

# D\*TOURS: CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER

ENGAGING WAY TO SEE THE "REAL" BRUSSELS...



EXPERT ADVICE  
ON THIS MONTH'S  
DESTINATIONS

## p&p

PLACES & PRICES >

Caesar salad at La Casa Que Canta.

**MEXICO'S 142**  
**PACIFIC COAST**  
For 750 miles, Mexico's Highway 200 links a ravishing coastline with pastoral enclaves and mountain towns.

Meet market. Outdoor tables fill the area around the Halles St-Géry.

### Dressed for Success

*As the capital of the European Union, Brussels revels in its new stature as a power player. Mark Schapiro reports on a city buzzing with politics, culture, and nightlife*

Abu Dhabi's Emirates Palace.

**MIDEAST 144**  
**PALACE HOTELS**  
Nine properties in three countries reassert the region's claim to the most opulent hotels on earth.

The continual arrival of delegations from the 25 member states of the European Union, from Ireland to Greece, has predictably upped the demand for hotel rooms and cultural experiences in Brussels. Thankfully, an abundance of hotels have opened to handle the flow, and the city teems with museums. In a classic Art Nouveau building with ornate iron terraces, the **Musical Instruments Museum**, on the rue Montagne de la Cour, has everything from primitive drums to the saxophone, which was invented by the Belgian Adolphe Sax in the 1840s. There are regular concerts and a rooftop restaurant with terrific views ([mim.fgov.be](http://mim.fgov.be)). Much of Belgium's wealth comes from the Congo, which didn't become independent until 1960. The **Royal Museum for Central Africa**, in the suburb Tervuren, still reflects changing views of colonialism ([africamuseum.be](http://africamuseum.be)). The **Bibliotheca Wittockiana**, a family library of rare and ancient books on the rue du Bémel, has the largest private bookbinding collection in the world ([wittockiana.org](http://wittockiana.org)). The **Atomium**, built for Expo '58, explores the evolution of technology ([atomium.be](http://atomium.be)).

At Léopold Park, the **European Parliament**, with its two buildings of steel and glass, bears a closer resemblance to a modern banking complex than to the grand halls of Capitol Hill. Inside, the corridors bustle with committee hearings and meetings over espresso and cigarettes, while in rows of glass-enclosed booths the proceedings are translated into each of the EU's 20 official languages ([europarl.europa.eu](http://europarl.europa.eu)).

Artist Valéry Lippens's original "sound walks," **D\*tours**, are an engaging way to see the "real" Brussels. These narrated tours of public and sometimes private places offer interviews with residents, shopkeepers, and cultural figures, such as the Belgian jazz musician Toots Thielemans. The best in English are the walks in the historic Marolles and in the ancient city center around the Grand Place ([d-tours.org](http://d-tours.org); \$9).

*The country code for Belgium is 32; when in Belgium, however, add a zero before the local number. Prices quoted are for August 2006.*

**Lodging**

Book well in advance, and include a weekend when rates generally drop. Among the nicest places to stay is the quiet, elegant **Hotel Amigo**. In a former jail off the Grand Place, it has sleek furniture, Art Deco lighting, and prints of classic Belgian art (2-547-4747; [roccofortehotels.com](http://roccofortehotels.com); doubles, \$280-\$306). An old mansion above the Grand Place, **Le Dixseptième** gives a taste of aristocratic Brussels. Its traditional wing is a warren of suites, cozy attics