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TOURIST MAGAZINE

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**Pays des Lacs
Tourist Office**

1 October to 31 March:

Tuesday to Sunday 10:00–16:00

1 April to 30 September:

Monday 12:30–17:00
and Tuesday to Sunday 09:30–17:00

Closed 11 November

– 24, 25 & 31 December

– 1 January



PUBLISHER

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SFX Translated

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TERRITORY MAP

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PRINTING MARCH 2022

Imprimerie Bietlot

D/2022/14.509/01

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Cover, p.4

UTOPIX

K.Demalsche

p.2, 17, 20, 21, 34, 35, 36, 39,
41, 50, 51, 52

H.Lenaerts

p.11,12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 22, 29, 30,
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de la

Wallonie

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- Getaways with friends
- Family getaways
- Getaways for couples



- Getaways with friends
- Family getaways
- Getaways for couples



IT IS TIME TO TRAVEL DIFFERENTLY

No need to travel far to get away. Set off on an adventure that's off the beaten track. Unspoilt nature, centuries-old forests, five of the most beautiful bodies of water in Belgium and more – the **Pays des Lacs** is sure to move you. From a simple stroll and tasting specialities to water sports and watching wildlife, boredom is a thing of the past. Allow yourself to be enchanted by the charm of the Pays des Lacs, a genuine gem located in the heart of Belgium.

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MY EXPERIENCE OF THE PAYS DES LACS REGION

“The contrast between nature and water, over just a few kilometres: on one side, there are lakes with numerous different activities on offer and, on the other, you can walk or cycle in the heart of the countryside... There is always something new to discover. The dissonance between the modern and picturesque aspects is very pronounced. It gives the very different and charming landscapes diversity.

I really like this region. Between the 250-metre zipline over the lakes or the aquagolf, between the walk around the streets of Thuin or the visit to the village of Toine Culot, between the escapèche and the gourmet menu with a Chimay, there is something for every taste and every desire.

I’ve been discovering the region with La Grande Balade for eight years and I never tire of it.”



LUDOVIC DAXHELET,
Creator of Viziit and RTL columnist



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LUDOVIC DAXHELET

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REASONS TO EXPLORE THE PAYS DES LACS REGION

Numerous walking, cycling and mountain biking routes reveal hidden corners to us.

THE REGION DELIGHTS TRAVELLERS LOOKING FOR NATURE, AUTHENTICITY AND PEACEFUL GETAWAYS.



“The locals even take the time to talk to tourists. When sitting at a table in a bistro or walking around a village, you talk to people,” says Christine Charue, the director of the **Pays des Lacs** Tourist Office. “For me, it is easy to speak naturally. We see each other, you say hello, you have a discussion. It is spontaneous.”

Closeness to locals

Tourism development is part of local life, just like that of folklore entertainment or the management of green spaces. It is part of the everyday life of citizens, without imposing itself. “Tourists and locals cohabit with a mutual interest.”

In addition, tourist activities are integrated into the landscapes. “Most of the attractions revolve around natural resources: forests, rivers, lakes, etc. Like tree climbing, a tree-top course, the Spin Cablepark, a ski lift pulled by a cable or the steam locomotive at the Chemin de Fer à Vapeur des 3 Vallées.”

Local products (beers, macarons, escavèches, etc.) or built heritage (castles, medieval towns, etc.) are revealed to those who take the time to discover them.

Preserved natural areas

There is little development in this area, which means there are many areas places left to explore. “I really like walking in this area. I feel good. It feels like I am the first person to visit, to discover places that are still relatively untouched.”

Vast natural expanses invite you to relax. «The Virelles Aquascope, the Viroin-Hermeton Natural Park and the Pays de Chimay Forest immerse us in an astonishing biodiversity.”

When you come to explore the region, don't forget a blanket. “This is an essential accessory for stopping for a picnic along a lake, in front of a panoramic vista or for stargazing in the middle of the fields.”



GETAWAYS WITH FRIENDS

WHY TRAVEL DIFFERENTLY BY BIKE?



FOR FABIENNE, THIS LIGHT MODE OF TRANSPORT HAS BECOME AN ESSENTIAL ALLY FOR EXPLORING WITH HER FRIENDS.

Did you know?

You can enjoy a picnic basket, prepared by Spamboux farm using its fresh produce. This is available by booking with the farm directly or with the Syndicat d'Initiative de Lobbes or the Couvin Tourist Office.

Good to know:

Plan a stop at the only fresh-fruit distillery in the area, located in Biercée, to try its spirits, liqueurs, gins and local aperitifs.

"We adapt the bike routes according to points of interest," explains this fifty-year-old. "For example, we left the RaVEL network to discover the Medieval City of Lobbes, with its majestic Saint-Ursmer Collegiate Church and the Folcuin garden. Or along the towpath at Merbes-le-Château, to observe birds and tarpans, wild horses, in the Labuissière nature reserve."

Close to places and people

"With two bags and my bike, I'm off. I travel light," she tells us. The bike allows her to get close to the places she discovers. "We often stop to chat to the locals. We travel at our own pace." Depending on their preferences, they can stop at a little bistro in a secluded village.

Awareness of time and distances

"I can more easily identify the geography of places. To reach **the heights of Thuin**, we climbed a steep road. We really felt the difference between the Quartier des Bateliers and the Belfry." Fabienne also perceives the distance more subtly. "The journey is gradual. We move from one landscape to another through all five of our senses."

Safety

For her, journeys by bike are safe. "We could go **from Charleroi to Chimay**, passing the Eau d'Heure lakes, by bike and using adapted trails. It all depends on our preferences and our athletic abilities." But feel free to combine modes of transport for more variety. "Some cyclists take the steam train in Thuin with their bike, in order to get a different look at the Sambre Valley."



**MÉLANIE, FLORENT, JONATHAN AND EMMA
HAPPILY PUSHED THEIR LIMITS THANKS TO
AN “EXTREME SPORT” GIFT VOUCHER.**

**HECK,
I’LL DO IT!**



I was happy to have my feet on the ground
– Mélanie at [Natura Parc](#)

Despite her fear of heights, Mélanie tried the experience at Natura Parc, an adventure park made up of several courses in the trees (tree climbing, zip line, monkey bridge, etc.). “On the first ladders, I started to shake, to have jelly legs.”

During the course, her friends encouraged her. Thanks to them, she reached the end of the course. “I’m really glad I did, although I was glad to have my feet on the ground.”



I was happy overtaking
– Florent at [Fagnes go-karting](#)

A motorsport enthusiast, Florent wanted to try the Mariembourg circuit. Renowned worldwide, the only Belgian outdoor track has hosted many champions. “Knowing that Ayrton Senna raced on this circuit is exhilarating.”

He tried it with friends. “The excitement is there from the start, from the beginning of the race.” He enjoyed the challenge: “With each lap, I got a little bit of satisfaction, especially if the person I was passing was a friend who doesn’t like to lose.”

I felt as though I was floating through the clouds

– Emma at the [Cerfontaine aerodrome](#)

This young thirty-something experienced parachute jumping at Cerfontaine aerodrome, thanks to a gift voucher she received at Christmas. On site, the instructor gives her instructions: “In flight, take the banana position.”

The atmosphere on the plane is good. “Before I jumped, I wondered why am I doing this? Finally, we jump. The free fall goes very quickly. When we opened the parachute, I felt like I was floating through the clouds.”



I really felt the speed
– Jonathan at the [Spin Cablepark](#)

Jonathan received tickets to test the water ski-lift pulled by a winch, which is unique to the Eau d’Heure lakes. The introduction to Spin Cablepark takes place sitting on a board. “I didn’t expect it to go that fast. I fell several times on the first few laps. Fortunately, the water cushions the fall.”

In the queue, he interacts with other participants. He gradually gains confidence and really enjoys it. For him, “the experience is worth the journey”.

Another challenge:
Why not solve the puzzle of one of the region’s best escape rooms, the [Chimay Escape Room](#)?



Raining?
Try the [Doische indoor climbing centre](#).



**IVÀN FLORINE, PERFUME MAKER AND EDUCATOR
AT ÔÔ PARFUMS IN PHILIPPEVILLE, GIVES YOU SOME TIPS
FOR FINDING YOUR OWN PERFUME.**

Follow your gut

“A perfume is chosen or created by trusting your nose, without consciously considering the olfactory process. You either like a scent or you don’t.”
For him, we have a lot of preconceptions about the olfactory universe. Therefore, it is important to really smell the scent for what it is, without intellectualising the process, pushing its interpretation in a personal way. For example, a fresh scent may represent citrus for one person and the ocean for another.

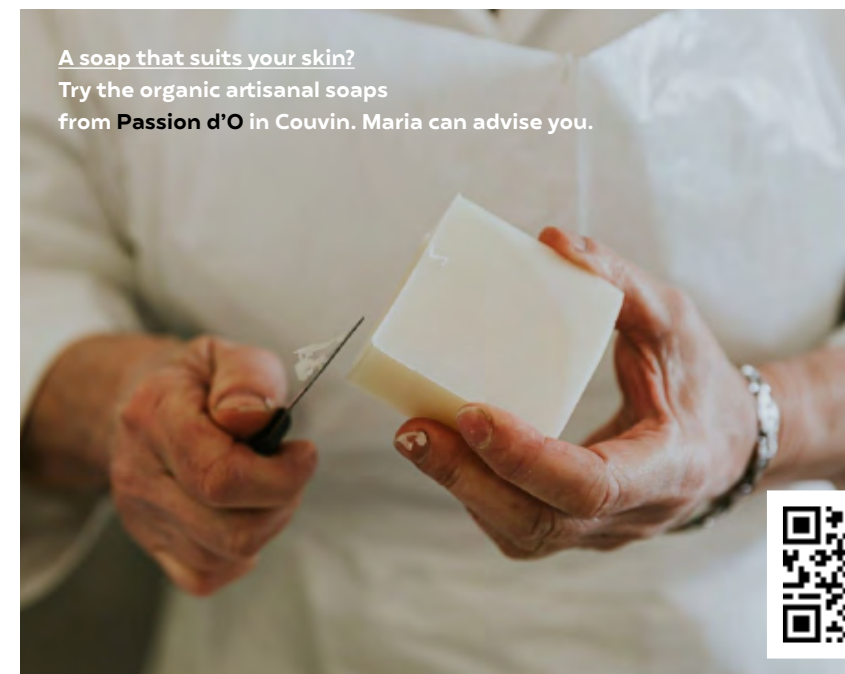
A perfume you wear “naturally”

“If you can no longer smell your perfume at the end of the day and people like it, you are wearing it correctly.” Scents must complement your body odour. But the perfume must also suit your emotions, your everyday habits

Reflection of your personality

According to this perfume maker, the choice of fragrance is a way of asserting your personality, of revealing yourself as you are. “A strong scent that you put on to ensure a certain presence can quickly stink. The scent will be based on the person’s taste, not the other way around.” For him, a personalised perfume allows him to get to know himself better and to stand out. “In the store, you buy a pleasant perfume. In the workshop, you create your own perfume, scent after scent.”

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR PERFUME?



A soap that suits your skin?

Try the organic artisanal soaps
from **Passion d'O** in Couvin. Maria can advise you.



ENJOY FOLKLORE FOR A WEEKEND

EVERY YEAR, THIBAUT PUTS ON A COSTUME FROM THE NAPOLEONIC ERA AND PARADES THROUGH HIS VILLAGE FOR A WEEKEND. HE CHALLENGES YOU TO JOIN HIM!

“We rouse the village by parading in costume to the sound of fanfare. The Saint-Roch procession begins at dawn. Over the course of two days, Ham-sur-Heure pays homage to this Saint. It really does give you a taste of the soul of the village,” explains Thibault, aged 27.

Discover folklore that is very specific to the life of a village

The Saint-Roch is one of 15 marches recognised by UNESCO (including Thuin, Florennes, Walcourt, Cerfontaine, etc.), among the hundreds that exist in Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse. These events are unmissable for locals and lovers of tradition and folklore. They are held every year between March and October.

“Marchers proudly embody folklore. The audience feels this enthusiasm. It’s impressive.

The return to [Ham-Sur-Heure-Nalines castle](#) is ceremonial. I am always emotional about the final return.”

Festive and unexpected exchanges

This folklore is very inclusive. Locals get involved at every level: preparing the costumes, hospitality for the public, the itinerary of the marchers, tidying the chapels, etc.

“It is a moment for sharing. People from every generation and all backgrounds come together to continue the tradition. It’s pretty crazy in this day and age.”



Getaways with friends

THIS LOCAL PERSONALITY IS BEHIND BRASSERIE D’ERQUELINNES, A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER, WHERE REGIONAL FOLKLORE AND TERROIR MEET.

“Beer reminds me of my childhood. The canteens served beer to the table of students,” says Alain. “The simple idea of producing beer awakens many memories in me.” As he approached the age of 40, he began producing beer, after first trying fruit wine

Sharing and generosity

A pioneer in his field, he and a few friends decided to open their own brewery in 2000 and make it accessible to the public. “At the beginning of the last century, each village had its own brewery. It was a real place for exchanges and meetings. We wanted to recreate this same atmosphere.”

ALAIN BROOTCOORENS: A UNIQUE BREWER



A true enthusiast, Alain also likes to share a lot, whether it is beer or his knowledge. “Can you smell the brew? Nothing is filtered. Everything is raw. Even people who don’t like beer like to discover the place and the way things are done.”

A real man of the terroir

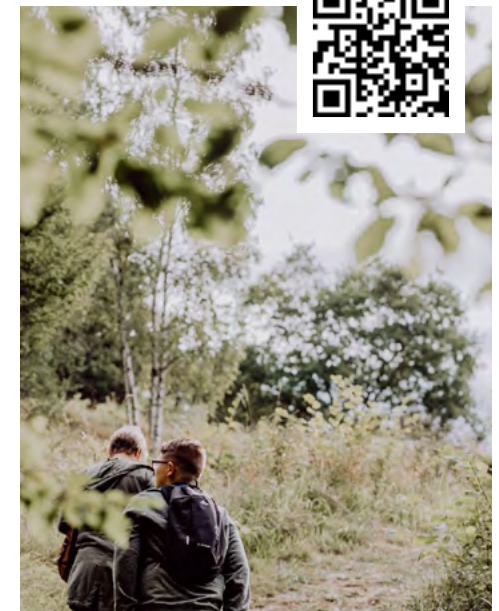
Curious and ambitious, Alain has planted a hop garden next to the brewery. His original ideas attract an audience. “I’ve launched a competition for the best picker of hop flowers, which takes place over the first weekend in September every year.”



**THESE WALKS REVEAL ASTONISHING LANDSCAPES
YOU GET TO SEE PART OF THE REGION IN ITS UNSPOILT STATE,
MARKED BY ITS HISTORY AND BIODIVERSITY.**

1. Along the [Grande Traversée trail in the Pays de Chimay Forest](#)

This trail is over 175 kilometres long and crosses many different sites. “We move from a wooded landscape, made up of fields and meadows separated by hedges, to a forest massif, which is dominated by oak trees. We then cross a very rugged limestone area, marked by rock, to arrive at a coniferous forest,” says Christine Charue, director of the Pays des Lacs Tourist Office. This hike is done over several days, with the possibility of sleeping in a bivouac or in guest rooms along the way. The Mazée camp area is renowned for the panorama that extends over 180 degrees over the entire region. “This walk took our breath away on several occasions. We did not at all expect to be immersed in such different landscapes in such a short distance. Between valleys and rocky outcrops, it’s very diverse.”



2. [Terril du Pétria](#): a key part of our history

As astonishing as it may seem, you start from the centre of Fontaine-l'Évêque, along a main road, and enter a Natura 2000 classified area in just a few steps. “It’s pretty crazy to think that nature has taken back its right to slag heaps, which are made up of waste from mining,” Christine tells us. The walk is 2 kilometres long and runs through the nature reserve. It crosses areas made up of birch trees, but it also runs along ponds where dragonflies, frogs, etc., can be observed. The heights of this green heap offer an astonishing view of the slag heaps. “This walk allows you to get a better understanding of the region, which is marked by heavy industry and reinvested in natural corners. We were surprised by the number of different flowers, by the wild nature which we really did not expect, in this urban environment.”



THREE UNIQUE WALKS



The bivouacs of the Pays de Chimay Forest, the first to be created in Wallonia, allow hikers to immerse themselves in areas of very beautiful natural resources for several days.

3. Along the marble and water

“You start the walk in the heart of the village of Rance, just in front of the marble museum,” explains Virginie Denis, employee at the Sivry–Rance Tourist Office, as astonishing as that may seem. “I often recommend paying a visit to it before starting the discovery. It helps to understand everything that you will come across on the way.”

The many trails linked to the exploitation of red marble appeal to hikers. The route passes in front of the church, which contains marble furniture, next to an old quarry, alongside a house entirely covered with marble and so on.

“If you look closely at the red marble, you will discover fossils, called ‘rat tails’, which are typical of the region.”

The **Ry d’Hernoy walk** crosses many different landscapes in just 10 kilometres. “If some walks in Belgium can be boring sometimes, this one is unexpected! We first pass through the urban centre and the alleys of the village, then we cross meadows, followed by a deciduous forest and, finally, find ourselves by the lakes. Take advantage of a bucolic setting on the way to have a picnic.”

This route is very successful, regardless of the season. “I really like doing it in the autumn, to take advantage of the beautiful colours of the season.”

RAW NETTLE SPREAD



IN WALCOURT, ANNE GOUVERNEUR, A FOOD LOVER WHO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT COOKING WITH WILD PLANTS, GOES TO COLLECT NETTLES.

Did you know?

Nettles no longer sting once sliced. When raw, they have purifying properties and are a source of vitamin C and calcium.

1. Put on gloves and collect a bowl of young nettles.
2. Use a mixer or a good knife to finely chop the nettles.
3. Add the softened salted butter (equivalent to 1/4 of the weight of the chopped nettles), a tablespoon of olive oil, the juice of a lemon, salt, pepper and garlic (according to your taste).
4. Mix everything together and spread on toast.
5. Decorate the toast with wild flowers, dandelion petals, daisies or purple deadnettle.



THIS ORIGINAL CONCEPT, WHICH GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH RESPECT FOR THE ANIMAL, ALLOWS YOU TO FIND WELL-BEING AND PEACE ALONGSIDE THESE CREATURES.

“Depending on their preferences, the donkeys come to you, ask for cuddles, massages,” explains Ariane, the co-coordinator of the **États d’Ânes** non-profit. For her and her colleague Virginie, the donkey is an animal that deserves to be known and respected.

In the company of gentle and calm animals

Like cat bars, the donkey bar invites you to make yourself comfortable in the gardens of Treignes castle-farm, in the middle of a historic and verdant setting, in the company of donkeys. “These animals look for closeness. They awaken our need for contact and affection,” she says

AN APERATIF WITH DONKEYS: WHAT DO YOU SAY?

The zen attitude of donkeys is rather contagious. Stress fades away in their presence. Their temperament makes people smile and strengthens the bond through dialogue and exchange.

An intimate and fascinating exchange

Just being with donkeys and observing them allows you to understand them better. “Donkeys are not as stubborn as the stories say. They are friendly and intelligent.” In this same logic of regeneration, Ariane and Virginie also offer the chance to care for the animal or take a walk with them.

Good to know:

Discover different ways of interacting with donkeys, notably through walks (Balad’ânes de l’Hermeton in Philippeville and Aux Pas de l’Âne in Momignies), games (L’Équi-Shet in Anderlues) or events (Ânes & Co in Walcourt).



BETWEEN WANTING TO UNWIND AND RELAX, IT IS NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS HOW TO SATISFY THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT FAMILY MEMBERS ON HOLIDAY. THESE PARENTS TELL US ABOUT THEIR DAYS, WHICH ALLOWED THEM TO PLEASE EVERYONE.

FOUR FAMILIES TELL US ABOUT THEIR DAY OFF



Joys of the water and sun
– Charlotte, mother to Léa, aged 8, and Jules, aged 4

Charlotte opted for the **Eau d'Heure lakes** to spend time with family while relaxing. In the morning, she tried the Crocodile Rouge tour. “The Amphibus tour is original. The sensation of passing from land to water is quite surprising. The kids loved the surprising effect.” In the afternoon, Charlotte went to Falemprie Beach. “Lea and Jules let off steam on the bouncy castles, while my husband and I quietly chatted over a local beer. The place is safe. We all ended up on a pedal boat at the end of the day.” For this young mother, the day allowed her to get what she needed. “The children played together. They even made new friends. I was finally able to read a few pages of my book, while enjoying a round of mini golf with them.”



Delightful moments
– Thierry, father to Clément, aged 13, and Noémie, aged 7

This forty-something father wanted to both laugh with his children and learn more about the Thuin region. Mission accomplished! “To begin with, we took an electric boat ride on the Sambre, which departed from Café Leblon. Clément piloted the boat like a pro.” **Aulne Abbey** then allowed them to travel back in time. “I was amazed that Noémie asked me so many questions. I didn’t think she would be so interested in ruins. Tasting Ada, a local beer, along the old locks, brightened up the day.” The day ended with the Tram Museum, thanks to a recommendation from a friend. “The steam tram trip left an impression, with a huge giggle at the end of the day.”



Really relaxing
– Gary, father to Lucie, aged 3

This single father chose the **Jardins d'O** in Nismes for their fun and safe aspects and peaceful setting. "Lucie was having fun turning the cranks: the water was flowing from one tray to another. She played in the wooden houses. Sometimes I would go over to her; sometimes I would sit quietly on a bench. I really enjoyed discovering the rowing boats with her." In the afternoon, they tried the tourist train. "I was completely stunned by the Fondry des Chiens. You don't expect this 20-metre-high chasm in the region." As he left, he stumbled upon the Musée du Petit Format, a collection of 4,000 small-format contemporary works of art. A cool idea for the next excursion. Gary achieved the relaxed side of this day in an unexpected natural environment.



Raining?
Discover the interactive and fun **Printing Museum in Thuin**, which is suitable for children aged 6 and over.



A journey into the past
– Julia and Renaud, parents of Lou, aged 9, and Tom, aged 15

No-one in this family will forget the **École d'Autrefois**. "Dad had to put on a donkey cap during the presentation," Lou explains, with a big smile.

"I learned to write with a quill, to rely on an abacus," Tom continues. The presentation entertained the whole family. After school, they enjoyed a steam train journey, as part of the Musée du Chemin de Fer à Vapeur des 3 Vallées.

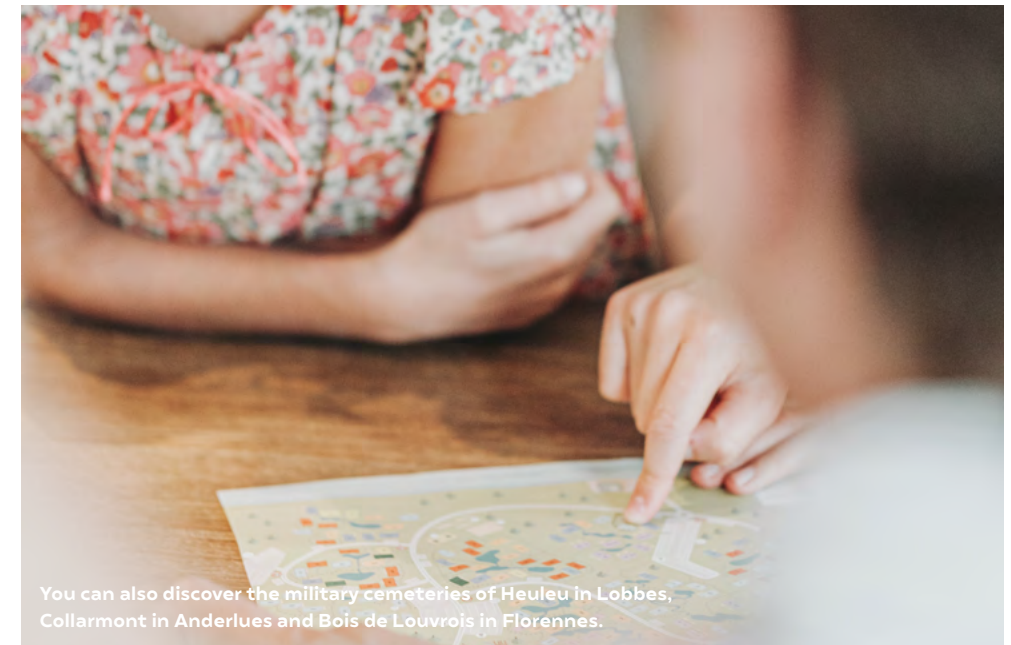
"Sitting on wooden benches, hearing the steam locomotive, seeing landscapes from the train windows... everything was quite unique," says Julia. In the end, Julia and Renaud had a very pleasant day, where everyone was able to discover things actively.

Want to be more active?
The **Landal Village indoor play area** allows children to let off steam in an elaborate space with slides, balls and courses. Got your swimsuit? The **Aquacentre** offers a pool with toboggans, a wild river and hot tubs.



Lac de la Plate Taille is dedicated to non-motorised nautical activities (sailing boats, diving, etc.). At Espace Fun, you can try windsurfing or kayaking, enjoy a game of beach volleyball or a local beer on the sand at a concert.

HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS FOR UNCOVERING THE SECRETS OF THESE INTRIGUING PLACES WITH CHILDREN.



You can also discover the military cemeteries of Heuleu In Lobbes, Collarmont in Anderlues and Bois de Louvrois in Florennes.

SERIOUSLY... YOU CAN VISIT CEMETERIES?

Far removed from the 70,000 concessions and 44 hectares of the Paris site of Père-Lachaise, our cemeteries are nevertheless open-air museums. They look different depending on the season and reveal local history to us.

Create a treasure hunt

With the children, observe where the cemetery is in the village, where is it located in relation to the church, does it refer to a historical event, what is the style of the gate, etc...

"At the entrance of the **Erquelinnes cemetery**, information panels describe the battle of Lobbes and the relief and food committees," explains Christian Warzée, president of the Syndicat d'Initiative d'Erquelinnes.

Discover the differences

In the alleys, examine the differences between graves, monuments and sepulchres. "Some mausoleums, of a secular nature, pay homage to local personalities, such as that of Alexandre de Robaulx, who is an important part of Belgian history and who is buried here."

Investigate the graves

Each grave tells a unique story. It puts a face to the past, sometimes in a surprising way. "On one grave, you can read the name of an Australian who died on 26 December 1918. Perhaps he celebrated a little too much after the end of the war and overdosed."

Finally, with the children, look at everything that has been put in place to remember our common past and give these places of remembrance all their appeal.



HOW CAN THE ECOSYSTEM BE PRESERVED IN A TOURIST CAVE?

Where Hitler resided...

To all those who want to remember World War II, a crucial period for our grandparents, and above all, to avoid repeating the same mistakes, visit **Hitler's Bunker** in Brûly-de-Pesche, where the Führer and his group stayed in June 1940 before invading France.

- The open-air exhibit also tells us how the resistance developed, or how the enemy strategically occupied our countryside.
- Discover the fountain of Saint-Méen, which, it seems, treats skin problems.

A SPECIAL TOURIST CENTRE AND SCIENTIFIC MONITORING ENABLE THE NEPTUNE CAVES SITE TO IDENTIFY ENDANGERED SPECIES.

"In recent years, we have changed all the old lighting to LEDs," explains Maryse Bourlard, the manager of the Couvin Tourist Office.

"This type of bulb, which is cooler and less luminous, reduces the appearance of foam, a type of pollution for an underground environment. In addition, we turn off the lights after each visit, in order to limit photosynthesis."

Open based on the needs of nature

Accessible to the public since World War II, the caves are closed during the hibernation period. «The closure period allows bats to hibernate.»

In addition, the guides' mission is to make the public aware of respecting the natural environment, which is very sensitive. "Touching the walls leaves traces of acidity, due to perspiration. This stops the growth of stalagmites and stalactites."

Beyond the underground environment

Awareness-raising work is also continuing around the cave, which is classified as a Natura 2000 zone.

"Some children pick orchids. They are not always aware that it is a protected species."



**ANTOINE LEBLON, EDUCATIONAL MANAGER, HAS DESIGNED
THE MUSÉE DU MALGRÉ TOUT TO MAKE THE VISIT
CAPTIVATING FOR ALL AGES.**

What is there to appeal to children?

"We organise experimental workshops. Children play with prehistoric instruments, paint with old paint or build a fire with stones. The experience must be practical. This practice allows us to explain the major periods in history."

Are you able to give a concrete image of the major periods?

"We generally use popular culture. We often use the image of Obelix, or that of the caveman with his animal skin. We explain to them why these images are caricatures."

For example, why prehistoric man used more than a club to defend himself, or the reasons why men and dinosaurs never existed together. The clichés disappear as questions are asked. Knowledge is refined."

And for the prehistoric sites, how do you do it?

"Children are often ambivalent to seeing the ruins of a Gallo-Roman villa. We draw their attention by comparing the periods; what has changed today compared to our past. For example, the tractor now replaces the work carried out by 80 men in a day a century ago. Then I ask them to consider how they would manage to accommodate so many people in their homes."

Good to know:

An area for board games, crafts, cartoons, colouring, etc. allows families to discuss their discoveries.

When the pebbles go on a journey...

Find travellers' pebbles in Couvin and everywhere in the region. Pebbles painted with pretty patterns and deposited during walks as you wish. On the pebble, you will see the artist's name and postcode. Find out how far this pebble has come via the Facebook group. Try the experiment yourself by painting pebbles in a creative way!



WHEN A PREHISTORIC MUSEUM INSPIRES CHILDREN



THREE THINGS LOCAL LEGENDS TEACH US

MURIEL DESOY, A GUIDE AT THE LEGEND INTERPRETATION CENTRE IN OLLOY-SUR-VIROIN, TELLS US ABOUT THE INTEREST IN THIS ORAL HERITAGE, WHICH WAS ONCE PASSED DOWN FROM OUR GRANDPARENTS.

1. The existence of ancient crafts.

"In Gatte d'Or, we discover the existence of a herder, a communal labourer who looked after the cattle of the inhabitants."

2. Details of the great personalities.

"We learn why Charles V needed a pot with four handles to drink his beer."

3. The meaning of certain celebrations.

"Bears are important in certain village carnivals. Legends tell us the reason for their presence."

Inspired by real events, local legends give us a brief history of man.



**Catacombs:
myth or reality?**

For those who doubt the existence of catacombs, explore the 600 metres beneath the Philippeville fortress and imagine this means of defence in the time of Louis XIV for yourself.

IN THE SHOES OF A MILITARY AVIATOR

INTERVIEW WITH GOFFIN, AN F-16 PILOT FOR 23 YEARS AND PRESIDENT OF THE SPITFIRE MUSEUM IN FLORENNES.

What do you like about your job?

"I particularly like the power and technology of fighter planes. Throughout my career, I've learnt to fly these very sophisticated machines, to participate in and manage formations of two, four and six planes... All for operational purposes. We fly to defend the airspace, perform reconnaissance, participate in foreign training, etc."

Very technical while being significant...

"Yes, we have a lot of responsibilities, but we get a lot of recognition. When I worked in Afghanistan, I supported the troops on the ground. It had a real impact. I was faced with the reality of war. It leaves traces and, above all, it gives meaning to our work."

What is it like on a daily basis?

"Maintenance takes a lot of time. We train often, sometimes with the chance to fly over spectacular landscapes. On a training flight, I flew over the skies of Morocco. I started in the north with a very green landscape, then I crossed the mountains to finally discover the desert. It was very nice."

A leap into the world of planes

Discover all the technology of the old military planes that marked the Florennes base at the Spitfire Museum, which has been fully renovated. Exhibition of F-84, Mirage, F-16 or cruise missiles. All these highly sophisticated machines help us get a better understanding of their technical prowess, as well as their military challenges.



Raining?

The **Musée sur la Guerre 40-45 et la Libération**, located in Monceau-Imbrechies, allows you to stay dry while getting a better understanding of the daily lives of soldiers in our grandparents' era.

Put yourself in the shoes of a brigadier

Head to the Gabelous Circuit in Momignies to discover the routes smugglers used to move goods from one frontier to another during World War II.





GETAWAYS FOR COUPLES

**DARE TO IMMERSE YOURSELF
IN NATURE FOR A FEW HOURS
AT **AQUASCOPE DE VIRELLES**,
FAR REMOVED FROM JAM AND
TOAST AND THE MORNING
RACE FOR THE KEYS**

This is not an ornithological walk consisting of observing all the birds. Rather, we offer an "immersive experience": the idea is to wake up with the day, at your own pace, in the heart of nature. "It's a moment for ourselves that we experience in a group," explains Stéphanie, the nature coordinator.

"When we arrive near the reeds, we are drawn into nature. We awaken in symbiosis with what surrounds us."

Disconnect

To make the most of the experience, you should be comfortably and warmly dressed. "We recommend good boots, a blanket, etc. It is cold in the morning, even in the middle of summer." Stéphanie also insists on being fully present in the moment. "We suggest turning your mobile phone off, not looking at the time, letting go of the idea of seeing certain animals, etc. You just need to pay attention to what the lake shares with us."

THE WILD DAWN OR WAKING UP BY A LAKE

Be surprised

Stéphanie welcomes participants when it is still dark. For her, the crucial moment comes at the cut-off point: when the group allows itself to be surprised, as if it had fallen into another world. "The expanse of the lake, the dawn and the boat in a rabaska (a type of canoe) create a very special atmosphere. There is that precise moment when people step out of their comfort zone and truly enjoy what they are experiencing in that moment." As the minutes go by, the lake comes to life. The ducks come out of the water, the geese fly away..

Just curious

"This walk is a rather unique experience. It awakens certain emotions in us. It's magical." The magic of the wild dawn ends with a breakfast made from local produce, which is served by the lake.

Good to know:

**Walk along the banks of the lake
at any time of year to discover
its impressive flora and fauna.**

Sleep under the stars
By the lake, in a bubble
provided for you.



**THEY TELL US WHAT THEY LIKE ABOUT THIUN,
A MEDIEVAL CITY THAT IS BELOVED BY WALKERS.**

THESE THUDINIANS AND THEIR CITY: A GREAT LOVE STORY



Waking up to the bells of the [belfry](#).
– Sandrine

“The belfry is the rallying symbol for many Thudinians,” this resident of the Grand’Rue tells us. “For me, this tower has accompanied me through different stages of my life. It is my workplace, symbolising my career. It’s also part of my balance: despite moving to Thuin, I’ve always had a window with a view of this building.” For her, the Belfry, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has a unique history. “The tower played both an administrative and a religious role. Usually, it is a tower or a steeple. Here, our belfry rang to communicate messages to the inhabitants and for religious services.” To all those who do not know the belfry, she invites them to discover it from the inside. “Interest is awakened through the four walls. As you climb the steps, you discover the old clock weights, then the bells, after the chime and, finally, the view of the valley.” The belfry, which measures 60 metres high, is 120 metres from the level of the Sambre. It can be seen from afar.



Integrated in the heart of a [medieval city](#).
– Valérian

“We have a microclimate here. I’ve planted kiwis, strawberries, grapes, etc.,” explains Valérian, the owner of three garden levels with 6.2 acres. Under the permaculture model, the terraces are covered with ground-cover plants (wood strawberries, nettles, clovers, etc.). The vegetable garden is planted in mounds and in squares. Valérian gets along well with his neighbours. “Given the layout, we help each other with the maintenance of the plots. I’ll mow the neighbour’s lawn, for example. I also set up beehives with another neighbour, whom I visit regularly.” As a child, he dreamed of living in a house on this street, one of the last to have a hanging garden without being located in the Grand Rue. «The acoustics are special: I hear the drums during the Napoleonic march, the children crying when they cycle down the alleys, the laughter during the harvest in the Clos des Zouaves vineyard and so on.”



**Sea legs in the quartier des bateliers
– Jocelyne**

“When I enter the area, I take the cobblestone street. I feel like I am somewhere else. It’s very special,” reveals this 60-year-old, whose house runs along the Sambre in the Quartier des Bateliers. The houses are small and colourful. They are decorated with many marine accessories: old boat name-plates, anchors, mooring chains, etc. She has always lived in the neighbourhood, which reflects her own personal history. «My grandfather was a boatman, so was my father... My mother didn’t like boats, so we stayed in Thuin.” And: “My father used to tell me that he lived his childhood in a world of his own. He lived 24 hours a day with his family. He travelled according to their wishes...” A former owner of the Café du Rivage, she takes great pleasure in chatting with former boatmen who live in neighbouring houses. «It is a whole nomadic universe guided by rivers that we discover through the words of the elders.”



Follow the Parcours d’Arts Actuels en Terre Médiévale

Through the city, discover the works created and integrated within this medieval city. To create their work, the various artists were inspired by heritage, architecture and the environment of the exhibition spaces. Stroll through the gardens, along the banks of the Sambre or in the Bois du Grand Bon Dieu in search of these astonishing works.

Try local produce

Enjoy a bistro in the heart of this medieval city to try local produce. You can also bring back local wine as a souvenir. The vineyard of the non-profit organisation, Clos des Zouaves, is located in the hanging gardens. This naturally sweet wine is vinified a few kilometres from the city, in partnership with the Biercée distillery, and is unique within the region.

WHAT IS HIDING BEHIND THE RAMPARTS OF WALCOURT?

ANNICK TRÉVIS, A MEMBER OF THE “PASSEURS DE REMPARTS”, TELLS US ABOUT THE APPEAL OF AN OLD FORTIFIED CITY THROUGH ITS RAMPARTS.

How do these old walls make you feel?

“The ramparts are part of a whole. This historical part is still visible, but you have to imagine everything else. They surrounded the fortified square, which was dominated by the Saint-Materne Basilica. Through the walls, we can better understand the geopolitical strategy of the time, in terms of access to roads, gateways and rivers.”

And more specifically, when you walk around the ramparts...

“You will be able to see traces of old grain mills, a watchtower in ruelle Frère Hugo, fortified posterns, a bridge that once allowed water to be supplied to the mill, etc. We can completely miss these historic gems if we don’t pay attention.”

Any tips for visiting?

“Although the 2.5 kilometre marked walk along the ramparts allows you to understand the historical side of things, I recommend strolling through the alleys. They are romantic when you stroll them as a couple. It makes you feel as though time is standing still. Films and adverts have also been filmed here.”

Tour Salamandre

Head to Beaumont to discover an old 11th century keep, which represents significant remains of a fortress.



A CRAZY EVENING IN THE PETIT THÉÂTRE OR A CAR RACE ON THE CIRCUIT: PHILIPPE DE RIQUET DE CARAMAN-CHIMAY SHARES HIS MEMORIES OF HIS CITY WITH US.

“For me, **Chimay** is synonymous with family gatherings at home [see the Château]. We get together around events such as Christmas,” the Prince tells us. “In fact, this house really reminds me of my childhood. I remember evenings dancing in the Petit Théâtre, where we put speakers on the stage and we danced or big games in the park behind the house.”

Marked by the racing circuit and Virelles lake

This Chimay native also remembers the Chimay Circuit. “At the time, many champions came to race at the Circuit. It is the oldest one in Belgium. Today, it mainly hosts motorcycle races, which bring in up to 15–16,000 visitors a year.”

THE PRINCE OF CHIMAY TELLS US ABOUT CHIMAY



Good to know:

Discover the secret of Chimay. While moving around the city, discover the puzzles left for you..



Sharing environmental and culinary heritage

For him, the region can be discovered through outings on foot or by bike. “The railway, which was created by my grandfather, is one of the first in Belgium. It has become part of the RAVel network. It is a very pleasant route.”

But the region can also be discovered through its cuisine. “If I have to present the region to outsiders, I usually offer a pot of escavèche, bernadins and a Chimay beer, particularly if I go to the United States. The beer has a reputation in Texas for being the only one that can knock a cowboy off his horse!”



For more details:

Chimay is known for escavèche, a pickled fish dish. At the time, the Spanish imported this recipe to keep the fish fresh during transport. The dish was transported in large stoneware pots. Today, enjoy this regional speciality served with fries and/or a beer.



BACKSTAGE AT LES PLUS BEAUX VILLAGES DE WALLONIE

BEYOND APPEARANCE-BASED CRITERIA, A VILLAGE IS LISTED DUE TO ITS HARMONIOUS INTEGRATION INTO ITS ENVIRONMENT.

“The image of a pretty village is often rather cliché. We imagine old buildings, flowers, etc.,” says Alain Collin, President of the Les Plus Beaux Villages de Wallonie non-profit organisation. “Our view is different. We want to promote the unique identity of each village based on agro-geographic zones. A good example is Vierves-sur-Viroin, which is fully embedded in the valley.”

Typical for the region

A listed village is assessed based on its geological, landscape and plant-based characteristics. “In Barbençon, attention should be paid to the church, the old farms, the lake, etc.”

Good idea:

When exploring Soulme, Vierves-sur-Viroin, Barbençon, Ragnies and Lompret, five of the 30 Most Beautiful Villages in Wallonia, you can really appreciate the uniqueness of each of these serene havens.

Some visitors stop at Auberge du Lac to soak up as much of the place as possible.” The heritage inherited from the past in these five villages in the region is also highlighted through information panels. “An old photo of the marble features of the village of Soulme gives an idea of the activity.”

Dynamic life

Numerous events are organised in these listed villages, notably thanks to villagers who are proud of their heritage. “In Ragnies, for example, they organise a romantic night during the summer solstice. It attracts large numbers of visitors.”

SYLVIE DIEU, THE WELLNESS MANAGER AT GOLDEN LAKES IN EAU D'HEURE LAKES, GIVES US SOME TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF A RELAXING MOMENT.

MINI RELAXATION GUIDE



When is a good time to book a spa and massage session?

“It depends on your needs and preferences. Wellness provides well-being after a stressful period, whether it is related to a complicated professional situation, the organisation of everyday life, etc. We are in a situation where we want to stop and take care of ourselves. A wellness session also allows us to recover after physical exertion.”

Wellness takes us out of our routine...

“Exactly. Some couples come together around this activity. A session allows you to relax, without any pressure. Sometimes I recommend starting a romantic weekend with a spa visit to relax upon arrival. In the **wellness centre**, the ideal is to start the wellness session with the spa, in order to release the pressure, and then finish with a massage to feel pampered.”

After two hours at the spa, what do you recommend doing?

“Anything is possible. Me, I like to go to a good restaurant. Wellness awakens the five senses. Enjoying a good meal in a pleasant setting is all the more enjoyable.”

THREE RECEIVED IDEAS ABOUT GOLF

JACQUES HARDY, THE OWNER OF GOLF DE RAGNIES, BREAKS DOWN INCORRECT IDEAS ABOUT THIS SPORT AND CHALLENGES US TO TRY PUTTING A BALL IN A HOLE FOR OURSELVES.

1. It is an expensive sport.

“While membership fees represent a significant cost, it gives access to more than 100 hectares of maintained gardens. Therefore, the price should be put into perspective, especially compared to other sports. Many golf courses offer packages for pensioners or young people, in order to encourage access.”

2. It is not a sport.

“Golf is not about cardio; it’s about technical skill. It calls for a lot of concentration. Throughout a 10 kilometre course, golfers have to consider many different parameters (wind, rain, elevation, etc.) when hitting the ball. For good sportsmen, they count between 70 and 80 strokes in four hours.

3. It is an easy sport.

“Golf requires a lot of discipline on the course. A poorly hit ball can be very dangerous. The golfer needs a licence to play on a course. There are strict rules. However, it is true that it is one of the only sports you can enjoy as a family. The principle of handicaps allows players to play together, regardless of age or physical strength”.



Small pleasures shared next to ruins

Meet on the terrace to taste an ADA, a beer from Aulne Abbey. Brown, blonde or amber: choose the style according to your tastes and the season.

You can play mini golf, take a boat trip, let the children play outdoor games or, when the occasion lends itself, listen to a concert during the July Musical d’Aulne, the Festival Scène-sur-Sambre or in the welcoming setting of the Abbey Farm.



PROFESSION: HOT-AIR BALLOON PILOT



GEOFFROY DELFOSSE, THE MANAGER OF BALLON ÉVASION, HAS BEEN FLYING HOT-AIR BALLOONS IN THE PAYS DES LACS REGION FOR OVER 20 YEARS.

“Inflating the ball is one of the crucial moments. For example, when we take off from a field in Cerfontaine, right next to the Eau d’Heure lakes, the canvas is on the ground. We fill it with hot air. It inflates quickly and stands vertically. The time comes when you have to find the balance between parking the balloon and hitching the basket.”

The challenge of flying at low altitude

Whether over the lakes, the Pays de Chimay forest or the groves, the pilot must anticipate various factors during the flight. Depending on the burner, the hot-air balloon reacts more or less quickly. “When we fly at low altitude, I always pay attention to cattle and horses, for example, who are very afraid of the balloon. I am also vigilant with power lines.”

The landing is quite tricky, depending on where the wind has taken us (Biercée field, Philippeville meadow, etc.). The balloon maintains wind speed until the basket touches the ground. A curtain of trees can sometimes help limit drafts, as it does here in Vodecée. “In terms of safety, when landing, I always advise passengers to put their hands securely inside the basket to avoid injury.”

Planning the flight

But before any departure, the most important thing is to prepare for the flight, depending on circumstances. “I check the weather. It needs to be dry and the surface wind must be below 10 knots so there is not a significant difference between the ground and air temperatures. Then, if the conditions are suitable, I book a launch site and I contact a partner to follow the balloon by car. Finally, the last step is to prepare the equipment, including the fuel.”

And lastly, contact the passengers to inform them their journey over a beautiful green region can go ahead. This is often the most joyful task.

A UNIQUE HONEYMOON



NATHALIE LOWIES, THE OWNER OF TERRE INSOLITE, TELLS US ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE OFFERING UNIQUE ACCOMODATION.

“Clients let their imaginations run wild before they arrive. They write to me telling me that they can’t wait to sleep among the trees.”

Make your dream of sleeping in a yurt come true

Customers choose a room based on their preferences or based on a good memory.

“Someone chose the Bali pavilion to celebrate their wedding anniversary as they had spent their honeymoon there.”

A desire to disconnect

Nathalie welcomes many clients looking to escape into nature. “The treehouse or the trailer allow you to immerse yourself in nature. A lady once came face-to-face with a deer upon leaving the dome.”

For her, the feedback is unanimous: “Clients are looking to escape their day-to-day life, overnight, into a world of imagination.”



Meet our Pays des Lacs Travel Truck!

The Tourist Office team travels the routes and stops at tourist sites, local markets, events or festivities to offer a personalised welcome. Deckchairs, bistro tables or areas for children: we have everything you need to get acquainted with our region. There is a photo booth so you can keep a souvenir of your visit.

Traveller's Charter

- I am a responsible tourist, in order to protect cultural heritage.
- I respect the rules in place to protect natural resources.
- For everyone's peace of mind, I respect other people and places.
- For everyone's peace of mind, I drive appropriately and only park where permitted.
- I take my litter with me to protect the planet.
- I follow the rules to protect everyone.



A person in a dark jacket and hat is walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The path is lined with utility poles on the left and a wooden fence on the right. The background features a field of tall grass and a line of trees under a hazy sky. The overall tone is warm and atmospheric.

**HAVE
A NICE TRIP!**