

TOURISM BOOMING IN FLANDERS



The year 2006 saw the northern part of Belgium, more commonly known as Flanders, enjoy record statistics in its tourism industry. The amount of overnight bookings was up 3.9% on the previous year and at an impressive 22.5 million. The so-called art cities proved to be especially popular as tourists flocked to visit museums in Ghent, Brugges (sometimes referred to as the Venice of the north), Brussels and Leuven. Experts say that the rise in the amount of visitors to Flanders and the amount they spend is likely to

continue.

Indeed, the Belgian government along with a plethora of tourist organisations has taken it upon themselves to inject huge amounts of money into the Belgian tourism industry. A sum of €900.000 has been labelled as the budget for promoting what the Belgian art cities have to offer. The aim is to detract foreign attention away from the gloomy weather and exploit the fact that these places are blessed with natural and cultural assets. Special events to be promoted with the aid of the budget include the tour of Flanders cycle race and the tours of Antwerpen's famous zoo.

Many tourists, who turn a blind eye to the grim weather of the cities, are drawn to Belgium by its 65km of white sandy coastline. The fact that Belgium borders so many countries means that the locals tend to be multi-lingual and provide no language barrier for visitors.

Another area of tourism, in which Flanders has excelled, is health tourism. The area has been labelled the 'surgery supermarket' of Western Europe. Hip surgery and fertility treatment are amongst the most popular kinds of treatment Flanders can offer. The services on offer are some of the cheapest in the EU and the standards are extremely high.

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