

# An Illustrated Tour through the Jewish Quarter in Antwerp



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In this article, I describe a tour through the Jewish quarter of Antwerp. Of course, you can only gain a small, not very profound impression. But you will be confronted with images that are unfamiliar to most of us and will give food for thought.

In this text you will only find a few introductory words on the issue of Jewish life in Antwerpen. If you would like to delve deeper into the subject during your stay, we recommend booking a guided tour. Most of the tours on offer are group tours in Dutch. Available in English is a tour organised by "With-locals". This can also be booked as an individual or small group. It is of course more expensive, but also more intensive. (see <https://www.withlocals.com/de/experience/die-judische-tour-in-antwerpen-0e7886ea/>).

The tour I am presenting here is approx. 5 kilometres long. You can expect it to take about 2 hours.

I hope that this text will help you to discover the Jewish quarter in Antwerp and that it will stimulate your interest in delving deeper into this topic.

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**If you like this information and the tour, I would be delighted if you would express your appreciation with a small contribution. You can use my paypal account**

**<https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/KlausFritsche>.**

**Thank you very much.**

## Antwerp: Jerusalem of the North

A special feature of Antwerp is the strong Jewish community in the city, which is closely linked to the diamond business. Antwerp has a total of around 20,000 Jewish citizens, making it one of the centres of Jewish life in Europe and is often referred to as the "Jerusalem of the North". A significant proportion of these are Orthodox Hasidic Jews.<sup>1</sup> Figures vary as to how large their share of the total Jewish population is. However, their traditional appearance on the streets, especially in the area around the main railway station, defines the image.



You will see numerous synagogues and prayer houses, Jewish schools as well as kosher shops and restaurants. Many residents speak Yiddish and Hebrew. Contact

with the non-Jewish neighbourhood is often limited, as life is very communal. But of course the Jewish community is not uniform in character, but is characterised by different faiths and world views. The article on the Jguide Europe website provides a brief overview (<https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/belgium/antwerp/>).

A more detailed overview can be found in the book "Jews in Antwerp" (also available as an ebook) by Ludo Abicht (Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2010), which is published in Dutch and German and on which the following explanations are largely based.

### Jews in Antwerp: a chronological overview<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish presence in Antwerp has been documented since the 13th century. These first Jews were Ashkenazi<sup>3</sup> from Eastern Europe. However, a larger Jewish community only emerged in the 16th century with the immigration of the Sephardim<sup>4</sup>, who were expelled from Spain and Portugal as a result of the Spanish inquisition. However, both groups differed not only in their regional origins, but also in numerous different rites.

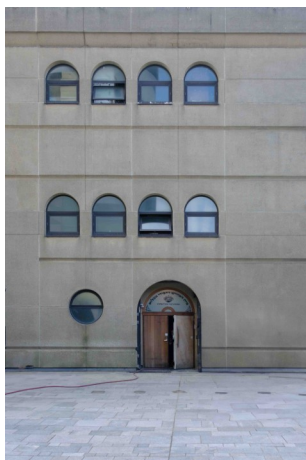
After ups and downs caused by the sometimes more liberal, sometimes more oppressive treatment of the Jewish population, a third wave of immigration from Eastern Europe began around 1880. In 1933, around 55,000 Jews lived in Antwerp, between 80-85% of whom worked in the diamond industry. The occupation of Belgium by Germany brought persecution and death to the Jewish population in Belgium from 1940 onwards. 25,634 of the 42,000 people registered as Jewish in Antwerp in 1940 were deported, only 1,244 returned (see in more detail :

<https://www.antwerpengedenkt.be/themen/la-persecution-des-juifs-pendant-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale>)

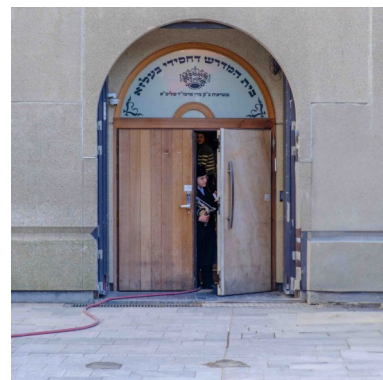
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- 1 Chassiden sind „(Von hebr. Chassid, pl. Chassidim: der/die Frommen): Bewegungen im Judentum, die eine besonders intensive Religiosität pflegen. In neuerer Ausprägung eine mystizistische geprägte orthodoxe Bewegung, die sich im 17./18. Jahrhundert in Osteuropa als Reaktion auf gewalttätige Pogrome herausbildete.“
  - 2 This account follows the aforementioned book by Ludo Abicht: Jüdisches Leben in Antwerpen, Munich 2010 (see the link above)
  - 3 Ashkenazim or Ashkenazi Jews are a Jewish ethnic group that originally came from the Holy Roman Empire and later immigrated to Eastern Europe. Today, Central, Northern and Eastern European Jews and their descendants describe themselves as 'Ashkenazi'.
  - 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardic\\_Jews](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardic_Jews)

Today, as already mentioned, around 20,000 Jews live in Antwerp. However, it is not surprising that anti-Semitism has also increased in Antwerp, despite the multicultural character of the city. That, too, is worthy of further comment.

## Suggestion for a tour



Start at Antwerpen-Centraal and then turn left into Pelikaanstraat along the main railway station. At the end of the station, walk through the subway into Lange Seitwärtstrat and turn right at the railway embankment into Van Entgegensprangt. You are heading straight for the Bet Midras synagogue. The school and the mikva (bathhouse) of the Belzer Hasidim are also located there.



The Van Spangenstraat then turns left. You then turn right into Van Immerseelstraat. There you will see the Benoth Jerusalem kindergarten and school, an orthodox primary school for girls that is part of the official education system. As with the synagogue, the surveillance of the surrounding area is striking. Images that are repeated throughout the tour.



Then turn left into Somersstraat, then right into Provinciestraat. At no. 206 you will find the Kleinblatt bakery, one of the best bakers and confectioners in the city according to those in the know. A refreshment and/or tasting is certainly recommended (<https://www.kleinblatt.be>).

Follow Provinciestraat to Van den Nestlei, at the end of which you will find the Romi Goldmütz Synagogue of the Sjomre Hadas community, built in 1927, in a white building at number 1.



Continue left into Oostenstraat. At no. 29 you will find the prayer and school building of the Eisenmann community. Continue on to no. 43, the large synagogue of the Machsike Hadass community. It was completed in 1918 and is notable for its oriental architectural style.





The route goes back along Oostenstraat to Van den Nestlei and turns left. After passing under the railway bridge, you will see the "Memorial to the Deported Citizens of Antwerp" on the other side of the road, which was inaugurated in 1997 (more at <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/memorialmuseum/denkmal-fur-die-deportierten-burger-antwerpens>).



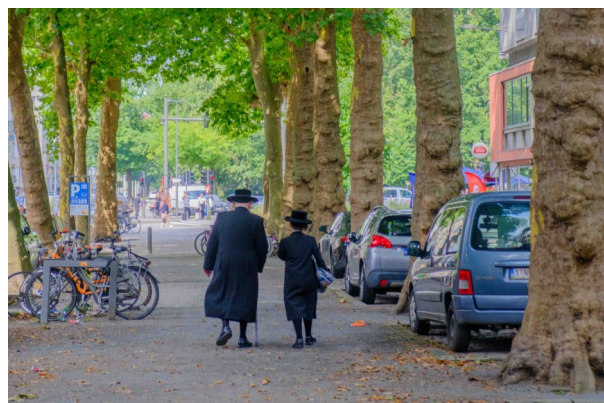
You will find the translation on p. 6.



100 metres further on in Belgielei you will find the bookshop "Judaica Plus" (Merkaz Judaica) on the right-hand side, where many other items - including ritual objects - are also sold.



You walk back towards Van den Nestlei and then turn left to enter Brialmontlei. At no. 48 is the prayer room and school of the Wisnitzer Hasidim, at no. 16 is the prayer room of the Lubavitcher Hasidim.



At the end of Brialmontlei, turn right into Quinten Matsylei, then right into Jacob Jacobs Straat. At no. 2 is the "Centrale voor Joodse liefdadigheid", at no. 6 is the building of the Hasidic Satmar community with prayer house and school, which is currently being renovated (August 2025).



Then turn left into Terlisstraat. The secretariat of the Jewish community, founded in 1832, is located at no. 35. A memorial plaque reminds us that people were rounded up in this building in 1942 for deportation to the camps.



The translation can be found on page 6.

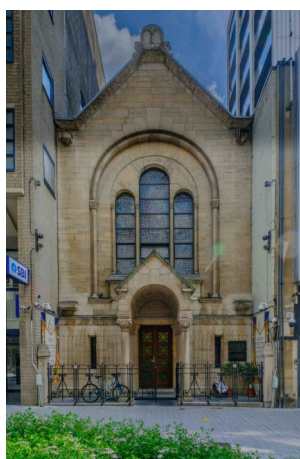


At the end of the street, turn right into Lange-Kievitstraat, a street with various shops. Right on the corner is the "Heimische Bakkerij", and at number 52 you will find the Hoffmann family's highly acclaimed kosher restaurant and grocery shop, Hoffs's Take Away (<https://hoffys.be/>). Booking is recommended.



Then walk back to Lange Herentalse-straat, then turn right into Schupstraat. You are now in the centre of the diamond district. Continue left into Hovenierstraat. The Portuguese Synagogue has been located there at no. 31 since 1898.

A memorial plaque commemorates the victims of a car bomb attack in 1981. As the service started at 9 a.m. instead of 10 a.m., "only" three non-Jewish passers-by were killed, many were injured.

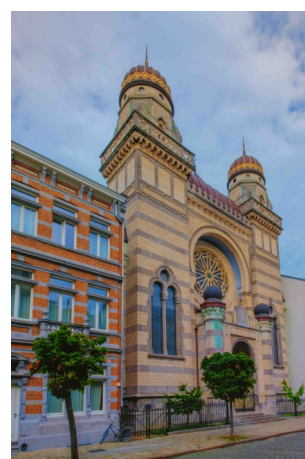


From there, continue along Pelikaanstraat and you will be back at the railway station. That concludes this tour.

## The Hollandse or Shomre Hadas Synagogue - in addition to the tour



Outside this Jewish quarter and therefore not on the tour is the Hollandse or Bouwmeester Synagogue, officially Shomre Hadas Synagogue, which was built in 1893 for the Jews who remained in Belgium after the



separation of Belgium from the Netherlands and later moved here from the Netherlands. However, it is well worth a detour.

## Translations of the memorial plaques from page 4

(left from Dutch, right from Hebrew)

The English translation is based on the German translation of the Dutch and Hebrew text.

### Tafel am Denkmal für die Deportierten Antwerpens

What we have heard and know and our fathers have told us, we will not hide from our children.	things we have heard and known things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation etc
Psalm 78	Psalm 78

### Gedenktafel am Haus der Israelitischen Gemeinde<sup>5</sup>

In memory of the Jewish citizens of the town who were brought to this building by the Nazis on Saturday 29 August 1942 for transport to the "Dossin barracks". From there they were deported to the concentration camps, where they met a terrible end. Dedicated on the eve of Rosh ha-Shana 2001 - 5.761.129.9.20001	Dedicated to the inhabitants of our town, men, women and small children, may the Eternal avenge their blood, who were driven out of their homes by the Germans on the night of Shabbat, 16 Elul (5)702, and who were brought to this house of learning by lorry.  On the same Shabbat they were taken to the "Dossin military camp" in the city of Mechelen and from there by goods train to the concentration camps in Poland, where they were tortured until they died.  Their souls were bound up in the bundle of life  Dedicated on the eve of New Year (5)761
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## Suggestion: A trip to Mechelen to the Holocaust memorial "Kazerne Dossin"

The Dossin Barracks in Mechelen, about 25 kilometres from Antwerp, mentioned in the Memorial Valley, is a unique Holocaust memorial site in Belgium. During the Nazi occupation in the Second World War, more than 25,000 Belgian and northern French Jews and gypsies were deported to Auschwitz from the barracks, which at the time functioned as the "SS Sammellager Mechelen". A new extension has just been added to the "Kazerne Dossin: Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights". It provides a link to the present day: The new museum focuses on current issues such as racism, marginalisation and human rights.

(<https://visit.mechelen.be/kazerne-dossin-8>)

Translated with support of [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version)

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<sup>5</sup> See in detail about the events in the building in a police report that has been found:  
<https://www.antwerpproject.com/museum/one-morning-in-the-synagogue-a-newly-discovered-police-report-about-the-raid-of-28-29-august-1942>