When guiding foreigners around the country, I find it’s often the trivial things that amaze them most. They may be of little importance, but sometimes these little things are the ones you remember best.

Church, church, basilica or cathedral? In Dutch and French, “kerk” or “église” (church) refer to a building where religious rites take place, whilst “Kerk” or “Eglise” (with capital) refer to the institution. A church can be awarded the honorary title of basilica – sometimes because they are of great importance, or because special relics are kept there. This honorary title is awarded by the Vatican. A cathedral (or “dom”, mostly used in Germany) is the most important church of a bishopric – the bishop literally has his “seat” there. Sometimes a cathedral can be a basilica as well. Belgium has eight bishoprics, but there are nine cathedrals: the bishopric of Mechelen-Brussels uses the cathedral of Mechelen as main cathedral and the St-Michael and St-Gudule cathedral in Brussels for special occasions.

Ja Ja / Ja Nee / Nee Nee. You will often see stickers on people’s mailboxes with “yes” and/or “no” on them. These are to indicate whether the inhabitants wish to receive free commercial press or free regional press. This quite successful scheme was introduced because it became apparent that lots of people throw the free papers away without reading them. You can get the stickers for free at most town halls or administrations.

Dialects. There are lots of Flemish dialects. Some are close to the Dutch Language but others are hard to understand. Even within a same province people can more or less hear where somebody comes from just by their dialect. Apparently it’s different in Wallonia: the Walloon language has almost died out – it’s folklore, really – and the only way to distinguish the people from different regions is in some of the words they use or the speed at which they talk.

Cables overhead! I don’t know why exactly, but power lines and tv cable have been above ground in Belgium for a long time. Nowadays however, it seems that most of them are put underground whenever major road works allow for it or when a new street is laid out. That’s something we’ve probably picked up from the Dutch – it’s much tidier having everything underground.

No Smoking! As you’ve probably noticed, smoking is forbidden in all the indoor public places except for some specially designated areas. This was done gradually by forbidding it in government and school buildings first, then restaurants and finally cafés and bars. It is allowed outside and on the streets however, and some cafés have special secluded smoker’s areas (that’s allowed) or a smoker’s terrace – it has to be open on at least one side. Tobacco advertisements are also forbidden but that’s a European law apparently. Belgium did enforce it sooner though, and because of that there was no Formula 1 Grand Prix in Spa in 2003 – without tobacco sponsorship Bernie Ecclestone didn’t want to come. Some deal was made though, and from 2004 on there was a GP again in Spa.

Grattoirs. Sometimes you see these metal things about 10cm above the ground next to old houses’ doors. I don’t know how they’re called in English or Dutch, but the French word is grattoir (“scratcher”). Before streets were paved, you could scrape off the dirt of your shoes here – and even after they were paved it was handy to remove horse droppings and the like before entering the house.

***The monarchy. Although the function of the King is purely ceremonial, Belgium is still a monarchy. Leopold I, formerly prince Leopold of ..., a widower at the British court, was the first king
of Belgium, crowned in 1831. He wasn't the national congres' first choiche, but he was acceptable to the international powers that had to support the young nation. ***
Sources of images:
All maps, photographs and images are my own unless otherwise noted. I have tried to trace the rightful owners of the copyright of the old postcards used in each chapter but they were not to be found. If you are the photographer of any of these cards and wish to have it removed, please contact me. Some pictures were taken from the picture collection book "s Lands Merkwaardigheden/Merveilles du Pays'. Here too, no copyright owner could be traced.

Sources of information
Some of the walks are loosely based on existing walks. None of them – except the Yvoir walk – are direct copies from the work of others. However, where possible, I will try to mention the source material I've used. Most of my information comes from tourist office brochures and books from Lannoo, Belgium’s prime editor of tourist books. Sometimes, additional sources were consulted – I’ve listed them by chapter.

General:
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- ‘In de voetsporen van Einstein, wandeling doorheen het architecturale erfgoed van De Haan’, De Haan Tourist Office publication, 2009. Also available in English as ‘in the wake of Einstein, walking through the architectural legacy of De Haan’.

2. Bruges and the "Westhoek"
- www.brugge.be
- http://www.josenclim.nl
- http://www.wandelpaden.com/Rubriek6d.html
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- Mustard Ferdinand Tierenteyn: http://www.tierenteyn.be
- About the drain pipe on the city hall:

5. Brussels, Waterloo, Europe in a nutshell, and a beautiful ruin
- http://www.waterloo1815.be - the official site of the Waterloo Foundation
- www.waterloocommittee.be. Website of one of the conservation associations of the site.

6. Dinant shows you how beautiful Wallonia can be
- Title-less walks in the region, kindly given to me by

Sonia of the tourist office.

7. Wonderful Wallonia: three days of wonderful walks
- The respective hiking maps

8. The most beautiful walk in Belgium

9. Liège and surroundings, a weird tower and a lot of fortresses.

10. Spa-Francorchamps and Coo, a splendid time for everyone
- Lemaire, Guy, Noé, Monique and Lohest, James, 'Spa en Omgeving', Editions de l'Octogone, 2009. Also available in French as 'Spa et alentours' but not (yet) in English.
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     www.lilletourism.com

12. A short peek into Luxemburg: Clervaux and Petite Suisse
    - Family of Man catalogue
    - Hiking map of Petite Suisse

13. A short peek into Holland... Or is it? Baarle.
    - ‘Dorpen met een verhaal’, Test-Aankoop.

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Sonia Decroix of the Dinant Tourist Office.
About myself and this book...

I am a self-employed electrician living in Sinaai, about half way between Ghent and Antwerp. In 2006, I picked up photography as a hobby. At that time, I also started exploring our little country, and I soon discovered that even lots of Belgians don’t know their way around the most beautiful sites in their own country.

I’ve started organising small group tours for photographers. The harbour route, the Dinant walks and the Lille walk all were used for these excursions. Meanwhile, I don’t organise these group tours anymore. Don’t ask why.

Because my Belgian and foreign friends often asked for advice on what to visit and where to look and what not to miss, I’ve started writing this book in 2010. This gave me a new chance to really get familiar with certain cities or regions like Ghent, Brugge, De Haan and the Westhoek, with the purpose of distilling a walk or tour that’s worth doing – the same thing I enjoyed when organising group excursions.

Other chapters were inspired by places I’ve visited before I started working on this book, places I’ll always remember, revisit and recommend.

About half of this book was written in the bath tub.

My other pastimes include restoring a couple of old Jaguars (a Mk II and a series 1 XJ6), restoring jukeboxes, playing with a band called De Blauwe Ridders (we rehearse a couple of times each year), writing concert and cd reviews for daMusic.be, reading, and of course walking, eating and drinking.

Feel free to contact me with any addition, remark or question you may have.