

Nick Boulos says hip, food-loving Antwerp is a gem of a destination

Scheldt-loads of style

Antwerp is one of Lonely Planet's hot cities of 2018 and 'Belgium's capital of cool'. Sliced by the Scheldt River, it's home to Europe's second-largest port (after Rotterdam) and a thriving style scene – ace designer Dries Van Noten is a local – while Belgian carrier VLM (flyvln.com) now flies from London City in less than an hour. What are you waiting for?

Location, location

Antwerp has a slew of new properties. Among them is Hotel U (doubles from £156, u-eatsleep.be) in Het Eilandje, the city's most exciting area. This historic port area has the Museum Aan De Stroom (from £7, mas.be) and Zaha Hadid's sparkling Port House, the Port Authority HQ, with hangars and warehouses turned into bars and restaurants.

The best-located budget hotel, however, is the Hotel Indigo Antwerp



Famous: Alfresco eating in Antwerp's old town ALAMY

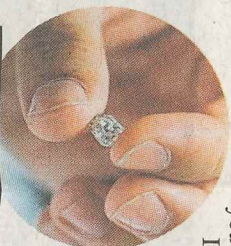
FIVE-CARAT CITY OF COOL

(doubles from £79, ihg.com.com), opposite the Central Station.

Girls best friends

It's said that every diamond passes through Antwerp. From next May the Diva Museum (divaanterwep.be) will focus on a trade that goes back to the 15th century.

Until then, wander around the diamond district, a pedestrianised area with lots



Cutting it: Visit the city's diamond district

of security, and in any showroom you may find stones being cut.

If you're on foot, swing by what is considered the prettiest street in the city. Cogels Oysiei also happens to be Dries Van Noten's preferred avenue. Naturally.

Fabulous frites

Last month, The Butcher's Son, part of the parquetry-floored De Koninck brewery, got its

first Michelin star. It offers a concise menu of meat in all its guises from pâté to Aberdeen

Angus beef (starting from £16, thebutcheresson.be). Coffee is taken very

seriously here and options range from the chilled-out Coffee & Vinyl (coffeandvinyl.com), where you can rummage through old records, to the Coffee.labs

group (coffeelabs.be), which offers

healthy lunches and its own-blend roasts and creations – dark

chocolate and chilli-flake cappuccino, anyone? Visit its outpost within the

Idealabs (idealabs.be) creative hub on Lange Klarenstraat 19 and you'll mix with the

rising stars of Antwerp. Among Belgian staples not to be missed are, er, French fries. Michelin-claimed the block back, so



Posh chips: The very Belgian Frites Atelier

GETTING THERE
VLM Airlines offers return flights from London City to Antwerp from £79, flyvln.com



Exciting: Hotel U in Antwerp

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