

GUIDED TOUR OF LEUVEN ALONG THE DIJLE DURING THE PROJECT MEETING IN BELGIUM

Preface:

Hello everyone, I'm Ann, I'm not a city guide, I'm just someone who was born here in Leuven and who has spent a big part of my life here.

Don't expect deep historical stories and scientific explanations from me, I just want to take you on a walk through my hometown.

Ulrike asked me to also show the old part of Leuven, but unfortunately a lot was destroyed during the First and Second World Wars and also a lot of the historical buildings and the city centre.

Because of a carnival celebration in the city, we had to change the whole of our tour and I will not be able to show you some important parts of the city.

Let's go...

Leuven is a very old city. Excavations showed us that the Romans, Franks and Vikings, have been living here.

The first mention of the city dates from 891, when a Viking army from Denmark was defeated by the Frankish king.

Population of Leuven: 102.122 inhabitants,

Student registrations at the Leuven university : about 61.000,

Leuven also has the oldest university in the Low Countries, founded in 1425.

In Belgium we speak Dutch. A part of Belgium speaks French and another small part German.

We start our walk in the Great Beguinage.

I say the great beguinage, because on the other side of the city, there is also a small beguinage.

This is a place of peace and quiet.

The beguinage dates back to the 13th century. During its glory days in the 17th century, some 360 beguines lived there. The site has about 70 houses. The last beguine died in 1988.

Since 1998, this Great Beguinage has been part of the Unesco World Heritage.

What are beguines?

They are single religious women who chose not to go to the convent. They are allowed to go wherever they want, visit relatives, or leave the beguinages if they would still like to get married.

The main difference between beguines and nuns is the fact that they do not have to take vows of poverty. They are allowed to have possessions.

In fact, these were very emancipated women. For instance, you even had rich beguines with their own homes. Other beguines went to work, they were allowed to keep what they earned. They were self-sufficient. In their beguinage, they had their own business, with a farm, an infirmary, a school. They performed textile labour: in a later phase mainly lace, but in the Middle Ages cloth.

This place is now owned and was restored by the university.

Today, only students, professors and foreign visiting professors and employees of the university are allowed to live there.

As you can see, the Dyle meanders through this beguinage and gives beautiful romantic pictures .

The Dijle

The Dijle has its source in Jemappes, in the French part of the country. In Leuven, it forms seven different confluents. You will see, throughout Leuven, pieces of the Dijle can be seen everywhere.

The Dijle is about 86 km long in total and flows on to Mechelen. Just above Mechelen, the river flows into the Rupel and later into the Scheldt.

A couple of smaller rivers also flow through Leuven, the Vunt and the Voer, and there is also a canal to Mechelen with a small marina in Leuven.

Currently, the Dijle is only used for recreation. Just outside Leuven you can rent a canoe to sail to the city.

The Dijle used to be an important transport route. Several sources also speak of active shipping towards Leuven. Now the Leuven-Dijle Canal takes over this transport function.

The people of Leuven shaped, praised and tamed the river to their liking. In the Middle Ages, new Dijle branches were dug to protect the town, to run mills and supply breweries.

The river was of great significance for the supply of raw materials such as grain and hops and for transporting the finished product.

In the eighteenth century, the city had more than 20 breweries on the banks of the Dijle.

People travelled on the Dijle using small boats that were no wider than 4 metres and no longer than 27 metres. The depth was limited to 1.2 to 1.5 metres. The boats sailed and/or were pulled by horses and manpower. A boat was pulled from village to village. In the process, shipping came into conflict with mill owners. To allow the pullers and their horses free passage on the shores of the river, it was forbidden to plant trees less than 2.4 metres from the shore.

The Dijle mills

There were water mills at several places on the Dijle and this one, the Dijle Mill was the largest. It was an industrial flour mill and operated until 1979.

A young man who lived on this street had the idea in 1980 to convert this mill into a living and working community with eco-friendly energy supply.

The wheel under the building would be used to generate electricity.

The project became the first co-housing project in Leuven in 1985

The Dijle Duck

Was an initiative of the neighbours of this place. The artists were also from this neighbourhood.

Rub the duck's back three times, grab its tail with your little finger and then step around the fountain until you reach the black button in the ground. Press it, drink and make your wish in silence.

This wish is always fulfilled but you should definitely not talk about what you have wished.

Due to the winter, the fountain does not spout water.

Father Damien

Was voted the greatest Belgian ever in Belgium in 2005 and was made a saint in 2009. He left as a priest for Molokai to live among the lepers.

Damien built schools, constructed roads and was the carer of the sick at the same time. However, he himself was diagnosed with leprosy in 1884 and died of the disease. He is buried here in this church.

St Michael's Church

Leuven's St Michael's Church, protected as a monument in 1940, is a Baroque church and is considered one of the seven wonders of Leuven. The church is no longer in use as a church and is only used for cultural purposes.

Its resemblance to an altar would be so striking that this looks a true 'altar outside the church'.

University Hall

The Cloth Hall or University Hall is a historic building in Leuven. The building, which dates back to 1317, is currently the seat of the Leuven Catholic University. The rector and general management of the university have their services here.

Old Market

This is the place to be for the students!

The longest bar in Europe, this market is called! Surrounded by bars and cafés, this beautiful square is the setting for events all year round. Just think of the multiple music festivals in summer! All the connecting terraces make it seem like you are sitting on one big, long terrace here - great to spend time on a warm, long summer evening.

De kotmadam

A "kotmadam" is a woman that keeps order in student houses. This statue is built in memory of all "kotmadammen" who would do their best to accommodate and take care of their students from all over the world. The city established this statue.

Grand Place

The city hall is the pride of Leuven. It is also one of the most famous Gothic town halls in the world. The first stone was laid in 1439.

Afterwards, in the 18th and 19th centuries, 230 statues were added to the façade. All these statues are of important figures from Leuven's history.

Since the move of the city services in 2009, the town hall has been used only for ceremonies. Currently, the interior is being restored and there are plans for a whole new use.

The Tafelrond, the round table now a luxury hotel and restaurant and formerly the National Bank, was originally from the last part of the 15th century the gathering place for various guilds in the city of Leuven. Those who most left their mark on the building were the rhetoricians, who gathered there for poetry and drinking.

St Peter's Church

St Peter's Church was built in the 15th century. In the years that followed, several additions and renovations took place. There were several collapses and fires that destroyed parts of the church.

In fact, it was once planned to add three towers to the church. Of which the tallest one would be about 170 metres and the other two about 120 metres. With this, Leuven would still be in possession of the tallest church tower in the world. Unfortunately, due to poor architecture and unstable ground, the towers were never completed. Later, they were lowered to their current level.

This church and town hall stand also on the unesco world heritage list.

The Jacquemart

This golden mechanical bell ringer on top of the St. Peters church strikes the clock every quarter of an hour.

Here in Leuven, he is called Master Jan

Fonske

This is the students' mascot.

Its official name 'Fons Sapientiae' means 'Source of Wisdom'. Everyone calls him Fonske. It was therefore donated on the 550th anniversary of and by the University of Leuven to the city of Leuven. As is often the case in big cities, this statue is regularly dressed up by students.

Paep Thoon stands here very strategically on the banks of the Dyle, the place where he also spent his life.

He became known for the jokes and pranks he played in the city.

Thoon was a natural child of a parish priest of St Peter's Church in Leuven. Paep refers to the fact that he was the son of a priest. Thoon lived in the 15th century; Possibly Thoon was hunchbacked. Thoon was organist and carillon player at St Peter's Church. Thoon wished to be buried, standing

upright, with his mouth under a waterspout of St Peter's Church. That way, he would never be thirsty. In fact, no one knows where he was buried.

Dijle terrasses

A lovely place for picnics and nice evenings, for sunbathing, for meeting up with friends. If you're very lucky, you'll get some music from the music conservatory to go with it.

Here you can see a statue of a woman, lying on the water, it is Fiere Margriet.

I will tell you the legend of **Fiere Margriet (Proud Margaret)**

Margaret was a poor young woman working in a tavern, owned by her uncle Amandus in 1207. Amandus decided to sell his tavern and on the last evening before their departure, a group of pilgrims entered. Since they were not expecting any more customers, Amandus had no drink to offer and requested Margaret to go and fetch a jug of wine from the town.

The pilgrims, who turned out to be robbers, robbed the uncle and killed everyone present. When Margaret returned, the robbers took her away, tried to rape her outside the town, but she resisted heavily. This earned her the nickname the 'Fiere' or the Proud because she preferred death to losing her virginity. They threw her body into the Dijle. Her body floated back to Leuven against the current. The duke of Brabant witnessed this miracle and captured the robbers.

She was subsequently beatified after many miracles happening at the place of her murder. Her reliquary is now in St Peter's Church and her statue is in the façade of the town hall.

Lover's lane

Called 'Le chemin des amoureux' in Leuven, Lover's lane, a very romantic path along the river Dijle. You find here a part of Leuven's first city wall of the 12th century. We see here two town towers and a wall fragment about 70 metres long with the foundation arches. This part served as a substructure of the former malt factory "The Hop Flower".

As you may know, malt is a raw material for beer and Leuven is the beer city of Belgium!

You surely know Stella Artois, InBev? That's Leuven.

Kloosterhotel - Church of Our Lady

This convent was built in the 16th century and belonged to this Church of Our Lady. The convent became a luxury hotel and the church is now used as a cultural centre and as a concert and exhibition space.

Minderbroedersstraat - view of the Entrance Gate to the Botanical Garden, the oldest in Belgium.

It is worth a visit, and also a place of peace and quiet.

Jansenius Tower and Justus Lipsius Tower.

Both parts of the town's first city wall from the 12th century and formed a water gate in medieval Leuven. It was through here that ships sailed into Leuven.

Jansenius was a Roman Catholic priest, bishop, theologian and philosopher from the 16th century and made the tower his working place. He was the founder of Jansenism, which was later condemned as heresy by the Catholic Church.

Justus Lipsius is correctly considered one of the most influential humanists of the 16th century. His like-minded companion was Erasmus who lived during the same period. Erasmus was a Dutch-born priest, Augustinian canon, theologian, biblical scientist, philosopher, writer and humanist.

Meanwhile, Lipsius got interested in the doctrine of Luther and in the spring of 1572 he travelled to Jena where he began teaching at the university. In the following year, he returned to Leuven and, despite his celibacy obligation, married a widow whom he had met some years before during his studies at the Leuven university. He also became a professor in Leuven until his death in 1606.

Here we are back at the Irish College.

I am sorry that because of limited time, I was only able to show you a small part of Leuven. I hope you enjoyed it.

Ann vanden Eynde