



Under a summer sky

BELGIUM On a driving holiday, RISHAD SAAM MEHTA takes in the charms of a quaint countryside, grassy knolls and a bit of World War II history

SWEEPING VISTA Bruges PHOTO: RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

getaway

The day broke cover topped with a sky that was the blue of a robin's egg. And, a quick check of the weather forecast indicated that Belgium was going to have a weekend that was all about sunny skies and days with temperatures in the mid-twenties. In Nijmegen, the Netherlands, where I was staying with friends, a plan quickly formed.

I had the Skoda Yeti parked downstairs. A lovely travel car and such lovely weather together was a shame to waste, so we soon got packing. In went the tents, the pots and pans, the portable barbecue, stove, sleeping bags, camp chairs and a portable fridge.

Houffalize that lies in the Belgian Ardennes is about 250 km south of Nijmegen. We headed out on the motorway for the 150 km or so and then swung off the motorway once we crossed into Belgium.

Scenic roads

Smaller roads are so much more scenic. Houffalize is one of the main towns in a national park called Parc Naturel des 2 Ourthes. There are many campsites in the region and since it is so close to The Netherlands and the terrain is so different, a lot of Dutch people holiday here.

The campsites were all quite busy. But we found a very char-

ming one 12 km west of Houffalize on the N860 on the banks of the river Bressol.

We set about pitching our tent on a lovely grassy knoll. Other friends who'd left from Eindhoven soon arrived, and we realised that we'd need a lot more food than we were carrying. So, I drove to Houffalize

along with Cathelijne and bought stuff from a convenience store. We came back to tents that were standing and camp tables and chairs set up with coffee on the boil.

The next day, we went exploring La-Roche-en-Ardenne. A typical Ardennes village, it was full of streetside cafés, souvenir

shops and bakers and butchers. Since this is the other main access point to the national park, campers come here to buy supplies, and butchers have an entire section of produce that is meant for barbecues.

La Roche was where the Battle of the Bulge took place happened — the last serious German offensive to push the Allies back into the English Channel, and The La Roche Museum of the Battle of the Ardennes, which is in the centre of town, gives a good insight into the battle, and on display are weapons, equipment and other paraphernalia.

That was a day well spent walking around the charming town, driving through lovely lit-

tle country roads in the Yeti. The drives around the Ardennes are superbly scenic. As far as the eye can see are rolling hills peppered with cultivated fields and little homesteads.

We headed towards Bruges, in West Belgium's Flemish region, the next day. Our 280 km-route took us past Bastogne and Brussels.

Setting up camp

We found a camping site called Camp Memling (www.vweb.be) on the outskirts of Bruges, and once we'd set up camp, headed out by local bus that took about 12 minutes to the centre of town.

Bruges is beautiful; though some might find it too touristy, with its horse-drawn carriages present to take tourists for a ride, and its street-side cafes that border two sides of the main centre square.

And, since it was yet again such a lovely day the city was packed to its gills. Little motor launches took tourists for rides down the canals while other visitors sampled the famed Belgian waffles. These are really, really good. Chewy like toffee on the outside and creamy like custard on the inside and topped with cream and caramel.

Those three days were a lovely break, almost a holiday within a holiday.

