

Travel Talk

By Maxine Silverstein

Antwerp, Belgium

When travelers think Belgium, they think of the capital Brussels or the canal city Brugge. But, often overlooked is Antwerp, which is a gem of a city rich in Jewish culture and history. In fact, Antwerp has the most concentrated and liveliest Jewish population in Europe.

Antwerp is the center of the global diamond industry which is run predominantly by Orthodox Jews, as it has been for hundreds of years. Jewish involvement in diamonds dates back to the Middle Ages when the very first stones were imported to Europe from India. Sephardic Jews traded, cut and polished diamonds and then brought that experience to Belgium after being expelled from Spain and Portugal.

Today, most of the adult Jews in Antwerp are employed in the cutting and polishing or the purchase and sale of diamonds. Eighty percent of the city's Jews work and live on and around the main street in the diamond district, Pelikaanstraat. This area begins at the central train station and stretches several blocks along the train tracks.

The diamond district is alive with Jewish culture. Signs are in Yiddish and bearded, Hasidic Jews scurry along in wide-brimmed,



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black hats and overcoats. Visitors will delight in the numerous cafes, kosher restaurants, bookstores

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and jewelry stores where diamonds can be purchased at savings of up to 50%. (A word to the wise: few Antwerp Jews adhere to Liberal Judaism. On Saturdays,

everything is closed!)

Visitors to Antwerp should stop by the offices of *Belgisch Israelitisch Weekblad*, a weekly Jewish newspaper, where you can purchase the publication's annual travel guide. It lists synagogues, kosher restaurants and Jewish institutions in Antwerp, Brussels and other European Jewish communities.

Antwerp also features numerous Gothic churches, medieval guildhalls and is home to several great museums that house work from Rubens to Van Dyck. One of the nicest places we saw on our trip was the zoo, which is next to the



photo credit: Belgian National Tourist Office

Brabo Fountain

central train station. It's the most incredible zoo I've ever seen, and when we visited, a Hebrew day school was there with dozens of children wearing kipots, running around in awe of the animals.

Antwerp is an exciting place to visit, whether it's for diamonds or Belgian chocolate or an opportunity to learn more about your heritage. It is also easy to get to because of its close proximity to Brussels and the international airport with numerous daily arrivals and departures.



Antwerpen gezien vanop Linkeroever

Speizman Jewish Library

By Amalia Warshenbrot

New On The Shelf

LITERATURE

The Book of Legends (Sefer Ha-Aggadah) - legends from the Talmud and Midrash edited by Hayim Nahman Bialik

NON-FICTION

Conversion to Judaism, a guidebook by L. J. Epstein Dove-tails - A newsletter by and for Jewish-Christian families (Qix&VtehLy)

The Healer of Shattered Hearts by Rabbi D. Wolpe Teaching your Children about God by Rabbi U. Wolpe

COOKBOOKS

The Jewish Holiday Kitchen by J. Nathan Jewish Vegetarian Cooking by R. Friedman

FICTION

Prizes by E. Segal
Angel of Death by R. N. Krich

ISRAEL
A Day in the Life of Israel by D. Cohen

REFERENCE
The Timetables of Jewish History - editor J. Gribetz The above mentioned books were purchased thanks to donations to several library funds.

For information on our Judaic book collection and on the funds please call Amalia Warshenbrot at 366-5007 ext. 258

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— Todah Rabbah

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