



# Belgium

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Den Gouden Harynck, Bruges (p128)
- » L'Ogenblik, Brussels (p111)
- » De Groote Witte Arend, Antwerp (p120)
- » Fin de Siècle, Brussels (p111)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hôtel Le Dixseptième, Brussels (p111)
- » Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce, Bruges (p128)
- » Hotel Julien, Antwerp (p120)

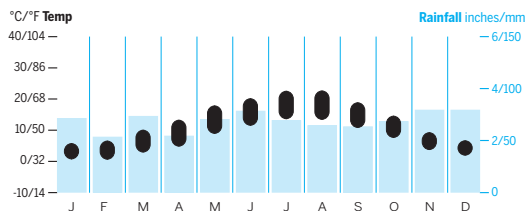
## Why Go?

Stereotypes of comic books, remarkable beers and sublime chocolates are just the start in this eccentric little country whose self-deprecating people have quietly spent centuries producing some of Europe's finest art and architecture. Bilingual Brussels is the dynamic yet personable EU capital but also sports what's arguably one of the world's most beautiful city squares. Flat, Dutch-speaking Flanders has many other alluring medieval city cores, all easily linked by regular train hops.

In hilly, French-speaking Wallonia, the attractions are contrastingly rural – castle villages, outdoor activities and extensive cave systems that prove a major draw for Dutch caravaners but are hard to fully appreciate by public transport. War buffs will find Belgium full of moving battlefield sites from many eras. And anyone with a love of the good life will quickly come to appreciate a country where cafe culture is king and fine food is almost a birthright.

## When to Go

### Brussels



**Many weekends before Easter**  
Belgium hosts Mardi Gras and many of Europe's weirdest carnivals.

**Mid-Jun Scenes**  
from the Battle of Waterloo recreated on the battlefield.

**Mid-Aug, even years**  
Brussels' Grand Place is covered by an ornate 'carpet' of flower petals.

## Connections

Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne and London are all under 2½ hours from Brussels by high-speed train. Liège and Antwerp are also on high-speed international routes. Go via Tournai or Ghent to reach France by train if you want to avoid the fast trains and their compulsory reservations. Budget airlines offer cheap deals to numerous European destinations, particularly from Charleroi airport.

### ITINERARIES

#### Four Days

If you've got the energy, four days is just about long enough to get a first taste of Belgium's finest; the glorious canals of Bruges and Ghent, Brussels' magnificent central square and the ancient-modern contrasts of intriguing Antwerp. All are easily accessed by train while you're hopping between Paris and Amsterdam. But once you've discovered all those wonderful cafes you'll wish that you'd budgeted longer.

#### Ten Days

Add an extra night in each of the above and add Ypres or a jaunt into Wallonia.

## Essential Food & Drink

Hearty home-style Belgian cooking, once limited to cheap cafes, has been recently undergoing a degree of gourmet rediscovery.

- » **ballekes/bouletten** meatballs
- » **chicons au gratin** endive rolled in ham and cooked in cheese/béchamel sauce
- » **croquettes de crevettes grises** like fish cakes, but containing tiny, highly flavoured North Sea shrimps
- » **filet américain** no, not a succulent American steak but a blob of raw minced beef, typically topped with equally raw egg yolk
- » **lambic** a beer-oddity that is spontaneously fermented to make an acidic brew made more palatable by ageing then blended with newer lambic to make *gueuze* or macerated with cherries to produce *kriek*
- » **mosselen/moules** steaming cauldrons of in-the-shell mussels, typically cooked in white wine and served with a mountain of *frites* (chips; please don't call the latter 'French fries here!')
- » **stoemp** a mashed-together veg-and-potato dish originally made to use up leftovers
- » **Vlaamse stoverij/carbonade flamande** semi-sweet beer-based beef casserole
- » **waterzooi** a cream-based chicken or fish stew

### AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro (€)
- » **Languages** Dutch, French, German
- » **Money** ATMs common; credit cards widely accepted
- » **Visas** Schengen visa rules apply; see p1319

### Fast Facts

- » **Area** 30,278 sq km
- » **Capital** Brussels
- » **Country code** 32
- » **Emergency** 112; ambulance 100; police 101

### Exchange Rates

|             |       |       |
|-------------|-------|-------|
| Australia   | A\$1  | €0.74 |
| Canada      | C\$1  | €0.74 |
| Japan       | ¥100  | €0.87 |
| New Zealand | NZ\$1 | €0.56 |
| UK          | UK£1  | €1.16 |
| USA         | US\$1 | €0.72 |

### Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** under €60
- » **Two-course evening meal** from €25
- » **Museum entrance** €2-8.50
- » **Beer (in bar)** €1.90
- » **City transport ticket** €1.70

### Resources

- » **For Flanders** [www.visitflanders.com](http://www.visitflanders.com)
- » **For Wallonia** [www.wallonie-tourisme.be](http://www.wallonie-tourisme.be), [www.belgiumtheplacetobe.be](http://www.belgiumtheplacetobe.be)
- » **For Brussels** <http://visitbrussels.be>