

# 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.