

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation listings in this book are ordered by price from camping sites and budget hostels (mostly under €20) through B&Bs and midrange hotels (from €60) to top-end options costing over €140 for a double room.

Availability varies markedly by season and area. May to September occupancy is very high (especially at weekends) along the coast, in Bruges and in the resort areas of rural Luxembourg and the Ardennes. However, those same weekends you'll find hotels cutting prices in business cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Kortrijk, Mechelen and Luxembourg City.

For upper-range hotels, online bookings can often save money. Arriving without a

booking, tourist offices can usually reserve local accommodation for you if availability remains. The service is often free or asks a deposit that is deducted from your room rate.

Beware that some rural hotels quote accommodation prices 'per person' assuming double occupancy, with 40% supplements for single use. National taxes are invariably included but several towns add a small additional *stadsbelasting/taxe de séjour* (city tourist tax), which might add a euro or two to the tally. At most B&Bs and some hotels, reductions for longer stays are fairly common while some places demand a minimum two- or three-day stay, especially at key times of year.

Many options include breakfast. For those staying two days or more, many hotels (especially in rural areas) offer *demi-pension* (half-board) deals including breakfast and a set lunch or dinner – often fair value but with limited choice of menu. Some popular places in touristy areas of the Ardennes will only rent rooms on summer weekends on a *demi-pension* or *pension complète* (full board) basis. Grandeur rural getaways increasingly offer *weekend gastronomique* options, accommodation plus various meals that are often high-end, four-course affairs.

Hotels that accept pets usually charge around €3 to €10 per night for the service.

Technically visitors need to show their passport when checking into accommodation, though this is only half-heartedly enforced.

B&Bs

B&Bs (*gastenkamers* in Dutch, *chambres d'hôtes* in French) are increasingly prevalent in both rural and urban Belgium, but very thin on the ground in Luxembourg.

B&B standards can vary from unpretentious homestays to luxury boutique hotels. Breakfast is generally (but not always) included at a communal table – a great way to interact with the owners and other guests. Many are run by vibrant hosts whose enthusiasm for the job can be seen in characterful interiors and thoughtful decor. The best B&Bs offer a level of charm and refinement that trumps all but the very finest top-end hotels.

PRACTICALITIES

- Electrical appliances need a two round-pin adaptor. The supply is 220V, 50Hz.
- Keep up to date with *The Bulletin* (www.thebulletin.com), Belgium's invaluable English-language newsweekly or Luxembourg's equivalent *Luxembourg News 352*.
- Top newspapers include *De Standaard* (in Dutch), *Le Soir* (Francophone) and *Grenzecho* (Germanophone) in Belgium, *Lëtzebuurger Journal* in Luxembourg.
- Radio-wise the BBC World Service is available (648 kHz AM). For contemporary music choose Studio Brussel (in Dutch) or Pure FM (in French), whose jingles make the astonishing assertion that 'Good music makes good people'. Klara (in Dutch) and Musiq3 (in French) play classical music and occasional jazz. Classic21 (in French) is great for classic rock and Sunday-night boogie-blues. Radio frequencies vary by area (see www.radioinvlaanderen.info, www.rtbfb.be).
- Flemish TV channels include TV1 (news and sport), VTM (soaps and game shows) and Ketnet/Canvas (documentaries/foreign films). Francophone Belgium is split between La Une and RTL for general news and sport but French channels are also popular, ARTE being especially good for nonmainstream films and documentaries. In Luxembourg RTL broadcasts nightly in Letzeburgesch.
- DVDs should be set on Region 2, and videos on the PAL system.
- Use the metric system for weights and measures. Decimals are indicated with commas and thousands with points (full stops).

You'll generally need to pre-book and arrange a mutually agreeable arrival time. Also be prepared for stairs as elevators are usually nonexistent.

Camping, Caravan Parks & Hikers' Huts

Camping and caravanning facilities are plentiful especially in the Belgian and Luxembourg Ardennes, but sites are often sardined with permanent trailers. Typical rates are compounded from per person, per car and per site fees.

Useful websites:

Camping Flanders (www.camping.be) Camping-ground finder for Flanders.

Camping Wallonia (www.campingbelgique.be) Extensive by-commune camping-ground listings for Wallonia.

CampingGid (www.campinggids-belgie.nl) Customer feedback on Belgian campsites (in Dutch).

CampriLux (www.camping.lu) Camping-site federation for the Grand Duchy.

Nudist Belgium (www.naturisme.be) Links to Belgium's eight campsites where clothing's an encumbrance.

HIKERS' HUTS

Known as *trekkershutten* in Flanders and *wanderhütten* in Luxembourg, these small four-person wooden **cabins** (d/tr/q from €37/41/45) come with basic cooking facilities but charge extra for electricity or heating usage. Maximum stay is four nights. They're mostly attached

to campsites or provincial recreation parks, with many along Flanders Cycle Route (p287). In Luxembourg, where they're within walking distance of one another, consult www.trekkershutten.nl. For Belgium download the brochure via www.vlaanderen-vakantieland.be/trekkershutten.

Gîtes & Apartments

Especially in southern Wallonia, a good family option is to rent an apartment or especially a holiday home called a *gîte* (*landelijk verblijf* in Dutch, or *gîte rural* in French). Generally you'll rent by the week with prices varying vastly by season, number of occupants and house standards. Some are on farms, others in castles, converted stables or historic buildings. There is often an extra cleaning charge of around €60. Wallonia tourism produces a thick booklet of choices and the following websites can prove helpful.

Belsud (www.belsud.be) *Gîtes* in Wallonia.

Gîtes de Wallonie (www.gitesdewallonie.be) Its website's map feature is especially helpful and also shows rural B&Bs.

Luxembourg National Tourist Office (www.visitluxembourg.lu) Publishes a good brochure entitled *Holiday Apartments Farm & Rural Holidays*.

Vlaamse Federatie voor Hoeve & Plattelandstoerisme (www.hoevetoerisme.be)