



## Antwerp Belgium Things to Know Before You Visit

### Description

#### An Antwerp Visitor Guide and Photo Gallery

Belgium is such a beautiful place with so much history and charm.  
*andi Dorfman*

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Antwerp (Antwerpen) has a deep and rich cultural heritage that goes back hundreds of years. At its heart is a progressive and vibrant modern city that is magnificent to explore. It is where gothic architecture and modern design have learned how to co-exist beautifully. It is a city that draws luxury travelers, art lovers, history buffs, and gastronomic aficionados.



Rubens Image from Rubens House website

The region has world-class museums, galleries, art centers, festivals, and events throughout the year. Museums include Flemish Masters Jan van Eyck, James Ensor, and Peter Paul Rubens. Additionally, sculptors, photographers, and people passionate about art will find plenty to immerse themselves in.

The city is known for its lively contemporary fashion scene and avid biking culture. There are [105 Michelin Antwerpen area restaurants](#), and this region has the highest density of top-class eateries worldwide. One of the best shopping centers in the world is in Antwerp.

Antwerp Belgium is calling you. Let us explore this fantastic city.

## Where is Antwerp, Belgium?



Antwerp is the largest city in Belgium, at 78.96 square miles, and the capital of Antwerp Province in the Flemish Region. Antwerp Province is the northernmost province in the Flemish Region (Flanders) and Belgium. The city has a population of around 520,000 and is Belgium's most populous city center. The greater metropolitan population is approximately 1,200,000, making it the second-largest urban region after Brussels.

Antwerp is situated on the River Scheldt and is linked to the North Sea by the river's Westerschelde estuary. The River Schelde, the Meuse, and the Rhine rivers form the largest estuary in Western Europe. The city is about 25 mi north of Brussels and approximately 9 mi south of the Dutch border.

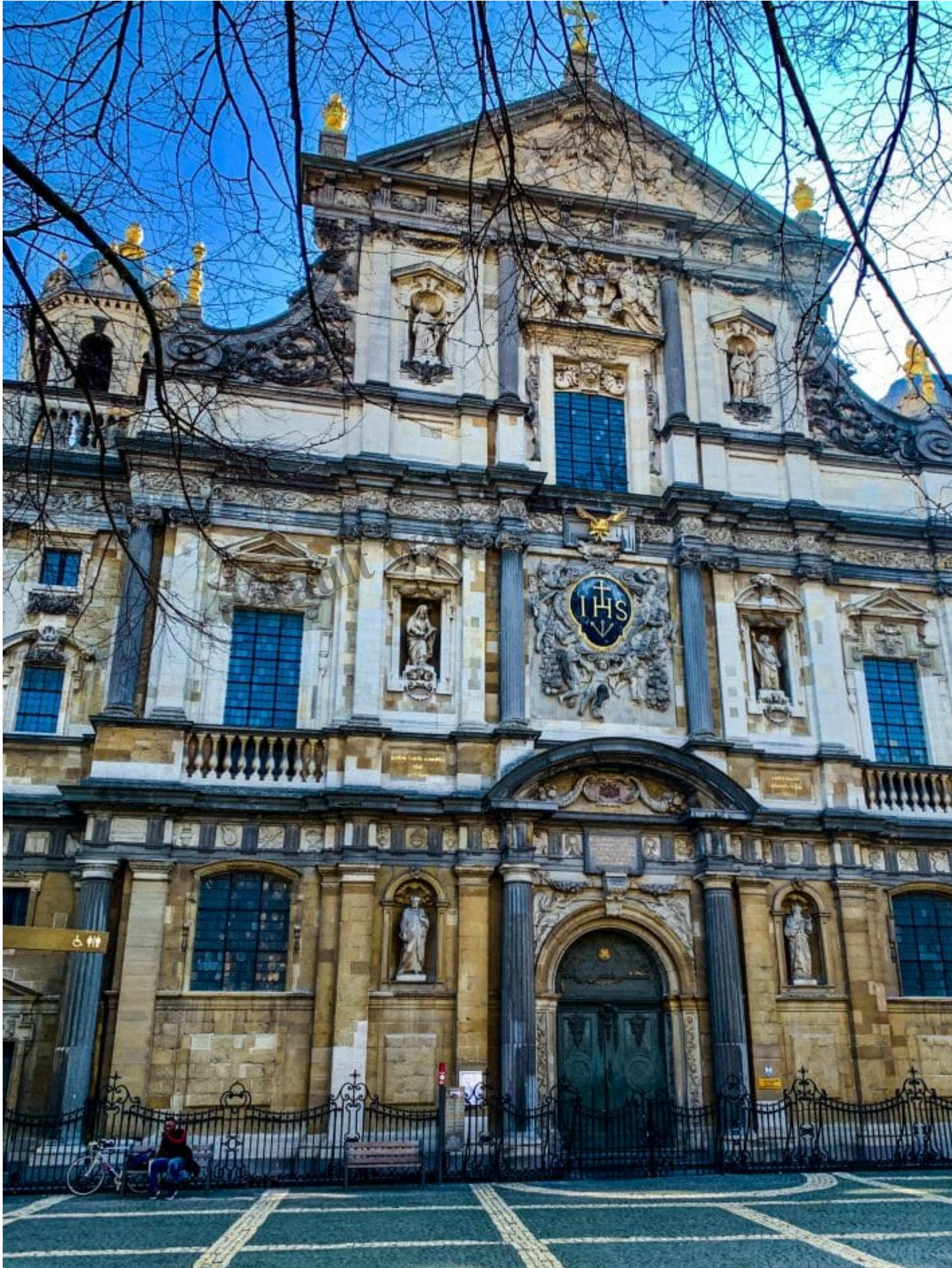
The Port of Antwerp is the second-largest seaport in Europe and one of the world's most respected harbors. The city's harbor installations ballooned after World War II, and as a result, it thrived from that expansion. Initially, the growth occurred only on the right bank of the River Schelde, but in the 1970s, development also began on the left bank.

## Map of Antwerp, Belgium

- [Antwerpen](#)

## Antwerp Belgium History

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## Carolus Borromeus Church Baroque facade by Rubens

Archeological excavations have shown that Antwerp was inhabited as far back as the Gallo-Roman period in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. The city appears to have risen around two settlements: the 'Antwerp' (alluvial mound) from which it gets its name, and Caloes, about a 1/4 mile further south.

The city experienced an economic boom in the 12th century when the nearby port of Bruges started filling up with silt. By the first half of the 14th century. Its reputation, primarily based on its seaport and wool market, made Antwerp the most important trading and financial center in Western Europe.

1356 Antwerp, originally part of the Holy Roman Empire, was annexed to the County of Flanders. As a result, Antwerp lost much of its status, and Bruges gained the advantage. Only fifty years later, the economic and political tides turned once again as the Golden Age unfolded. Antwerp became a world-renowned metropolis, described at the time as 'the loveliest city in the world.'

### **The river, at its core**

During the late 16th century, the River Scheldt was closed due to struggles between the Protestant North and the Catholic South (Spain). This was an economic disaster for Antwerp. But somehow, this resilient city continued to prosper in the 17th century due to painters like Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Jordaens, and Teniers, printers such as Plantin and Moretus, and the famous Antwerp harpsichord builders.

However, with the river closed off from 1650 until the 19th century, Antwerp experienced a significant decline. As a result of Napoleon's fall at Waterloo (1815), Antwerp entered a short-lived period of prosperity. The Belgian Revolution (1830) and the closure of the Scheldt again halted that progress. Finally, the river opened again, this time for good, in 1863, paving the way for Antwerp to become one of the shining cities of the world.

Since the River Scheldt flows again, Antwerp has experienced steady and impressive economic growth. Though the years of the two world wars had a substantial impact, the 20th century brought much status and wealth to the city that continues to prosper into the 21st century.

### **Can a city have two Golden Ages?**



According to experts, Antwerp has two Golden Ages.

The first Golden Age started in the 16th century when it became a well-known financial center worldwide. Tradespeople from all over Europe visited here to buy and sell their goods. Even the other colonial powers of Europe took advantage of this city's leading commercial center status and enjoyed the profit from their trade.

Not only were the tradespeople impressed with Antwerp, but even artists were drawn to the booming prosperity of the city. They explored different subjects and experimented with new art styles. For example, Jan Gossaert (a French-speaking painter) was one of the first few artists who lived in Antwerp and worked with new compositions to create a unique, eclectic style.

The second Golden Age of Antwerp is now.

Today, Antwerp is the world's biggest diamond hub, and almost everyone is involved in the lucrative diamond business.



## Center of the diamond world



### Antwerp Home Of DIAMONDS

Logo from [DIVA museum website](#)

In fact, 84% of the world's mined diamonds land in Antwerp. This is why Antwerp is the center of the world diamond trade.

This is a relatively new piece of Antwerp's history. After WWII, trade started to return slowly. In 1945, the government created the Diamond Office in the Antwerp diamond quarter to help regulate the import and export of diamonds from Antwerp. This facility aimed to make the trade of diamonds as smooth as possible, with minimal interference and red tape.

Antwerp's diamond district is a great example of the current state of the global diamond industry. In the diamond district, Flemish, Jewish Orthodox, and Indian diamond dealers work alongside manufacturers, service providers, buyers, and traders of rough, polished, and processed diamonds from almost every country where diamonds are mined.

There should be no surprise that the world's most highly skilled diamond cutters are based here. The expertise and sophisticated financial and commercial infrastructure unmatched worldwide back the diamond culture here.

If you are the center of the diamond world, you would expect a museum to follow suit. The DIVA Museum is where you can learn about the Diamond Industry that has put Antwerp on the map.

## TIP

This is an expensive city to visit. One way to keep costs down is to buy an Antwerp diamond. [clicking here for the link.](#)

## Antwerp Belgium – Interesting Facts

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If you plan a trip to Antwerp, here are some interesting facts that show this place has many more pleasant surprises.

- The official language of Antwerp is Dutch. However, the residents of this city also speak French and German fluently, as they are also the official languages of Belgium.
- The currency in Belgium is the euro.
- Johann Carolus published the first weekly newspaper of Europe (Relation) in Antwerp almost 400 years ago. The local authors recognize it as the first weekly newspaper in Europe, and the World Association of Newspapers accepts it.
- This city also played an essential role in World War I. It became the fallback point of the Belgian Army when they faced defeat in the battle of Liege.
- Nazi Germany occupied Antwerp and its port during World War II after a series of military operations. The port of Antwerp was vital for them as it assisted the allies (the United Kingdom and France) in pushing toward Germany. But, in September 1944, the British troops from the Armored Division liberated the port and the entire city after four years of German occupation.

#### Some fun facts

- Antwerp also has the world's largest coffee storage site. The stock is currently sitting in its port and holds more than 250,000 tons of coffee beans, which is enough for more than 27 billion cups of coffee. If you want to taste the world's best coffee, you can visit famous coffee bars, such as Kaffeenini, Caffenation, and Kolonel Koffie.
- If you are an artist or an art student, you can't call yourself a professional if you don't visit the "Royal Academy for Fine Arts." This academy is also one of the oldest of its kind in Europe. Though founded in 1663, today it is an internationally acclaimed institute for Fine Arts and offers Bachelor's and Master's Programs to students.
- Historic and beautiful Antwerp hosted the 1920 Summer Olympics right after World War I. The international community awarded these games to Antwerp to renew its devastated spirit.
- You will find one of Europe's oldest zoos here. This zoo rubs shoulders with history and impresses you with its overall old construction. It has almost 1,000 species of animals. It is a great family activity. The authorities of Antwerp Zoo are proud of their many breeding programs for endangered species.

## Top 12 Things to Do

If you are visiting Antwerp for the first time, here are the top 12 things to do to capture its fantastic vibe.



Image from [Ruben's House website](#)

1. **Visit Ruben's house**, built by Flemish artist Pieter Paul Rubens. Peter Paul Rubens was a brilliant and versatile artist, and you can visit his "palazetto" in the center of Antwerp. The master lived with his family for years and painted with his colleagues and assistants in a studio he designed. There is, of course, a permanent collection and special exhibitions. It is a well-done tour with a fascinating history and audio stories about the artist, his family, and the home's history. Worth a visit.



Image from [Red Star Line Museum website](#)

2. **Explore the Red Star Line Museum** as it offers a memorable trip back in time. Over two million passengers sailed from Antwerp on Red Star Line ships between 1873 and 1934, the great majority of these immigrants bound for America. This is a fascinating museum with beautiful exhibits. It deals directly with immigration in an informative and enlightening way everyone should see.



Image by Filip Cop from Unsplash

3. Are you interested in artifacts & artwork? Check out the **MAS (Museum aan de Stroom or *Museum by the Stream*)**, which is located along the River Scheldt in the Eilandje district of Antwerp. It opened in May 2011 and is the largest museum in Antwerp. The central focus is Antwerp and its connection to the world. It is superb and has lovely views.

*Another stunning city in Belgium, Ghent, is a short distance from Antwerp. Check out our blog post on this fascinating city: Ghent Belgium [The History Book of Europe](#), [The Ultimate Ghent Visitor Guide](#), and [Photo Gallery](#).*

4. Spend time along the core of what makes Antwerp what it is, the **River Scheldt**. Feel the energy and vitality of Antwerp's port-city hub. Though it is industrial and has many massive wind turbines, it is still a sight to behold. The Port Authority building is quite impressive in its own right. An easy way to get there is to take the water bus near the Grote Market. You can tour the port and the Schelde River for a few euros.



Image from [Antwerpen Zoo website](#)

5. **The Antwerp Zoo** is also a great attraction for tourists. It is open 365 days a year in the center of Antwerp next to the Antwerpen-Centraal train station. It is the oldest animal park in the country and one of the oldest in the world, established on 21 July 1843.

6. Visit **Steen Castle, Het Steen** (which stands for the rock), as it is called in Antwerp, is a medieval fortress in the old city center of Antwerp, Belgium. The surviving structure was built between 1200 and 1225 as a gateway to a larger castle of the Dukes of Brabant. As the first stone fortress of Antwerp, Het Steen is Antwerp's oldest building. It is a photogenic castle with a fantastic entrance bridge.

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*For more information on the city, check out the [official tourism site for Antwerp, Belgium](#).*



Image from [De Koninck Brewery website](#)



7. Take a trip to **De Koninck Antwerp City Brewery**. Belgium is known for its beer; visiting this city and not learning about it would be missing part of the city's pulse. Get fully immersed in the Belgian beer world and discover all its secrets.

There are many breweries, and De Koninck is number one on Trip Advisor. Other breweries worth visiting include Speciale Belge Taproom and Antwerpse Brouw Compagnie.



8. **Explore Antwerp by bike**. You can rent a bike and ride independently with the many online route guides. There are also many guided bike tours to check out all the city's significant sites.

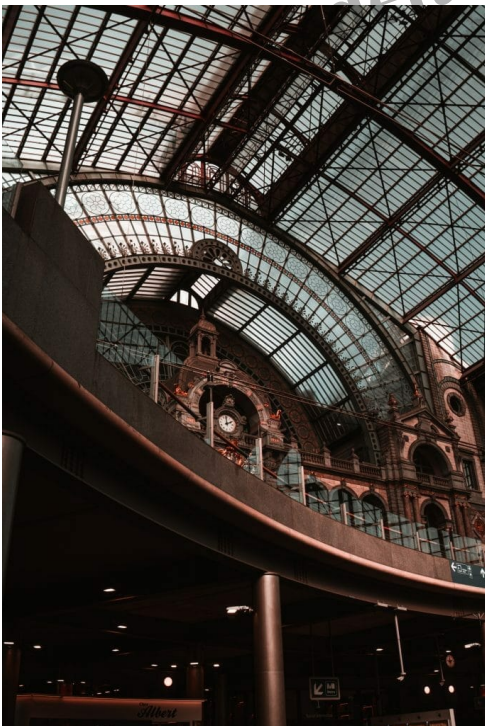


Image by Jonas Jaeken on Unsplash

9. You are in the Diamond Capital of the World, so take in the **DIVA museum**, the new diamond museum in Antwerp. The museum’s collection “features over 500 objects that detail the story of Antwerp’s history with diamonds and gemstones.”

10. Do you love railway stations? Well, you are in luck. **Antwerpen-Central Train Station** is an absolute must-do when in the city. The gorgeous railway station of Antwerp is a sight for sore eyes. It has a kingly presence but also owns some modern industrialist features, which make it more warm and elegant. Even if you aren’t taking a train there, make a point to stop by.

*If you want more inspiration and visit other parts of Belgium, check out our [Belgium Travel Guide](#). It will help you plan your trip and save money.*



11. Wander in awe in **The Cathedral of Our Lady**. The Roman Catholic Gothic-style cathedral is in the heart of Antwerp. Construction started in 1352, and although the first stage was completed in 1521, the structure itself has never been ‘completed.’ It contains several significant works by the Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens and paintings by artists such as Otto van Veen, Jacob de Backer, and Marten de Vos. It is stunning both inside and out!

12. Shop to your heart’s content on **Antwerp’s Meir**. Whether just window shopping or people-watching, it will be quite an experience. Meir is the number one street for shopping in Antwerp and the most prominent shopping street in all of Belgium. It is located in the core of Antwerp and is very pedestrian-friendly. Take a lovely afternoon stroll while viewing the grand window displays of the shops and the ornate Rococo architecture.

While shopping in Meir, make sure to visit Stadsfeestzaal Shopping Centre. The Centre is referred to as the beating heart of Antwerp. It is the place where 6.5 million people a year enjoy a unique shopping experience in a beautifully restored environment (the city’s former event hall) that exudes luxury and grandeur. It draws shoppers from all over the world.

## **The Most Attractive Features**

In our opinion, the most attractive features of Antwerp were Steen Castle and The Cathedral of Our Lady.

### **The Castle**

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Image of Steen Castle from Adobe Stock Images

Steen Castle is the oldest building in Antwerp and exhibits architecture from the Roman Empire. It has a glorious past and is a symbol of art and ancient architecture. This castle was built in the early medieval ages to prevent the incursion of Vikings. Therefore, you will find a lot of history of Europe's wars here. This castle has 11 rooms. Walking through them, you learn about Antwerp's history and get a first-hand look at castle life.



## The Church

After 169 years of construction, the Cathedral of Our Lady has dominated Antwerp's skyline since 1521, with a height of about 360 feet. It's the highest Gothic building in the Low Countries. The Cathedral is an iconic treasure, with an impressive collection of marvelous art pieces, including a series of paintings by Rubens.

It has been under a twenty-year renovation, and finally, the seven-apsed church has been restored to its former architectural self. Some of the most beautiful features include Rubens' 'Elevation of the Cross' and his 'Descent from the Cross.' We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and wished we could've given it more time.

## Dining in Antwerp, Belgium



Antwerp is a culinary hub known worldwide for its gastronomic excellence. It has over 100 Michelin Antwerpen restaurants alone. However, many superb restaurants are not even listed in the Michelin Guide. We arrived late, and it was not able to enjoy dinner in the city. That was such a disappointment. As a result, we can't recommend any places.

When we travel, we look at reviews at THE Fork, and [here is the link for Antwerp](#). You can choose from many well-reviewed restaurants.

**Foods that are not to miss while in Antwerp.**



1. This may sound cliché, but you are in Belgium, so get some local Belgian Waffles. They are a specialty here. A favorite place for waffles in Antwerp is La Gaufrerie, next to the Cathedral of Our Lady.

2. Chocolate – Belgium is famous for its chocolate, so you will see chocolate shops everywhere in Antwerp. There are a lot of world-famous brands in Antwerp, but nothing beats locally-made chocolate. **Sjokolat** was one of these hidden gems for chocolate.

Belgian chocolate is a great gift for family and friends. But don't forget to bring some home for yourself, too.

## How Do You Get to Antwerp, Belgium

From Brussels airport



The largest airport in Belgium is Brussels Airport. You can reach Antwerpen Centraal Station in 36 minutes by train. Take the Intercity Direct to Amsterdam Central.

You can also take a long-distance bus to the Antwerp center, choosing the [Airport Express](#) or the [BlaBlaBus](#). You can buy a ticket for this via the websites. The bus stops are directly below the arrivals hall, at level 0.

Taxis and Uber are available from the airport. Remember that the distance between Antwerp and Brussels is more than 25 miles, so the ride cost is steep.

### **By Car**

When we traveled to Belgium, we had a rental car. We found the roadways excellent with clear signage, but once in the city, it was a bit more complicated and stressful. Though we did not arrive or leave during rush hour, we heard it can be challenging to get around. Plan to park and walk or take excellent public transportation.

Our hotel provides parking, but we are told parking can be hard to come by, and it is best to reserve a space via Mobypark before your arrival. We did not use this service and can not vouch for it.

### **By Train**

Antwerpen Centraal Station is the ideal station to go to if you want to visit Antwerp. You can walk from the station to the Meir Shopping area in minutes. Antwerp has other stations as well. Depending on your destination, you can see which is closest to you.



## Where to Stay In Antwerp, Belgium



As we mentioned, we only had one night in Antwerp, but we did stay, in our opinion, in the perfect location. We were at the Hilton Antwerp Old Town. The hotel is in the heart of Old Town, overlooking the Cathedral of Our Lady and the Old Town square and steps from the waterfront. Shops, restaurants, and the Plantin-Moretus Museum are a short walk from our door. Antwerp Zoo and Antwerp Central Rail Station are within a couple of miles. We loved the Old Town area, and it would be a great choice if you could stay there.

*Using Hilton points, we had our stay there for free. Check out our blog post if you want to learn more about traveling for free. [Want to travel for free? Let us show you how.](#)*

## When to visit and for how long?

Summer is a great time to visit Antwerp. The average daily temperature stays at 18 degrees Celsius,

and the day lasts, on average, 15 hours.



But the summer is also busy as it's the tourist season and the residents are often on holiday too.

We recommend spending two days here if you want to get a better feel for this city. It's an ideal amount of time to check out all the famous attractions of Antwerp. We only spent one night in the town and packed a lot in. That said, we short-changed ourselves. There is so much to offer here, and this city's food alone is worth many meals.

## Final Thoughts



Due to its historic status, this city oozes power and attracts travelers from all around the world. It is a cosmopolitan city at its core with a diverse international community. It has everything you could wish for in a European city. This city has energy and youth while paying respect to its long, rich history.

We noticed a feeling of community and pride in its people in our short time there. Everyone was so welcoming and kind. It was an easy city to navigate. It felt safe everywhere and was clean and well-kept.

So, are you ready to immerse yourself in the majesty of Antwerp?

## Antwerp Belgium Photo Gallery









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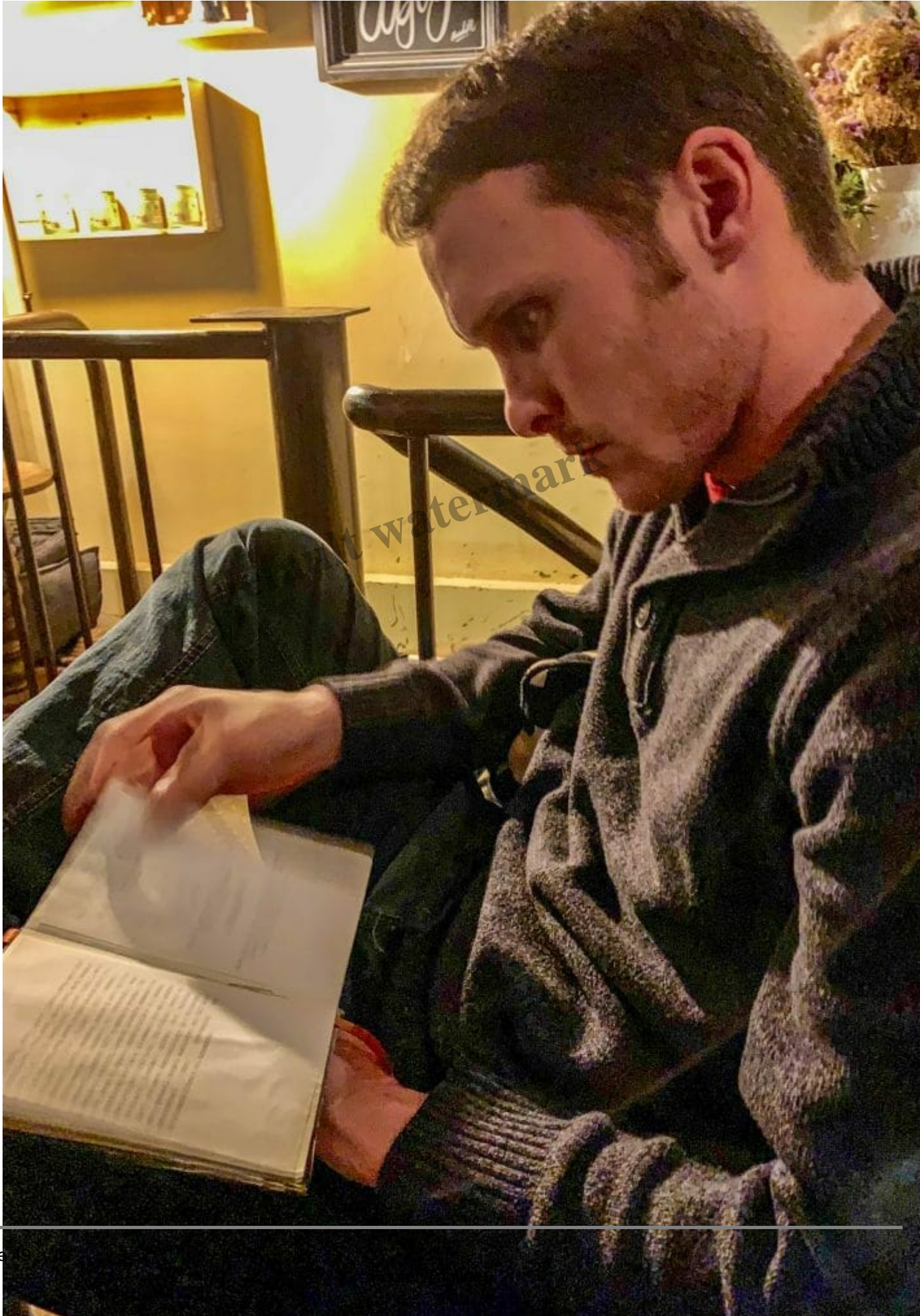


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When people ask me where  
I get my wisdom from I  
tell them: "That's what I  
do. I drink and I know  
things!" \*Tyrion Lannister

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\*Tosca

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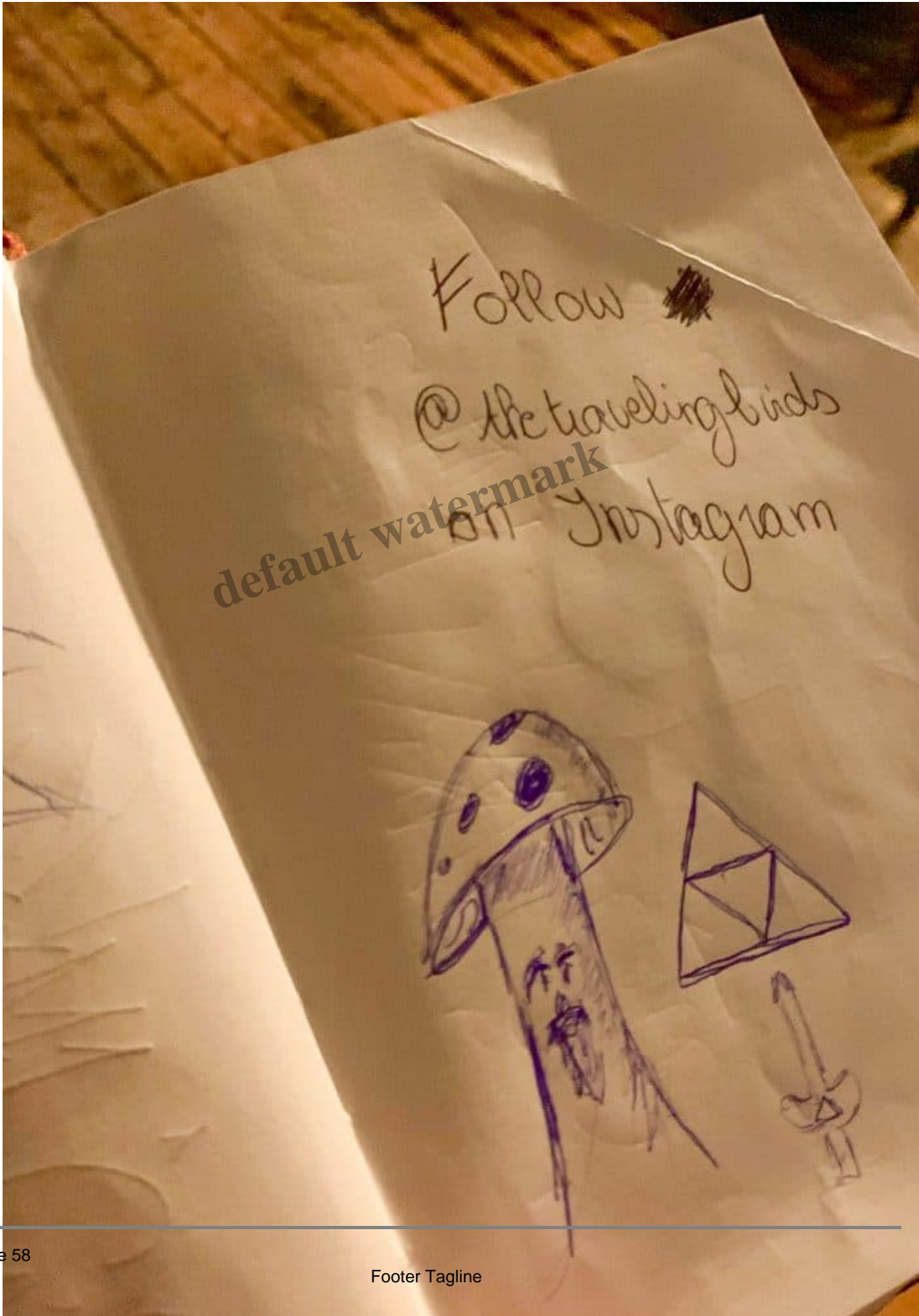


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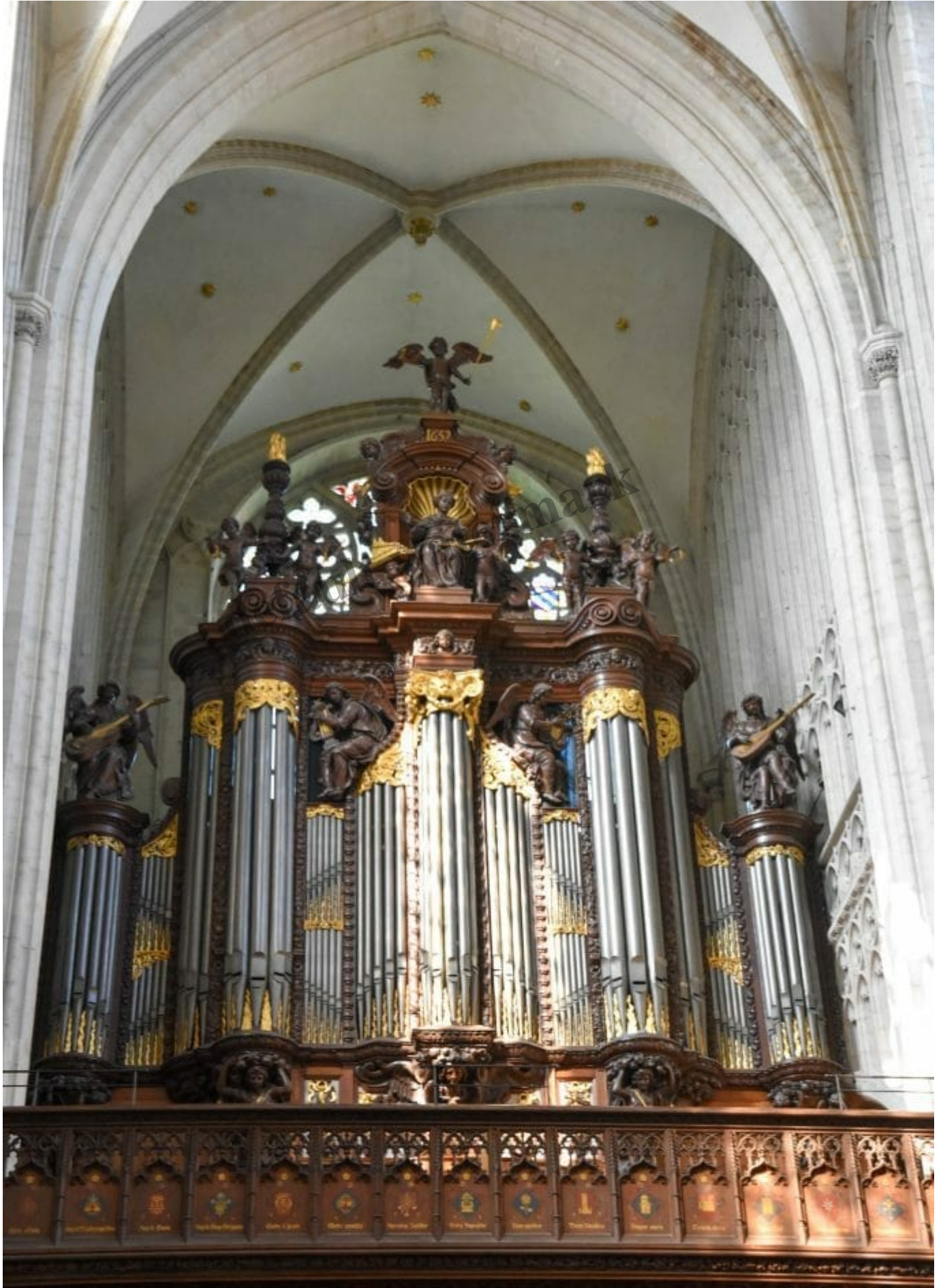
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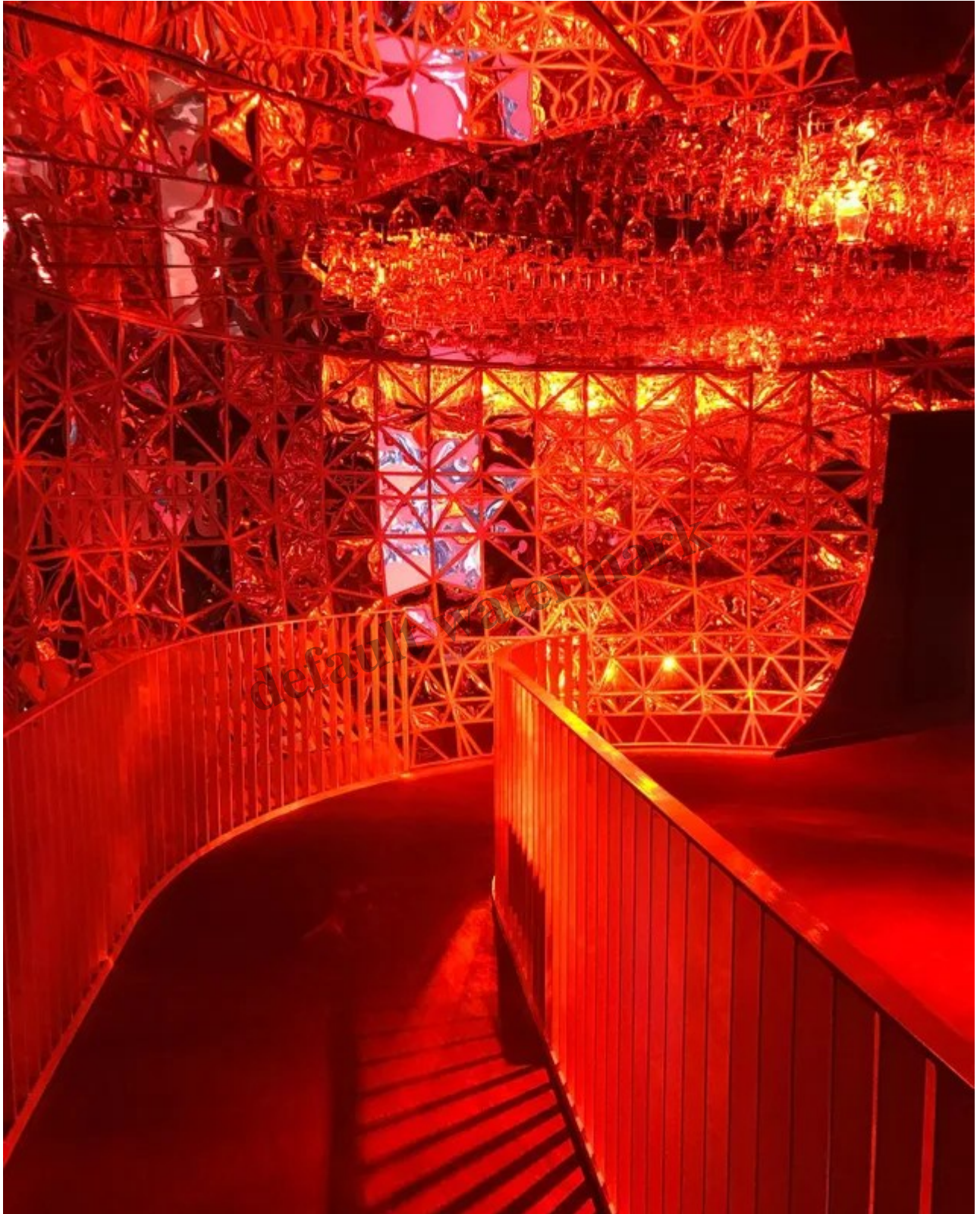




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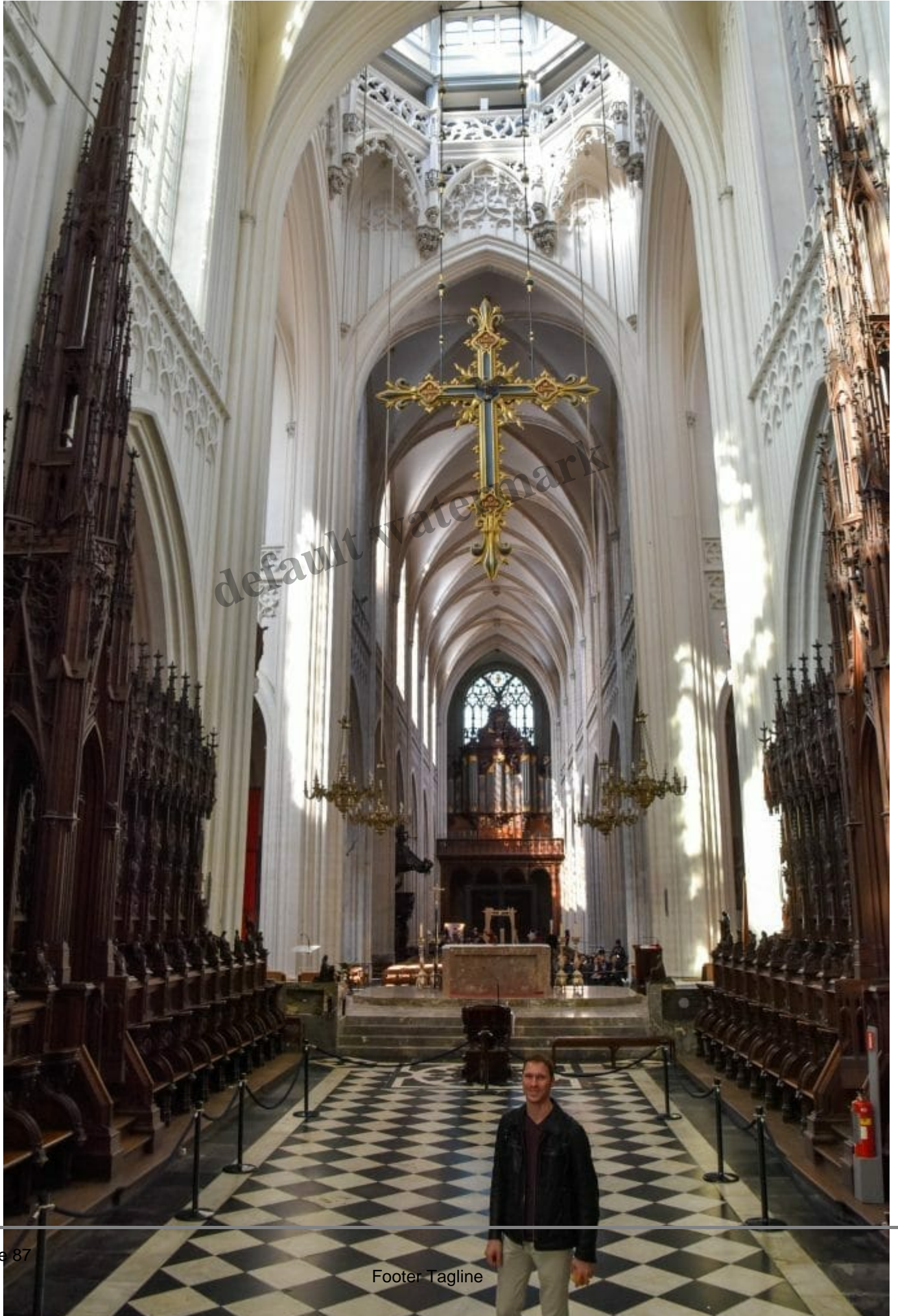


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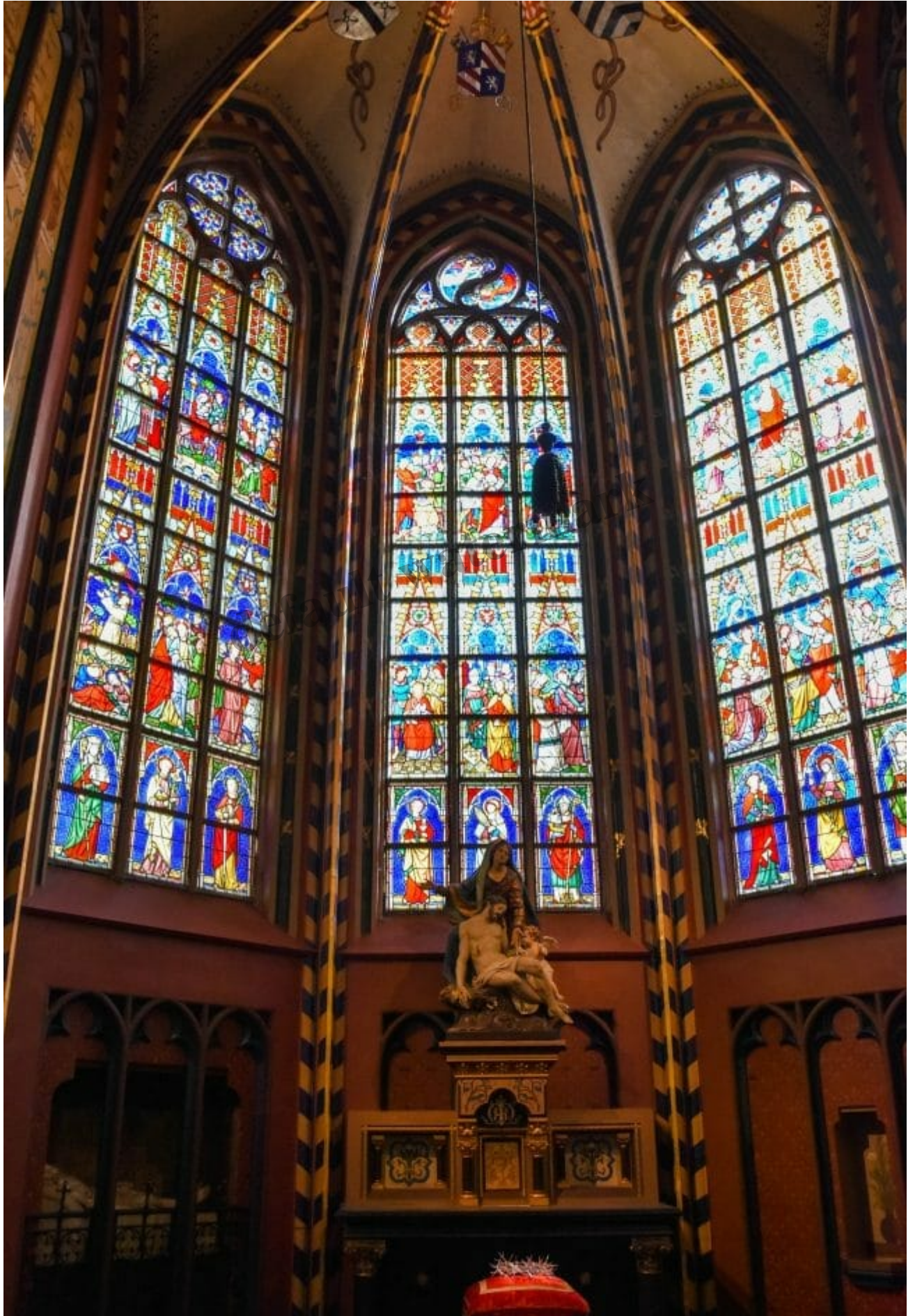


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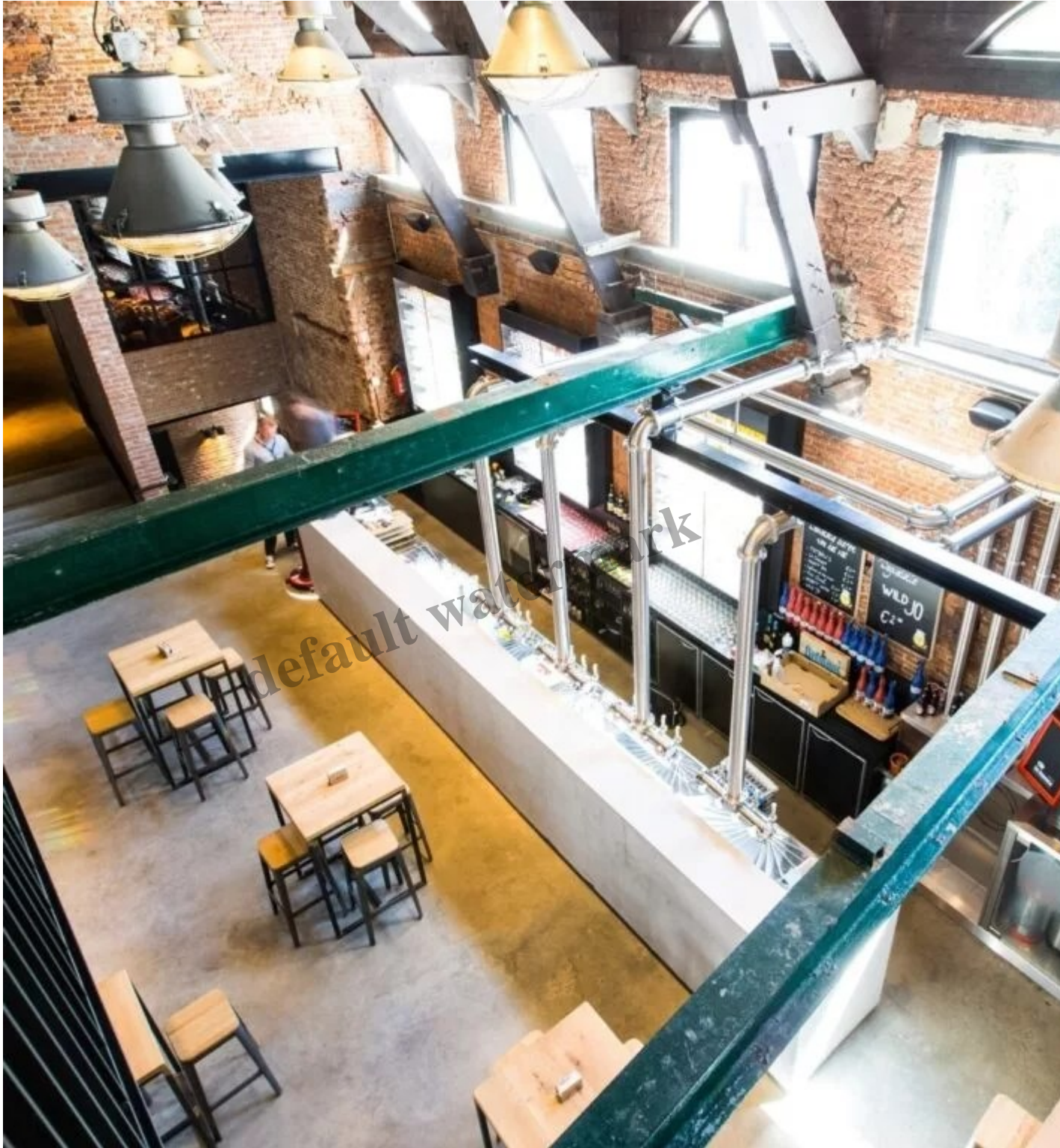


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