



# Belgium for volunteers



## Sommaire

I/Introduction about Belgium .....	4
II/Discovery of Belgium .....	4
Brief history of Belgium .....	4
The Kingdom of Belgium .....	4
Brussels-capital .....	5
Wallonia .....	7
Flanders.....	7
The way we live.....	8
A little bit more about our three official languages.....	9
Our climate.....	10
Our gastronomy .....	10
Our celebrities.....	14
Belgian people, the subject of all jokes .....	14
Folklore .....	15
III/Some Practical and important Information.....	16
How to come to Belgium .....	16
How to go from the airport to the centre of Brussels .....	16
Public Transport.....	18
Do I need a Visa to come to Belgium? .....	19
Emergencies and medical care .....	21
Business days and business hours .....	23
Money and services .....	24

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Cost of living.....	24
What to bring with you .....	25
Internet .....	26
Belgium Telephone Code and Sim Cards .....	26
Smoking.....	26
IV/Ready to go?.....	26
Appendix: Canadian perspective about Belgium .....	28



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# I/Introduction about Belgium

It has come to my attention that people are often confused about Belgium. A popular conspiracy theory even once stated that Belgium doesn't exist at all. Others may also think that going to Belgium is not a very exciting trip. Well, they are wrong! Yes, Belgium might be a flat country, but the most exciting part of it stands in its inhabitants.

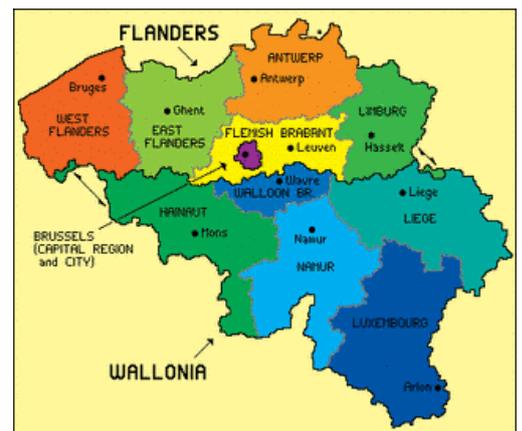
Many foreigners believe that Belgium is just a land of fries and mussels. Well, this is wrong too, as you will realize as soon as you set foot in Belgium. The extent of its wealth on such a small territory will surprise many people. We might not have mountains or a famous coast, but our artistic and cultural wealth is breath-taking with many historic towns, gothic churches, museums, markets, many festivals and a wonderful countryside encouraging cyclists and hikers. And on top of that, Belgians are warm, welcoming and fun people to be around. They also love partying - they will always find something to celebrate.



# II/Discovery of Belgium

## Brief history of Belgium

When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, the people he found living in Belgium were the Belgae - one of various Celtic Tribes from early Gaul. The Romans have decided to call their new province Gallia Belgica. Back then, the country has been ruled over the centuries by England, France, Spain and the Netherlands, but on January 20th 1831, Belgium was finally granted independence. The first king, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, contributed to the development of Belgium economy and culture.



## The Kingdom of Belgium

By the North Sea in Western Europe, Belgium is a small country with a central position. This crossing point country is about 30,528 square meters for a population of 10 666 866 people. The country is divided into 10 different provinces

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and its capital is Brussels. The city of Brussels took on a leading role as a co-founder of the European Community and became also the capital of what is now called the European Union (EU). The headquarters of NATO are also situated there.

Apparently, Belgium has a story with the number 3... :

- 3 communities: The Flemish community, the French community and the German speaking community.
- 3 regions: The Flemish region, The Wallonia region and the bilingual Brussels Capital region.
- 3 languages: Flemish, French and German.

Though it seems to be a bit confusing, it's part of Belgium's beauties!

## Brussels-capital

Brussels city is quickly becoming a trendy spot for weekend getaways and holidays. Apart from its famous chocolates and beers there are many more attractions than you can guess. It is a centre of European culture, officially nicknamed 'the European Village', with almost 90 museums, beautiful parks, fascinating walks, trendy restaurants and bars.

Languages spoken: Mainly French and some Dutch.

Getting to Brussels is quite easy; Brussels airport and Charleroi airport both receive cheap flights; there are high-speed trains from London, Paris and Amsterdam, an intercity train network that can bring you from all over Europe; and you can even get here by ferry!

If you are coming to Belgium just for several days it is definitely better to book your accommodation in advance.

You can stay in a [hostel](#) or, for cheaper fees, in a [youth hostel](#).

But of course, there are several other cheap ways to stay in Belgium.

Why don't you try [camping](#)? Only if you don't mind the rain though ;)

Another good option is to check some [couch-surfing opportunities](#) in Belgium.



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Here are the top things to do in Brussels:

- Grand Place. This is a must-see site. It's the central square of Brussels, which offers a great European urban view. Except for the view, there are a lot of coffee shops, restaurants and chocolate shops. Every other summer, the Grand-Place is covered with a worldwide famous tapestry of flowers.
- Another popular attraction – the Atomium. It was built in 1958 and is seen as the symbol of Europe's capital. For more information about opening hours and prices [www.atomium.be](http://www.atomium.be)
- Manneken Pis. Believe it or not, this statue of a small boy peeing is one of Brussels top attractions. But don't worry, there is a nice historic story behind it. Make sure you also check out the similar statue of a girl (Janneke Pis), not far from there. Here is the story about this little boy: [manneken pis](#)
- The Comic Strip Center. Did you know that Brussels is considered the spiritual home of the comic strip? This center contains anything you possibly wanted to know about comics and no, it's not just for geeks. The place has both permanent and temporary exhibitions. Even just the beautiful building is already worth the entrance. You can find more information right here: <http://www.comicscenter.net/en/home>
- Place Flagey. When people in Brussels say something is “hype”, they don't mean overhyped, but hipper-than-hip. Fitting that Description is Place Flagey. There are houses, a concert venue, a cinema, an international restaurant and fabulous brasserie and bar.
- “Saint Gilles”: It's the most multicultural area of Brussel and it's a place where there is an important artistic dynamic. In the Parvis, there is night market on Thursday and day market on Sunday. You can also take a drink in this area, where there are nice bars and artistic events.
- Gare du Midi Market. Said to be the biggest market in Europe, this sprawl of colorful stalls has an international flavor, with exotic North African and Mediterranean spices, cheeses, meats clothing, etc. Its food stands selling bites like Moroccan pancakes with cheese, honey and vegetables along with mint tea are a favorite with clubbers winding down from Saturday night.



In order to learn more about what the city of Brussels has to offer, you can pay a visit to the Tourist Information Office. The main one is located at the Town Hall of Brussels in the Grand Place and is open 7 days a week between 9AM-6PM (except for winter time, when it's open between 10AM-2PM).

You can also check out the website of USE-IT. It has tourist information for young people. The maps and guides are made by locals who know what's going on in the city, and who will give you inside advice on where to eat, sleep and

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go out if you're not a millionaire. USE-IT keeps things up-to-date for 6 big Belgian cities: [www.use-it.be](http://www.use-it.be). For Brussels you can also check <http://www.bruxelles-j.be/>.

As mentioned before, Belgian people love to go out and party whenever it's possible. If you want to explore the night life in Brussels, here are a few good places to do that:

- A la Mort Subite. (Rue Montagne aux herbes potagères 7, metro Gare Central).
- L'Archiduc. An exclusive art deco bar which turns into heaven for Jazz lovers in the weekends (Rue Antoine Dansaert 6 ).
- Café Belga. A quiet café during the day and a trend pub in the evening (Place Flagey 18, take tram 81).

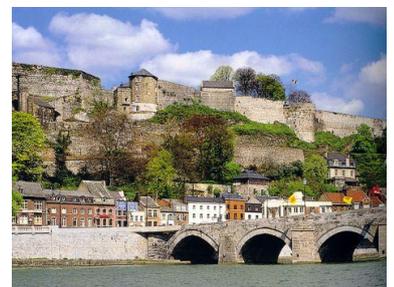
## Wallonia

The Walloons, who live in Belgium's southern provinces, are the country's French-speaking inhabitants. Their culture contrasts with that of the Flemings, who inhabit the northern part of the country and speak Flemish, a language similar to Dutch. The Walloons' closest cultural ties are to France and other countries in which Romance languages are spoken.

With an area of 6,600 square miles (17,094 square kilometers), Wallonia covers 55 percent of Belgium's territory and includes the provinces of southern Brabant, Hainaut, Namur, Liège, and Luxembourg. Wallonia is a densely populated area with 3.2 million inhabitants.

If you are a bike-lover, you might want to visit the Ardennes (see first pic), a beautiful zone of countryside full of ancient castle and beautiful landscapes.

Some of the great historic towns in Wallonia are: Bastogne, Bouillon, Bruxelles (Brussels), Dinant, Gand (Gent), Liège and Namur (see pic). Tournai and Mons are equally beautiful towns.



## Flanders

The northern part of Belgium is known as Flanders, the inhabitants are called Flemings and speak Dutch. All Flemish towns are brimming with quiet medieval squares, tree-lined canals, gorgeous architectural facades, world class museums and friendly outdoor cafes perfect for sipping on the local brews.

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The scenic Flemish countryside is painted with green hills and winding roads bordered by proud farms and peaceful canals. Cities in Flanders exhibit their charm with cobblestone streets, beguinages, gothic cathedrals and artistic treasures of internationally renowned paintings from the Flemish primitives to Breughel and Rubens and such modern masters as Permeke, Ensor and Magritte.

But there is a lot more to Flemish cities than just architecture and history. You can also enjoy your time discovering the colorful open-air markets, shopping galleries, breweries, European nightlife and stylish restaurants overflowing with local culinary delights.

Some of the great historic towns in Flanders are:

Anvers (Antwerpen) (first pic), Bruges (Brugge) (second pic), Courtrai (Kortrijk), Louvain (Leuven), Malines (Mechelen), Ostende (Oostende).



## The way we live

So now after learning about the history and the climate, you might want to know what you can do and what you cannot do when you're in Belgium. Well, there aren't many rules since we are very open minded people, but here are a few tips that might help you:

- If you want to say hello, you always have the choice between shaking hands and giving one kiss on the cheek. It all depends on the situation in which you meet the people and how well you know them.
- We do know how to appreciate jokes... Except the ones that mock us.
- Avoid spitting in the street, even though you might see some peasants doing it.
- We don't worry much about queuing, but we try to be respectful about each other.
- Lunch is normally between 12 and 1 PM. Dinner time is usually between 6 and 8.
- In case you're invited to someone's house, it's generally well received if you bring flowers to the lady of the house, a box of chocolate or a bottle of wine for the meal.
- Argue only if it's necessary. Belgium people likes consensus.

Apart from that, if you find yourself in an unfamiliar situation and you're not sure how to act, don't worry, it's very simple. Just look at what the others are doing and act the same way. That will do the trick :)

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## A little bit more about our three official languages

The first language is Flemish in the Northern part of the country which has similarities with Dutch. The second is French which is spoken in the Southern Part of the country. Then there is German, spoken in the small Eastern part close to the German border. Eventually, the area of Brussels is bilingual – French and Flemish.

We realized that this might sound complicated, so here are a few basic words to get you started:

ENGLISH	FLEMISH	FRENCH	GERMAN
Yes / No	Ja / Nee	Oui / Non	Ja / Nein
Please	Alsjeblieft	S'il vous plait	Bitte
Thanks	Dank u	Merci	Danke
You're welcome	Graag gedaan	Il n'y a pas de quoi	Gern geschehen
Here is/are	Hier is	Voici	Hier ist/sind
Good morning / Good evening / Good night	Goede morgen / goede avond / goede nacht	Bonjour / Bonsoir / Bonne nuit	Guten Morgen / Guten Abend / Gute Nacht
Good bye	Tot ziens	Au revoir	Auf Wiedersehen
How are you ?	Hoe gaat het ?	Comment allez-vous ?	Wie geht es Ihnen ?
Excuse me	Excuseer	Excusez-moi	Entschuldigen Sie mich
Do you speak English ?	Spreekt u engels ?	Est-ce que vous parlez anglais ?	Sprechen Sie Englisch ?
Can you help me ?	Kan je me helpen ?	Est-ce que vous pouvez m'aider ?	Können Sie mir helfen?
I don't understand	Ik begrijp het niet	Je ne comprends pas	Ich verstehe nicht
I don't know	Ik weet het niet	Je ne sais pas	Ich weiß nicht
Can you write it down?	Kan u het opschrijven ?	Est-ce que vous pouvez l'écrire ?	Können Sie es aufschreiben ?
Sorry	Sorry	Désolé	Entschuldigung

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## Our climate

Belgium has the reputation to be a rainy country. Well, let's moderate this a little bit!

Due to its location, Belgium has a typical temperate oceanic climate, which means of course having 4 seasons. Generally speaking, concerning temperature, there are no significant differences between the South and the North. That being said, the southern part might be a bit colder during the winter (anyway don't forget your mittens for the whole country) while the northern part (by the coast) might be a bit hotter during the summer. During the summer, it's even possible to take a dip in the North Sea so think about bringing your swimming suit.

- Average number of rainy days:

135,7 days per year.

- Average sunshine hours: 1506.4

hours per year.



10



## Our gastronomy

### *The Famous "French Fries"*

Belgium is the center of Europe, but ironically, modesty is by far Belgium's national pride! For example: Did you know that French Fries are actually Belgian Fries? Yes sir! We invented Fries, and we have the best ones in the world!

The name fries comes from the word "frenched" which means "thinly sliced". When British and American soldiers tasted them in Belgium during World War I, they called them "French" as it was the official language of the Belgian army at that time and "fries" as they are fried when preparing them.

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You can find good french fries in what we call a 'frietkot' - a place in the streets where you can buy fries. For Belgians, that's the only place where you can eat the really good Belgian fries. So don't think you can taste them at McDonalds!

Check on this website: <http://www.lafrite.be/>

11

Belgians love to drink and to eat and are very good at it. And what's the best thing to drink along with our famous fries? One of our famous **Beers** of course!



We offer one of the most diverse national collections of quality beer in the world. Beer varies from the popular pale lager to lambic beer and Flemish red. Belgian beer-brewing's origins go back to the Middle Ages. There are approximately 125 breweries in the country, ranging from international giants to microbreweries. In Europe, only Germany, France and the United Kingdom are home to more breweries. Belgian breweries produce about 800 standard beers. When special one-off beers are included, the total number of Belgian beers is approximately 8700. Belgians drink 93 liters of beer a year on average

Here is a good place with more than 2000 kinds of beer: [www.facebook.com/Deliriumbrewery](http://www.facebook.com/Deliriumbrewery) or discover them on: <http://www.belgian-beer.net/> and <http://www.beerparadise.be/>

And what about a dessert afterward? You might want to try **Belgian Chocolate** - the best in the world! Belgian chocolate is definitely one of our most famous products. From the beginning of its history in Belgium, the chocolate was considered as a gift. In 1912, the Belgian confectionery created the "praline", a filled chocolate mouthful which perfectly complied with its gift vocation.



To protect the delicate nature of the "praline", an adequate packaging has been patented under the name of "Ballotin". Since that time the "Ballotin de pralines" became the perfect gift appreciated

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in all circumstances. When visiting Bruges and Brussels's center, in between all the lace shops, you'll find a lot of small traditional hand-made chocolate shops . These pralines are often tiny pieces of art and you'll have to pay for them accordingly. And here is a tip for you: Buy chocolate in normal shops, it's way cheaper! You can also visit the museum of chocolate and cacao: [http://www.mucc.be/EN/index\\_en.htm](http://www.mucc.be/EN/index_en.htm)

**Brussels waffles** are also very famous, they are prepared with a yeast-leavened batter. It is generally, but not always, lighter, thicker, and crispier and has larger pockets compared to other waffle varieties. They are easy to differentiate from Liège Waffles, which are heavier and have round corners. In Belgium, most waffles are served warm by street vendors and dusted with confectioner's sugar though in tourist areas they might be topped with whipped cream, soft fruit or chocolate spread (a practice considered 'unauthentic' by some local connoisseurs). In America, they are served in the same ways the American waffle is served. Despite their name, 'Brussels waffles' were actually invented in Ghent in 1839. They were introduced to America by restaurateur Maurice Vermeersch, who sold his Brussels waffles under the name "Bel-Gem Waffles" at New York's 1964 World's Fair.



**Liège waffle** (from the city of Liège, in eastern Belgium) is a richer, denser, sweeter, and chewier waffle. Invented by the chef of the prince-bishop of Liège in the 18th century as an adaptation of brioche bread dough, it features chunks of pearl sugar, which caramelizes on the outside of the waffle when baked. It is the most common type of waffle available in Belgium and is prepared in plain, vanilla and cinnamon varieties by street vendors across the nation.

Belgium is also known for its chicory (endive), Brussels sprouts and cheese.

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***One Belgian recipe: Flemish Beef Stew (Carbonnades à la Flamande)***



This classic Belgian beef stew is known for its sweet-sour combination of caramelized onions and beer. Any dark Belgian-style ale would be a good choice here. As with most stews, the dish will taste even better a day or two after it's made.

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 pounds beef flatiron or blade steaks, cut into 1/3-inch-thick slices, about 3 inches wide
Salt and freshly ground pepper
3 cups thickly sliced onions
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
Three 12-ounce cans beer
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
2 bay leaves
Chopped parsley, for garnish
Boiled carrots and potatoes, for serving

- In an enameled cast-iron casserole, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter. Season the beef with salt and pepper and add one-third of it to the casserole. Cook over moderate heat until lightly browned, 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a bowl. Repeat with 2 more batches of meat, using the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter.
- Add the onions to the casserole, cover and cook over low heat, stirring, until browned, 8 minutes. Stir in the flour until the onions are well-coated, then slowly add the beer. Return the meat to the casserole along with any accumulated juices. Add the thyme and bay leaves, cover and simmer over low heat, stirring, until the beef is tender, 2 hours.

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- Uncover and transfer the meat to a bowl. Simmer the sauce over moderate heat until thickened slightly. Discard the bay leaves. Return the meat to the casserole and season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with boiled carrots and potatoes.

## Our celebrities

The saxophone was invented by Adolphe Sax (1841), Zénobe Gramme invented the Gramme dynamo (1871), Jean Joseph Etienne Lenoir developed the first internal combustion engine (1859), Professor Edward J. de Smedt was the inventor of the modern road asphalt (1870), Charles Van Depoele invented the electric railway (1883) and Georges Lemaitre provided us with the Big Bang theory (1927).

Belgians are very proud of their female tennis players, but also of Eddy Merckx (he won the Tour de France 5 times!), Father Damien a.k.a Blessed Damien of Molokai, Jacques Brel (a famous artist!) and Manneken Pis... Oh wait, that is just a statue of a little guy peeing in Brussels.

### Our singers

The greatest Belgian chansonnier was Jacques Brel, whose classic songs have been covered by several international artists such as David Bowie and Frank Sinatra. Others like Axelle Red, Stromae, selah sue, vaya con dios have also enjoyed some success in other French-speaking countries.



Here is more information about them: <http://artists.letssingit.com/jacques-brel-bgpvw/biography>

## Belgian people, the subject of all jokes

Over all the land and food clichés, it's the Belgian population that has to put up with the most stereotypes. In the mind of foreigners, the typical Belgian is as follows: they often say "une fois", have a strong and heavy accent (whether speaking French or Flemish), are stupid and passionately in love with fries. We already showed that Belgian people love fries so this one is closed - but let's admit that anyone who's ever tried Belgian fries loves them too. Here is an example of one of the numerous jokes about Belgians:

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A Belgian walked through the forest when he heard a cry for help. He found a dwarf, stuck in a trap. He freed the dwarf, and the dwarf granted him two wishes.  
 ' My first wish' the Belgian said,' is a bottle of beer that will never be empty.'  
 And flash, there was the bottle. The Belgian opened it, and drank it empty. The next moment, the bottle was full again. The Belgian was very happy.  
 ' What is your second wish? ', the dwarf asked.  
 The Belgian replied: ' I want another bottle'

## Folklore

Festivals play a major role in Belgium's cultural life. Nearly every city and town has its own festival, some of them dating back to several centuries. These are not merely aimed at tourism but authentic celebrations that take months to prepare. Two of the biggest festivals are the three-day carnival at Binche, near Mons, held just before Lent and the Procession of the Holy Blood, held in Bruges in May. During the carnival in Binche, "Gilles", which are men dressed in high, plumed hats and bright costumes, lead the procession. Several of these festivals include sporting competitions, such as cycling, and many fall under the category of kermesse.



Here is a list of useful websites for places to sleep or to visit: <http://www.use-it.be/>, <http://www.expatica.com/be/main.html>, <http://www.opt.be/accueil/en/index.html>

### Did you know it? The ancestor of Santa Claus is still celebrated in Belgium...

An important holiday (which is however not an official public holiday) takes place each year on December 6. This is Sinterklass in Dutch or la Saint-Nicolas in French (English:

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Saint-Nicholas). This is sort of an early Christmas. On December 5 evening before going to bed, children put their shoes by the hearth with water or wine and a carrot for Saint Nicholas's donkey. According to tradition, St. Nicholas comes at night and travels down the chimney. He then takes the food and water or wine, leaves presents, goes back up, feeds his donkey, and continues on his course. He also knows whether children have been good or bad. This holiday is especially loved by children in Belgium and the Netherlands. Dutch immigrants imported the tradition into the United States and "Nicholas" became "Claus"...

## III/Some Practical and important Information

First of all please send us a confirmation form 7 days before your arrival.

### How to come to Belgium

#### *Coming to Belgium by Plane*

Some companies allow cheap flights to Belgium: [opodo](#), [bravofly](#).

### How to go from the airport to the centre of Brussels

#### *Brussels Airport (Zaventem)*

[Brussels International Airport](#) is at Zaventem, 14 km from the city centre.

How to reach the city-centre from Brussels Airport:

- By Bus: a [STIB bus](#) assures connection between the Centre and Brussels National Airport.
- By train: an [SNCB train](#) assures connections between the city and the airport. The journey lasts about 30 minutes.
- You will find more information about bus and train tickets lower.

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### **Brussels South - Charleroi Airport low cost airport**

Situated to the south of Brussels, approximately 60 km away, [Brussels-South Charleroi airport](#) mainly houses low-cost airlines.

17

How to get to the centre of Brussel from Charleroi airport:

- By Bus: a bus links Charleroi Brussels-South and the Gare du Midi railway station in Brussels more than 20 times a day. The timetables are organised to coincide with Ryanair airline flights.
- Bus from Brussels to Charleroi: the shuttle departure point is situated at the junction of [rue de France and rue de l'Instruction](#) ; follow "Thalys" exit at the Gare du Midi station.
- Bus from Charleroi to Brussels: the shuttle departs 30 minutes after the Ryanair airline flight arrives at the airport
- One-way ticket fare: 10.00 € tickets are sold inside the shuttle
- By train: a bus route (route A) permanently links the Charleroi Brussels-South airport with Charleroi railway station. You can then take the train very easily to Brussels. Combined ticket: around 10.00€
- By Taxi: the set price linking Brussels to Charleroi airport can reach more than 85 €, so we do not advice you to take a taxi

### **Coming to Belgium by Bus**

Do you prefer to come by bus? No problem, Eurolines is the leading bus traveling company in Europe. It covers 34 countries, including Belgium. The cost of it is not too bad either - for example, a one way ticket from Barcelona to Brussels costs around 108 €. You can learn about the costs from other cities right here: [Eurolines](#)

### **Coming to Belgium by Train**

You can also easily come by train from all the European countries using TGV (High Velocity Trains), Thalys, Eurostar (from England) or any other classic international train company. For more information on schedules, prices, booking online, go to the national train society website of SNCB – NMBS. You can also [get more information here](#).

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- **[incoming@servicevolontaire.org](mailto:incoming@servicevolontaire.org)**

## Public Transport

### *In Brussels*

18

In order to get around in the city itself, you have many different options to choose from as we have trams, buses and metro. They are all managed differently and to learn more about the public transportation in the city, check out [this website](#) that offers a good map of the city and its transportation.

If you're about to stay in Belgium for the long term (at least one month), you might also want to consider buying a bus card. It will save you a lot of money, since it costs only 51.5€ per month and you can use it to take any public transportation the city has to offer (buses, trams and metro). You can go to the main office (Rue Royale 76, 1000 Brussels) and take care of it. Just make sure you bring a passport picture with you for the card.

After a month, when the card will expire, you can go to any office at the main metro stations (such as Montgomery) and recharge the card. It will cost you € 46.5 and will be good for one month

You can also look here: [STIB - MIVB](#) for different kinds of tickets. For instance, a One Jump ticket allows you to go on buses, trams, subways and trains (only inside of Brussels) ; you can even get on a De Lijn or a TEC bus (as long as it's a Brussels internal line). With this ticket, you have the possibility to change between lines for one hour after the first validation. To buy your tickets, you can:

- Go to the "Kiosk" that are the ticket offices (inside 19 of the subway stations)
- Use the "Go" system (vending machine)
- Go to one of the 6 "Bootik" point that are commercial agencies
- Go in train station of Brussels
- Go inside trams or buses (but then it's more expensive)
- Get them on De Lijn and TEC busses.

You have several types of tickets depending on your needs (For example: One Jump – 1.70€, 10 Journeys – 11.50€, 3 days – 9.50€). There's also a night network on the week-end from 00:20 AM until 03:00 AM, and the cost of a one jump ticket during the night is 3€.

- Go-pass(10 train tickets for people under 26) € 51
- Railpass (10 train tickets for people older than 26) € 76

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- Collecto (is an available collective service of taxi 7 days of 7 between 11 pm and 6 am on all territory of the Region of Brussels-capital) 5€ per person by itinerary
- Taxi € 2,70 (basic fee) + min. € 1,60/km

### *In provinces*

Trains are managed by SNCB - NMBS. The railway network is well developed in Belgium, so it's really easy to go from one place to another.

**The Flemish region** - De Lijn [NL]: The system is different from Brussels. Of course there are different tickets and fares, but the price depends on the number of zones you cross during your way. A zone is a delimited area that includes several towns. There are several zones in each Belgian province (for example one ticket for 1 or 2 zones costs 1,20€ outside the vehicle and 1,60€ inside - for 3 or more zones it costs 2€ outside the vehicle and 2,70€ inside the vehicle).

If you don't know the number of zones you cross, just ask the driver and know that you can as well plan your itinerary here.

**The Walloon region** - TEC : The system is quite the same as the Flemish one. The price is also different according to the zones you cross. Check on [this website](#).

## **Do I need a Visa to come to Belgium?**

It all depends on where you're from, how long you're planning on staying here and why you want to come to Belgium. All these type of questions regarding the visa can be easily answered just by [clicking here](#).

To apply for a Visa, you have to go to the Belgian embassy or consulate in your country. If there aren't any, you have to check which institute is responsible for Belgium in your country.

If you need an invitation letter, you can ask us to send you one: [info@servicevolontaire.org](mailto:info@servicevolontaire.org).

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### **Embassies and Consulates in Belgium**

The following diplomatic missions are located in Brussels.

- Australie tél. 02 286 05 00; fax 02 230 68 02; Rue Guimard 6, B-1040 Brussels
- Canada tél. 02 741 0611; fax 02 741 0643; Ave de Tervuren 2, B-1040 Brussels
- France tél. 02 548 87 11; fax 02 513 68 71; Rue Ducale 65, B-1000 Brussels
- Germany tél. 02 787 18 00; fax 02 787 28 00; Rue Jacques de Lalaing 8-14, B-1040 Brussels
- Ireland tél. 02 235 66 76; fax 02 235 66 71; Rue Wiertz 50, B-1050 Brussels
- Luxembourg tél. 02 735 57 00; fax 02 737 57 10; Ave de Cortenbergh 75, B-1000 Brussels
- Netherlands tél. 02 679 17 11; fax 02 679 17 75; Ave Herrmann-Debroux 48, B-1160 Brussels
- New Zealand tél. 02 512 10 40; fax 02 513 48 56; 7th fl, Sq de Meeus 1, B-1100 Brussels
- UK tél. 02 287 62 11; fax 02 287 63 55; Rue d'Arlon 85, B-1040 Brussels
- USA tél. 02 508 21 11; fax 02 511 27 25; Blvd du Régent 27, B-1000 Brussels

### **Belgian Embassies & Consulates Abroad**

You may want to check [up-to-date information online](#)

- Australie tél. 02-6273 2501; fax 6273 3392; 19 Arkana St Yarralumla, ACT 2600
- Canada tél. 613-236 7267; fax 2367882; Constitution Sq, 360 Albert St, Ste 820, Ottawa ON K1R 7X7
- France tél. 01 44 09 39 39; fax 47 54 07 64; rue de Tibitt 9, Paris F-75840, Cedex 17
- Germany tél. 849-3020 6420; fax 3020 642 200; Jager-strasse 52-53, Berlin D-10117
- Ireland tél. 8 01-205 7100; fax 283 9403; 2 Shrewsbury Rd, Balisbridge, Dublin 4
- Luxembourg tél. 8 25 43 251; fax 45 42 82; rue des Girondins 4, Luxembourg City L-1626
- Netherlands tél. 070-312 34 56; fax 364 55 79; Alexan-derveld 97, The Hague NL-2585 DB
- New Zealand tél. 8 09-575 6202; ismad(enzie@xtra.co.nz; 15A Rarangi Rd, St Heliers, Auckland
- UK tél. 020-7470 3700; fax 7470 3795; 103-105 Eaton Sq SW1W 9AB
- USA tél. 202-333 6900; fax 333 5457; 3330 Garfield St, MW, Washington DC, 20008

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### *Travelling in Belgium: the tricky challenge of bilinguism in town names*

You have to be careful, because sometimes the name of cities can be written either in French or in Dutch:

Anvers : Antwerpen	Genappe : Genepiën	Mons : Bergen
Biévène : Bever	Grammont : Geraardsbergen	Montaigu-Zichem :
Comines-Warneton : Komen-	Halle : Hal	Scherpenheuvel-Zichem
Waasten	Hannut : Hannuit	Moucron : Moeskroen
Bruges : Brugge	Hautem-Saint-Liévin: Sint-	Namur : Namen
Bruxelles : Brussel	Lievens-Houtem	Nieuport : Nieuwpoort
Braine-le-Comte : 's-	Herck-la-Ville : Herk-de-Stad	Nivelles : Nijvel
Gravenbrakel	Laethem-Saint-Martin : Sint-	Oreye : Oerle
Courtrai : Kortrijk	Martens-Latem	Ostende : Oostende
Coxyde : Koksijde	La Hulpe : Terhulpen	Perwez : Perwijs
Dixmude : Diksmuide	Léau : Zoutleeuw	Saint-Nicolas : Sint-Niklaas
Enghien Edingen	Lessine : Lessen	Saint-Trond : Sint-Truiden
Espierres-Helchin : Spiere-Helkijn	Liège : Luik	Saint-Vith : Sankt Vith
Fouron : Voeren	Lincet : Lijsem	Tongres : Tongeren
Furnes : Veurne	Louvain : Leuven	Vilvorde : Vilvoorde
Gammerages : Galmaarden	Malines : Mechelen	Ypres : Iepe
Gand : Gent	Menin : Menen	

## **Emergencies and medical care**

### *Insurances and fees*

Before leaving your country, check what your complementary insurance will cover. If you believe your insurance isn't enough then you can contract a supplementary insurance that will cover hospitalization and repatriation.

In case of an accident with a third party, make sure you have his name and address and fill an accident report as soon as possible (straight away, if possible). Car insurance is obligatory and for all other types of accidents most inhabitants have a civil liability insurance (Responsabilité civile) and a family insurance (for damages caused by their kids, for example).

All medical emergency services are available both during the week and weekend, day and night. The price of a consultation is higher during the weekend (from Friday evening until Monday morning) and on public holidays. The GP's consultation varies between 20 and 30 Euros, a specialist will charge between 25 and 50 (it could be more). If you go to the hospital's emergency service, you will be asked to pay a supplement if your GP hasn't sent you.

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If you are an EU national (+ Island, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), **you should have the European Health Insurance card (valid 1 year)** that exists since June 1, 2004. If you have one of these documents, give it to the doctor or hospital and you will not have to pay the bill or you will be (partially) reimbursed in your country.

If the doctor or hospital does not respect the official fees (he is then called non-conventionnée), or if you don't have a document mentioned above, you will have to pay the bill immediately and be reimbursed in your country when you present the bill and proof of payment. Doctors are paid in cash but most hospitals accept bank cards.

### *Emergency services*

If you need to see a doctor in Belgium, you can find phone numbers in a telephone directory to get an appointment. If you need a doctor during the weekend (from Friday evening until Monday morning) or during a public holiday, you will have to phone the out-of-hours service (médecins de garde) who, very rapidly, will send a doctor at your home.

If you are in a critical state or you have had a bad accident, don't hesitate to go (by ambulance if necessary) to the emergency department of the closest hospital. When you are at the hospital, the severity of your condition will determine how long you will have to wait.

### *Emergency phone numbers*

If you encounter any trouble related to your volunteering project, call the **SVI** at +3228886713 or +32495680934. It might be useful for you to check the address and phone number of [your country's embassy or consulate in Belgium](#).

The following numbers can be called **for free** in any emergency situation:

	100	Medical emergency and fire service
	112	European service in case of accident or aggression
	070 245 245	Poison center
	071 448 000	Burn care center
	105	Help in case of sinister and catastrophe

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## Business days and business hours

### Business hours

- Banks: 9am-3.30pm or 5pm Mon-Fri
- Clubs: 11pm-6am Fri-Sun
- Pubs & Cafés: 10am or 11am-1am or 2am (some stay open till dawn)
- Restaurants: 11.30am-2pm or 3pm & 6.30-11pm, brasseries 11am to 1am
- Shops: 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun in major cities; most supermarkets stay open until 9pm. Shops in smaller towns often close for lunch (noon to 2pm). Tourist information offices Hours vary - see the individual town sections

### Official holidays

On these dates you'll find most stores are closed. In any other time of the year, most stores will be open every day until 5 or 6 PM and will be closed on Sunday.

1 January – New Year's Day
Varying – Easter
1st Monday after Easter – Easter Monday
1 May – Labour Day
6th Thursday after Easter – Ascension
7th Sunday after Easter – Pentecost
8th Monday after Easter – Pentecost Monday
21 July – National Holiday – commemorating the ascension to the throne of Belgium's first king Leopold I
15 August – Assumption of Mary – Liège city is famous for binge-drinking on that occasion!
1 November – All Saints
2 November - St.Sander B-day - All souls day - public holiday most companies are closed
11 November - Armistice Day
25 December – Christmas

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## Money and services

### Changing money

Belgium currency is the Euro. If you have a foreign currency and you want to change it, all you have to do is to go to a bank or to a money exchange office. Just take into consideration that generally the exchange office is much more expensive. Plus, sometimes it might be much easier and much more financially interesting to just go to an ATM.

### Cash and credit cards

If you're planning on paying with a credit card, most of the shops will accept credit cards and usually if so, it'll be written at the entrance of the store. You can't pay by check in Belgium.

Reference exchange rates in June 2012 - <a href="#">update</a>	
1 AUD=	0.776 EUR
Inverse:	1.288
1 CAD=	0.749 EUR
Inverse:	1.334
1 CHF=	0.814 EUR
Inverse:	1.229
1 JPY=	0.008 EUR
Inverse:	124.167
1 NZD=	0.636 EUR
Inverse:	1.572
1 USD=	0.75 EUR
Inverse:	1.334

### ATM's

In case credit cards are not accepted, you'll have to go to an ATM in order to take out cash. In Belgium it's called Belgium "Bancontact" (Mister Cash) and you can usually find them next to banks and post offices and near most commercial centers. Check that your credit card is working abroad and that you don't pay any extra-fee.

### Cost of living

Here are a few examples of the average prices (Sept. 2012):

#### Supermarket: groceries and beverages

- Bread (800 g) ~ € 2
- Milk (1l) ~ € 0,70
- Apples (1kg) ~ € 1,60
- Emmentaler cheese (100g) ~ € 0,75
- Yoghurt, plain (1l) ~ € 0,85
- Chocolate (100g) ~ € 0,85
- Pack of biscuits ~ € 1,20

- Sugar (1kg) ~ € 1
- Mineral water (1,5l) ~ € 0,75
- Apple juice (1l) ~ € 1
- Bottle of beer (0,5l) ~ € 0,75
- Pack of chewing gum ~ € 0,80

#### Various expenses:

- Daily newspaper ~ € 1

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- Music CD ~ € 14
- Deodorant ~ € 2,50
- Haircut (cut only!) ~ € 35 for girls, ~ € 18 for guy

Eating out:

- Sandwich ~ € 3
- Bowl of soup ~ € 3,50
- Main dish ~ € 14,-
- Big Mac ~ € 2,99
- Glass of coke ~ € 1,80
- Cup of coffee ~ € 1,80
- Glass of beer (0,3l) ~ € 2,50

Going out:

- Cinema ticket ~ € 7,50
- Concert ticket (no international mega sellers!) ~ € 18
- Entrance fee for a club ~ € 9

## What to bring with you

You'd better not forget some useful things when you are thinking about traveling to Belgium:

- Sleeping bag, sheet and pillow, mat (if specified on the infosheet of your project), towels.
- A **TENT** if specified on the infosheet of your project
- Sun cream, hat
- Clothes and shoes adapted to various weather (even in summer!) and outdoor activities.
- Your mobile phone (if you stay here for a long time it is convenient to buy a Belgian Sim-card)
- Some things about your country (posters, music, postcards, map, video, food) and your family.
- Pocket money
- Personal pharmacy
- If possible bring only ONE bag to have more space in your dormitory. Backpacks are the best!

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## Internet

Internet use is widespread in Belgium. Many fixed-line and mobile telephone companies offer Internet packages which vary from unlimited Broadband (ADSL) to fixed time (for example four hours per month).

Wi-Fi is also available in many public areas, such as Brussels Airport and in some cafés and bars or in Urbizones (free wifi). In every city you can find several internet cafés.

## Belgium Telephone Code and Sim Cards

The International country calling code of Belgium is +32 (0032).

If you want to call abroad, you have to type 00 before the country code.

We advise you to take your mobile phone with you and to buy a local sim card. There are some typical telephone operators such as Belgacom, Mobistar, Base, ...

In order to do that you can go to any mobile or Base store. The first month will cost you 15€ because you have to pay for the sim card as well. After that, each month you'll need to pay 10€ for 500MG.

You can also make low cost calls with [VOIP companies](#) or by buying [a cheap international sim card and phone credits](#).

## Smoking

Belgium has banned smoking in restaurants, joining a growing European trend to restrict smokers.

Smoking is forbidden in all public places like railway stations, shops, restaurants and areas where food is served, also in some non-smoking areas of cafes and bars.

Smoking is only allowed in most cafes and in special rooms sealed off from where food is served.

## IV/Ready to go?

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I hope that you now understand that Belgium is a really rich country with a lot of curiosities.

You should just remember not to forget our rules:

1/ Enjoy food and drinks

2/ Don't spit in the streets.

3/ Be relax and funny.

**Congratulations, you are now ready for your new Belgian life!**



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## Appendix: Canadian perspective about Belgium

How do foreigners perceive Belgium and its way of life? Here are some telling examples to illustrate the Canadian perception.

### *National Heroes*

Question:

Who are this country's national heroes?

Local Perspective:

Belgium does not have a lot of heroes. Belgians are proud of the singer Jacques Brel, the actor Benoit Poelvoorde and tennis players Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin.

Canadian Perspective:

Several Belgians have left their mark in different domains and for each in his own way. In the scientific arena, Georges Lemaître has initiated the Big Bang theory and Pierre Deligne has been one of the most famous mathematicians of the century. Victor Horta and Henri Van de Velde have both been very famous architects. Although they lived at different times, Belgian musicians have influenced the musical scene of their generation: Roland de Lassus, César Franck, Adolphe Sax and Jacques Brel. Writers like Janssen and Raymond Devos and artists like Pierre Breugel, Pierre-Paul Rubens and Paul Devaux are equally quite famous, each in his own style. Athletes like Eddy Merckx, one of the best cyclists of all times, Jacky Ickx, former automobile racer, Jean-Michel Saive, excellent table tennis player and Enzo Scifo, one of the great soccer players of his generation, have all left their mark on their own discipline.

### *Conflicts in the Workplace*

Question:

I have a work-related problem with a colleague. Do I confront him or her directly? Privately or publicly?

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Local Perspective:

Talking to the colleague in private would be the best solution. If the problem persists, you should go to the superior. Then, the supervisor will handle the problem.

Canadian Perspective:

Work problems with colleagues should be resolved in a straightforward way and in private. If the problem remains, a neutral third party can be consulted. It could be a supervisor, or somebody from Human Resources, but this third party should not have a friendship relation with either of the two colleagues. The best way to find out if a colleague is offended by something you may have done is to respectfully ask him. If two colleagues cannot discuss minor problems in a reasonable way, it would be preferable to have the discussion and the solution of the problem in question taken by a supervisor. In general, healthy and respectful business relations between colleagues should be strong enough to allow the resolution of conflicts.

### *Display of Emotion*

Question:

Are public displays of affection, anger or other emotions acceptable?

Local Perspective:

Public displays of affection are acceptable and common. For instance, friends often touch each other, lovers walk hand in hand. However, public displays of anger have to be avoided. Happiness is always good to show and share (with some limits). Laughs and a smile are well perceived. Sadness and pain are only shown to people known/friends/close persons. In comparison with Canadians, Belgians do not react as strongly to something that a speaker tells them. One should only show empathy if s/he really cares about the subject.

Canadian Perspective:

Signs of affection, anger or others are acceptable in public. Sometimes people will raise their voice in public. If a conversation becomes heated, one is better not to interfere and go about one's own business, but rarely does such a heated conversation evolve into something more. In public, couples can openly show their affection towards each other.

You can get the complete version at: <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=be#cn--1>

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This guide book has been written by the volunteer team of SVI.

30

If you have any comment, please contact us at: [info@servicevolontaire.org](mailto:info@servicevolontaire.org)

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