

## The cultural profile of Liège

The city of Liege is proud of its prestigious past. Being the capital of an episcopal principality whose history goes back as long as a thousand years, until the French revolution, the city of Liege had reached a status which at the end of the Ancien Regime was almost the equivalent of a real independence. The city has maintained from this old history some characteristics that have given the city of Liege its specific identity.

Seat of a diocese - together with Tournai the oldest one in Belgium – the city has had its own public university since 1817, initially established in the city centre, but over the last few decades it also has had a campus on the outskirts (le Sart-Timan). The university is active in all disciplines, but it has especially contributed to knowledge and technological innovations closely related to the industrial revolution in which the Liege region was one of the first to develop. The British industrialist John Cockerill, active in the first part of the 19th century, gave his name to the region's main company in the steel industry. The region has recently been restructured under its new name Arcelor.

Liege has always been home to strong pro-French feelings. The 14<sup>th</sup> of July is celebrated as a bona fide national holiday. The title of a novel by count Henry de Carton de Wiart, *La Cité ardente* (1905), describes the city with little empathy while indicating the characteristics one recognises in its population and that can also be observed in a particularly vivid folklore whose main character is the puppet Tchanchtès, symbol of the "esprit frondeur", the rebel nature of the Liege population. Every year this character illustrates the celebrations of the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

The history characterised by important political and social tensions has made its mark on the cultural life of Liege and its environs.

There are numerous and diverse activities in Liege in all artistic areas.

The Royal Opera of Wallonia has a very diverse programme. This is also the case for other theatres, orchestras and performances too numerous to provide a complete list here.

Like other urban centres in Belgium, Liege has undergone renovations that were sometimes late, sometimes severe. Place Saint-Lambert, home of the old cathedral until the French Revolution, has not escaped and has been a building-site for years.

The most famous person born in Liege is without doubt the writer Georges Simenon, creator of the character Inspector Maigret and author of a rich collection of novels that has been translated into numerous languages. Although he only spent his childhood and his youth in Liege, the atmosphere of his native town has put its stamp on an important part of his literary work.

The cultural life isn't limited to the city centre. This is why Seraing, the industrial town situated in the meridian part of the agglomeration and main site of Cockerill-Arcelor, is nowadays internationally well-known as the site where the movie directors Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne filmed there masterpieces, emblems of the social difficulties with which the region of Liege is faced because of the industrial structures going out of date.

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