Park is easy to reach by car from the E314 motorway via exit 32 (Nationaal Park-West) or 33 (Nationaal Park-Oost). The entrance gates are near these exits.



The entrance gates

This vast nature reserve has nine entrance gates, 3 of which are still under development. These are places on the edge of the National Park which have all the necessary facilities such as ample parking, info signs, catering toilets, and so on. Moreover, each entrance gate tells its own story and forms the starting point of a different adventure.

Terhills (Maasmechelen)

- Spectacular panoramas
- Main entrance gate with the National Park Visitors' Centre
- Cycle between the slag heaps
- Discover also: the mining heritage, an adventure play pit, the Ecotron and much much more

Find all the practical details [here](#)

Kattevennen (Genk)

- Stargazing in the Cosmodrome
- Stone man route
- Discover also: the mini-golf, playground and much more

Find all the practical details [here](#)

Station As (As)

- Themed around the coal railway line
- Take a roundtrip on a miniature train
- The ideal starting point for a bike ride
- Discover also: a 31-metre-high observation tower and the play forest

Find all the practical details [here](#)

Lieteberg (Zutendaal)

- Step into the world of bees and insects
- Visit insect centre "Entomopolis"
- Discover also: a barefoot trail and butterfly dome

Find all the practical details [here](#)



© Bjorn Snijders



© Tim Blijman



The entrance gates



© Marjorie, Berisne Bilan



© Peter Baas



© Chris König



© Chris König



© Joen Vannemelen

Pietersheim (Lanaken)

- Immerse yourself in the noble past of the medieval Moated Castle
 - Stroll around the children's farm with playground
 - Discover also: the gnome trail and two premium walks
- Find all the practical details [here](#)

Mechelse Heide (Lanaken)

- Highest natural point in the National Park
 - Enjoy the wide vistas, purple heathland and gravel ponds
 - Discover also: the Beestige Boelbos (play forest), the Kids safari and the Hourglass trail
- Find all the practical details [here](#)

Duinengordel (Oudsbergen)

- Climb the Oudsberg, the highest land dune in the country
 - Explore the Joekelbos, the largest play forest in Flanders
 - Discover also: the picnic decks by the water, pole campsites, a ford for the horses and much much more!
- Find all the practical details [here](#)

Bergerven (Maaseik)

- A former gravel extraction transformed with water ponds
 - Large grazers contribute to the management of the area
 - The landscape provides tranquillity and inspiration
 - Ideal spot for bird watching
- Find all the practical details [here](#)

Thor Park (Genk)

- Climb the slag heaps of the former Waterschei mine
 - Notable buildings: the Colony of As and the Waterschei coal mine
 - Starting point of the Stone man trail
 - Also discover nearby: the Heiderbos, Mijndepot, LABIOMISTA and so much more!
- Find all the practical details [here](#)



A WHOLE DAY OF ADVENTURE IN HOGE KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK

Let yourself be surprised by the versatility of the beautiful Hoge Kempen. Discover **the magic of an early morning**, when the sun paints the sky pink and the park awakens. Go on an adventure with a **Ranger** who will enthusiastically point out rare animals and plants during an exciting safari. Or feel the freedom as you traverse the forests on **horseback**. For a unique experience, try the **barefoot trail** in Lieteberg, where your feet can feel the different textures of the trail: from soft sand to cool stones and muddy pools. Go, enjoy and, above all, experience it for yourself.

Climb Flanders' — highest land dune

Discover the magic of the Oudsberg! The Oudsberg, part of the elongated "Duinengordel", is the highest and largest land dune in Belgium, rising 85 metres above sea level. At the summit, a breathtaking panorama awaits: dunes, heathland, sand and clusters of trees, surrounded by a green forest belt. Put on your walking shoes and explore the 9 marked walking routes of between 2 and 14 km.

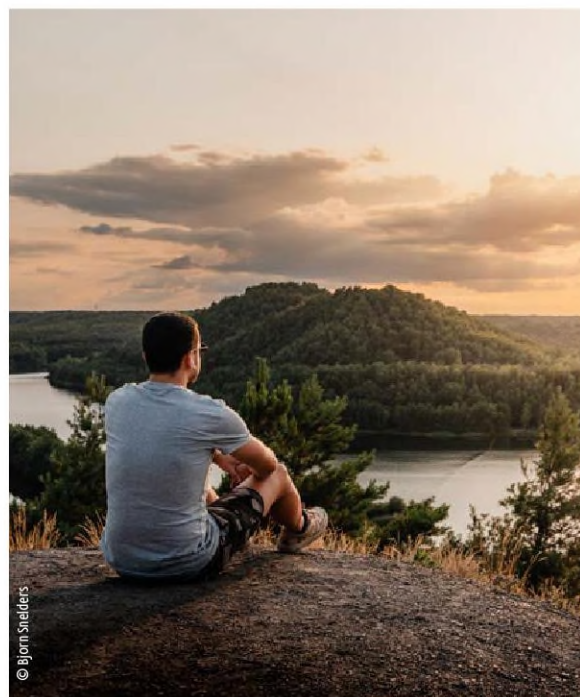
Read all about it **here**.



— Wake up with the sunrise

Experience an enchanting moment in nature. Get up early and head towards Terhills. Here, where the Eisdien coal mine operated at full capacity until 1987, you can now enjoy a surprising landscape of hills and lakes. Terhills is not just a place; it is an experience in itself. You feel the history of the mining site, but at the same time you see how nature has found its own way. It is a place of contradictions, where the industrial past flows seamlessly into a lush green oasis.

Climb one of the slag heaps and enjoy breathtaking panoramas. From the peaks, you look out over the Meuse Valley and the National Park. The panoramic slag heap offers the most impressive views, but the others are also more than worthwhile. The perfect adventurous start to the day if you ask us.



© Björn Shelders

On safari with a Ranger

Interested in the special animals and plants that you can find in the park? And not worried about getting sand between your toes? Then join an experienced Ranger out on the trail. The Ranger leads you to the most enchanting and hidden spots, while telling you all about the beauty of nature. During such a trip, you experience things you never would encounter otherwise.

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN A RANGER ACTIVITY
IN 2 WAYS:

- Sign up for a Ranger activity from the activity calendar. Every first and third Sunday of the month, a Ranger goes out with you into one of the sub-areas.
- Book a Ranger activity for you, your family, your friends, your colleagues... Choose the date, location and type of activity that suits you best.



© Chris König

— Trekking on horseback

Riding horseback in the Hoge Kempen National Park is a perfect way to experience the beautiful nature in an adventurous way. With 198 kilometres of bridle and carriage paths, about 85 per cent of which are unpaved, there is plenty of choice for riders and carriage drivers. The network of paths is built according to a node system, allowing you to create your own route.

THERE ARE 3 WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE:

- Use the equestrian map from Toerisme Limburg
- Follow one of the suggested routes
- Create your own route with the route planner

You can find all the details [here](#)



Trot through forests, water, over dunes and along the heathland on [Dream route Duinengordel](#). As well as the soft sand of the dunes, you also come across captivating obstacles. You can also give your horse a barefoot experience there at the ford. A must for horse lovers.

Tiny
Tip

— Barefoot trail

Rediscover nature on the adventurous [barefoot trail in Lieteberg](#). Hang up your shoes and go for a 3 km walk on a controlled surface of wood, stones, tree chips, grass, loam and water. Every step stimulates your feet and your senses. Explore winding paths, defy challenging obstacles and let yourself be surprised by the different textures. The Barefoot Trail is a perfect mix of adventure and relaxation for the whole family.



After your adventurous journey, there is nothing better than relaxing in the cafeteria, where a refreshing honey beer and a slice of Limburg flan await you.

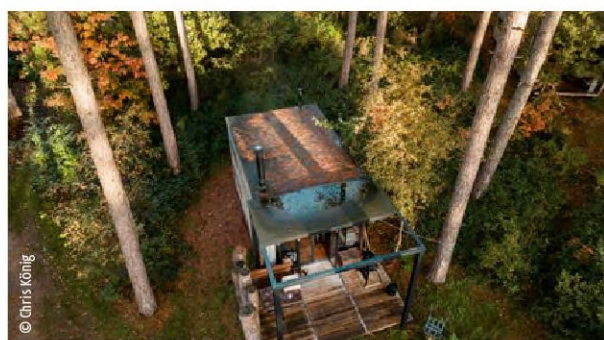
Tiny
Tip

Spend the night in nature

From the first rays of the sun slipping through the leaves to the song of birds greeting the day, nothing is more relaxing than waking up in the midst of nature. In the Hoge Kempen National Park and its vicinity, there are many original places where you can spend the night and blissfully dream away.

Warredal, Maaseik

Warredal, situated on the edge of the Hoge Kempen National Park, is a magical glamping and recreation domain. Here, it is all about re-energising and connecting with nature and each other, not with the digital world. These cosy cabins in the middle of the Limburg forests are perfect for a quiet holiday without distractions.



Terhills Resort by Center Parcs, Dilsen-Stokkem

In the middle of the forests, right next to Hoge Kempen National Park, a stay in the VIP and Exclusive cottages of the Terhills Resort is a delight. As well as cottages for 2 to 12 people, there is also a swimming pool with infinity pool, a trendy Beach House and much much more.



Castle hotel Pietersheim

Wake up in a beautiful castle, situated in a tranquil setting. With its long driveway, moat and moated castle, you can imagine yourself in a fairy tale here. This charming hotel has 15 rooms and is situated in Lanaken.



Volmolen B&B, Maaseik

Holiday accommodation B&B Volmolen is located by an idyllic water mill, surrounded by two clear babbling streams. Here, nature, culture and sport meet in a harmonious mix. The location is ideal for lovers of walking, cycling, mountain biking, equestrian sports, and carriage trails.



THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES FOR YOU TO TICK OFF IN HOGE KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK

Imagine the morning mist slowly clearing while you follow the mysterious stone men to the top of the slag heap. Or experience an incredible space adventure in the Cosmodrome's planetarium. Discover our bucket list experiences, tick them off one by one and create your own unforgettable memories.

1. FOLLOW THE STONE MEN TO THE TOP

Put on your walking shoes and let the ancient paths guide you. In Thor Park, the stone men show you the shortest way to the top of the slag heap. Once at the top, catch your breath while enjoying the stunning panoramas.

2. STARGAZING IN THE COSMODROME

Experience an incredible space adventure at the Cosmodrome, the showpiece of entrance gate Kattevennen. Discover the planetarium there, take a tour with an astro-ranger or visit the observatory.

3. NATIONAL PARK TRAIL

The National Park Trail is a long-distance walk of 110 km that takes you along the most beautiful spots in the Hoge Kempen National Park. This trail is one of the few walks in Flanders where, for more than 100 km, you see little building and/or traffic.



TASTE THE NATURE

Taste the different flavors that the nature in the surroundings of Hoge Kempen National Park has to offer. Here are a few suggestions:

SCHRIJNWERKERS BLUEBERRIES

This 15-hectare blueberry plantation is located in Oudsbergen. From mid-July until the end of August, you can come here and pick the berries yourself. For those who love walking and cycling, there is good news: this plantation borders the car-free cycle route network and numerous walking routes.

'T RORENIJSJE

Situated in a quiet, rural setting next to the cycle route network, 't Rorenijsje offers a wide selection of artisanal farmhouse ice cream and sorbet, perfect for enjoying on the sunny terrace from April until September.

BIESONDER APPLE JUICE

Alden Biesen is home to the largest traditional orchard in Western Europe. With more than 40 hectares of traditional fruit orchards, around the end of September, this location offers an abundance of ripe fruit. And those apples form the basis of the delicious "BIESONDER" apple juice, an authentic regional product from Bilzen.

WINE ESTATE MONTEPERTINI

Experience la dolce vita in Limburg. The Montepertini wine estate produces a high-quality still wine, using the wine grape varieties Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Conclude your bike ride with a visit to this vineyard, where you can enjoy stunning views over Limburg.



Tiny Tip

Order a **picnic basket** and enjoy a delicious lunch at Nomadland or LABIOMISTA.



LABIOMISTA & Nomadland

LABIOMISTA is a living art project by Koen Vanmechelen which can be found on the foundations of an old mine and zoo. It combines art, science and society in one large park with animals, plants, sculptures and architecture. In this way, it forms a meeting place for all sorts in this world.

On the other side of the road from LABIOMISTA, there is **Nomadland**, a spot that connects the neighbourhood with the allotments of Zwartberg. Here you can have a picnic, sample local drinks and delicacies and enjoy the colourful surroundings. Nomadland, built by local residents, artists and the city of Genk, is a meeting place for everyone.

FOR CYCLISTS AND WALKERS: OUT AND ABOUT IN HOGE KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK

The best way to explore Hoge Kempen National Park? Cycling or walking. Fill your lungs with 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.

Tiny Tip

The cycle route network received an update with new nodes. Explore the cycling map [here](#).



Cycle routes

Recommended routes

Follow one of the seven recommended routes already marked out. Especially useful if you are not familiar with the area.

You can find all the details [here](#)

Purple splendour

A mostly flat cycle route through shady pine forests, purple heathland and right across the Hoge Kempen National Park

- **Distance:** 52 km
- **Departure point:** Maasmechelen
- **View the route** [here](#)

Surprising views

Start at the Cosmodrome in Kattevennen (Genk). Thus you cycle straight into the National Park with pine forests as a backdrop. These merge seamlessly into the heathlands of the Mechelse Heide.

- **Distance:** 57 km
- **Departure point:** Maasmechelen
- **View the route** [here](#)

Mountain biking

The Hoge Kempen National Park network contains 400 km of mountain bike trails spread over 13 loops. 98% of the routes are on unpaved paths and are suitable for bikers of all levels.

Discover the routes [here](#)

At the main entrance gate to the Hoge Kempen National Park, called the National Park Visitors' Centre, you can hire e-bikes from 2 April until 30 September. You can also hire bikes at entrance gates Station As, Kattevennen, Lieteberg and Pietersheim.

You can reserve your e-bike [here](#)



Walking routes

Top walks (20km+ walking loops)

Want it to be a little longer? Six unique top walks of more than 20 km have been put together. Each walk is located in a different area of the National Park. These routes are often a combination of shorter walking loops, supplemented by some unique walking trails where there are no signposted routes.

You can read all the info [here](#)

Walking with your dog

Do you enjoy going out with your four-legged friend? Your dog is more than welcome on a leash at most places in the National Park. Furthermore, there are a total of 9 dog-walking zones where your dog has free rein.

You can read all the info [here](#)

Walking packages

The Hoge Kempen National Park has compiled a number of ready-made walking packages with all the highlights of the National Park as well as the award-winning National Park Trail!

View the packages [here](#)

NATIONAL PARK TRAIL

The National Park Trail is a long-distance walk of 110 km that takes you along the most beautiful spots in the Hoge Kempen National Park. This trail is one of the few walks in Flanders where, for more than 100 km, you see little building and/or traffic. In December 2022, this trail achieved the Leading Quality Label, placing it among the 25 best long-distance walks in Europe!

THE FIVE BASIC STAGES:

- KATTEVENNEN → PIETERSHEIM (23,8 km).
- PIETERSHEIM → TERHILLS (23,9 km).
- TERHILLS → DUINENGORDEL (22,6 km).
- DUINENGORDEL → THORPARK (26,8 km).
- THORPARK → KATTEVENNEN (11 km).

Each stage starts and ends at an entrance gateway of the Hoge Kempen National Park, where all facilities are available.

You can find all the details and the topographic map [here](#)



Flanders
State of the Art

COLOPHON

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER

Peter De Wilde, VISITFLANDERS,
Grasmarkt 61, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

LEGAL DEPOSIT

D/2024/5635/17

MORE INFORMATION

nature@visitflanders.com

www.visitflanders.com

COPYRIGHTS

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a database or retrieval system, or be published in any form or in any way (electronically, mechanically, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other means) without prior written permission from the Publisher.

VISITFLANDERS



Flanders
State of the Art

Micro-adventures in Meuse Valley River Park

EXPERIENCE NATURE IN FLANDERS

© Provincie Limburg, Robin Reijnders

VISITFLANDERS

Dear friends of Flanders,

Micro adventures await you in **Meuse Valley River Park**, where unspoiled nature and rich culture come together. Along **the 40-kilometre border** the river Muse flows between Belgian and Dutch **Limburg**, the imposing rain-fed river that shapes this unique landscape. Here, **wild river nature** meets **charming Meuse villages**, each with its own fascinating history and authentic charm.

The Meuse, the backbone of the River Park, has sculpted a landscape that is unique in the Benelux. Its banks are a **haven** for countless water birds, butterflies, dragonflies, wild bees, special flowers and herbs. Even gnawing beavers and grazing **Konik horses** have a home here.

Leave the beaten track and immerse yourself in the wild river nature. Discover the tangle of old river arms, canals and gravel banks, which together with the **picturesque villages** form a very varied landscape. The Meuse Valley River Park offers a range of unique activities on the Lakes and is known for its 'untamed nature' - where you are free to leave the paths and explore nature in all its glory.

In short, there is so much to discover in this unique part of Flanders. Read on, be inspired and experience the most wonderful micro-adventures there yourself.



Contents

ACCESSIBILITY AND GATEWAY VILLAGES 4

- Kessenich
- Aldeneik
- Stokkem (Visitor Center ‘De Wissen’)
- Leut
- Oud-Rekem
- Dutch bank

THE WHOLE DAY OF MICRO-ADVENTURES IN MEUSE VALLEY RIVER PARK 6

- Water fun on the Meuse Lakes
- On safari in Meuse Valley River Park
- Art on the Meuse
- Search for beavers accompanied by a Meuse Scout (MaasVerkenner)

SPEND THE NIGHT IN NATURE 10

- TASTE THE NATURE** 11
- Wine estates
 - Regional products

TICK OFF THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES 12

- Do the Long-Distance Walk
- Bird watching at sunrise
- Raft camping

FOR CYCLISTS AND WALKERS: OUT AND ABOUT IN MEUSE VALLEY RIVER PARK 13

- Cycle routes
- Walking routes





ACCESSIBILITY AND GATEWAY VILLAGES

The Meuse Valley River Park is an imposing park that stretches along the banks of the River Meuse in Belgian and Dutch Limburg. Covering an area of over 13,000 hectares, it forms a special cross-border area. Along the Meuse, there are **five villages on the Flemish side: Kessenich, Aldeneik, Stokkem, Leut and Oud-Rekem**. These 'gateway villages' are within easy reach, no matter which direction you come from.

The 5 Flemish gateway villages are the best starting points for exploring the area. The starting points are signposted from the N78 and all have parking spaces and information boards. The information boards explain more about the area and walking routes. On the Dutch side, you also start from the Meuse villages, where there are parking spaces and information boards. For those coming by train, Meuse Valley River Park begins a few kilometres to the north of Maastricht station.



The gateway villages

Each gateway village is the starting point for an established walking area. On the Flemish side, there are six walking areas, each with its own unique character (the five gateway villages + walking area Elen).

Start your adventure here:

Kessenich

- A delightful combination of nature and culture
- Walk to the 'end of Belgium' (red loop) or Borgitter Castle (blue loop)
- Wild river nature, beaver tracks and a bird hide in Koningssteen - Kollegreend nature reserve (red walking loop)

Discover the Kessenich walking area [here](#)

Aldeneik

- Picnic by the lakes in Heerenlaak
- **Aldeneyck wine estate:** learn more about grape growing in the Meuse Valley and follow the entire process from grape to wine in a bottle.
- Soak up history in Maaseik and Aldeneik
- Pilgrimage village Heppeneert

Discover the Aldeneik walking area [here](#)

Stokkem

- **Visitor Center De Wissen**
- Take the little ferry across the Meuse
- Mud watchtower in the Negenoord - Kerkeweerd nature reserve: stunning views across the region
- Maria Park in Oud-Dilsen
- Gastronomy: restaurant Vivendum

Discover the Stokkem walking area [here](#)

Leut

- A perfect combination of nature and culture
- The tree walk through the castle park
- Take the little ferry from nearby Meeswijk
- Vilain XIII^e Castle
- Mining area Eisden - village

Discover the Leut walking area [here](#)

Oud-Rekem

- Explore the authentic centre of the village.
- Chosen as the most beautiful village in Flanders in 2008
- Discover the three churches, a chapel, castle and the museum pharmacy
- Nature reserve the Oude Weerd, where donkeys are used for grazing
- d'Aspremont - Lynden Castle

Discover the Oud-Rekem walking area [here](#)

THE WHOLE DAY ON MICRO-ADVENTURES IN MEUSE VALLEY RIVER PARK

Whether you love water, art or want to see wildlife; the Meuse Valley Landscape Park is the place for you. Dive into the **refreshing waters** of the Meuse Lakes and try your hand at swimming, sailing or stand-up paddling. Or why not hire a kayak and paddle downstream on the Meuse while enjoying the tranquillity, babbling water and beautiful surroundings. Or would you prefer to keep both feet on the ground? Then put on your walking shoes and go on an adventure. **Search for beavers accompanied by a Meuse Scout (MaasVerkenner)**, admire the panoramic views and let yourself be surprised by the beautiful surroundings. Furthermore, art lovers can indulge themselves in **Art on the Meuse**.

What are you waiting for?



Water fun on — the Meuse Lakes

KAYAKING

From the water, you can experience the splendour of the surrounding nature at its best. Why not hire a kayak or canoe? You can choose from trips ranging from 9 to 21 km, with different start and finish locations.

INFO AND RESERVATION:

Kayak Maasland and rafting
+32 (0)89 71 73 90
info@kajakmaasland.be
www.kajakmaasland.be



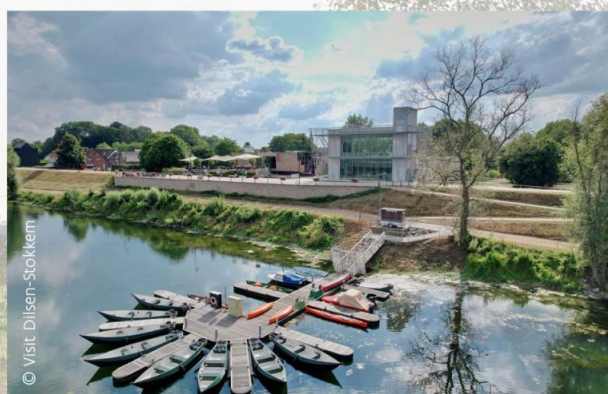
Handy tip

Kayak Maasland, in collaboration with Meuse Valley River Park, is offering a free 'Meuse Cleanup Package'. This package includes a grabber, rubbish bag and gloves, so you can collect litter along the way while enjoying your journey.



SILENT SLOOPS (STILSLOEPEN)

Want to experience the beauty of Meuse Valley River Park in peace and quiet? Then a trip on a silent sloop is for you. These electrically powered boats from Botel Ophoven are silent, simple to operate and you do not need a boating licence to use them.



WHISPER BOATS (FLUISTERBOTEN)

In Dilsen-Stokkem, you can hire an electric boat for a pleasant trip on the Oude Maas and surrounding lakes. You can combine the boat trip with a stroll along the Meuse. The whisper boats can be booked from April to October.

On safari in Meuse — Valley River Park

Put on your hiking boots for an adventurous walk in Negenoord-Kerkeweerd. A nature guide will lead you right through the open plains where Konik horses and Galloway cattle create their own paths. Discover why these grazers are so important and explore this unique nature reserve.

Read all about it [here](#).

Large grazers, such as Konik horses and Galloway cattle, play a crucial role in the development of these new wilderness areas. Together, they prevent the area from being choked by lush vegetation when the water rises. With both horses and cattle grazing on the landscape, **a dynamic patchwork of open grassland, wild thickets and shrubs** is created and constantly evolving.

— Art on the Meuse

Art on the Meuse is an ambitious project bringing art to the Limburg Meuse Valley. The project explores how humans and nature shape the landscape. Four themes take centre stage: river dynamics, border blurring, gravel industry and site-specific stories. Artists will work around these themes and so **strengthen the connection between the Meuse and its inhabitants**. The river, which is a border on paper, actually acts as a connecting lifeline for the Meuse Valley. The challenge for art, design and architecture is to create new connections with the phenomena in this beautiful area.



Discover 'Tree of Life', the artwork by Mark Dion (USA) on a hill near Herbricht.

Tiny tip

Search for beavers accompanied by a Meuse Scout (MaasVerkenner)

You will probably not come across these mysterious inhabitants of the River Park anytime soon, but you cannot miss the traces they leave behind! During this activity, you learn about the beaver's hidden life and how to recognise its tracks. **The Meuse Scouts (MaasVerkenners)** will assist in your search.



Spend the night in nature

From the first rays of the sun peeking through the leaves, to the song of birds greeting the day: nothing is more relaxing than waking up in the midst of nature. In Meuse Valley River Park and its vicinity, there are many original places to spend the night where you can dream away blissfully.

B&B Botel Ophoven, Kinrooi

Botel Ophoven is a floating hotel and restaurant where you can enjoy stunning views of the water while dining or staying overnight. An extraordinary experience!

Warredal, Maaseik

Warredal, situated on the edge of Hoge Kempen National Park, is a magical glamping and recreation experience. The focus is on re-energising and connecting with nature and each other, not with the digital world. These cosy cabins in the middle of the Limburg forests are perfect for a quiet holiday, away from the distractions of the modern world.

Camping raft (treibgut), Kinrooi

The Treibgut rafts of Sailcenter Limburg offer a 'back to basics' camping experience on the water. These unique and rustic rafts let you enjoy nature away from crowded marinas or jetties. The raft serves as a holiday home, swimming island, sun deck, fishing spot or a place to hang out on the water.

De Sjeiven Dörpel, Maaseik

De Sjeiven Dörpel in Maaseik is a family-run hotel and brasserie where you can enjoy comfortable rooms and delicious home-cooked meals. Located within walking distance of the Meuse, it is perfect for relaxing in peace.

Au Nom De Dieu, Dilsen-Stokkem

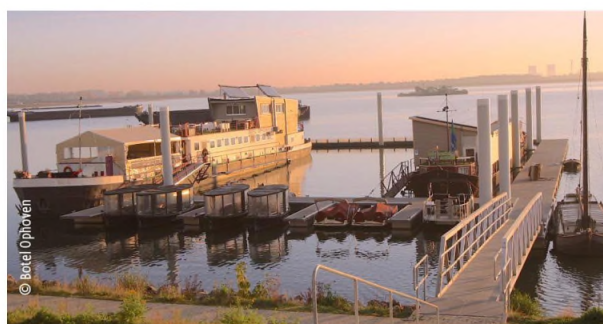
Au Nom De Dieu in Dilsen-Stokkem is a charming hotel located in the old presbytery of Lanklaar. Here, you can spend a lovely night in the middle of the Maasland. Hostess Christel will gladly show you the way to unique places and the most beautiful cycle routes of Limburg.

B&B Haerlekijn, Maasmechelen

B&B Haerlekijn is located in the rural village of Meeswijk, in the heart of the Meuse Valley, right on the Limburg cycle network. The key word at B&B Haerlekijn is 'relaxation': that is what the peaceful country life, the silence around the B&B, the excellent overnight accommodation and the extensive breakfast guarantee. Hostess Annick & her husband Frank will welcome you and look after you with the utmost care and are happy to start you off on your walk.

B&B Slapen bij Sint Pieter, Lanaken

Discover peace and nature in the most beautiful village in Flanders: Oud-Rekem. At 'B&B Slapen bij Sint Pieter', you can enjoy a beautifully decorated and spacious room with its own gas fireplace and lounge. Moreover, there are a great many delicious dining options within walking distance. It's an ideal base!



Tiny tip
Also discover
the camping rafts of
De Wissen among
the bucket list
experiences.

TASTE THE NATURE

The Meuse Valley is one of the driest and sunniest regions in the Benelux region. The **pebble and gravel terrain** provides the perfect soil for cultivating wine with the distinctive mineral aroma of the Meuse. Savour the different flavours that the nature in and around Meuse Valley River Park has to offer. Here are a few suggestions:

ALDENEYCK WINE ESTATE

On a sun-drenched south-eastern slope along the Meuse with a mineral-rich gravel that is excellent for grapevines, Karel and Tine Henckens-Linssen passionately cultivate the Pinot varieties, Chardonnay, Riesling and three sparkling wines. The Aldeneyck wines have even been awarded the title of best Belgian wine on multiple occasions. Go and taste them for yourself!

THILESNA WINE ESTATE

Thilesna wine estate is located in the heart of the Maasland. With the utmost dedication, Pinot Auxerrois, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris and Riesling vines are cultivated.

DE POORTERIJ

This restaurant in Elen, in the middle of the Meuse Valley, serves seasonal cuisine with many vegetables and herbs from its own garden. It is known as one of the best vegetable restaurants in the world.

VIVENDUM

This restaurant in Dilsen-Stokkem offers light, pure cuisine with local produce and inspiration from the Meuse Valley. Chef Alex Clevers creates tasty dishes using local ingredients.



Tiny tip

Cycle via **the Vegetable Route (Groenteroute)** (41 km) through the beautiful agricultural landscape, created and maintained for years by the farmers and market gardeners.

The largest vegetable garden in Flanders

Did you know that Kinrooi calls itself the 'largest vegetable garden in Flanders'? More than 30 different varieties of fruit and vegetables are grown in this municipality. Presiding over this large vegetable garden is, of course, the queen: the asparagus.

TICK OFF THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES

Just imagine: the morning mist slowly clearing as you spot a Mute Swan, Kingfisher or Great Crested Grebe. Or how about a **long-distance walk** along the **most beautiful landscapes and cosy villages** of the Meuse Valley? When night falls, you can admire the sunset from your **camping raft**. Discover our bucket list experiences, tick them off one by one and create your own unforgettable memories.

1. DO THE LONG DISTANCE WALK

The Long Distance Walk was specially developed for enthusiasts of multi-day walks. This 137-km cross-border hike connects the 11 municipalities in Meuse Valley River Park and takes you past the most beautiful landscapes and lovely villages. This walk was chosen as 'Best Walking Route of the Benelux' in April 2021.

2. BIRD WATCHING AT SUNRISE

The Meuse Valley forms part of a number of important **bird migration routes**. Especially during the spring and autumn migration, there are unusual species to be observed here. Some breed here, others come here to spend the winter. But there are also a great many species you see throughout the year. You do not need to be an expert to spot birds in the Meuse Valley.

3. RAFT CAMPING

The camping rafts of **De Wissen** can be found in the middle of the **Negenoord nature reserve (Dilsen-Stokkem)**, in the heart of the Meuse Valley. **Two camping rafts** are available, each accessible only by **Canadian canoe**. These rafts are located in separate creeks of the Oude Maas. Here, you can enjoy an oasis of peace away from all the hustle and bustle. From your sleeping bag, admire the sunset and watch the many water birds unnoticed. If you are lucky, a beaver may even swim past your raft!

More information is available on the Dilsen-Stokkem Tourism website.



For cyclists and walkers: out and about in Meuse Valley River Park

The best way to explore Meuse Valley River Park is by cycling or walking. Fill your lungs with 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.





Cycle routes

As you cycle through the Meuse Valley River Park, the area's uniqueness and charm immediately becomes apparent. The winter embankments are **car-free** so you can cycle undisturbed for kilometres while fully enjoying the **beautiful views**. Moreover, a little ferry makes it **easy to cross** to and from the Dutch side of the river.

It is no coincidence that the Meuse Valley is **the most popular region for cycling tourists in Flanders!** The **starting spots in the gateway villages are an ideal point of departure** for a cycle tour in Meuse Valley River Park. There is always ample parking available and the tourist information offices nearby can provide you with a cycling map or more info about the region. You can always find a charging point for electric bicycles close to the start points.

Where the Meuse is boss

Enjoy kilometres of cycling pleasure along endless banks interspersed with some cultural highlights.

- **Distance:** 50 km
- **Departure point:** Meuse Centre De Wissen
- **View the route [here](#)**

Cycle route network

With the **extensive cycle route network**, you can create your own route using the nodes which are indicated in both directions. Using them, you decide the direction in which to go and how long your ride is. The cycle route networks connect seamlessly with each other. The system is the same, only the colour of the signs is different. In Flanders, you follow the blue signs, in the Netherlands the green ones.



Through the most beautiful village and magical Maastricht

This cross-border cycling loop, with a few moderate climbs, takes you past historical highlights such as medieval Oud-Rekem, which was chosen as the most beautiful village in Flanders in 2008.

- **Distance:** 66 km
- **Departure point:** Riemst
- **View the route [here](#)**

From the white town to Maasland renaissance

This route takes you through the northern part of the Maasland. You pass many cultural and historical sights such as the statue of the Van Eyck brothers in Maaseik, the Aldeneyck wine estate and the white town of Thorn.

- **Distance:** 66 km
- **Departure point:** Maaseik
- **View the route [here](#)**

International Meuse Cycle Route

Hop on your bike and cycle through three countries (France, Belgium and the Netherlands) via 30 stages. On the 1,152 km of signposted roads, you discover dozens of cities, towns and villages. Thanks to the ferries, you can choose which side of the river you cycle along!

- **View the route [here](#)**



Walking routes

The Meuse Valley is the **perfect place to relax and to take a long walk**. **Six walking routes** have been created on the Flemish side of the Meuse and there is one on the Dutch side of the river. Together, they **stretch for over 200 km** and take you past the most beautiful places in Meuse Valley River Park.

All the walking routes on the Flemish side of the river are **signposted** using wooden posts bearing coloured symbols that indicate each of the routes. If you follow a particular symbol, you walk along the walking loop and return to the same starting point. If you want to combine two or more walking routes, keep an eye on the walk changes.

Leut – Trees walk

The park around Castle Vilain XIII is home to some very special species of tree. To discover all these unique giants, follow the tree walk.

- **Distance:** 3.7 km
- **Departure point:** Vilain XIII Castle
- **View the route [here](#)**

Aldeneik – yellow walking route

Walk from the charming Meuse village of Aldeneik to the historic centre of Maaseik. Stop by the Aldeneyck wine estate on Friday or Saturday and taste the delicious wines.

- **Distance:** 10.7 km
- **Departure point:** Maaseik
- **View the route [here](#)**

Oud-Rekem – red walking route

Indulge in your love of culture in one of the most authentic village centres in the Limburg Meuse Valley.

- **Distance:** 15.4 km
- **Departure point:** Oud-Rekem
- **View the route [here](#)**

Stokkem – orange walking route

This walk lets you see how beautiful nature can be in an area where the Meuse has its way.

- **Distance:** 7 km
- **Departure point:** Visitor Center De Wissen
- **View the route [here](#)**



Flanders
State of the Art

COLOPHON

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER

Peter De Wilde, VISITFLANDERS,
Grasmarkt 61, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

LEGAL DEPOSIT

D/2024/5635/33

MORE INFORMATION

nature@visitflanders.com

www.visitflanders.com

COPYRIGHTS

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a database or retrieval system, or be published in any form or in any way (electronically, mechanically, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other means) without prior written permission from the Publisher.

VISITFLANDERS



Flanders
State of the Art

Micro-adventures in the Zwin Region

EXPERIENCE NATURE IN FLANDERS

VISITFLANDERS

Dear friends of Flanders,

Small adventures await you in the enchanting **Zwin Region**. This beautiful region by the sea stretches across the border of Flanders and the Netherlands to the outskirts of **Bruges**. Furthermore, with its location on the coast, the Zwin Region is unique compared to other nature areas in Flanders. No other Flemish Park is so close to the beach and to the sea.

Feel as free as a bird in the **Zwin Nature Park** or wake up in the midst of nature in a **corn tent**, **tiny house** or **tree house**. Water lovers can go **packrafting**, **boating** or standup paddleboarding on the canal. And for the gourmets among us, sample all the salty and sweet delights this region has to offer and do so in unique locations.

In short, there is so much to discover in the Zwin Region. Read on, be inspired and experience **the most wonderful micro-adventures** there yourself.





Contents

THE ZWIN REGION IN A NUTSHELL	4
AWAKEN IN NATURE	5
DAY TRIPS IN AND AROUND THE ZWIN REGION	6
WATER FUN GALORE	8
FOREST BATHING IN BULSKAMPVELD	10
THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES IN THE ZWIN REGION FOR YOU TO TICK OFF	11
Packrafting	
Birdwatching	
Dew walks	
TASTE THE NATURE	12
ON THE MOVE	14
Cycle routes	
Walking trails	



5



6



8



10



12



14



THE ZWIN REGION IN A NUTSHELL

The Zwin Region lies on the border of Flanders and the Netherlands. The tidal area extends from the north of West Flanders to the west of Zeelandic Flanders (the Netherlands). There are many beautiful towns and picturesque villages to admire in the Zwin Region.

EXPLORE THE ZWIN REGION FROM:

— Bruges

Discover the rich history of this UNESCO World Heritage city or explore the beautiful nature spots of the Zwin Region.

— Damme

Wander through this historic town, cycle along picturesque canals or discover the peaceful footpaths along the Damse Vaart.

— Knokke-Heist

There is much to experience in this bustling seaside town. Explore the extensive polder landscapes, take beautiful strolls along the beach or stretch your legs during a walk to the Zwin Nature Park.



Awaken in nature

From the first rays of the sun slipping through the leaves to the song of birds greeting the day, nothing is more relaxing than waking up in the midst of nature. In the Zwin Region and its vicinity, there are many original places to spend the night where you can dream away blissfully.

Boomkamp, Oostkamp

Boomkamp is located in Oostkamp, near Bruges. Here you can spend an original night in a tree house or tent. From June to October, it is the ideal place to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Boomkamp lies just outside the Zwin Region, but its location near Bruges makes it an ideal base from which to explore the region.

Maïsterplan, Damme

During the summer months, you can spend the night in the middle of a cornfield in a tiny house or a corn tent. During the day, the vast corn maze invites adventure and exploration.

Nomad, Knokke

Nomad is a unique camping and glamping concept right on the Belgian coast. Here, the luxury of a hotel is combined with the freedom of camping.

Vlotkamp, Zuienkerke

Spend the night in a tent on the water in Vlotklamp. With a canoe, you paddle to one of the eight rafts scattered on the lake at Domain Polderwind in Zuienkerke.

La vache au lit, Oostkerke

This tiny house, near Damme, is situated in a beautiful location in the midst of nature. An ideal place for people who love tranquility and nature.



© Boomkamp



© Maïsterplan



© Ieren Vandeweghe



© Westtoer



© La vache au lit



© Maïsterplan

Day trips in and around the Zwin Region

Go on a whole day of adventure in the Zwin Region and the nearby surroundings. Enjoy an invigorating **forest bath**, explore the **Zwin Nature Park** or experience endless **water fun**. And when night falls, slip both feet under the table at one of the **delicious and original dining venues** that you find here. What are you waiting for?

— Zwin Nature Park

The Zwin Nature Park is an interactive experience park for the whole family and is considered as an international airport for a great many migratory birds, of which the stork is undoubtedly the most famous visitor. Although, of course, you can spot many other feathered travellers as well. Keep your boarding pass to hand and brace yourself for an interesting flight across the Zwin Plain.



5 must dos

1. EXHIBITION

In the Zwin Nature Park, you can explore the interactive exhibition centred around the Zwin migratory birds all year long. At the reception, you receive a boarding pass, which you need in order to visit the “international airport for birds”.

2. CABIN TRAIL

The cabin trail is a leisurely walk of just under 2 km past various experience points and themed cabins, each telling its own story. The walk is suitable for prams and wheelchairs.

3. PANORAMA TOWER

A panorama tower can be found on the roof terrace of the visitors' centre. Here you can enjoy a 360° view of the Zwin Nature Park, the sea, the Zwin dunes and polders and the Kleyne plain.

4. THE ZWIN PLAIN

You can explore the Zwin Plain via a number of walking trails. Each season, you will discover different accents and inhabitants there. Put on your wellies or waterproof shoes, bring your binoculars and explore a fascinating landscape that is dotted with mudflats and salt marshes.

5. STORK TOWER

Between February and the end of July, spot the Zwin Nature Park's most famous visitor: the stork. Via the stork tower, located along the cabin trail, you can climb up to the level of their nests.

— Accessibility

The Zwin Nature Park visitors' and viewing centre is located in Knokke-Heist and is accessible on foot, by bicycle, by public transport or by car.



- Via the international dyke that connects Cadzand with the Zwin
- Use this handy [route planner](#)
- Want to hire a bicycle? Take a look at the [large offer in Knokke-Heist](#)
- There is a spacious covered bicycle shed with 200 places.



- Via [line bus 41](#): this runs every hour from Bruges/Knokke-Heist station to Oosthoekplein
- After that, it is about a 3 km walk. Check out this [route planner](#)



- Set your GPS device's destination to “Zwin Natuur Park”
- You can park in the park's car park: check the charges [here](#).

Tiny Tip

The **barefoot trail** is an ideal family activity. Explore the different substrates of sand, mud and salt marsh during a 2 km barefoot walk.

Water fun galore

A splendid water adventure awaits you in the Zwin Region and in the region around Bruges. From a day by the sea to standup paddleboarding, sailing, surfing, mastering water slides... the possibilities are endless. And for the truly daring, a day of packrafting is an absolute must. Dive in to the offerings below.

Lakeside Paradise, — Knokke-Heist

- Wakeboarding
- Water skiing/wakeskating
- Kneeboarding

View all the sports [here](#)



© Lakeside Paradise

— De Kijkuit, Beernem

- Kayak
- Pedalo
- Standup paddleboarding
- Indian canoe

View all the activities [here](#)



© Westtoer

— Aan de Plas, Bruges

- Kayak
- Rafting
- Standup paddleboarding
- Windsurfing
- Sailing

View all the sports [here](#)



© Aan de Plas

Recreatiepark Klein Strand, — Jabbeke

- Swimming lake
- Water slides
- Flyboarding
- Standup paddleboarding

View all the info [here](#)



© Westtoer

Discover even more water and sea sports in [Knokke-Heist](#).



PACKRAFTING

With a **packraft**, inflatable bag, paddle, life jacket and waterproof backpack, explore the **beautiful Damse waters**. Experience is not required. It is the ideal way to traverse the region in a completely different way.

Tiny
Tip
Bring your bike and
cycle back along the
Damse Vaart.



CRUISE FROM BRUGES TO DAMME ON THE LAMME GOEDZAK

Journey along the Damse Vaart on the nostalgic riverboat the Lamme Goedzak. It travels four times per day between Bruges and the centre of Damme.

Forest bathing in Bulskampveld

Forest bathing, known as **shinrin-yoku** in Japanese, is a special way of immersing yourself in nature. It is much more than an ordinary walk: it is an intense experience where you use all your senses to their full potential. In a forest or other natural area, far from the hustle and bustle of modern life, you can listen to the sounds of nature, breathe in the aroma of the trees and view the landscape with fresh appreciation. And in Bulskampveld Landscape Park, there are several places where you can do just that.

Put on your hiking boots, let yourself to be swept away by the forest and immerse yourself in the tranquillity and beauty of nature.



THREE BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCES IN THE ZWIN REGION FOR YOU TO TICK OFF

Imagine: **dewdrops on the grass**, a **packraft** in which you glide gently across the water, and the **calls of thousands of birds** sparking your curiosity. This is the **Zwin Region**, where **adventure and wonder** go hand in hand. Discover our **bucket list experiences** and tick them off one by one.

1. PACKRAFTING

Traverse the **Zwin Region** while walking and paddling with a packraft! With an inflatable boat, you venture out onto the Damse waters while you enjoy the freedom and the unique views.

2. BIRDWATCHING

The Zwin Nature Park is a year-round hotspot for a great many migratory birds. From storks and colonial breeders to a host of other species - it's high time to venture out and start using your binoculars.

Check [here](#) to find out where and when you can spot which birds.

3. DEW WALKS

Wander through dew-covered fields, enjoy the silence of the morning and then witness the world come alive. A dew walk is an invigorating experience that will energise you for the rest of the day.

Discover [here](#) the most beautiful routes for morning walks in the Zwin Region and its vicinity.



Taste the nature

Experience the different tastes that the salty nature of the Zwin Region has to offer. Here are a few suggestions:

Farms & fruit **— vending machines**

- **De Zoete Polder:** farm with cherries, plums and apples. Try their homemade jams, juices, beers, and more.
- **Kers & Bes:** cherry vending machine.
- **Aardbeien Depestel:** strawberry vending machine
- **Steffi Fruit:** vending machine with apples, pears and juices.

Ice cream and **— dairy products**

- **Hoeve Hazegras:** you can stay here overnight and also eat delicious ice cream. As a partner of the Lost Ports of the Zwin, they have made ice cream with medieval spices.
- **Hoorns Geitenkaasje:** goat's cheese (farm with more than 50 breeds of goat).
- **Beukenhoeve:** picnics, ice cream and dairy products from the farm
- **Sandy Roomijs:** artisanal ice cream, with no added preservatives or colourings.
- **The IJshoeve:** For more than 20 years, Carine and Patrick have been selling their artisanal farmhouse ice cream made using milk from their own cows in the Oude Damse Weg in Vivenkapelle. After all this time, the IJshoeve has become an unmissable stopping spot for visitors to Damme exploring the region by bicycle.

— Breweries

- **Bryggia brewery:** microbrewery in Moerkerke.
- **Siphon brewery:** a small Belgian brewery that began in a family restaurant in the West Flemish town of Damme and which has been around for four generations.
- **Brewery Viven:** Krystle, one of the few female brewers in Belgium, is responsible for the flavour of the various beers in the product range. She comes up with the recipes and brews the first test batch in boilers in Damme. When Krystle has tasted and approved a new beer, production moves to the Proefbrouwerij in Lochristi so that larger volumes can be brewed.

TASTE THE LOST PORTS OF THE ZWIN

Along The Lost Ports of the Zwin cycle route, you can now enjoy a taste of the past. Thirty entrepreneurs present contemporary creations inspired by ingredients and products from medieval times.

View the route [here](#)



© Ian D'Hondt



© Ian D'Hondt

On the move

The best way to explore the Zwin Region?
Cycling or walking. Along the way, you will come
across the most beautiful spots in the region that
provide the perfect opportunity to take a break.
To get you started, we have some great cycle
routes and walking trails ready for you.



Tiny tip

A visit to the
artworks at sunrise
or sunset adds a
magical touch.

Beaufort Sculpture Park

Beaufort is a triennial art event that has
been held along the entire Belgian coast since
2003. Over 40 works of art from previous
editions have been given a permanent home,
including in the Zwin Nature Park.

View all the locations of the sculpture park
[here](#).



Cycle routes

Coastal Route

Looking for that perfect combination of nature, history and culture? On the Coastal Route, you cycle alongside the beach, overlooking the sea. Along the way, you pass through many bustling coastal resorts.

- **Distance:** 85 km
- **Departure point:** Knokke-Heist
- **View the route [here](#)**

Lost Ports of the Zwin

Using VR viewers, this signposted cycle route reveals never-before-seen images of the lost medieval ports of the Zwin.

- **Distance:** 60 km, or choose a loop of 44 km or 31 km
- **Departure points:** Zwin Nature Park, Sluis, Damme or Bruges
- **View the route [here](#)**

Through the polders

Cycle through the polders and discover lots of agricultural and farm shops along the way.

- **Distance:** 19 or 22 km
- **Departure points:** Zwin Nature Park, Sluis, Damme or Bruges
- **View the route [here](#)**

Strava-route

This one is perfect for anyone who loves a sporting challenge. Along this route, you explore, among other things, the dunes and the polder landscape. At the end, you will be rewarded with a Strava artwork on your screen.

- **Distance:** 70 km
- **Departure point:** Knokke-Heist
- **View the route [here](#)**



Walking trails

Zwin walking trail

Wander through the magnificent natural beauty of the Zwin dunes and polders and enjoy the spectacular views. The trail is not located in the Zwin Nature Park. So there is no need to purchase an admission ticket for the park.

- **Distance:** 13.3 km (can also be shortened to 9.2 km)
- **Departure point:** Knokke-Heist
- **View the route [here](#)**

Damse Vaart walking trail

The Damse Vaart walking trail leads you through the vast polder landscape between Damme and Oostkerke. Past rows of trees, old dykes and along arrow-straight canals, such as the Damse Vaart, you walk from the historic centre of Damme to picturesque Oostkerke and back again.

- **Distance:** 12 km
- **Departure point:** Damme
- **View the route [here](#)**

On the dykes of the Oude Zwin

This walk takes you past historical ruins, over the former sea dyke in Lapscheure and the Oude Zwin to the Damse Vaart.

- **Distance:** 13.4 km
- **Departure point:** Lapscheure
- **View the route [here](#)**

Streek-GR Kust

The Streek-GR Kust is a coastal path and it is the ideal route for exploring the coast. Walk through dunes, nature reserves, seaside resorts and along the beach and by the sea.

- **Distance:** 103 km
- **Departure point:** De Panne or the Zwin
- **View the route [here](#)**



Flanders
State of the Art

COLOPHON

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER

Peter De Wilde, VISITFLANDERS,
Grasmarkt 61, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

LEGAL DEPOSIT

D/2024/5635/9

MORE INFORMATION

nature@visitflanders.com

www.visitflanders.com

COPYRIGHTS

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a database or retrieval system, or be published in any form or in any way (electronically, mechanically, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other means) without prior written permission from the Publisher.

VISITFLANDERS