



# Belgium

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Den Gouden Harynck (p146)
- » House of Eliott (p141)
- » L'Ogenblik (p126)

## Best Places to Stay

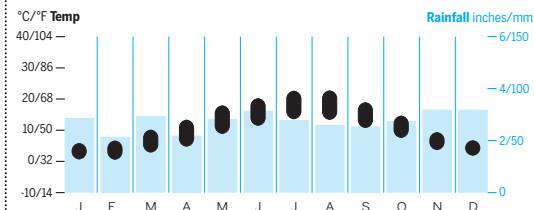
- » Guesthouse Nuit Blanche (p145)
- » Chambres d'Hôtes Verhaegen (p140)
- » Relais Bourgondisch Cruyce (p146)
- » Hotel Julien (p134)

## 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 the world's most beautiful city square. 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 caravanners but are hard to fully appreciate by public transport. War buffs will find Belgium full of moving battlefield sites from all 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



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

**Mid-June** Scenes from the battle are recreated at Waterloo by uniformed armies of volunteers.

**Mid-Aug, even years** Brussels' Grand Place hosts an ornate, multi-coloured 'carpet' of flower petals.

## AT A GLANCE

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

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 30,278 sq km
- » **Population** 10.4 million
- » **Capital** Brussels
- » **Telephone** country code ☎32; international access code ☎00
- » **Emergency** ☎112

## 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	€0.67

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel double** under €60
- » **Two-course dinner** from €25
- » **Museum entrance** €2–8.50
- » **Beer** (in a bar) €1.90
- » **City transport ticket** €1.70

## Resources

- » **Belgium** ([www.belgium.thelaceto.be](http://www.belgium.thelaceto.be))
- » **Brussels** ([www.visitbrussels.be](http://www.visitbrussels.be))

## 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 such lines and their compulsory reservations (or if you have a railcard that requires it). Budget airlines offer cheap deals to numerous European destinations particularly from Charleroi.

## 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 canal-side 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 the moving WWI sites of historic Ypres, hopping to Antwerp via Leuven, Mechelen and Lier, and possibly driving around rural Wallonia to visit a selection of fascinating caves and castles.

## Essential Food & Drink

Classic, home-style Belgian dishes include the following:

- » **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** 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** Semi-sweet beer-based beef casserole.
- » **Waterzooi** A cream-based chicken or fish stew.