

Cycling in East Belgium

RAVeL, VeloTour, Mountain biking
Road cycling, Electric bikes, ...

Routes, tips and anecdotes

DE NL FR **EN** **FREE MAGAZINE**
N°2



Introduction



I have been cycling since I was a child and have been a passionate and close follower of how cycling has developed as a sport in general, but especially in East Belgium. Its technical development has been literally breathtaking - from a simple fixed-wheel bike followed by a 3-gear model, I was given my first 10-gear road bike in my teens. This gave me a great deal of freedom, as I could now access the whole of south-east Belgium. Then mountain bikes came onto the scene and technology improved by leaps and bounds. Trips into the countryside offered a completely new riding experience and I waited impatiently for the next evolutionary stage. Those technology developments in mountain bikes and modern road bikes can now be seen in every type of bike. It's simply amazing!

Those developments have also affected cycle tourism. In East Belgium, much work has been done and large amounts have been invested in creating suitable conditions for cyclists, such as the RAVeL network (cycle paths on former railway lines), VeloTour, the Vennbahn, electric bike hire and the MTB route network. The results can now be seen and East Belgium can be favourably compared with other major cycling destinations. A digital cycle route planner and an app are being developed and will soon be available, so there are still some exciting things in the pipeline!

Nowadays, I still go for a spin on my bike, sometimes on the road, sometimes off-road - and the broad smile on my face is still there. East Belgium offers infinite variety for cyclists - why not find out for yourself?

Enjoy your voyage of discovery!

Dany Heck
Product Developer Cycling and Hiking
Deputy Head of Tourism Agency of East Belgium

PUBLISHER
Tourism Agency of East Belgium
Sandra De Taeye / Director
Hauptstrasse 54, 4780 St. Vith
www.eastbelgium.com

EDITORS
Dany Heck | Jörg Weishaupt

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
Gilbert Perrin | Pierre Pauquay | Stefan Maes |
RSV St.Vith | Ward Van Loock

COORDINATION
Dany Heck (TAE)

DESIGN
Christoph Heinen • www.design1A.com

© PHOTOS
TAE | D. Ketz | P. Pauquay



With the support of the province of Liège.
www.liegetourisme.be



The greenways RAVeL 4

East Belgium's greenways, especially the Vennbahn, provide pure cycling enjoyment. They run through unspoiled countryside with no motor traffic and are surrounded by magnificent natural landscapes.

Electric bikes 10

Electric bikes are right at home in East Belgium. The benefit of power assistance really comes into its own in this hilly region.

Bed+bike & Bikes Welcome 14

VeloTour

6

The VeloTour cycle path network covers 850 km and has been designed using the "junction point" system, making it easy for you to plan your tour.



Cycling shop

16

Cycling events

18

Mountain biking

8

Mountain biking has been on the tourist menu since the 1990s, ranging from cross-country to enduro, professional downhill and 4cross routes.



Road cycling

12

Road cycling in East Belgium almost always has a cross-border feel to it!

A warm welcome and good accommodation await you! There are more than 30 recommended accommodation providers with the "bed+bike" and "Bikes Welcome" designation, indicating that they are particularly cycle-friendly businesses.



The independent network for slow-moving traffic (or RAVeL for short) comprises routes that are reserved **solely for non-motorised** users, such as cyclists, walkers, skaters and horse riders. Of course, the RAVeL routes are also accessible to people with restricted mobility. Widths, gradients and surfaces are required to meet standards so that all users can negotiate the paths safely.

In East Belgium these paths are disused railway lines that have been converted. The cross-border network of paths is now more than 200 km long. One of the highlights is the Vennbahn, one of the longest railway track cycling paths in Europe!

www.vennbahn.eu



Vennbahn

In the past, a surprisingly close network of railway lines developed in eastern Belgium which fell into disuse over the years, as happened in many other places. I have spent months studying the routes in all directions on foot, sometimes even across country. As part of a unique project to convert the railway lines into cycle paths, I brought my passion to working sessions with partners from Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. And then I rediscovered this old railway line on my bike just like thousands of other cyclists peacefully and in comfort.

These former railway lines have actually become beautiful greenways. The layout of the paths is flat with gentle rises and they are well away from the noise of street traffic; they lead through hills and valleys, across viaducts and through tunnels, along rivers, through forests, towns and villages, and, now and then, they take you past a former railway station. East Belgium's greenways are a delight for any cycle tourist, believe me! Are you keen on cycle touring but don't like hills? But you also like a variety of scenery where you suddenly leave a very hilly landscape and drop into a peaceful valley? If there's one place where you can find a combination of all these supposed contradictions it's East Belgium.

While you are continually crossing the border you will meet the German-speaking Belgians who are also fluent in French, Dutch or English. You will discover enchanting towns, romantic castles and interesting museums. The famous Vennbahn provides a route from north to south, or vice versa. It's also worth taking a detour down the east-

west RAVeL, crossing the Vennbahn. This will take you, for example, right down to Lake Bütgenbach or the little town of Malmedy with its places of interest.

If you follow the Vennbahn you may, as I did, have the opportunity to talk to the German citizen who lives in an old keeper's cottage. His house and garden are in Belgium, just like the whole of the former railway line that runs through German territory. But the pavement in front of his house is in Germany, as is the electricity that lights up his Belgian house.

The Vennbahn has truly earned the title of Europe's craziest border.

Gilbert Perrin

*Technical Advisor - VoE Chemin du Rail
President of the European Greenways Association*

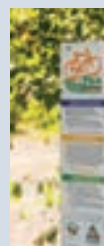
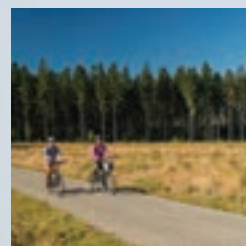
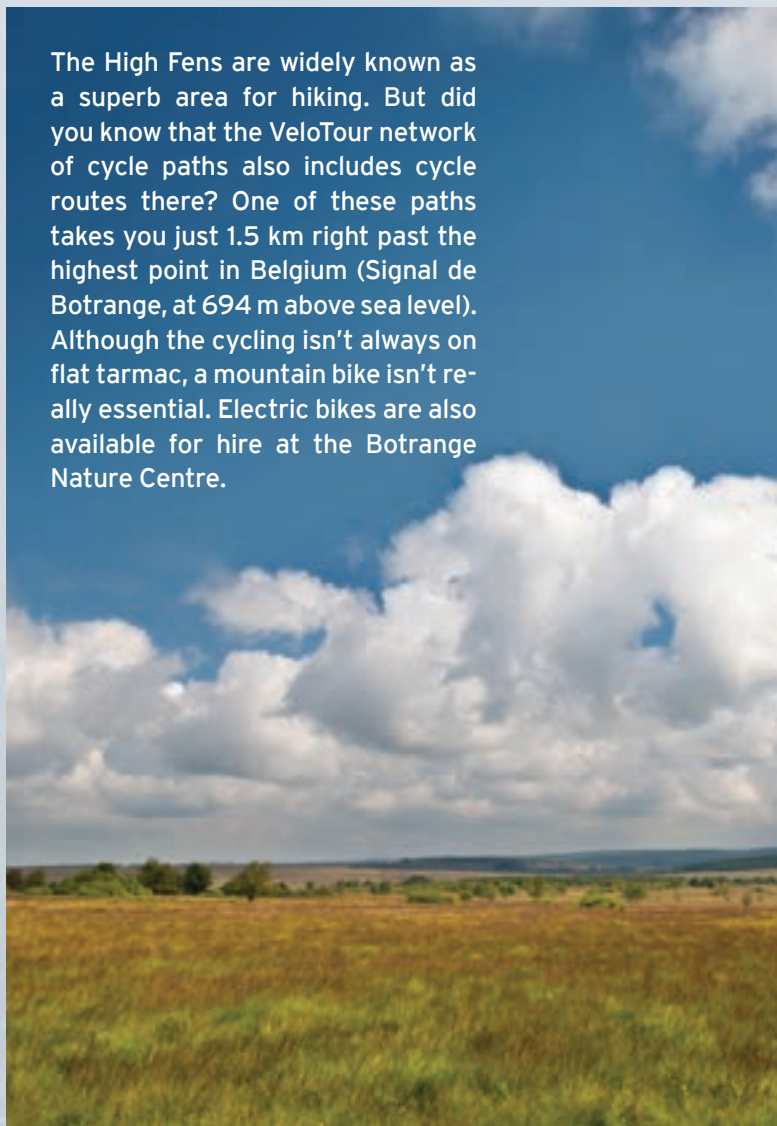


Away from towns like Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith you will rediscover an infectious kind of peace. The effect of contact with unspoiled nature, meadows, forests and fens lasts for a long time. Being in an environment like this lets you automatically switch over to the rhythm of nature away from the rush and stressful traffic.

VeloTour takes you along 850 km of paths to the most beautiful places in East Belgium. And the junction point waymarking means you won't lose your way.

www.eastbelgium.com/velotour

The High Fens are widely known as a superb area for hiking. But did you know that the VeloTour network of cycle paths also includes cycle routes there? One of these paths takes you just 1.5 km right past the highest point in Belgium (Signal de Botrange, at 694 m above sea level). Although the cycling isn't always on flat tarmac, a mountain bike isn't really essential. Electric bikes are also available for hire at the Botrange Nature Centre.



Crossing borders



My cycling buddy likes borders, especially borders between countries. His eyes gleam when we cycle together from country A to country B and then back again from country B to country A. "Fantastic, today I've been to two countries," he says, giving a satisfied laugh. But two or three border crossings aren't enough for him any more. Now he plans our cycle tours so he can subsequently astound everyone by claiming to have crossed the Belgian-German border ten times in a single day.

Later, when I showed him the VeloTour junction point network, he fobbed me off at first. His argument was: "Isn't East Belgium too strenuous with all those hills?" But when we studied the VeloTour map he changed his mind. Many of the signed routes take you quite close to country borders. That opens up new opportunities and soon he had quite forgotten the contours on the map.

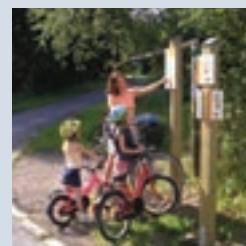
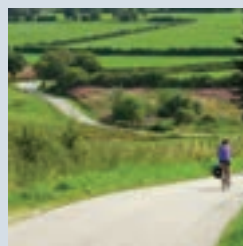
In fact, the VeloTour cycle path network is continuously in contact with borders. This is due to East Belgium's unique location and special status.

In the north, the region fleetingly brushes against the Netherlands, in the east it follows Germany's Eifel mountain range, and in the south it knocks on the door of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Some routes caress the border with Flanders at Voeren and flirt with Wallonia in the west. In the east, VeloTour continuously flirts with the German cycle path network. Nobody can resist this temptation, particularly not my buddy. After a quick initial glance at the border area he worked out a one-day border-crossing tour for the two of us. "In one day we will visit two countries and cross the border 15 times," he boasted. "If that's not a flirtation, well..."

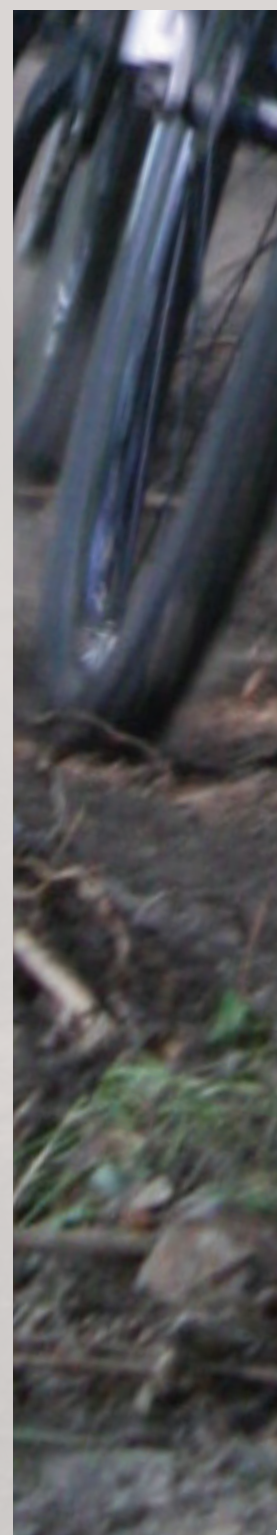
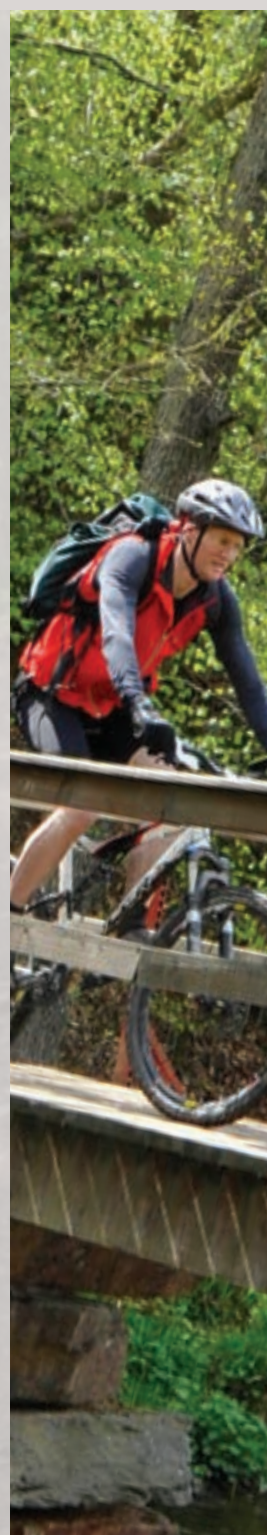
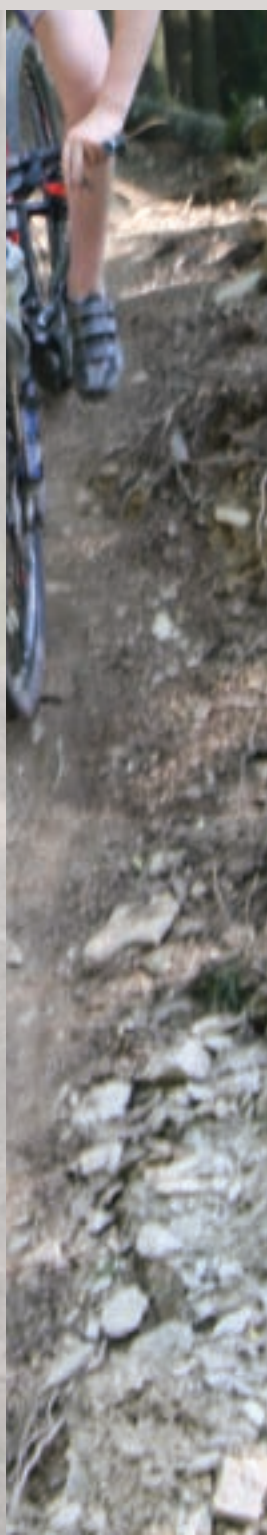
Ward Van Look

Cycling writer/www.recreatiefietser.be



A wide-ranging network of waymarked cycle paths criss-crosses East Belgium, particularly in the south of the region. The total length of the **18 MTB routes** from the Baraque Michel to Ouren is **480 kilometres**. The routes offer numerous alternatives - from short routes to those that are technically and physically very demanding. Each route is also available for GPS. To make cycle touring by mountain bike easy, you can hire the appropriate GPS devices when you get here.

www.eastbelgium.com/mtb



The big circular tour of East Belgium is an even greater adventure.

This unique six-stage route stretches over 190 kilometres and can be completed in three days of discovery from St. Vith to Burg Reuland via Malmedy and Bütgenbach.

www.eastbelgium.com/mtb

Down from the tarmac

East Belgium is a fascinating place that attracts mountain bikers due to its vast open spaces. The gentle terrain in comparison with the large mountain ranges, the variety of scenery, the vast forests and numerous streams, all offer endless opportunities for cycle touring on a mountain bike. In the north there are paths that criss-cross the landscape of hedges and meadows in and around Raeren. In contrast, you have the more untouched paths leading to the dam at Eupen and through the vast Hertogenwald Forest. Mountain bikers can ride up them to the High Fens, the peak of unspoiled nature. From the roof of Belgium they take you down towards Malmedy at breathtaking speed alongside streams and becks. The Rivers Warche and Amel lead to the Obere Amel area, an isolated stretch of land that has preserved its charm and remoteness. With a mountain bike you can criss-cross the gentle landscape at

your own pace. Life here is still based on agriculture and rearing livestock. After a fair amount of pedalling you will arrive at the lakes at Robertville and Bütgenbach. The forests here are reminiscent of the far north of Europe. Then comes St. Vith, with its hilly countryside and open spaces, sheltering the Ourtal valley like a treasure at the country's borders. Mountain bikers who love freedom and adventure, and who are looking for warm hospitality and unspoiled nature, will be welcomed with open arms in East Belgium.

Pierre Pauquay

*Freelance journalist and editor
Special subjects: hiking and cycling*



Nature, quiet paths and a network of hire stations for **electric bikes**. East Belgium has much to offer riders of electric bikes. Electrical assistance ensures you can cope with even the steepest hills and still keep smiling.

www.eastbelgium.com/ebike

Crossing East Belgium on electric power



I am amazed. I've been cycling along the VeloTour cycle path network in the High Fens for two hours. Beaming sunshine, traffic-free paths and endless forests, even babbling brooks that flow into the reservoir at Eupen a bit further down. However, in these two hours I have met only two hikers and one mountain biker. Is there anywhere else as tranquil as here? In many cycling regions you are often literally pushed off the road on sunny Sundays by racing cyclists and motorbikes.

East Belgium has a lot to offer (electric) bike riders. The dams at Bütgenbach, Robertville and Eupen are as pretty as a picture. Cycling in the Ourtal valley is

like cycling through a romantic poem. And the High Fen-Eifel Nature Park with its moorland and wooded areas says it all. The region has been a paradise for electric bike riders for the last three years.

There are 18 stations where you can hire electrically assisted bikes that let you discover East Belgium "with a tail wind".

The 850 kilometre-long VeloTour cycle path network comes highly recommended. The routes take you to the most beautiful places which you would

probably never find on your own. But VeloTour is not East Belgium's only cycle path network. There is also a 220 kilometre-long cycle path network on former railway lines - the Vennbahn. Voted cycle route of the year in the Netherlands in 2014, this is the crown jewel among cycle paths that have been converted from former railway lines. Between Aachen and Troisvierges in Luxembourg you will criss-cross the region over a length of 125 kilometres, enabling you to experience East Belgium in a completely different way than by road.

Stefan Maes

Press Officer

Fiets- en Wandelbeurs Amsterdam



www.eastbelgium.com/ebike

There you will find hire and re-charging stations for electric bikes. You don't need to plan a route at home. The people who work at the stations will be pleased to give you tips and route suggestions. Three-day cycling package tours are also on offer. Hiring an electric bike costs between €21 and €30 per day.

00:00:00



Interview |

Freddy Steinmetz

President of RSV St. Vith cycle club

DanyHeck (TAE): What does East Belgium offer the road cyclist?

Freddy Steinmetz: Road cyclists in the wider region know that East Belgium is an ideal location for a ride or a holiday. Here you can simply find everything a road cyclist desires. Roads with only light traffic, a colourful mix of flat and hilly routes and, as the icing on the cake, the strength-sapping and respect-inducing hills well known from cycling classics such as "Liège-Bastogne-Liège". And all this in a little patch of land endowed with all nature's blessings in the border triangle between Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. You can pass through all three countries even on a 60 km ride. Anyone who wants to can also turn it into 200 km. It's simply fabulous!

When is the best time of year for a cycle tour through East Belgium?

Summer is quite clearly the best time. That's when you have already put in your basic training and been on your first hard tours. That way you can make full use of the opportunities and take on the legendary climbs that are simply a must for any road cyclist. And, having arrived at the top, you will still have enough breath to enjoy the beautiful views down into the valley.

And, of course, there are also places to stop after a long ride...

Of course! And, in East Belgium, you don't need to look for long. The people who live here understand the meaning of hospitality. Eating and drinking are traditionally a high priority here.

As an experienced road cyclist, do you have a particular favourite route? Which "classic tour" can you recommend to our readers?

A good tip is the Ourtal valley, as it offers everything a road cyclist needs. The landscape is hilly and very beautiful. I would recommend that anyone who wants to explore the Ourtal without a lot of preparatory work should quite simply follow the waymarked Ourtal route. This is 108 km in total with a short detour into Luxembourg. Recommended starting points are St. Vith or Burg Reuland.

There are many organised cycle rides for road cyclists in the region. Which highlight can you recommend?

Every year, on the first weekend in July, around 1,000 cycling enthusiasts come to St. Vith where our "International Three Countries Ride" takes place. There are six road bike routes and two MTB routes on offer through the border triangle. We put high priority on organising a suitable route for every age group and level of ability. It's worth being there for the whole day.

Other cycling clubs in the region also organise these kinds of rides, such as the "Ostpfel" organised by the Cyclo Club Helowa. In my view, these rides are an ideal way to get a good impression of East Belgium's potential for road cycling.

www.eastbelgium.com/roadcycling



providers geared

Cycle tourists (or cycling holidaymakers) know the value of good accommodation. Anyone who spends their holiday in the saddle, pushing the pedals all day long, enjoys a good meal in the evening, a refreshing sleep and good hospitality. Landlords in East Belgium have geared up to this and the number of cycle-friendly businesses with the “bed+bike” and “bikes welcome” designation has now risen to 38.

In East Belgium you can spot the cycle-friendly accommodation providers who are associated with the official designation of the German Cyclists' Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad-Club, ADFC or the official designation of the wallon region) by the above shown signs. These are the best places for cyclists to stay. As well as East Belgium's famous hospitality, these places also provide a range of specific services for holidaymakers travelling by bike.



Accommodation particularly to cyclists



“bed+bike” and “bikes welcome” accommodations focus on the special needs of guests travelling by bike:

- You are welcome even for just one night
- Your bike will be stored securely
- There are facilities for drying out wet clothing and equipment
- There are tools available for minor repairs to your bike
- If you have more serious mechanical problems, the nearest bike shop will help you out
- Information is available, such as regional cycle path maps or bus and rail timetables, so you can find attractive places to visit
- You will be given a hearty cyclist’s breakfast in the morning.

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION

Camping sites
Holiday homes
and apartments
Guest houses
Hotels
Youth hostels
B&Bs

A list of all “bed+bike” certified accommodation providers in East Belgium can be found www.eastbelgium.com/bedandbike. **Many of these places can also be booked online** via the official website of the Tourism Agency of East Belgium www.eastbelgium.com

CYCLING SHOP

- **Online tourist shop**
www.eastbelgium.com
- **Tourist Office**
Place Albert 1^{er} 29a, 4960 Malmedy
- **Tourist information offices**



NGI cycle maps

The cycle path networks shown in this brochure have been plotted on National Geographical Institute maps (1:50,000). This means you can see the entire range of official cycle and MTB paths and discover every last corner of East Belgium.

**VeloTour
High Fens - Eifel**
850 km of signed cycle routes
using the junction point system
€ 9



**2) MTB map
In south-east Belgium**
480 km of waymarked
MTB routes
€ 8

Accessories



**Multifunctional snood
East Belgium**
€ 10,50



**Multifunctional snood
Vennbahn**
€ 10,50



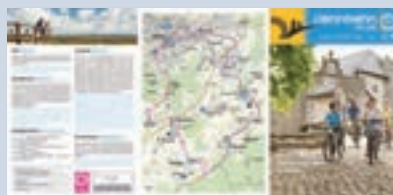
**Cyclists' first aid
and repair kit**
10 x 13.5 cm
€ 7,50



Vennbahn map

- › Topographical map
- › Places of interest
- › Specialist information for cyclists
- › Directions on how to get there

€ 4,50



Vennbahn PLUS

The Vennbahn and its
16 additional adjacent loops
in 1 handy map

(16 cm x 22 cm)

Vennbahn map

- › Large topographical map (Vennbahn + 16 additional routes)
- › Places of interest
- › Specialist information for cyclists
- › Directions on how to get there

16 foldouts

additional adjacent loops

- › Topographical maps
- › Route descriptions
- › Altitude profiles
- › Detailed descriptions of places of interest, scenery and features on the route
- › Places to take a break
- › Addresses of information providers

Only €12,50



Cycling events



Triptyque Ardennais

Three-day stage race in East Belgium / The springboard for amateurs wanting to turn professional / Yvan Basso and Philippe Gilbert were among those there.

Annually at end of May

05



Raid des Hautes Fagnes

One of the hardest and biggest MTB marathon events in Europe / Not for the faint hearted / 65 km (1925 m of climbing) - 90 km (2580 m of climbing) - 115 km (3130 m of climbing).

Annually at end of June

06



International Three Countries Ride

This festival for road cyclists, mountain bikers and cycle tourists has been organised for more than 35 years.

Annually on the first weekend in July

07



ProTour⁴

Makes a stop in Malmedy - Bike Park Ferme Libert World-class riders and big finale.

Start of September

09



... and many more cycling events

For people of all ages, for leisure cyclists as well as ambitious riders
March to October

03-10



Cycle for a day,
keep fit and
enjoy nature!



Whether on foot, on horseback or by bike, if you travel through the province of Liège on the RAVeL network of paths you will discover unexpected scenery and places to inspire you!

The RAVeL map is available
from 11 tourist offices
or can be downloaded from ...



www.liegetourisme.be

Cycling package tours

Arrive, get on your bike and GO!



Smart cycling
holidaymakers make use
of East Belgium's
cycling package tours

» www.eastbelgium.com

Completely relaxed travelling,
right from the start!



FOR EXAMPLE

THROUGH THE HIGH FENS AND THE BELGIAN EIFEL

Cycle on quiet paths through the Hertogenwald Forest and past the High Fens Nature Reserve. After the wild moorlands the landscape changes to slightly hilly meadows edged by beech and hawthorn hedges. Discover the refreshing places of Lake Robertville and Lake Bütgenbach, both embedded in the Warche valley. Further south you reach the picturesque and secluded Ourtal valley where pretty little villages reflect the peaceful country life of times past. You will be amazed by East Belgium's abundant natural and cultivated landscapes as you move from one unspoiled stretch of countryside to the next natural wonder.

4 days / 4 overnight stays / from € 450 per person

Departures : 08/05/2016 - 03/07/2016 - 04/09/2016

Min.8 participants

Info and reservations: T +32 80 280 997
caroline.massotte@eastbelgium.com
monique.jabobs@eastbelgium.com