

Belgium for volunteers



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Introduction about Belgium

It has come to my attention that people are often confused about Belgium. A popular conspiracy theory even states that Belgium doesn't exist at all. Some others people may also think that going to Belgium is not a very exciting trip. Well, they are wrong! Belgium has a lot of surprises in stock. The extent of its wealth on such a small territory will surprise many people. Yes, Belgium is a flat country but its relief is none other than the one its inhabitants give the country. Belgians are warm, welcoming and fun.

Many foreigners believe that Belgium is a land of chips and mussels. This is a false idea as you will realize as soon as you set foot in Belgium. We do not have mountains or much coast but our artistic and cultural wealth is breath taking with many historic towns, gothic churches, museums and a wonderful nature encouraging cyclists and walkers, markets and many festivals. Belgians love partying: they will party at every opportunity.

Reading through these pages, our compilation of books and web sites, you will discover many aspects of Belgium. It is a small country but is rich in curiosities.



// Discovery of Belgium

Brief history of Belgium

When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, the people he found living in present-day Belgium were the Belgae, one of various Celtic Tribes of early Gaul. The Romans called their new province Gallia Belgica. The country has been ruled over the centuries by England and France but on 20 January 1831, Belgium was finally granted independence. His first king Leopold of Saxe-Coburg contribute to the economically and culturally development of Belgium.

After World War II, Brussels took on a leading role as co-founder of the European Community and became the capital of what is now called the European Union (EU). It is also the headquarters of the NATO. In 1957 Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg founded the Benelux Union.

The Kingdom of Belgium

Boarding the North Sea in Western Europe Belgium is a small country with a central position. This crossing point country is about 30 528 square meters for a population of 10 666 866 people and the capital is Brussels.

One of the Europe founding members... This federal parliamentary monarchy has something to deal with the number 3...

- 3 communities: The Flemish community, the French community and the German speaking community.
- 3 regions: The Flemish region, The Wallonia region and the bilingual Brussels Capital region.
- 3 languages: Flemish, French and German.

Moreover the country is also cut in 10 provinces (West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg, Liège, Luxemburg, Namur, Hainaut, Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant)

Well, even though it seems sometimes complicated, it's being part of the beauties of Belgium!



Our three official languages

First you have Flemish in the Northern part of the country which has similarities with Dutch.

In the Southern part, Belgians speak French.

In a small Eastern part close to the German border, the language is German.

A particularity is that the Brussels Region is bilingual (French and Flemish).

Basics in our languages...

ENGLISH	FLEMISH	FRENCH	GERMAN
Yes / No	Ja / Nee	Oui / Non	Ja / Nein
Please	Alsjeblieft	S'il vous plait	Bitte
Thanks	Dank u	Merci	Danke
You're welcome	Graag gedaan	Il n'y a pas de quoi	Gern geschehen
Here is/are	Hier is	Voici	Hier ist/sind
Good morning / Good evening / Good night	Goede morgen / goede avond / goede nacht	Bonjour / Bonsoir / Bonne nuit	Guten Morgen / Guten Abend / Gute Nacht
Good bye	Tot ziens	Au revoir	Auf Wiedersehen
How are you ?	Hoe gaat het ?	Comment allez-vous ?	Wie geht es Ihnen ?
Excuse me	Excuseer	Excusez-moi	Entschuldigen Sie mich
Do you speak English ?	Spreekt u engels ?	Est-ce que vous parlez anglais ?	Sprechen Sie Englisch ?
Can you help me ?	Kan je me helpen ?	Est-ce que vous pouvez m'aider ?	Können Sie mir helfen?
I don't understand	Ik begrijp het niet	Je ne comprends pas	Ich verstehe nicht
I don't know	Ik weet het niet	Je ne sais pas	Ich weiß nicht
Can you write it down ?	Kan u het opschrijven ?	Est-ce que vous pouvez l'écrire ?	Können Sie es aufschreiben ?
Sorry	Sorry	Désolé	Entschuldigung
Where ? / When ? / How ? / Why ? / Who ?	Waar ? / Wanneer ? / Hoe ? / Waarom ? / Wie ?	Où / Quand ? / Comment ? / Pourquoi ? / Qui ?	Wo ? / Wann ? / Wie ? / Warum ? / Wer ?
How much ? / How many ?	Hoeveel ?	Combien ?	Wie viel ? / Wie viele ?
I would like	Ik zou graag	Je voudrais	Ich möchte

Our climate

So Belgium has the reputation among its people to be a rainy country. Well let's moderate this a little bit.

The country due to its location has a temperate oceanic climate. So of course 4 seasons. Generally speaking about temperature there are no differences between south and north eventhough the southern part can be a bit colder in winter while the northern one (boarding the coast) hotter in summer.

Here are the average temperatures for the country:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min	0,7°	0,6°	2,9°	4,8°	8,9°	11,5°	13,6°	13,3°	10,8°	7,6°	3,7°	2,0°
Max	5,6°	6,4°	9,9°	13,2°	17,7°	20,0°	22,3°	22,5°	18,7°	14,4°	9,1°	6,5°

- Average number of rainy days: 135,7 days per year.
- Average sunshine hours: 1506.4 hours per year.

Who we are

In summary we can say that Belgian people are really friendly, party-being and have a great sense of hospitality so they will certainly share this personality with you.

We know we're living in this strange small country surrounded by political disputes between the communities. But well, politics is not the way citizens are and fortunately we know about us and can make jokes about ourselves. The sense of humor and self-mockery is then one of our strength we can say. Typical Belgian stuff are the "Belgian compromise" which our peaceful method to settle the disputes, and the "brick in the belly" as we invest heavily in homes building and restauration.

The way we live

So now you might want to know what you can do or not when you are with people.

There are not so much rules actually. If you want to say hello you have the choice between shaking hands or giving one kiss on the cheek. It all depends on how well the feeling is going between you and the other people.

Belgian jokes are not that funny to us.... ;)

It's considered a bad thing to spit on the streets even though sometimes it happens!

Queuing is not really of our concern even if people are respectful. Just make your way.

Lunch is between 12 and 1 pm, dinner time is around 7 and 8 pm.

If you're invited to a house, it's generally considered that you bring flower to the lady of the house.

For the rest, don't worry you're in Belgium keep in mind to act like us: adaptation, party, relax, humor and no pride... it should do!

Traditions / Legends

Like every other country, Belgium has a lot of traditions and legends but most of them vary from city to city. There are some however who are typical for all of Belgium.

Sinterklaas or St-Nicolas

In Belgium, December 6th is dedicated to the so-called *Sint-Nicolas* [Dutch: *Sinterklaas* or French: *St-Nicholas*], a saint and bishop who lived during the third century A.C. The legend is that Sint-Nicolas lives in Spain and comes to Belgium and Holland ones a year by ship to reward all children with gifts and candy. On the evening of December 5, *Sinterklaas* brings presents to every child that has been good in the past year. There for he drives the rooftops on a white horse and his black helpers throw the gifts down the chimneys (which is why they are black). This event is even broadcasted on TV and adult people will claim to their children that this guy actually brings the presents! Adults like to give each other big size chocolate letters and speculoos as typical Sinterklaas candy.



More about St. Nicholas on:

<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=23>

Ice cream cars

In Belgium, you don't have to go to a store to buy an ice cream. There are cars driving around in the streets, most of the time they play music (a children's tune) or ring a bell. When you hear the sound (normally every day around the same time, because they do a tour) you go outside and buy an ice cream. Yummie!

Friet kot

What Belgians call a 'frietkot' is a place in the streets where you can buy fries. For Belgians, that's the only place where you can eat really good Belgian fries. So don't think you can taste this at McDonalds!

National Pride

Belgium is the center of Europe, but ironically, modesty is by far Belgium's national pride! For example: Did you know French Fries are actually Belgian Fries? Yes sir! We invented Fries, and we even named our biggest mountain after it: Baraque Fraiture. (A frituur/frietkot is a little place in the streets where they sell French Fries,... only in Belgium baby!)

Belgians love to drink and to eat and are in fact very good at it. What do you drink with some Belgian Fries? One of our famous Beers off course! Discover them on: <http://www.belgian-beer.net/> and <http://www.beerparadise.be/>

And afterward you have to eat Belgian Chocolate, the best in the world.

TIP: Just buy chocolate in normal shops, that is way cheaper!

Our famous people

The [saxophone](#) was invented by Adolphe Sax (1841), Zénobe Gramme invented the [Gramme dynamo](#) (1871), Jean Joseph Etienne Lenoir developed the first [internal combustion engine](#) (1859), Professor Edward J. de Smedt was the inventor of the modern road [asphalt](#) (1870), Charles Van Depoele invented the [electric railway](#) (1883) and Georges Lemaitre provided us with the [Big Bang](#) theory (1927).

For the moment Belgians are very proud of their female tennis players. Some other people Belgians are proud of Eddy Merckx (he won the tour the France 5 times!), Father Damien a.k.a Blessed Damien of Molokai, Jacques Brel (a famous artist!) and Manneke Pis... Oh wait, that is just a statue of a little guy pissing in Brussels.

Our singers

The greatest Belgian chansonnier was Jacques Brel, whose classic songs have been covered by several international artists such as David Bowie and Frank Sinatra. Others like Salvatore Adamo, Maurane, Axelle Red and Lara Fabian have also enjoyed some success in other French-speaking countries.

Our food

✓ *Our beers*

We offer one of the most diverse national collections of quality beer in the world. Beer varies from the popular [pale lager](#) to [lambic](#) beer and [Flemish red](#). [Belgian](#) beer-brewing's origins go back to the [Middle Ages](#). There are approximately 125 [breweries](#) in the country, ranging from international giants to microbreweries. In Europe, only Germany, France and the United Kingdom are home to more breweries. Belgian breweries produce about 800 standard beers. When special one-off beers are included, the total number of Belgian beers is approximately 8700. Belgians drink 93 liters of beer a year on average



✓ *Belgian Chocolate*

Probably one of our most famous products is Belgian chocolate. From the beginning of its history in Belgium, the chocolate was considered as a gift. In 1912, the Belgian confectionery created the "praline", a filled chocolate mouthful which perfectly complied with its gift vocation. To protect the delicate nature of the "praline", an adequate packaging has been patented under the name of "Ballotin". Since that time the "Ballotin de pralines" became the perfect gift appreciated in all circumstances. When visiting Bruges and Brussels's center, in between all the lace shops, you'll find a lot of small shops making chocolate by hand with original tools. These pralines are often tiny pieces of art and you'll have to pay for them accordingly.



✓ **Belgian Waffles**

Brussels waffles are prepared with a yeast-leavened batter. It is generally, but not always, lighter, thicker, and crispier and has larger pockets compared to other waffle varieties. They are easy to differentiate from Liège Waffles by their rectangular sides. In Belgium, most waffles are served warm by street vendors and dusted with confectioner's sugar though in tourist areas they might be topped with whipped cream, soft fruit or chocolate spread (a practice considered 'unauthentic' by some local connoisseurs). In America, they are served in the same ways the American waffle is served. Despite their name, 'Brussels waffles' were actually invented in Ghent in 1839. They were introduced to America by restaurateur Maurice Vermeersch, who sold his Brussels waffles under the name "Bel-Gem Waffles" at New York's 1964 World's Fair.



Liège waffle (from the city of Liège, in eastern Belgium) is a richer, denser, sweeter, and chewier waffle. Invented by the chef of the prince-bishop of Liège in the 18th century as an adaptation of brioche bread dough, it features chunks of pearl sugar, which caramelizes on the outside of the waffle when baked. It is the most common type of waffle available in Belgium and is prepared in plain, vanilla and cinnamon varieties by street vendors across the nation.

✓ **French fries**

What little people know is that French fries are actually from Belgium. The name comes from "frenched" which means "thinly sliced". When British and American soldiers tasted them in Belgium during World War I, they called them "French" as this was the official language of the Belgian army at that time and "fries" as they are fried when preparing them.

Belgium is also known for its cheese, chicory (endive), sprouts and some other items...



II/ Discovery of Belgium

Cash and credit cards

Euro is the currency in use in Belgium as most of the European countries.

So this is what you need to pay cash. But in most of the shops credit cards are accepted as well and logically it's written at the entrance of the store you want to go in.

ATM's

In the case credit cards are not accepted, you will need to go to a money machine. It's called in Belgium "Bankcontact - Mister Cash". They are usually located next to banks and post offices.

Changing money

If you have a foreign currency you want to change, it's also possible. You can do that in banks and in some exchange offices. Generally it's more expensive to do so in the exchange office. And sometimes it might be more interesting to just go to an ATM.

Cost of living

So how much does it cost then? Some examples average prices in September 2009:

Supermarket: groceries and beverages

- * Bread (800 g) ~ € 2
- * Milk (1l) ~ € 0,70
- * Apples (1kg) ~ € 1,60
- * Emmentaler cheese (100g) ~ € 0,75
- * Yoghurt, plain (1l) ~ € 0,85
- * Chocolate (100g) ~ € 0,85
- * Pack of biscuits ~ € 1,20
- * Sugar (1kg) ~ € 1
- * Mineral water (1,5l) ~ € 0,75
- * Apple juice (1l) ~ € 1
- * Bottle of beer (0,5l) ~ € 0,75
- * Pack of chewing gum ~ € 0,80



Eating out:

- * Sandwich ~ € 3,-
- * Bowl of soup ~ € 3,50
- * Main dish ~ € 14,-
- * Big Mac ~ € 2,99
- * Glass of coke ~ € 1,80
- * Cup of coffee ~ € 1,80

- * Glass of beer (0,3l) ~ € 1,80

Going out:

- * Cinema ticket ~ € 7,50
- * Concert ticket (no international mega sellers!) ~ € 18,-
- * Entrance fee for a club ~ € 9,-

Transport:

- * Metro / tram / bus ticket (single) ~ €1,80, (5 trips) ~ € 7.30, (10 trips) ~ € 11,20, (One day) ~ € 4,20, (three days) ~ €9,20
- * Go-pass(10 train tickets for people under 26) € 50
- * Railpass (10 train tickets for people older than 26) € 74
- * Collecto (is an available collective service of taxi 7 days of 7 between 11 pm and 6 am on all territory of the Region of Brussels-capital) 6€ per person by itinerary.
- * Taxi € 2,70 (basic fee) + min. € 1,60/km
- * Petrol (1l) ~ € 1,38

Renting a place:

- * Rent for a room ~ € 300 (of course depending on the place, facilities etc.)

Various other things:

- * Daily newspaper ~ € 1
- * Music CD ~ € 14
- * Deodorant ~ € 2,50
- * Haircut (cut only!) ~ € 35,- for girls, ~ € 18,- for boys

Do you need a Visa to come to Belgium?

As it all depends from where you're from, how long and why you're staying in the country, this question can be answered just by clicking here:

- <http://www.diplomatie.be/en/travel/visa/default.asp>

To get your Visa, you will need some [documents](#).

To apply for a Visa, you have to go to the Belgian embassy or consulate in your country. If there aren't any, you have to check which one is responsible for your country.

How can you come to Belgium?

You have the choice that usually depends from where you're coming from.

By Car

Belgium has always been a crossroad, so as the road network is well developed; it's easy to come to Belgium from all the bordering countries via the motorways. You have then several possibilities through the main European motorways:

- E17 Belgium - France
- E19 Netherlands - Belgium - France

- E25 Netherlands - Belgium - Luxembourg - France
- E34 Belgium - Netherlands - Germany
- E40 France - Belgium - Germany
- E42 France - Belgium - Germany
- E411 Belgium - Luxembourg
- E314 Belgium - Netherlands
- Don't forget that the speed-limit on the motorways is 120 km/h, 50km/h on built-up areas and 70 km/h or 90km/h outside of the built-up areas.

By Bus

You want to come by bus? No problem, [Eurolines](#) is the leading bus traveling society in Europe. It covers 34 countries and so Belgium. For example a one way ticket from Barcelona to Brussels costs 108 €.

By Train

You can come by train from all the European countries using TGV (High Velocity Trains), Thalys, Eurostar (from England) or classic international trains. For more information (schedules, prices, booking online) go to the national train society website [SNCB – NMBS](#). Get more information on :

http://www.servicevolontaire.org/international/billet_avion_solidaire.php?menu_selected=68&sub_menu_selected=226&language=FR

By Plane

In Belgium, there's one national airport and four regional ones.

- **Brussels Airport**
There's a station at the sublevel -1 at the airport (called "Brussels National airport") with 4 trains/hour, so to get there is really easy. You also have the possibility to arrive on a bus until 11pm with the ["STIB"](#) or ["De Lijn"](#) and we invite you to go to their respective website for more information.
- **Antwerp Airport**
To get there with public transport you can take a ticket to the railway station Antwerpen-Berchem which is really near from the airport. The Bus "De Lijn" n° 14 will take you from Antwerpen-Berchem station to the airport in 10 minutes.
- **Ostend-Bruges International Airport** : To arrive at this airport is also quite simple, you take the train to Ostend, and there get on the bus ["De Lijn"](#) n° 6 "Raversijde via Luchthaven".
- **Brussels South - Charleroi Airport** (low cost airport)
The official shuttle service between Brussels and Brussels South -Charleroi airport is organized by voyages l'Elan (a single ticket costs 13 € and a return one is 22 €). But if you want to go by public transportation, ask in any railway station the "C61 - Charleroi airport ticket" : the price will also include the bus transfer from the railway station to the airport.

- **Liège Airport** : In train you have to stop in "Liège-Guillemins" and then take the "TEC" bus n° 53 headig "Jemeppe".

You will find more information about planes on:

www.avion.servicevolontaire.org

By Boat

There are two sea harbours that welcome travelers in Belgium mainly from Great Britain.

[Ostende Zeebrugge](#).

Public Transport

Public transport is divided in two categories: One is organized by the national level and the other by the regional one. **National level** Trains are managed by [SNCB - NMBS](#) for a national level. The railway network is well developed in Belgium so it's really easy to go from a place to another. On the website you have the ability to book online and check for tickets types and fares. **Regional level** Trams, busses, subways that are managed differently according to the region : **Brussels** - [STIB - MIVB](#) : One Jump ticket allows you to go on busses, trams, subways and trains (only inside of Brussels) ; you can even get on a De Lijn or a TEC bus (as long as it's a Brussels internal line). You have the possibility to change between lines, for one hour after the 1st validation. To buy your tickets, you can:

- go to the "Kiosk" that are the ticket offices (inside 19 of the subway stations) [List of the Kiosk points](#)
- use the "Go" system (vending machine) [List of the Go Points](#)
- go to one of the 6 "Bootik" point that are commercial agencies [List of the Bootik points](#)
- go in train station of Brussels
- go inside trams or busses (but then it's more expensive)
- get them on De Lijn and TEC busses.

You have several types of tickets depending on your needs (For example: One Jump - 1€70 outside the vehicle, 10 Journeys - 11€50, 3 days - 9€50). There's a night network on the week-end only from 00:20 a.m. until 03:00 a.m., and the cost of a one jump ticket is 3€.

- [List of all the ticket possibilities and fares](#)
- Note that you can plan your journey online [here](#) and that you view the network map [here](#).

The Flemish region - [De Lijn](#) [NL]: The system is different from Brussels. Of course there are different tickets and fares, but the price depends on the number of zones you cross during your way. A zone is a delimited area that includes several towns. There are several zones in each Belgian province (for example one ticket for 1 or 2 zones costs 1,20€ outside the vehicle and 1,60€ inside - for 3 or more zones it costs 2€ outside the vehicle and 2,70€ inside the vehicle).

- [List of all tickets and fares](#)

- If you don't know the number of zones you cross, just ask the driver and know that you can as well plan your itinerary [here](#).
- [List of all selling points and buying possibilities \(online, sms,...\)](#)

The Walloon region - TEC : The system is quite the same as the Flemish one. The price is also different according to the zones you cross.

- List of all tickets and fares and calculation of prices according to the zones [here](#).
- Planning your [itinerary](#)
- List of all [still selling points](#) and [mobile selling points](#).

Where to go and what to do

You have just arrived in Belgium. It is a small country on the planisphere but, Belgium has a wide range of tourist attractions.

Landscapes of Brussels, Charleroi and the Centre, hills, stone, chocolate, beer, rivers and forests in the Ardennes, the traditional housing in Famenne, marble, comics, animated dikes, the old fish market in Oostende, the Polders...

You will also notice that Belgium is rich in art. Many Belgian towns are proud of their architectural, religious or interesting military heritage.

Some of the great historic towns are: Anvers (Antwerpen), Bastogne, Bouillon, Bruges (Brugge), Bruxelles (Brussels), Dinant, Gand (Gent), Courtrai (Kortrijk), Louvain (Leuven), Liège and Namur.

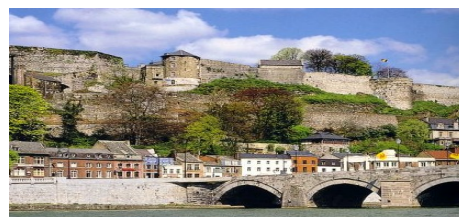
Ostende (Oostende), Malines (Mechelen), Tournai, Mons, Charleroi ...are equally beautiful towns.

You will find tourist attractions to discover and to explore on the entire Belgian territory. There are museums, natural sites, architectural heritage, exhibitions, sports and cultural activities, food and drink specialties, theme parks.

Antwerpen



Namur



Bruges



Bruxelles



You have to be careful because, sometimes, the name of cities is indicated in French or in Dutch :

Anvers : <i>Antwerpen</i>	Léau : <i>Zoutleeuw</i>
Biévène : <i>Bever</i>	Lessine : <i>Lessen</i>
Comines-Warneton : <i>Komen-Waasten</i>	Liège : <i>Luik</i>
Bruges : <i>Brugge</i>	Lincen : <i>Lijsem</i>
Bruxelles : <i>Brussel</i>	Louvain : <i>Leuven</i>
Braine-le-Comte : <i>'s-Gravenbrakel</i>	Malines : <i>Mechelen</i>
Courtrai : <i>Kortrijk</i>	Menin : <i>Menen</i>
Coxyde : <i>Koksijde</i>	Mons : <i>Bergen</i>
Dixmude : <i>Diksmuide</i>	Montaigu-Zichem : <i>Scherpenheuvel-Zichem</i>
Enghien <i>Edingen</i>	Moucron : <i>Moeskroen</i>
Espierres-Helchin : <i>Spiere-Helkijn</i>	Namur : <i>Namen</i>
Fouron : <i>Voeren</i>	Nieuport : <i>Nieuwpoort</i>
Furnes : <i>Veurne</i>	Nivelles : <i>Nijvel</i>
Gammerages : <i>Galmaarden</i>	Oreye : <i>Oerle</i>
Gand : <i>Gent</i>	Ostende : <i>Oostende</i>
Genappe : <i>Genepiën</i>	Perwez : <i>Perwijs</i>
Grammont : <i>Geraardsbergen</i>	Saint-Nicolas : <i>Sint-Niklaas</i>
Halle : <i>Hal</i>	Saint-Trond : <i>Sint-Truiden</i>
Hannut : <i>Hannuit</i>	Saint-Vith : <i>Sankt Vith</i>
Hautem-Saint-Liévin: <i>Sint-Lievens-Houtem</i>	Tongres : <i>Tongereren</i>
Herck-la-Ville : <i>Herk-de-Stad</i>	Vilvorde : <i>Vilvoorde</i>
Laethem-Saint-Martin : <i>Sint-Martens-Latem</i>	Ypres : <i>Ieper</i>
La Hulpe : <i>Terhulpen</i>	

Example of 5 things to do in Brussels

Gare du Midi Market: Said to be the biggest market in Europe, this sprawl of colorful stalls has an international flavour, with exotic North African and Mediterranean spices, cheeses, meats clothing, etc. Its food stands, selling bites like Moroccan crêpes with cheese, honey and vegetables along with mint tea, are a favorite with clubbers winding down from Saturday night.

Place Flagey: When Bruxellois say something is “hype”, they don't mean overhyped but hipper-than-hip. Fitting that description is Place Flagey. There are houses, a concert venue, a cinema, an international restaurant and a fabulous brasserie and bar.

Comic Strip Museum: Did you know that Tintin was created by a Belgian artist? You would if you visited Brussels' Comic Strip Museum. See original pages of comic artwork sketches and memorabilia.

Manneken Pis: Literally “Little Man Pee” in Marols, a Dutch dialect spoken in Brussels, it is famous Brussels Landmark. It is a small bronze fountain sculpture depicting a naked little boy urinating into the fountain's basin. Put in place in 1619, it bears a similar cultural significance as Copenhagen's Little Mermaid.

Chocolate, Waffles & Fries: You cannot travel to Brussels without sampling the local delicacies. Make sure you find a nice little shop that sells the chocolates individually so you can select which one you want – they can be pricy but it is worth it!



III/ Some Tips

Holidays and Short Stay

When you are coming to Belgium just for several days it is definitely better to book accommodation in advance.

If money is not an issue, you can check internet's top classic: www.bookings.com. A cheaper alternative is the second most famous www.hostels.com/be.htm !

But off course, there are several other cheap ways to stay in Belgium. USE-IT is tourist information for young people. The maps and guides are made by locals who know what's going on in the city, and who give no-nonsense inside advice on where to eat, sleep and go out if you're not a millionaire. USE-IT keeps things up-to-date for 6 big Belgian cities: www.use-it.be. Very useful.

For Brussels you can also check <http://www.bruxelles-j.be/>.

Why don't you try a camping? Only if you like rain though: www.camping.be

Or check some couchsurfing-opportunities in Belgium: <http://www.couchsurfing.org/>

What to bring with you

You should better not forgive some useful things when you are thinking about traveling to Belgium:

- ✓ Sleeping bag, sheet and pillow
- ✓ Sun cream, hat
- ✓ Your mobile phone (if you stay here for a long time it is convenient to buy a Belgian Sim-card for your mobile phone)
- ✓ Some things about your country (posters, music, postcards, map, video, food) and your family.
- ✓ Pocket money
- ✓ Personal pharmacy
- ✓ If possible bring only ONE bag to have more space in your dormitory.

Alcohol

If you are younger than 16, it is forbidden to drink any kind of alcoholic drink. From the age of 16, you are allowed to drink anything with less than 22 % alcohol in it, like beer or wine. Strong alcoholic drinks like vodka or whisky are only for adults older than 18.

It is forbidden to drive a bike or car under the influence of alcohol (0,5 pro mille or more in your blood).

Smoking

Belgium has banned smoking in restaurants, joining a growing European trend to restrict smokers.

Smoking is forbidden in all public places like railway stations, shops, restaurants and areas where food is served, also in some non-smoking areas of cafes and bars.

Smoking is only allowed in most cafes and in special rooms sealed off from where food is served.

Internet

Internet use is widespread in Belgium. Many fixed-line and mobile telephone companies offer Internet packages which vary from unlimited Broadband (ADSL) to fixed time (for example four hours per month).

Wi-Fi is also available in many public areas, such as Brussels Airport and in some cafés and bars or in Urbizones (free wifi). In every city you can find several internet cafés.)

Belgium Telephone Code

The International country calling code of Belgium is +32.

If you want to call abroad, you have to do 00 before the country code.

We advise you to take your mobile phone with you and to buy a local sim card here to get phone call from your country. You can do low cost call with VOIP companies like <http://www.12voip.com>

There are some typical telephone operators: Belgacom, Mobistar, Base, ...

Emergency services

If you need a doctor in Belgium, you can find one in the telephone directory. Choose one and phone in order to receive a consultation time or he will let you know when he is on duty. If you need a doctor during the weekend (from Friday evening until Monday morning) or during a public holiday, you will have to phone the out-of-hours service who, very rapidly, will send a doctor to your home.

If you are in a critical state or you have had a bad accident, don't hesitate to go (by ambulance if necessary) to the emergency department of the closest hospital. When you are at the hospital, the severity of your condition will determine how long you will have to wait.

Emergency numbers

Accident, aggression	112
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Ambulance and Fire service	100
S.O.S. Brussels Doctors	02 513 02 02
Police	101
Red Cross	105
Anti-poison center	070 245 245

The price

All medical emergency services are available both during the week and weekend, day and night. The price of a consultation is higher during the weekend (from Friday evening until Monday morning) and on public holidays. The GP's consultation varies between 20 and 30 euros, a specialist will charge between 25 and 50 (it could be more).

If you go to the hospital's emergency service, you will be asked to pay a supplement if your GP hasn't sent you or if you didn't need an ambulance to take you.

Methods of payment

If you are an EU national (+ Island, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), you should have received, before leaving your country, the E111 (valid 1 year), E106 (over 1 year stay in a family) or E109 (stay over a year) forms or you should have the European Health Insurance card (valid 1 year) that exists since June 1, 2004. If you have one of these documents, give it to the doctor or hospital and you will not have to pay the bill or you will be (partially) reimbursed in your country.

If the doctor or hospital does not respect the official fees (he is then called non-conventionnée), or if you don't have a document mentioned above, you will have to pay the bill immediately and be reimbursed in your country when you present the bill and proof of payment.

Doctors are paid in cash but most hospitals accept bank cards.

Insurances/Repatriation on medical grounds

Before leaving your country, check what your complementary insurance will cover. If you believe your insurance isn't enough then you can contract a supplementary insurance that will cover hospitalization and repatriation.

In case of an accident with a third party, make sure you have his name and address and fill an accident report as soon as possible (straight away, if possible). Car insurance is obligatory and for all other types of accidents most inhabitants have a civil liability insurance (Responsabilité civile) and a family insurance (for damages caused by their kids, for example).



Conclusion

I hope that you now understand that Belgium is a real country rich in curiosities. You should just remember not to forget our rules:

- 1/ Don't tell Belgian jokes.
- 2/ Don't spit on the streets.
- 3/ Be relax and funny.

Congratulations, you are now ready for your new Belgian life!



Appendix n°1: Canadian perspective about Belgium

How do foreigners perceive Belgium and its way of life? Here are some telling examples to illustrate the Canadian perception.

National Heroes

Question:

Who are this country's national heroes?

Local Perspective:

Belgium does not have a lot of heroes. Belgians are proud of the singer Jacques Brel, the actor Benoit Poelvoorde and tennis players Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin.

Canadian Perspective:

Several Belgians have left their mark in different domains and for each in his own way. In the scientific arena, Georges Lemaître has initiated the Big Bang theory and Pierre Deligne has been one of the most famous mathematicians of the century. Victor Horta and Henri Van de Velde have both been very famous architects. Although they lived at different times, Belgian musicians have influenced the musical scene of their generation: Roland de Lassus, César Franck, Adolphe Sax and Jacques Brel. Writers like Janssen and Raymond Devos and artists like Pierre Breugel, Pierre-Paul Rubens and Paul Devaux are equally quite famous, each in his own style. Athletes like Eddy Merckx, one of the best cyclists of all times, Jacky Ickx, former automobile racer, Jean-Michel Saive, excellent table tennis player and Enzo Scifo, one of the great soccer players of his generation, have all left their mark on their own discipline.

Conflicts in the Workplace

Question:

I have a work-related problem with a colleague. Do I confront him or her directly? Privately or publicly?

Local Perspective:

Talking to the colleague in private would be the best solution. If the problem persists, you should go to the superior. Then, the supervisor will handle the problem.

Canadian Perspective:

Work problems with colleagues should be resolved in a straightforward way and in private. If the problem remains, a neutral third party can be consulted. It could be a supervisor, or somebody from Human Resources, but this third party should not have a friendship relation with either of the two colleagues. The best way to find out if a colleague is offended by something you may have done is to respectfully ask him. If two colleagues cannot discuss minor problems in a reasonable way, it would be preferable to have the discussion and the solution of the problem in question

taken by a supervisor. In general, healthy and respectful business relations between colleagues should be strong enough to allow the resolution of conflicts.

Display of Emotion

Question:

Are public displays of affection, anger or other emotions acceptable?

Local Perspective:

Public displays of affection are acceptable and common. For instance, friends often touch each other, lovers walk hand in hand. However, public displays of anger have to be avoided. Happiness is always good to show and share (with some limits). Laughs and a smile are well perceived. Sadness and pain are only shown to people known/friends/close persons. In comparison with Canadians, Belgians do not react as strongly to something that a speaker tells them. One should only show empathy if s/he really cares about the subject.

Canadian Perspective:

Signs of affection, anger or others are acceptable in public. Sometimes people will raise their voice in public. If a conversation becomes heated, one is better not to interfere and go about one's own business, but rarely does such a heated conversation evolve into something more. In public, couples can openly show their affection towards each other.

[...]

You can get the complete version at:

➤ <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=be#cn--1>