



WEEKEND BREAK

Roeselare: Roll, ride and revel

Best known for cycling and Rodenbach beer, Roeselare is a small West Flemish city with an unexpectedly broad repertoire. Beyond the world champions and breweries lie unusual museums, ambitious restaurants and a strong shopping culture and reminders of a turbulent past. **Angela Dansby** spends a weekend exploring the city

“ The city has produced several world champions and is home to major races, a velodrome and Belgium’s largest cycling museum. ”

Roeselare has long combined industry with an appetite for the good things in life. Cycling champions are commemorated on its streets, cafés spread across its squares, and food and shopping are serious business. Surrounded by some of Belgium’s most productive farmland, the city has grown on agriculture, manufacturing and commerce – but it has never defined itself by work alone.

There is more to Roeselare, however, than bicycles and beer. Belgian art fills a former church; a Second World War communications bunker survives on an otherwise ordinary residential street; and one of the country’s oldest Renaissance castles stands just outside the city. A carillon guild still rings bells by hand, while a market first established more than a millennium ago continues to occupy the centre every Tuesday.

That mix reflects a city accustomed to making the most of what it has. Roeselare grew from a medieval market town on the Mandel River

into one of West Flanders’ most productive centres. Wool and linen drove its early prosperity; later came railways, textiles, bicycles and food processing. Today it remains at the heart of Belgium’s agri-food economy.

History in brief

Roeselare has repeatedly had to rebuild. After centuries of warfare and fires, it was devastated during the First World War, when an estimated 70% of the city was destroyed. Much of its present-day architecture dates from the reconstruction and modernisation that followed.

The city also played an outsized role in the Flemish linguistic and cultural movement. In 1875, students at the Klein Seminarie (Minor Seminary) staged the Groote Stooringe (Great Disturbance), a protest against the dominance of French in education. Encouraged by local teachers and priests, the students included Albrecht Rodenbach, who became one of the movement’s leading young voices. The protest helped give rise to *blauwvoeterij*, a Catholic Flemish student movement whose influence spread well beyond Roeselare.

The Second World War brought further destruction before Roeselare was liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division under General Stanislaw Maczek. Its industrial heritage, Flemish cultural legacy and wartime history remain conspicuous in a city that is now a prosperous regional centre.

Cycling

Cycling is inseparable from Roeselare. The city has produced several world champions and is home to major races, a velodrome and Belgium’s largest cycling museum. Four local legends – Patrick Sercu, Jean-Pierre (‘Jempi’) Monseré, Freddy Maertens and Benoni Beheynt – won six professional world titles between them.

Monseré, who died in a cycling accident in 1971 at just 22 years old, became a martyr of both Roeselare and Belgian cycling. His memory is still conspicuous around the city – from a street-art mural, sculpture and professional race bearing his name to a giant puppet created in his likeness.

At the heart of it all is **KOERS Museum van de Wielersport**, the largest cycling museum in Belgium. Its collection covers almost 200 years and includes more than 300 racing bicycles, alongside trophies, jerseys, memorabilia and temporary exhibitions. The Hall of World Champions celebrates leading riders on film and in displays, including Belgium’s Lotte Kopecky, while murals outside depict Eddy Merckx, Yvonne Reynders, Kopecky, Maertens and Beheynt.

In nearby Rumbeke, the **Defraeye-Sercu Velodrome** offers amateurs the chance to experience cycling like professionals. Built in 1912 by Odiel Defraeye, the first Belgian to win the Tour



Top: model of Roeselare town hall in front of the real thing. Above left: Sint-Michielskerk (St. Michael's Church). Above right: Sint-Amandskerk (St. Amand's Church), with the Rodenbach statue

de France, it was also where Patrick Sercu got his start. Groups of five to 15 can ride there from March to October, except Mondays.

Roeselare is also the annual starting point for **Dwars Door Vlaanderen**, a semi-classic road race on the UCI World Tour. For amateurs, numerous signposted routes around and beyond the city offer an easier way to explore the countryside. The 43.6-km **Groene Ronde cycling route** can be divided into two loops and a four-language map is available at Visit Roeselare. Bicycles can be rented from KOERS.

Food

Roeselare's relationship with gastronomy is rooted in its surroundings. Farms feed a powerful food industry, producing everything from cereals, pasta and beer to frozen fruit and vegetables.

Brouwerij Rodenbach has been a local institution since 1821. Its distinctive red-brown sour ales are made with mineral water from the site, regional malted barley, corn and hops, and five types of yeast. Fresh beer fermented in steel tanks is blended with older beer matured for two years in oak casks. The brewery even makes its own 12-year-old beer vinegar.

Besides tastings, Rodenbach tours include a sound-and-light show centred on enormous wooden foeders (flat-topped conical barrels), while visitors can design their own beer label or, on the Vintage Tour, blend their own beer.

The city's excellent culinary scene includes **Boury**, one of only two restaurants in Belgium with three Michelin stars. Chef Tim Boury incorporates Rodenbach beer and vinegar into some of his dishes, while also producing his own beer and spirits.

BOMBrewery and **Mikken Urban Winery** add to the local drinks scene. Other specialties include Elixir de Roulers, a bright yellow herbal liqueur made to a secret recipe since 1871; Marsel sea salt; and award-winning artisanal cheese from **Kaasboerderij 't Groendal**, made with fresh cow's milk from the farm.

In late October, **Week van de Smaak** brings together farmers, producers, chefs and diners for food tours, tasting menus, masterclasses, high teas, beer tastings and an amateur cooking contest.

Shopping

Roeselare also has one of the highest concentrations of shops among Belgium's regional cities, with familiar chains and independent boutiques spread across several central streets. Pedestrianised **Ooststraat** is the main shopping artery, punctuated by Art Nouveau architecture; **Noordstraat**, **Brugsesteenweg** and **Westlaan** provide further options.

Shopping has even acquired its own local rituals. **Batjes**, a four-day festival in June, combines pavement sales and entertainment



Clockwise from top left: Eddy Merckx mural; KOERS Museum van de Wielersport; Rodenbach pavement rivets; Jempi Monsere memorial

with the opening of a giant barrel of Rodenbach beer, distributed free to the public. **Winkel-nacht** (Shopping Night) in April brings another evening of late opening, promotions and events.

The city's **Dinsdagmarkt** has an even longer pedigree. Held since 957, the Tuesday market now fills several public squares from 7am to 1pm with fresh produce, flowers, clothing, accessories and household goods. Come December, the **Kerstmarkt** (Christmas market) adds artisan crafts and festive stalls to the mix.

War memories

Roeselare's wartime history turns up in unexpected places. In the middle of a residential street sits **Bunker 1944**, a well-preserved German communications bunker that opened as a museum in 2024. It tells the story of the First Polish Armoured Division's liberation of Roeselare during the Second World War under General Stanislaw Maczek. Photographs, testimonies and authentic objects illustrate both the liberation and fate of Polish soldiers after the war, while a film brings Maczek's story to life. Red-and-white Hot Lips flowers around the bunker echo the colours of the Polish flag. Visits are by group tour only.

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Clockwise from top left: Rodenbach brewery; Bunker 1944; Het Kunstuur

“ Outside the church stands a statue of Rodenbach, the Flemish student who advocated for greater use of Dutch in schools and culture. ”

Eight Polish soldiers killed on the eve of liberation are also remembered around the city, with plaques and information panels marking the places where they died. Their helmets are preserved at Bunker 1944.

Parkbegraafplaats is a moving reminder of the human cost of both world wars. The park cemetery contains the graves of French and Commonwealth soldiers as well as civilians, alongside imposing tombs belonging to historic residents such as Albrecht Rodenbach.

Art

The former bourgeois Sint-Amandskerk (St Amand's Church) now has a very different pur-

pose. it houses **Het Kunstuur** (The Art Hour), an immersive presentation of around 30 paintings by Belgian artists from 1850 to 1950. Well-known Flemish personalities explain their connection to individual artists or works, accompanied by music from Belgian composer Dirk Brossé. The selection changes each year.

Outside the church stands a statue of Rodenbach, the Flemish student who advocated for greater use of Dutch in schools and culture. A grandnephew of one of the founders of the Rodenbach brewery, he died at just 23 years old. A bird perched on his hand represents the Flemish movement, while a bullet hole in his right thigh is a curious reminder of the First World War.

A statue near Sint-Michielskerk (St. Michael's Church) commemorates **Adriaen Wil-laert**, a Renaissance composer and polyphonist who was born in the area and invented the stereo effect. A 5-km musical walking route uses QR codes to tell his story and introduce his work.

Tiny **Citroenenstraat** takes its name from a canopy featuring a sculpture of half a lemon, while street murals spread contemporary art throughout the city. A Visit Roeselare **Street Art Tour** goes past 14 murals, including an abstract portrait of Rodenbach and a caricature of cycling champion Monseré. (All are listed on the Street Art Cities app.) The city's family of giant puppets makes occasional appearances during local events, adding a distinctly Belgian touch of whimsy.

Architecture

The **Stadhuis** (City Hall) combines two very different chapters of the city's history. Its older section, built in the late 18th century, is an elegant example of Louis XV style, while the newer section dates from after the First World War. The latter includes an Art Deco belfry recognised by UNESCO with a striking, gilded bas-relief. Recent renovations have added a luminous atrium, terraces, courtyards and rooftop gardens.

The nearby **Klein Seminarie**, a secondary school founded in 1802, was where Rodenbach famously got into trouble for leading his protest song in Dutch that became a catalyst for the Flemish movement. Poet Guido Gezelle, who taught there, is commemorated by a bust at the entrance. The school later served as a hospital for German troops during the First World War. It is open to groups for tours.

Rodenbach's legacy continues at **ARhus** – short for Albrecht Rodenbach House – a striking modern knowledge centre described by locals as the “library of the future”. Its glass architecture houses high-tech digital facilities, teaching and meeting spaces, and a unique automated book-sorting machine.

Sint-Michielskerk and its 65-metre clock tower from the 16th century preserve another unusually persistent tradition: the Roeselaarse

Klokkengilde, a guild that has manually rung the church's carillon bells every day for more than a century – a practice that survives in only a few Belgian towns. In Roeselare, the bells mark virtually every public and church occasion, even the beginning of seasonal sales. Inside, historic paintings and an ornate Baroque wooden pulpit compete for attention. This church notably held the funeral of Monseré.

An exception to Roeselare's post-war modernism is just outside the city at **Kasteel de Rumbeke**, one of Belgium's oldest Renaissance castles. Dating to the 16th century, it is made of red brick with a distinctive black roof, surrounded by a moat crossed by a small drawbridge. During the First World War, it was occupied by German forces, including the notorious fighter pilot Manfred von Richthofen, better known as the "Red Baron".

Brass rivets in pavement with the likeness of Rodenbach correspond to an 8.7-km signposted route that goes past the city's top attractions. Visit Roeselare sells a printed map of it in English and Belgian languages.

At the start of the Roeselare–Leie Canal near Rodenbach Brewery, an industrial grain silo from 1933 is being renovated into a **watchtower** with panoramic views of the city. Its first and second floors will feature an exhibition about the industrial history of Roeselare. The tower is expected to open in 2027. A nearby street art mural will mimic the theme of industrialisation.

Green spaces

For all its industrial energy, Roeselare has plenty of room to breathe. The **Stadspark** (City Park) links five green areas across four hectares with a pond, summer pedal boats, concerts and a pop-up bar.

Moermanpark, which opened in 2025, offers a more unusual urban escape. Its see-through black structures evoke the paint factory that once occupied the site, turning industrial memory into a contemporary park.

Beyond the city, **Provinciedomein Het Sterrebos** surrounds Rumbeke Castle with a 27-hectare star-shaped forest, where trails radiate through the landscape. The 34-hectare **Bergmolenbos** provides another green space, including Zilverberg orchard with almost 100 varieties of fruit.

EXPERIENCE

Batjes: A four-day shopping festival in June with sales, street entertainment, music, food and Rodenbach beer

Het Kunstuur: An immersive spectacle spotlighted around 30 paintings by Belgian artists from 1850 to 1950 with commentary by Flemish celebrities

Kerstmarkt: A Christmas market in December featuring artisan stalls, live music, an ice rink, a Ferris wheel, and festive eats and drinks



Clockwise from top left: ARhus (Albrecht Rodenbach House); Rodenbach foeders; Rumbeke Castle

Kunstenfestival Roeselare: New in 2026, a January–March cultural festival that fills the city with contemporary art, performances, concerts, lectures and workshops every three years

Paris MontmARTre: A September weekend fair during which Roeselare's Grote Markt becomes an open-air artists' studio

Rodenbachfeesten: A two-day cultural festival in September with music, circus and street performances inspired by the late Albrecht Rodenbach

Week van de Smaak: An October food festival with tastings, tours, workshops, masterclasses and special restaurant events

SAVOUR

Alto: A tiny, intimate restaurant offering contemporary, Belgian-inspired menus, built around regional and seasonal ingredients

Boury: Chef Tim Boury's three-Michelin-starred restaurant, where technically precise, creative cuisine connects to the local terroir

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Street art: Sozyone by Jules Censure (left) and Karma, by ZEDI (right)

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surrounds Rumbeke
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Brasserie Bellis: A friendly brasserie on the Grote Markt serving fresh, seasonal Belgian classics

Het Foederhuis: A brasserie inside the historic Rodenbach brewery, serving Belgian dishes and beer pairings beneath enormous oak foeders

KOERSkaffee: A relaxed café beside the KOERS cycling museum serving Belgian comfort food with a terrace overlooking the museum garden

Sanseveria: A cosy, authentic eat-and-drink café near the harbour known for simple comfort food and Belgian beers in a characterful setting

SIP & SNACK

ARhus Café: A relaxed library café serving seasonal lunches, local products and cakes with books, newspapers and board games close at hand

Atelier Noisette: A high-end pâtisserie from two former Boury chefs, specialising in elegant pastries and inventive ice creams

Bar Giraf: A cosy bar in the former rectory of Sint-Amandskerk, with intimate “living rooms”, a garden terrace and an extensive drinks menu

Barsista: A cosy breakfast and lunch hotspot offering creative dishes, homemade treats and a Saturday brunch

Camillus Kookt: A welcoming eatery and coffee house serving fresh lunches and desserts with local ingredients, including vegan options

EuropArt: A brown café offering art sales, exhibitions and creative workshops

Louma: A casual restaurant and takeaway with an extensive selection of croquettes alongside Flemish classics in a crispy format

K-Trolle VZW: A laid-back, creative pub where drinks, art and a relaxed atmosphere come together, including outdoor seating

Romen: An Art Deco café with a marble

bar, original interior and a unique garden terrace, serving Rodenbach on tap alongside other drinks.

STAY

Hotel Ter Zuidhoek: A peaceful, 18th-century farmstead just outside the city with spacious rooms, a garden terrace, breakfast and Hofstee restaurant

Hotel Vijfwegen: Near the city centre with modern rooms, breakfast, a terrace and cosy bar, plus Bistro Frogs restaurant

L’Inconnu B&B: In a beautifully renovated 1941 townhouse near the Grote Markt, it offers just two guests a spacious room, private living area, rooftop terrace and breakfast

Parkhotel: A modern three-star hotel opposite the railway station with 80 comfortable rooms and secure private parking

R&Breakfast B&B: Welcoming and bike-friendly in a renovated townhouse in central Roeselare with three spacious rooms, a private city garden and secure bicycle storage

SHOP

Boost Moodshop: A four-storey design and gift shop filled with fun and functional objects, stylish home accessories and furniture

Kaasboerderij ’t Groendal: A farm shop selling award-winning cheese as well as other dairy products

Rodenbach: The brewery’s shop with Rodenbach branded items and beers

UNIEK Shop Gallery: Offering antique and decorative arts from paintings, and ceramics to carpets and furniture

Visit Roeselare: Sells local, non-perishable food and beverage products

WANDL: A stylish outdoor shop specialising in hiking clothing, footwear and gear with personal advice