

RONSE city walking tour

Ronse: walking tour through the rich past of a textile town

Ronse will surprise you with its rich textile history, its architectural jewels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and its Romanesque crypt. This walking tour will take you on a journey through the history of Ronse. You will start with a mix of Art Deco buildings, a green park, a 15th-century motte and former textile buildings. This brochure will give you a quick overview of the various aspects of this walking tour. During your visit to the unique crypt of the Basilica of St. Hermes, you will learn all about the veneration of St. Hermes and his connection to mental illness. You will walk past Art Nouveau and Art Deco buildings until you reach the train station. There you will discover the remarkable history of that structure. After that, you will delve into the textile manufacturing of the past, with the Villa Portois and the narrow alleys between the workers' cottages. Meanwhile, we will tell you a bit more about Ronse's fool, Den Bluuten Pompier, the Bommels festival, the Fiertel procession ... in short, a highly varied discovery of this town in the Flemish Ardennes.



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- Distance: 3.5 km
- Departure and arrival points: Hoge Mote (Mouroitplein – De Biesestraat)
- Type of activity: city walking tour
- Surface: paved roads
- Relief: flat
- Wheelchair access: yes
- Route markers: none
- Route map on smartphone: <http://m.reisroutes.be/274>
- Ronse website: www.visitronse.be

Departure point of the walk

You can park **free** at the Portois parking lot (Oude Vesten – M. Portoisstraat, see map).

GPS coordinates: N 050°44'49.37" E 003°36'17.97"

Or park **free** at the Familia parking lot (Parking Familia is accessible via the Kegelkaai and Kruisstraat, see map)

GPS coordinates: N 050°44'59.48" E 003°35'53.71"

Yummy: The Ronse gastronomic map 2.0

Take a walk through Ronse that focuses on tasting, with the Gastronomic map 2.0. The walk through the 'De Vrijheid' neighbourhood will be seasoned to taste with five culinary hotspots. At each delicious hotspot, you can choose one eatery or drinking establishment. You can immediately recognize the gastronomic partners from the sticker on the window.

For sale at Visit Ronse at the Hoge Mote experience centre. More information via www.visitronse.be



Walking – cycling in the Flemish Ardennes

Ronse is situated in the Flemish Ardennes, as you will have noticed when you entered the town. The tourist office is of course the place to go for information about walking and bike routes across the whole of the Flemish Ardennes and the hills across the linguistic border (Pays des Collines). More information is available on their website www.visitronse.be.

Legend:  = route marker  = attraction

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Description of the route

1 You set out from the Mouroitplein, the square just across from the entrance to the Tourist Office. From there, cross the bridge to the Hoge Mote. As you leave the bridge next to the Hoge Mote, go left and continue to follow the water on the left, until you reach the Bruulpark. The first statue in the park is titled 'Spring'. On the left-hand side are the two departments of the Must textile museum. Continue walking towards the basilica, passing the statue of Stefaan-Modeste Glorieux. Walk toward the entrance to the St Hermes Basilica and Crypt, and you will find yourself on the Kleine Markt (small marketplace).

A Jean-Baptiste Mouroitplein

There are several typical Art Deco houses on this square. They were all built in red brick and make up a fine, harmonious whole. Yet no two houses are alike. Along this walking route, you will see more examples of Art Deco and Art Nouveau buildings. Farther along the walk, we will look in greater detail at the typical features of these architectural styles. If you would like to plunge in further, you can also take an Art Deco walk with a fun treasure hunt that you can download from reisroutes.be, or ask for your free copy from Visit Ronse at the Hoge Mote.



The statue in the middle of the square is the work of Rik Wouters (1913) and is named 'Huiselijke Zorgen' (domestic concerns). It is meant to represent the housewife's daily concerns. Rik Wouters' beloved Nel was his model.

B Hoge Mote (Tourist Office) and the 'Visitor and Experiential Centre' of the Flemish Ardennes

The Tourist Office is located in the Hoge Mote, in a brand new visitor and experiential centre for Ronse and the Flemish Ardennes.

In this modern tourist information centre, you can discover the treasures of Ronse and the region: the rolling landscape, the cult of St. Hermes, and the textile craftsmanship. The Hoge Mote already had three towers, and addition of a fourth has made the view complete! Be sure to take a look.

By means of interactive panels, audio recordings, film clips and virtual reality, visitors discover more about St. Hermes, the development of Ronse and its links with the textile industry, and of course about Flanders' finest landscape. The information is available in four languages. This historical site has, after restoration, become a jewel of the area's heritage that also incorporates a few surprisingly contemporary touches. **The site is open uninterruptedly from Monday to Sunday between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. during the tourist season. Check the opening hours at www.visitronse.be.**



A 'motte' is a simple defensive structure, built on a hill and generally surrounded by water. Ronse had nine of these. The Hoge Mote is the only surviving one. It is said to date from the 15th century and was modified several times. It served as a home for canons, a court of the justice of the peace and later as the home of a textile baron. He had his textile business Cambier-Robette built onto it. That factory now houses the Must textile museum.

The Must – Textile Museum

This part of the Must can only be visited with a guide. All the looms, about 40 in all, are in perfect condition. The guide will operate a few of them so that you can see the evolution of weaving over the years. Well worth a visit. There is a daily guided tour for individual visitors. For more information, check their website www.visitronse.be. Tickets to the museum are available for sale at the Tourist Office.



C Bruulpark

If you continue walking left in the park, you will see the statue titled 'Spring'. It is a memorial to local residents who died in the Second World War. The young woman symbolizes the Ronse residents who fled at the beginning of the war, including many women and children. It was spring at the time (May), and so the statue, by Jozef Cantré, was given the name 'Lente' (Spring).

A bit further along, you will see a striking building known as the 'Spaniards' Castle'. In the 17th century, Spanish soldiers were stationed here, tasked with chasing away the Protestants. During the 18th century, this was the deanery of the Chapter of St. Hermes. The last dean who lived here had rooms decorated in the Louis XV and Louis XVI styles, with a striking floral motif textile wall coverings dating from circa 1800. The historical building is closed for the moment.

www.virtueelronse.be/en

Take a virtual walk through the Spaniard's castle via www.virtueelronse.be. You can view not only this building, but all the major sights thanks to crystal-sharp 360° photos and 360° aerial images along with tourist information. 60 points of interest, in 4 languages!

Walk further towards the basilica and just before you reach the back side of the basilica, you will get to the statue of Modeste Glorieux. This bronze statue (1973) by Florent Devos honours Modeste Glorieux, a nineteenth-century priest. He looked after orphans and the poor and unemployed. He not only fed them but also provided them with training to be able to work in the textile industry. The school he founded still exists and bears his name.



D Crypt and basilica of St. Hermes

On 2 February 2019, the collegiate church was elevated to the status of 'Minor Basilica' or 'smaller basilica', an honorary title for a Roman Catholic church building with a special significance: the presence of relics of St Hermes (since 6 July 860) and the Fiertelommegang (Fiertel Procession) that has been held here since 1090, a procession with the relics throughout the city.

The monumental Romanesque crypt (1089) is without a doubt the architectural jewel in the city. The essential elements, such as the hidden burial chamber, the water well and the baths for the mentally ill are still visible. In the crypt, a pilgrim could pray for healing with the intercession of St Hermes.



Since 2020, there has been considerable activity in and around the basilica. The entire site has undergone a serious makeover, and the last phase of the restoration will begin in 2023. During the works, a part of St Hermes' Basilica will remain open to visitors. Stop and admire the shrine holding the relics of the patron saint, Hermes, in the southern St Hermes chapel next to the high altar. Above the reliquary is a life-sized equestrian statue of St Hermes. The most remarkable feature is the wooden plank with hooks. You can see it if you stand with your back to the reliquary. People suffering from mental illness were attached to it overnight, after bathing in the crypt, in the presence of the reliquary of St Hermes.



The basilica's St Colette chapel was the original entrance to the crypt. In future, individual visitors will be able to discover the crypt and the basilica on their own thanks to the new scenography and digital applications.

'Onze Vrijheid' City Tour

Would you like to visit the crypt and basilica during de restoration? No problem! Visit Ronse offers a guided City Tour: 'Onze Vrijheid' Information and reservations via Visit Ronse: T 055/23.28.16 – toerisme@ronse.be – www.visitronse.be .

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Fiertel procession

You are now on the Kleine Markt, where early in the morning on the first Sunday after Pentecost, you will hear the call to gather. That is when the Fiertelommegang (Fiertel Procession) takes place. This is a 32.6 km pilgrim route that takes you all around Ronse. The pilgrimage is intended to heal and protect the participants and residents of Ronse from mental illness. It is led by the bellman, followed by the reliquary shrine of St Hermes carried by four people.

The reason? Very simple: to be admitted as a pilgrim to the crypt, you had to have walked at least one day to reach Ronse. The residents of Ronse lived too close, however. And so they held a procession of 32.6 km around their city.

When you leave the basilica, you will see on the right the marvellous statue of the bellman. The statue evokes the Fiertel Procession. He is the person who leads the procession and announces the arrival of the reliquary of St Hermes.

2

As you leave the St. Hermes Basilica, on the left you come to a little park, known as the Albert park. Notice the statue of the 'Belleman' (town crier) and behind it, the war monument 'Den Bluuten Pompier' (so named because of the scantily dressed flag-bearer) and the tower of the old St. Martin's church. Then return to the front of the basilica. With your back to the basilica, continue straight via the Kleine Markt and then turn left onto the wider street (Wijnstraat). From there, continue walking until you reach the Rooseveltplaats with the fountain. Now you have reached point 3.

E 'Den Bluuten Pompier' and the former St. Martin's church

In the Albert park there is also a monument to those who died in the First World War. It is an example of the artistic style of its period, which was known as the 'fireman's style' because the art works usually featured many helmets. Its erection in 1923 was met with considerable criticism, because the flag-bearer was represented half naked. This earned the monument the nickname of 'Den Bluuten Pompier' (the naked fireman), alluding to the 'fireman' artistic style.

Here you can also see a second church tower. This is a remnant of the former St. Martin's church. The new (end of the 19th century) church stands a bit further on, and is also included in this walking tour. The nave of the old church has been given a new function. It has long ceased to be used for religious services and has served as a cinema, a sawmill and a garage.



Until one day a Ronse patron could no longer bear to see it fall into ruin, and turned it into a place for foodies. In March 2015, he opened his **Passage** here. The beautifully renovated 15th-century building now is a centre for food and drink. More info is available on www.depassageronse.be.

When you leave the Passage, you will see on the right the 17th-century gravedigger's house. The step gable was added on later. On the other side of the street, where the Albertpark is now located, was the site of the first cemetery.

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F Art Nouveau in Ronse

Thanks to the textile industry, Ronse experienced great prosperity from the end of the 19th century until the mid-20th century. The textile barons built grand villas and townhouses. Those of course followed the latest trends and styles. From 1880 until the First World War, Art Nouveau set the tone in the architecture of the prosperous classes. You can see that in particular in the Wijnstraat. The large townhouse at number 8 and 10 comprises typical Art Nouveau elements: decorative painted tiles in faience. They show symbols linked to trade and industry. At the end of the walk you will see more examples of Art Nouveau. Other characteristics of Art Nouveau are the abandonment of symmetry, the use of large plate glass windows and colourful, decorative ornaments. Victor Horta was the founder of this style of architecture. After some 30 years, this architectural style gave way to Art Deco, of which we will also see several fine examples further on along this walk.



3 'The Dancing stones on the water'

This has been a central spot in Ronse since time immemorial. It was a crossroads of trade routes that brought travellers to Ath, Saint-Sauveur, Oudenaarde and Ghent. This square therefore also served as a market, and on the spot where the fountain is located was a basin where horses could drink. This is why this place is known to Ronse residents as the 'pond'. In this artwork, Christian Tobin wanted to bring together water and the past.

Continue your walk by taking the first street to the right after the fountain (Hoogstraat) and then the first street to the left and keep immediately to the left (Forstierlaan). Continue walking until you reach the Charles de Gaullestraat (see info panel). Now you have reached point 4.



Art Deco in Ronse

In the period between the two world wars, Art Deco made its appearance. Straight lines, no excessive decoration, exclusive and durable materials in a combination of cement and brick. In the Forstierlaan, at numbers 55-53, 50 and 42 there are several houses that feature Art Deco elements.

4

Would you like to see the finest example of Art Deco in Ronse? Then keep following the route and keep walking straight ahead (Gefusilleerdenlaan). Have you had enough of architecture? Then go left into the Charles de Gaullestraat and at the end of the street, turn right (Stationsstraat) until you reach the statue and fountain in front of the train station. Now you have reached point 5.

Architecture lovers should keep walking along the Gefusilleerdenlaan. At the large intersection, cross the concrete bridge. The bridge dates from 1920 and was one of the first concrete structures in Belgium. Around 150 metres further in the Saint-Sauveurstraat, to your left you will see the finest example of Art Deco architecture. The house features some of the typical elements of Art Deco: the stairwell, straight lines, cement combined with brick and a lot of glass.

Now walk back and cross the bridge to the right (Oudstrijderslaan) and you will come to the train station and the fountain with the 'Ronsiese zot' (Ronse's fool), point 5 on the map.



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Station

The railway station neighbourhood will be completely renovated in the coming years. It is based on an ambitious concept study.

Would you like to see the front of the station building? Then go to the platforms, because the square before the station is actually the back. The station comes from Bruges (on 't Zand square next to the Concertgebouw) and was the first train station (1841) in Belgium. When the Bruges station became too small and Ronse urgently needed one, the Bruges station was taken down stone by stone and rebuilt here (1881). It was restored in 1989 and 2001. The railway line now links Ronse with Ghent, but in the past it used to continue on into Wallonia.



Ronsiese Zot and the Bommels festival

The statue on the station square is the symbol of the Bommels festival, the earliest carnival in Belgium. The Bommels festival takes place during the first weekend after Epiphany and lasts three days. Ronse residents really go crazy then. Disguised so they are unrecognizable, they can make fun of neighbours, relatives and friends.

It doesn't matter if they act a bit of the fool during this period, as their patron saint St. Hermes watches over them. While initially the festival took place at several spots in town and even in the basilica, after the Second World War the 'bommels' (people in disguise) gathered together in a procession. The procession takes place on the evening of Saturday after Epiphany. Information about the Bommels festival is available on www.bommelsfeesten.be.

5

With your back to the station, turn right (IJzerstraat) and keep walking until the roundabout. There you can see a fine example of the rich textile history of the town: the Villa Portois. At this roundabout, go left into the Zuidstraat. Around 150 metres further, go past the house with green faience tiles and enter the gate to the right. This little passage leads to one of the workers' alleys: the Barasteegje.

Villa Portois

This villa is in a district that was built at the end of the 19th century at the same time as the new St. Martin's church we will be visiting later. It was the stately home of a textile baron. Until 1963 the textile factory was right behind the house. The building has now been beautifully restored and houses the 'Villa Portois bar', an event location in Ronse.

H The textile industry in Ronse and the workers' alleys

The textile industry has been present in Ronse since the 13th century and the town became an important centre for the cloth industry. Ronse was burned to the ground twice over the centuries, and survived the Eighty Years' War. When Belgium was founded in the early 19th century, more than half its population worked in the textile industry. After a brief dip, the industry once again saw explosive growth starting in 1870.

After the Second World War, the industry declined, but Ronse has remained a city of textiles, a sector that continues to employ a significant portion of the local population.

There are numerous visual reminders of the textile industry throughout the city's landscape: in addition to the many attractive houses, Ronse still has some alleys that once housed the textile manufactures.



When the textile industry was at its height, Ronse had trouble housing all its residents. So cottages were built in the gardens of existing homes. They were linked to the street via a narrow path and a gate. In the alleys there was only one toilet for all the residents, and often there was only one spot with running water as well. You will soon reach the Barasteegje, the finest of the city. At the end of the walk you can pop into the Willocqsteegje as well.

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6 As you emerge from the Barasteegje, go straight towards St. Martin's church. The entrance is on the side. At the front of the church is a war monument. When you leave the church by the side, continue straight in the Ch. Vandendoorenstraat. Keep walking along this street and a bit further on you will see a passageway to the Willocqsteegje. At the intersection, go straight on and you will reach the Grote Markt (large market) with the town hall right in front of you, to your right the obelisk, and the Brasserie Harmonie next to the town hall.

I St. Martin's church

Remember the Old St Martin's Church, located in the historical centre known as 'De Vrijheid', south of St Hermes' Basilica? At the end of the 19th century, it had become too small and dilapidated. Encouraged by the Catholic mayor at the time, Ephrem De Malander, and thanks to the sponsorship of the newly rich and influential families of textile industrialists, the new St Martin's Church was built here, in the heart of the new residential neighbourhood.

This purely neo-Gothic building, based on plans by the renowned architect Modeste De Noyette, contains exceptionally beautiful stained-glass windows. Be sure to take a look inside – **it's open every day from 10 am to 5 pm.**

J Grote Markt

In front of you is the town hall, built in the 1950s. Only the pillars remind us of the former town hall. On the other side of the market you can see the obelisk. It has been there since 1812 and was the first public fountain. When it was built, it also featured a throne with the letter 'W' for William I, king of the Netherlands.



Listed pubs

Next to the city hall, you can see the Brasserie Harmonie, one of the two listed cafés on the Grote Markt square. On the other side is the other one, the Local Unique café. The interiors of the two cafés are very well preserved and date from the beginning of the 20th century. It attests to the 'savoir vivre' of the Ronse elites of the period. For the walls, for example, they commissioned remarkable faience tile images, the designs for which were made by Bosch Frères in La Louvière, which was the centre of glazed tiles in Belgium at the time. Both cafés are now heritage listed properties, so if you go and have a pint there, you are also soaking in culture.

7 At the obelisk, turn left into the Hospitaalstraat, and you will be back at the Tourist Office, the point of departure of this walk.



Made a nice picture during this walk?

Share your photos on social media and use the hashtags: #ronse, #visitronse, #indevlaamseardennen

