

# Travel the Benelux

## Explore Tienen for a sweet journey

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A former Roman settlement, Tienen has a sweet story to tell. Called Sugar Town by locals, this city in the Belgian province of Brabant has appealing museums, a large town square and, since 1836, Raffinerie Tirlemontoise, the sugar refinery that gives the town its nickname.

The market leader for sugar in Belgium, Raffinerie Tirlemontoise, produces sugar from sugar beets for industry and everyday consumption. Its logo, the block T on a blue background is well known not just in Belgium but all over the European Union. About 6 million tons of sugar beets are processed there every year.

Named for lake that once stood on the site and built in the 14th century, Our Lady of the Lake church dominates the east side of the square, which is one of the largest town squares in Belgium. Next to the church is Hero Square, a monument to honor the soldiers who lost their lives in the battles of the Belgian revolution, World War I and World War II.

On the south side is the town hall with a neoclassical façade, designed by architect Francois Drossaert. In front of the city hall, embedded in the pavement and made of white limestone is the rose compass. It doesn't mark the center of Tienen, but something much more macabre. The last beheading in Belgium took place on that spot in 1845.

On the north side of the square, in the former municipal court building is the suiker (sugar) museum. Behind the sugar museum, in the former city jail, stands Het Toreke, a museum displaying relics from the city's time as a Roman settlement. The exhibits feature the results of archaeological digs in the Tienen area and show the rituals of life and death of the Romans.

At Tienen's main attraction, the sugar museum, you will learn the history of the sugar beet, how it's grown, harvested and processed, and many interesting facts about sugar. An informative and entertaining audio guide (available in English) leads you through this sweet museum. Children will love all the interactive touch-screen displays with animated cartoon characters. In the "maternity ward," a row of cribs each with a sugar beet in one of its various stages of development line the room. It takes two years for a sugar beet to reach maturity. A model of a sugar refinery takes up one large room. Clips of 50 songs with the word "sugar" in them, many in English, will have you singing along in the music exhibit.

In 2016, Suikerrock, a popular music festival held in Tienen, will celebrate its 30th anniversary. Always held the last weekend in July, the festival draws thousands of music fans to the city every year.

Outside the gate



(Clockwise) The maternity ward in the sugar museum is a favorite of children. • Our Lady of the Lake church stands on the square. • Tools used in the past for the sugar beet harvesting on display in the sugar museum. • Pottery found in archaeological digs around Tienen at the Roman museum.

