

Flanders Today

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The Top 20

Flanders Today correspondents searched far and wide for the best holiday gifts the region has to offer. Happy shopping!

1 Eastpak tablet sleeve

While a smartphone or a tablet computer may not be in your budget as a gift this year, a cool sleeve to protect them certainly could be. This timeless leather pouch by Eastpak, for instance, is a beaut (€80)



Buy it at:

Hunting and Collecting
Brussels' hippest concept store needs very little introduction. You'll find everything you need to survive the festive season, from an on-trend outfit to the coolest gifts. This year, they have a little food corner as well, with fancy biscuits, pasta and spices (*Kartuizerstraat 17, Brussels, www.huntingandcollecting.com*)

2 Skip Hop zoo bookends

How cute is this? Not only will you be encouraging your little ones to read by placing books between these soft (but heavy) vinyl bookends, you will be brightening up their rooms. Or heck, the living room, because that's where we'd put 'em (€35/set of two)

Buy it at:

Premaman
These beautiful shops carry products from mostly small manufacturers but stay within reasonable prices. You'll find an outlet of the Brussels-based retailer in practically every shopping street across Flanders (*www.premaman.com*)



3 Replica perfume

These fresh scents sport pretty, simple packaging and pastel colours that will look good on any woman's dressing table. The price isn't bad, either, considering they're from Maison Martin Margiela (€80/100 ml)

Buy it at:

Obius
It's easy to find Flemish designers' flagship stores in Antwerp, but where else to get their



wares in Flanders? Step into this homage to local designers in a cobblestoned sidestreet of Ghent's Vrijdagmarkt. You'll see the work of Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Martin Margiela and many more (*Meerseniensstraat 4, Ghent, www.obius.be*)

4 Cavalier pralines

This Flemish chocolate-maker was one of the first in Europe to start using the alternative sweetener stevia in its chocolate and now it has expanded into pralines. These are perfect for diabetics or for anyone trying to limit their sugar intake this month. And they taste much better than you think (€5.50-€27.50)



Buy it at:

't lang leven
Cavalier pralines were just launched and are finding their way into health-food stores across Flanders. They are already on the shelves of this very cute shop in Lochristi, just outside of Ghent, which sells a large range of both fresh and packaged organic foods and cosmetics and puts together a mean gift basket of cheeses, jams and wines (*Dorp West 1, Lochristi, www.tlangleven.be*)

5 Randplan calendar

This 2013 calendar is full of tips for day trips in *de rand*, or the Flemish belt, around Brussels. It lists events, comes with cute stickers to help keep you organised and includes coupons worth €25 (€12.95)

Buy it at:

The Randplan calendar was published by de Rand, the organisation that introduces Flemish culture to foreigners living in the belt around Brussels. Buy it in bookstores and newsagents in *de rand* or online from Davidsfonds (*www.davidsfonds.be*)

6 Hasseltse Speculaasjenever

Jenever was first drunk in the 16th century in the Low Countries; by the 19th century, Hasselt was famous for its distilleries. Now jenever is available in upwards of 100 flavours, including *speculaas*, the spiced biscuit that's also a Hasselt speciality (€10)

Buy it at:

Lekker Limburgs
If you're looking for a unique gift for the gastronome on your list, this is the place to be. They carry *streekproducten* (regional products) such as artisanal jenever, *speculaas*, fruit syrups and preserves, honey and wine (*Kuringersteenweg 161, Hasselt, www.lekkerlimburgs.be*)



7 With a Sword in My Hand

This novel by Flemish authors Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem and Pat van Beirs, available in English translation, is a fictional account of the real-life Marguerite of Malle, daughter of a 14th-century Count of Flanders. It's meant for young adults, but its realistic atmosphere and Marguerite's stubborn refusal to conform to ladylike expectations makes it a highly enjoyable read for the older set, too (€10)



Buy it at:
Treasure Trove

The go-to place for English-language books for children, this long-standing bookshop, with its hardwood floors, comfy sofas and friendly staff, is a pleasure to visit. They carry a selection of books for adults, too. Lingered allowed (*Brusselsesteenweg 7, Tervuren, www.treasuretrove.be*)

8 Clio Goldbrenner wallet

Wallets make excellent presents. They are seriously underrated as far as accessories go, and everybody needs one. Impress a friend or relative with a classic piece by Clio Goldbrenner. This Antwerp-based designer adorns all her fine leather goods with a gold-coated band, referring to her family name (€100)



Buy it at:
Corifeo

Corifeo oozes elegant lifestyle from the affluent village of Brasschaat. The store sells an excellent selection of home decoration, tableware, fashion, jewellery and toys, with special attention to local talent (*Bredabaan 362B, Brasschaat, www.corifeo.be*)

9 X-mini speaker

When it comes to gifts, bigger is not always better. The X-mini II is an award-winning miniature speaker that produces excellent audio and can be carried around easily. A must-have for anyone who loves impromptu house parties, and it comes in multiple colours (€ 29.90)



Buy it at:
Fnac

Save time holiday shopping by buying everything you need in one place. At book and media chain store Fnac, you're likely to score your niece's favourite CD, that book for your uncle and X-mini capsule speakers for all your buddies. (If you link them up, the sound is even more powerful) (*Across Brussels and Flanders, www.fnac.be*)

10 Luxe cufflinks

For the man of taste who's a little bit rock'n'roll: cufflinks from Flemish designer Stijn Helsen in the shape of skulls, coiled cobras or mosquitos, in silver, gold plate and semi-precious stones (€139-€309)



Buy it at:

Stijn Helsen Concept Store
Helsen has designed costumes for Hollywood movies and red-carpet fashions for Hollywood celebrities. His flagship store in his hometown of Hasselt showcases the fashion wunderkind's edgy style (*Diesterstraat 10, Hasselt, www.stijnhelsen.com*)



11 Tamawa champagne stopper

This champagne stopper by Brussels manufacturer Tamawa is so pretty, you might be inclined to leave the bottle half full in order to use it. (Though it looks just as stylish on an empty one) (€55)

Buy it at:

Onni means good luck in Finnish, and this design shop has indeed got enough bright objects and clothes to make anybody happy. Brands include the Finnish design company Marimekko, Swedish Hasbeens and of course the Belgian Tamawa (*Vlaanderenstraat 70, Ghent, www.onnishop.be*)

12 Beer pralines

Liqueur pralines, you either love them or hate them. But how about beer pralines? This Beer Chocolate Experience box includes 16 pralines with beer-infused fillings: kriek, white beer, brown beer and a pale ale. Cheers! (€14)

Buy it at:

Corné Port-Royal
Beer praline-maker Corné Port-Royal has shops in Kortrijk, Roeselare, Brussels Airport (handy for holiday travellers) and across Brussels. Our favourite is in the capital's Koninginnegalerij. It has a stunning Art Nouveau design and is open every day (*www.corneportroyal.com*)

13 Happy Socks

Socks are no longer the dullest presents under the tree. Swedish label Happy Socks wants to make the world a bit more gleeful with crazy designs and loud prints, from argyle with a twist to fashion-forward wildlife (€8)

Buy it at:

Moose in the City
This small stretch of Scandinavian soil in the heart of Antwerp sells designs by Marimekko, Hay and Normann, Filippa K and Won Hundred. It's Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm rolled into one (*Ijzerenwaag 10-12, Antwerp, www.moose-in-the-city.com*)



14 Zara scented candle

Gorgeous scented candles are good gifts for friends, co-workers, partners and hostesses of fab festive parties. These from Zara Home in white jasmine and black vanilla are stand-outs this year. Smells like 2012 (€16)

Buy it at:

Zara Home
Zara Home has a great range of interior decoration all year round, but during the holidays, they turn it up a notch. You'll find everything you



need to get in a festive mood. Outlets of the Spanish brand can be found in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges (www.zarahome.com)

15 Pet necklaces
Marc by Marc Jacobs, the affordable line by the popular American designer, finally has its own store in Brussels. The clothes! The shoes! But especially: the accessories! We predict these adorable doggie, kitty and bunny necklaces will make many fashionistas very happy (€95)

Buy it at:
Marc Jacobs
The Marc Jacobs store opening

was delayed for more than a year, but better late than never. Fans of MBMJ goodies can now find the entire collection on Brussels' Dansaertstraat. The top floor also stocks books and will welcome a small bar in the near future (*Dansaertstraat 90, Brussels, www.marcjacobs.com*)



16 Monchhichi dolls
Remember Monchhichi? If you were a kid in the '70s, chances are you played with the little simian dolls that originated in Japan. Now they're back and available in suitably festive outfits (€20-€25)

Buy it at:
Eigenwijs
This speciality store in Hasselt caters, as its name suggests, to the individualistic child – kids who know their own minds and tend to go their own ways. Owner Pascale Wagelmans hand picks all the colourful toys, clothing and accessories (*Aldestraat 52, Hasselt, www.eigenwijs-kids.be*)



17 Onyx earrings
When in the market for jewellery, you might want to consider giving earrings: less of a grand gesture than a ring and more romantic than a bracelet. Flemish duo Katrin Wouters and Karen Hendrix design beautiful ornaments in silver and semi-precious stones. These triangles in onyx are part of their latest collection, inspired by Russian constructivism (€170)

Buy it at:
Wouters & Hendrix

The designers have their roots in Antwerp, where they both graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts 28 years ago. The city houses two stores next to each other: One sells the collection of silver jewellery, the other the more expensive gold line (*Lange Gasthuisstraat 13A, Antwerp, www.wouters-hendrix.com*)



18 Sweetie-making kit
Have your kids, nieces or cousins got a sweet tooth? We bet they've never made their own sweeties. Discover the wonderful world of sugar with this "make your own" kit, available in various flavours. (There's a "make your own soap" kit, too, if you're worried about their teeth) (€20)



Buy it at:
Eurekakids

This international chain store selling mainly educational toys has just opened a first branch in Brussels, with games, jigsaws, fancy dress and much more (*Louizalaan 199A, Brussels, www.eurekakids.com*)

19 City bags
Forget GPS and Google maps, if you want to show someone the way in Brussels get them a Monsieur Madame tote bag. Each one features a map of a one of the city's communes and can be customised with lapel badges from the basic "I live here" to more personal information about where to get the best *frietjes* or a lingering kiss. There's also an Antwerp bag, covering the whole city (€18)

Buy it at:
SuperGreenMe

Perfect gifts for eco-heads, including cosy slippers, cute Ts, organic cotton coin purses and the like. You can also order the Monsieur Madame tote bag online directly from the source, a "tiny little room in Brussels" (*Van Arteveldestraat 10, Brussels, www.supergreenme.be or www.monsieur-madame.be*)

20 Papillote box with chocolate
Flemish designer Piet Stockmans' signature blue-and-white porcelain has graced the tables of royalty and is featured in international museums. His latest collaboration with Hasselt chocolatier Boon combines delicate containers with equally delicate creations in pure chocolate (€77)

Buy it at:
Boon: The Chocolate Experience

A chocolate atelier and cafe offering an extensive selection of teas, coffees and chocolate drinks, all served with handmade pralines. The Stockmans collection is available in the Boon shop and from selected Studio Pieter Stockmans dealers (*Paardsdemerstraat 13, Hasselt, www.thechocolateexperience.be*)



This gift guide has been brought to you by Lisa Bradshaw, Diana Goodwin, Catherine Kosters, Katrien Lindemans and Ian Mundell



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Flanders' new salt-spreading equipment and bicycle path plan are already paying off

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December dance

From raw and naked to fantastical and angelic, our Nordic neighbours take over Bruges' annual festival

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A new wave

After years of steady decline, Flanders' fishing industry is earning quota increases and farming new species

Alan Hope



For as long as anyone can remember, the fishing industry has been in decline. Local fishing boats were pushed aside by giant industrial trawlers. Countries began defending their coastal waters more jealously. The seas, we were warned, were gradually being plundered of all life. Then came global warming. The Flemish fishing industry has suffered with the rest, but the industry is looking forward these days to a brighter future than anyone might have expected.

The Flemish fishing fleet has been in steady decline for more than half a century. In 1950, there were 457 boats; by the end of 2009, there were 89. The decline

of jobs has been as severe: In the seven years between 1995 and 2002, one in three jobs in the fishing industry – 315 jobs in all – disappeared, even as total employment in the coast area went up by 7%.

Over-fishing is one of the most pressing problems facing the industry worldwide, but not so much in Flanders, according to Emiel Brouckaert, director of Redersentrale, the industry federation. "There's a lot of discussion about overfishing, but, given the species that are fished by the Flemish industry, we have next to no problem with overfishing," he says. "Not even for cod, which for us is a sort of by-catch, Flanders being mainly targeted towards flat fish."

Previously, cod had to be thrown back, but "now that problem arises much less often because we've done a lot of

work on the technical side to avoid catching cod," Brouckaert explains.

The most important species for Flemish fishers are plaice and sole. Although Belgium has quotas for about 90 species of fish, the industry prefers to trade many of those quotas with other countries to increase their own quotas of the two main species and of cod (to cover by-catch). In 2009, these swaps saw the industry catching 28% more sole, 27% more plaice and 22% more cod than the original quota allowed.

The quotas are still very much lower than they once were: In 1983, when the European Commission's Common Fisheries Policy was introduced, Belgium was allowed to catch 11,080 tonnes of plaice, going up to 12,395 tonnes in 1993. The quota in 2010 (without swaps) was 4,536 tonnes. The quota for sole

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