

Tens of kilometres of quiet farm paths entice cyclists and hikers to Sint-Laureins.

A region which is as flat as a pancake makes for a cyclist's paradise.

You can follow the marked routes or choose your own route, guided by the Meetjesland Cycling Network.



Another network has been developed for creative hikers.

At every junction, you decide for yourself which direction to take.

Only one thing is for sure: after every bend, you will get goose pimples as you are captivated by the impressive panoramas.

Anyone wanting a real taste of the countryside must consider a night on the farm.

Scores of farmers have a guest room to let, very often in the splendid setting of a historic farmhouse.



Apart from that, you will not be hungry when you leave Sint-Laureins.

In the excellent restaurants, amongst other things, you can sample the delights of various eel dishes, which are a real local speciality.

If you are looking for a friendly terrace to enjoy the sun you will not be disappointed.

The village of Sint-Laureins is dominated by a huge building: the 'Godshuis' (House of God).

It was built from 1843 onwards with the encouragement and finance of a devout lady, Antonia Van Damme.



Any village resident can give you the history of the building down to the finest details.

Over the years, it has served as a monastery, orphanage, hospital, and rest home.

The imposing hospital wards have now been converted into stylish banquet rooms and you can sample a local beer in the labyrinth of the extensive supply cellars.

Sint-Laureins

Endless Enjoyment!

In the far north of the province of East Flanders, five minuscule villages cuddle up to the Dutch border: Sint-Laureins, Watervliet, Sint-Margriete, Sint-Jan-in-Eremo, and Waterland-Oudeman.

The handful of occupants of these villages live in breathtaking surroundings.

Here you can still enjoy magnificent scenery now virtually unique in Flanders, which is covered in buildings. Large stretches of water (the so-called creeks) serve as a reminder of the huge floods which ravaged this region in centuries past. In those days, people avoided these areas like the plague.

When the border posts were erected between the Netherlands and Belgium in 1843, the Dutch politely refused this area: after all, they could not do anything with the land.

This has preserved Sint-Laureins as an oasis of peace and quiet, whilst it has also become a paradise for cyclists, walkers, and connoisseurs of food and drink. The multitude of excellent restaurants cater for the latter. During your trips through this region, you inevitably cross the Belgian-Dutch border again and again.

However, when it comes to enjoyment, there are no borders in Sint-Laureins.

Natural beauty, peace and quiet, and an excellent cuisine: this is a town of endless enjoyment.

Sint-Laureins really is a synonym for endless pleasure.

Sint-Laureins is easily accessible and centrally located between the artistic cities of Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, and is only a stone's throw from the Belgian and Dutch coasts.

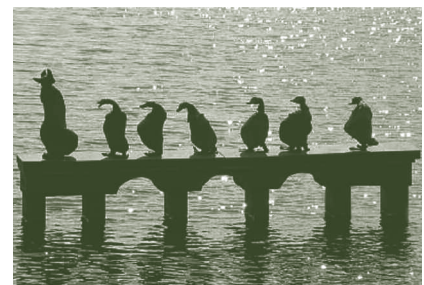
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When the fox preaches, take care of your geese.

It is no coincidence that the statue of the mischievous Reynaert de Vos is found along the Oudemans creek.

The medieval Elmare monastery – mentioned in the world-famous story – is said to have been in the vicinity of

Waterland-Oudemans.



Here you can cycle along the magnificent Reynaert route, which takes you past some ten sculptures. These all portray a fragment of the beast epic.

Near the Oudemans creek, you come to the picturesque little pub 'De Roste Muis' (The Red Mouse).

You might well hear a spicy story about how this secret little bar from the 17th century got its name.

We would not be surprised if the expression 'to de-stress' originated in Sint-Laureins.

You can explore the region in a delightful manner during a trip on a tilt cart.

During these trips, you can infinitely enjoy all the beauty which this little town has to offer.



Clip-clopping slowly along farm paths with a view of the solid seat of a cart horse.

There are more stressful situations in life!

A little game of rolle bolle ('krulbollen') causes somewhat more tumult.

This traditional popular sport is still played here with full fervour.

You have to roll a heavy wooden, cheese-shaped ball on a sandy court, so that it comes to rest as close to a stake as possible.

The region of Sint-Laureins is characterized by many creeks.

For centuries, the locals fought against floods and storm tides.

The many creeks which are spread out here form the remnants of those disasters.



Two canals were dug out to relieve the polders of surplus water.

The Schipdonk canal and the Leopold canal are adorned with stately poplars and are highly photogenic.

Many people enjoy fishing here along the steep banks.

"The prettiest village square in Flanders," say the locals, with a tiny hint of bias.

Yet they could be right, as we are talking about the village square of Watervliet.

This magnificent spot is surrounded by a few 18th century buildings.

The butter bank ('boterbank') dates from the same period.

This is where farmers' wives used to come and sell their dairy products on market days.



However, the pride of Watervliet is undoubtedly the 'Cathedral of the North', with its ornate interior and scores of artistic treasures, including the famous Need of God ('Nood Gods').

People wanted to turn **Watervliet** into a seaport town like Antwerp in the 16th century, but things turned out differently.

Around the village of

Sint-Margriete, you can still

find a few so-called tithe stones

('tiendenpalen') from the 15th century.

In those days, farmers had to set aside

one tenth of their produce for St. Bavo's

Abbey in Ghent or the Chapter of

Tournai.



The tithe stones were meant to put a stop to the endless quarrels about who was actually entitled to the tithes from this or that farm.

Those working on one side of the stone paid their tithe to SB (St. Bavo's Abbey), whilst those on the other side had to fork out for *Dornick* (Tournai).

Innumerable couples from the region have exchanged their marital vows in the church building of

Sint-Jan-in-Eremo.

This single-nave little church is certainly very cosy.

It is also a listed building and lies in the heart of the polder, somewhat lonely, but very picturesque.



Also typical of the region are the graphic dike houses.

These tiny houses, where the farm labourers used to live, are built against the protective wing of a dike.

Anyone living there can hardly move a foot without using the stairs.

Sint-Laureins has been a real farming region for centuries.

The fertile polder soil yields crops which are now hardly found elsewhere.

For example, if you come here in June, you can still see the flax in bloom.

Fields full of dazzling blue flowers write pure poetry before your very eyes.



In the Rural Centre ('Plattelands-

centrum') of Sint-Laureins,

you can have a glance behind the scenes of a modern farm.

It soon becomes clear that the farms which we know from traditional farm films have long since passed away.

The centre also has a soft spot for regional products and the farmhouse specialities which are on sale all over the region.