



# Belgium & Luxembourg

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## Why Go?

Stereotypes of comic books, chips and sublime chocolates are just the start in eccentric little Belgium: its 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 the world's most beautiful city square. Flat, Dutch-speaking Flanders has many other alluring medieval cities, 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. Independent Luxembourg, the EU's richest country, is compact and hilly with its own wealth of castle villages, while its capital city is famed for banking but also sports a fairytale Unesco-listed historic Old Town. And from the brilliant beers of Belgium to the sparkling wines of Luxembourg's Moselle Valley, there's plenty to lubricate some of Europe's best dining. Welcome to the good life.

## Best Places to Eat

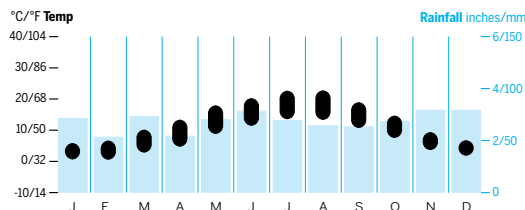
- » De Stove (p121)
- » Salon des Lumières (p124)
- » L'Ogenblik (p109)
- » In 't Nieuwe Museum (p122)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hôtel Le Dixseptième (p109)
- » Hôtel Simoncini (p127)
- » Auberge Aal Veinen (p130)
- » B&B Dieltiens (p121)

## When to Go

### Brussels



**Pre-Easter week-ends** Belgium hosts many of Europe's weirdest carnivals, not just at Mardi Gras.

**Feb–Mar** Both countries symbolically burn the spirit of winter on the first weekend after Carnival.

**Jul–Aug** Countless festivals, hotels packed at the coast but cheaper in Brussels and Luxembourg City.

## Connections

Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne and London are all under 2½ hours from Brussels by high-speed train. Liège, Luxembourg City and Antwerp are also on high-speed international routes. Go via Tournai to reach France by train if you want to avoid such lines and their compulsory reservations. Budget airlines offer cheap deals to numerous European destinations particularly from Charleroi (an hour south of Brussels).

## ITINERARIES

### Four Days

Just long enough to get a first taste of Belgium's four finest 'art cities': Bruges, Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp, all easy jump-offs or short excursions while you're train-hopping between Paris and Amsterdam. Bruges is the fairy-tale 'Venice of the north', Ghent has similar canalside charms without the tourist hordes, and Brussels' incomparable Grand Place is worth jumping off any train for, even if you have only a few hours to spare. Cosmopolitan Antwerp goes one further, adding in fashion and diamonds. If you're overnighing make sure to hit Brussels on a weekend and Bruges on a weekday to get the best deals on accommodation.

### Ten Days

Add an extra night in each of the above and consider stops in Mechelen and Lier, practising your French in Mons and Tournai on the 'back route' to France or in Luxembourg en route to Koblenz, Germany.

## Essential Food & Drink

- » **Chicons au gratin** Endive rolled in ham and cooked in cheese/béchamel sauce.
- » **Filet Américain** A blob of raw minced beef, typically topped with equally raw egg yolk.
- » **Mosselen/moules** Steaming cauldrons of in-the-shell mussels, typically cooked in white wine and served with a mountain of *frites* (chips).
- » **Paling in 't groen** Eel in a sorrel or spinach sauce.
- » **Stoemp** Mashed veg-and-potato dish.
- » **Vlaamse stoverij/carbonade flamande** Semisweet beer-based meat casserole.
- » **Waterzooi** A cream-based chicken or fish stew.
- » **Judd mat gaardebounen** Luxembourg's national dish; smoked pork-neck in a cream-based sauce with chunks of potato and broad beans.
- » **Kniddelen** 'Dumplings'; often gnocchi-style balls served in various sauces, but the term can also refer to meatballs, which are known as *ballekes/bouletten* in Belgium.

## AT A GLANCE

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

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 30,278 sq km (Belgium), 2586 sq km (Luxembourg)
- » **Capitals** Brussels (Belgium), Luxembourg City (Luxembourg)
- » **Country code** 32 (Belgium), 352 (Luxembourg)
- » **Emergency** 112

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.82
Canada	C\$1	€0.77
Japan	¥100	€0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.65
UK	UK£1	€1.18
USA	US\$1	€0.78

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** under €60
- » **Two-course meal** from €10
- » **Museum entrance** €5–10
- » **Beer** €2
- » **City transport ticket** €1.20–2

## Resources

- » **Belgium** ([www.belgium.be](http://www.belgium.be))
- » **Luxembourg** ([www.ont.lu](http://www.ont.lu))