

ON THE ROAD

YOUR COMPLETE DESTINATION GUIDE
In-depth reviews, detailed listings
and insider tips



SURVIVAL GUIDE

VITAL PRACTICAL INFORMATION TO
HELP YOU HAVE A SMOOTH TRIP

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welcome to Belgium & Luxembourg



Unexpected Riches

Over 60 Unesco sites are particularly strong on medieval urban architecture, but there's also a remarkable range of other attractions from state-of-the-art interactive museums to countless castles, caves and kayaking, industrial experiences and North Sea beaches. The region was an early crucible of European painting and has remained remarkably creative ever since. Artistic strengths encompass everything from the classic Flemish Primitives through the voluptuousness of Rubens and the sinuous curves of art nouveau to 20th-century surrealism and some boundary-pushing 21st-century mind-benders. Popular culture has its own

surrealist twists too – Belgium's bizarre carnivals are some of the world's weirdest.

Town & Country

Belgium is a country of two distinct halves. The historic 'art' cities of Dutch-speaking Flanders (northern Belgium) seduce visitors with medieval belfries, magical market squares and step-gabled houses overlooking pretty urban canals, all interspersed with superb museums and art galleries. And handily they're all remarkably close together, seamlessly interconnected by regular public transport.

Many attractions in French-speaking Wallonia (southern Belgium) are contrastingly rural: impressive caves, castles and

Fabulously historic, bursting with cutting-edge art yet never really showy – Belgium and Luxembourg are little countries full of big surprises.



(left) Street cafe scene, Ghent (p129)
(below) Belgian truffles and chocolates (p286)



bucolic valleys with plenty of outdoor activities in the wooded hills. Staying in village inns and stringing together several minor countryside sights can make for a truly delightful experience if you're driving or have strong cycling legs. However, if you're limited to patchy and infrequent public transport, you'll struggle to make any real sense of this area's rural charms.

Luxembourg falls somewhere between the two, its awesome castles and pretty rural hill-villages enjoying good roads, short distances and regular buses.

Chips & Chocolate

Pack a spare stomach. These little countries are culinary treats. Luxembourgers enjoy the

world's highest number of Michelin stars per capita. Belgians create a remarkable range of edible specialities including some of the planet's most mouth-watering chocolates. Jumbo wine-soaked mussels are served up with crispy, twice-fried *frites* (chips). And then of course there's the beer. Brewing is an almost mystical art in Belgium where some of the finest ales are still created in working monasteries to age-old recipes. To be sipped, slowly! Meanwhile Luxembourg keeps in a celebratory mood with its ever-flowing supply of local Moselle bubbly.

Safe and convenient, historic and tasty, gently humorous and decidedly multi-lingual, these compact little countries are packed with attractions that continue to surprise and delight.

Belgium & Luxembourg





GERMANY

NETHERLANDS

Lier

Moated beauty, enchanting
beginnhof (p167)

Düsseldorf

Han-sur-lesse

Classic, if commercial,
cave experience (p213)

Vianden

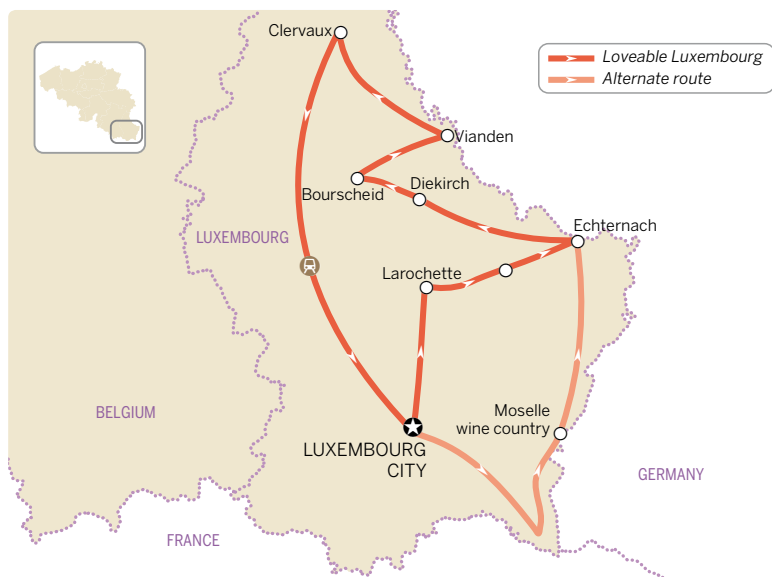
Luxembourg's super-quiet
castle village (p264)

Luxembourg City

River deep, steeple high
(p247)

itineraries

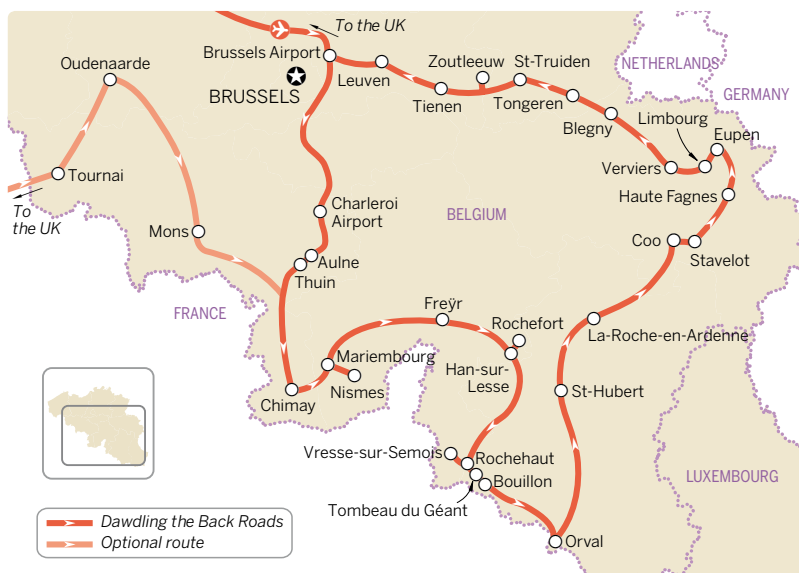
From two-day dash to two-week trundle, these itineraries make some practical suggestions for how to make the most of your valuable time in these wonderful, underrated countries.



One Week Loveable Luxembourg

Little Luxembourg makes an unexpectedly complete destination. Accommodation prices in Luxembourg City fall dramatically at weekends. Midweek is better for the rural castle villages with fewer Dutch bikers on the country lanes.

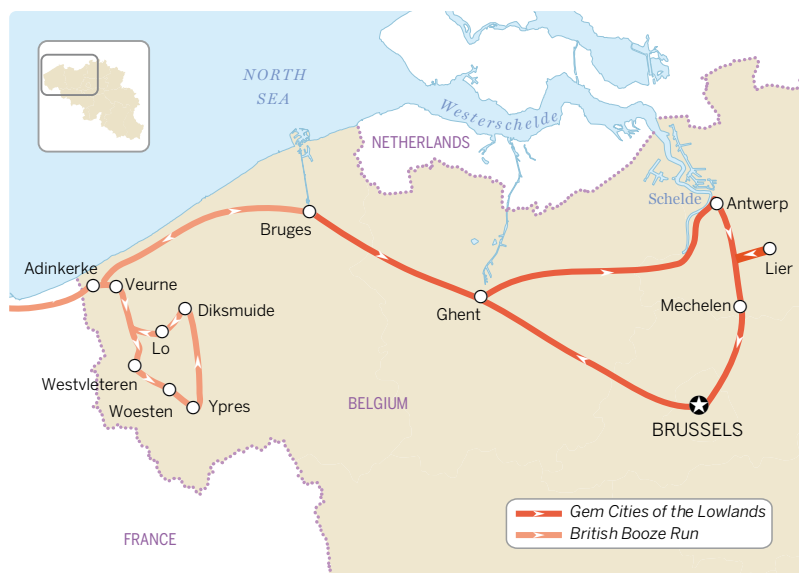
Arrive in **Luxembourg City** on Friday afternoon, making the most of the city's decent range of nightlife options and remembering that many restaurants close on Sundays. On Saturday buy a two-day Luxembourg Card if you're planning to see all of the main museums, or just stroll the remarkable city ramparts and gorges. On Monday head for **Echternach** perhaps via **Larochette** or through **Moselle wine country**. Hike in the attractive Müllerthal micro-canyons then head to **Diekirch** for the best Ardennes Battle museum around. By bus it's a bit of a fiddle, but consider visiting **Bourscheid** to admire the Grand Duchy's impressive castle ruin. Head to **Vianden**, the most convenient rural getaway, whose restored fortress looms above the charming little town. Take the bus to pretty **Clervaux** and continue by train to Coö or Liege in Belgium or return to Luxembourg City.



Two Weeks Dawdling the Back Roads

If you want to drive around some of Belgium's more off-beat and rural corners, try this trip. It starts and ends in Brussels or Charleroi Airport, where you'll pick up a rental car, but if you are driving from Britain, take the motorway via Lille and add nights at historic Tournai, winding through the pretty 'Flemish Ardennes' between Oudenaarde and Geraardsbergen and dining in 17th-century style at Mons.

Drive down to beer-famed **Chimay** for two nights, taking in **Aulne** abbey ruins and **Thuin** on the way. Tootle along the pretty lanes to **Mariembourg** and **Nismes**, possibly taking the steam train. Visit the splendid gardens of **Freyr** and the fabulous caves at **Han-sur-Lesse** or less commercial **Rochefort**, which has some fine local accommodation. From there drive down to **Bouillon** with its Crusader castle, and kayak along some of Belgium's prettiest stretches of wooded valley around **Vresse-sur-Semois**. Follow the lovely Semois Valley in both directions enjoying the panoramas at **Rochehaut** and **Tombeau du Géant**. Visit the golden stone ruins of **Orval** monastery and the classic brewery *café*. Then head north through thick forests via **St-Hubert** to **La Roche-en-Ardenne**. Famed for its carnival, attractive **Stavelot** makes a good base for a few nights and a range of outdoor activities (organised at nearby **Coo**), and a day hike on the **Haute Fagnes**. Stop for coffee and pastries in **Eupen**, Belgium's only really Germanic city, and explore the attractive country lanes, not missing delightful little **Limbourg**. If it's getting late, sleep in **Verviers** which has an attractive sense of style as well as one of Wallonia's best blues-rock concert venues. Nip up the motorway via Visé to visit **Blegny**, descending into Belgium's last accessible coal mine. Sleep in appealing **Tongeren**, Belgium's 'oldest' town, then drive the Roman road to underrated **St-Truiden** with random wanders off into the pretty Haspengouw lanes around Bogloon. Don't miss the remarkable church in **Zoutleeuw** and drop into **Tienen** to see the sugar museum. Spend your last night in lively student city **Leuven**.



Two Days British Booze Run

So, you're driving from Britain on a cheap one-night, two-day booze-buying Eurotunnel return, arriving at dawn in Calais. On the way back you are planning to spend two hours filling the car with French cheese and wine at Auchan in Dunquerque (Grand Synthe, closes at 9.30pm and all day Sundays). Then you'll zip onto the last valid return channel (channel tunnel) before midnight. But what to do with the two spare half-days? Magical **Bruges** makes a rather rushed possibility. Instead beer fans might prefer something more original. After lunch in historic **Veurne**, drive south into Belgium's hop-growing country, stopping to taste a fabled **Westvleteren 12** Trappist (careful!) at St-Sixtus and to buy some *Struise Pannapot* in **Woesten**. Rolling into **Ypres**, check into your accommodation then get to the Menin Gate in time to witness the last post at 8pm. Or simply admire the brilliant Lakenhalle. Next day visit In Flanders Fields museum or drive to one or two Ypres Salient WWI sites. Return via **Diksmuide** and pretty little **Lo**. Still need cheap Belgian cigarettes and chocolates? There's a last-chance stockist 700m off the France-bound motorway at **Adinkerke**.

One Week Gem Cities

Four of northern Europe's most memorable historic cities are so handily close together that an hour's train ride is enough to get between any of them. So you *could* just about glimpse them all in a long weekend. However, even one week wouldn't really do them full justice. Take as long as you can. To save on midrange accommodation costs, order the trip to sleep in Brussels at the weekend and Bruges midweek.

EU capital, **Brussels**, has a Grand Place that's one of the world's most beautiful squares. Explore seductive chocolate shops, wonderful *cafés*, great galleries, fine museums and art-nouveau buildings. And don't miss the unique 1958 Atomium.

Medieval architecture and endless canal-side charm make beautiful **Bruges** one of Europe's most romantic getaways. Less tourist-oriented, grittier yet somehow more satisfying, is magical **Ghent**, whose intimate medieval core is complemented by a lively student vibe and some wonderful museums. Larger **Antwerp** is an eclectic port city whose historical credentials are balanced by its vibrant nightlife, *café*-culture and cutting-edge designer fashions. If time allows, add **Lier** and **Mechelen**, too.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Mark Elliott

Coordinating Author, Western Flanders, Antwerp & Eastern Flanders, Western Wallonia, The Ardennes, Luxembourg As a small child Mark Elliott was dragged up a bizarre conical hill to meet a giant lion (Waterloo) then let loose inside an enormous chemistry set (the Atomium). To a baby Brit, Belgium already looked pretty weird. But that was just the start. Having spent most of the last two decades based there, he has merrily discovered that Belgium's surrealism is more

than skin deep, that the carnivals really are as crazy as one might hope and that there always seems to be yet another timeless classic *café* to discover. This enthusiasm he has tried to pass on through articles in local magazines, books on Belgian culture and several travel guides for Lonely Planet.



Helena Smith

Brussels, Bruges Helena's previous Brussels experience involved getting locked out of her hotel and staying up all night at the Archiduc; she loves Belgium for its jazz fixation and laid-back attitude. Helena is a travel writer and photographer who blogs about food and her community.

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